

## BOOK REVIEW/COMPTE RENDU

**Takeyuki Tsuda**, ed., *Diasporic Homecomings: Ethnic Return Migration in Comparative Perspective*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009, 362 pp. \$US 24.95 paper (978-0-6276-2) \$US 65.00 hardcover (978-0-8047-6274-8)

**A**s indicated by its title and subtitle, this fascinating book is about a special type of migration — the return of diasporic peoples to the homelands of their ethnic ancestors. The main focus of the collection is on second and subsequent generations of diasporans, but the superb editorial introduction also addresses return migration of first generation migrants, and more generally compares ethnic return migration with other types of migration. The comparative framework of the collection allows both its editor and individual contributors to examine a wide variety of diasporic groups: Jews and ethnic Germans from the former Soviet Union, Spanish-descent Argentines, Swedish-descent Finns, Hungarian-descent Romanians, Peruvian, Brazilian and American ethnic return migrants to Japan, and Korean Chinese and Korean Americans in South Korea. The book also includes two interesting comparative policy chapters, one dealing broadly with similarities and differences between European and Asian ethnic return migration policies, and the other focusing more narrowly on the ethnic migration policies of the Israeli and German states.

The Swedish-speaking Finns are the only group examined whose decision to migrate is made on an idiosyncratic basis, without any incentives from either the Finnish or the Swedish state. Most of the migrants interviewed by Charlotta Hedberg were fluently bilingual, suffered no or only very minor discrimination in either Finland or Sweden, and treated their migration as an internal one within the Scandinavian context. From their perspective, migrating to Sweden as Swedish-speaking Finns was no different from other forms of migration, such as moving to study, taking a job, or living closer to family members. For all the other diasporic groups, in contrast, the state is always present, since its varying policies on dual and ethnic affinity citizenship, nation-building, labour market recruitment, and foreign investment literally create ethnic labour migration.

However, there is often a huge gap between policy assumptions about co-ethnics and the socio-economic reality of their lived experi-

ence once they land in their ancestral homeland, even if they speak the local language. Despite the openly welcoming attitude to ethnic brethren on the part of the state, particularly evident in Israel, Germany and Spain, ethnic return migrants typically experience significant social and economic marginalization. Since ethnic return migrants were born and raised abroad, the ancestral ethnic homeland is essentially a foreign country to them, and they frequently feel like strangers there. However, as Tsuda points out in the Introduction, a more significant reason for the similarity of experience between ethnic return and “ordinary” labour migration is that, for the most part, “ethnic return migration is not driven by the search for ethnic roots and ancestral heritage but by global economic disparities, which have caused diasporic descendants from poorer countries to return to their richer ethnic homelands” (p. 6).

While some ethnic return migrants, such as Japanese Brazilians or Transylvanian Hungarians, were grudgingly willing to accept low-status and poorly paid jobs in the ancestral homeland, others, such as Spanish-descent Argentines with dual Argentine and Spanish citizenship, were not, as they “felt entitled to the same treatment as natives” (p. 143). Since 1989 hundreds of thousands of ethnic Hungarians from Romania have spontaneously gone to work for higher Hungarian wages, but rather than being welcomed as ethnic brethren, they have been resented and slurred as “Romanians.” “Not surprisingly,” Jon E. Fox argues, “Transylvanian migrant workers have consistently and stridently rejected the Romanian label... migrant and host have engaged in symbolic struggles over who is really Hungarian. Transylvanian Hungarians depicted themselves as carriers of the virtues of tradition, whereas they portrayed Hungarians in Hungary as exemplars of the ills of modernity” (p. 195).

The lack of mutual acceptance of natives and newcomers was also found among the other diasporic groups examined in the book. The largely negative experiences of the newcomers and the subsequent ethno-national re-negotiations are captured quite well by the titles of the various chapters, such as “From Germans to Migrants: *Aussiedler* Migration to Germany” by Amanda Klekowski von Koppenfels, “Ethnic Hierarchy and Its Impact on Ethnic Identities: A Comparative Analysis of Peruvian and Brazilian Ethnic Return Migrants in Japan” by Ayumi Takenaka, or “Brothers Only in Name: The Alienation and Identity Transformation of Korean Chinese Return Migrants in South Korea” by Changzoo Song. In fact, largely because of the significant social integration problems, the *Aussiedler* are increasingly seen and treated like ordinary migrants instead of returning German ethnics. Serious integration problems have emerged even in Israel, despite the Israeli state’s ongoing commitment to

the return migration of all ethnic Jews in the Diaspora. Larissa Remennick convincingly argues that

a lot of what we call integration is in fact an adaptive, instrumental response aimed at survival and adjustment in the new environment. The cultural core, shaped by premigration socialization, remains largely intact, and adaptive behavioral layers (new language, social and technical skills, appearance, etc.) are glued on top of it, gradually forming a thick external shell that makes a person practically bicultural ... In general, there is usually more integration occurring in the public or formal realm than in the private or informal realm. Personal relationships, family life, and networks of friends are the least affected by the demands of integration (p.221).

Thus, within the context of global economic inequalities and ethno-national hierarchies, assumed ethnic affinity to the host population can backfire and have a negative impact on the experiences of ethnic migrants moving from poorer to richer countries. However, the experiences of ethnic migrants from richer countries, such as Japanese or Korean Americans, are generally more positive.

*Diasporic Homecomings* is a stimulating book that represents what is best in collaborative work. No single author could have written such an informed global overview, and provide so much primary data on so many diverse diasporic groups and locations. The typical shortcomings of many edited books – incoherence, repetition, uneven quality of individual chapters – are all avoided in this collection. *Diasporic Homecomings* reads like a unified monograph, each author building on previous chapters, both reinforcing earlier arguments and adding new data and analytical insights.

The only criticism of the collection is the inconsistent incorporation of gender analysis. Larissa Remennick and Nadia Y. Kim are the only authors who explicitly address the different experiences of male and female ethnic return migrants to Israel and South Korea. Kim even explains how the perception of gender hierarchy in South Korea informed the decision of many Korean American women *not* to settle in South Korea. Some authors ignore gender completely. For example, Tsuda's chapter on "Japanese American and Brazilian Encounters with the Ethnic Homeland" rightly incorporates differential class positioning as a significant variable in an interesting comparative analysis of Japanese Brazilian factory workers versus Japanese American students and professionals. However, no systematic information is provided about their respective gender, age, and family status. While some of the interviews cited make it clear that the research subject is a woman, with no informa-

tion about the gender composition of the sample, we do not know if any men were interviewed, or the extent to which the women's experiences apply also to men.

Despite this shortcoming, *Diasporic Homecomings* is highly recommended to all those interested in global migration and diasporic studies.

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**Alena Heitlinger** is the author of six books and numerous articles on a variety of gender and public policy issues. In recent years, she has published several articles on postwar Czech and Slovak Jewish themes. Her most recent book is *In the Shadows of the Holocaust and Communism: Czech and Slovak Jews Since 1945* (Transaction Publishers, 2006).

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