

Rezensionen

Amrute, Sareeta: *Encoding Race, Encoding Class: Indian IT Workers in Berlin*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2016. 268 pp. ISBN 978-0-8223-6135-0. Price: £ 18.99

In “Encoding Race, Encoding Class,” Sareeta Amrute explores the conditions of digital globalization by a focus on the everyday life of Indian IT coders in Berlin. By investigating the precarious circumstances of this temporary labor force in a neoliberal economy, Amrute reveals the racialized and class-encoded terrain in which these highly skilled yet nonwhite migrant workers try to make a living. Inserted into the transnational IT industries, and employed on short-term contracts, Indian programmers in Germany must reconcile the existential contradictions of race, middle-class aspirations, foreignness, and national belonging. In negotiating such incongruities, as Amrute points out, these elite migrants “are refusing their position in coding economies as limited grunt workers and their slot in European fantasies of migration that compare them with other black and brown bodies,” while furthermore attempting to navigate “Indian middle-class identity” (6). Amrute analyzes the resultant “politics of refusal and deflection” in the contexts of the global, German European, and personal worlds of Indian IT workers.

How did the author navigate ethnographic research in this highly fluid and mobile work environment? In addition to anthropological fieldwork, participant-observation, and completing over eighty interviews in IT offices and at trade fairs, Amrute was able to shadow corporate managers and Indian IT workers, attended employee free-time activities, and conducted multiweek team observations. Yet access to corporate spaces proved uneven, since at work knowledge was “a potentially valuable and well-guarded commodity” that was linked to trade secrets (11). Working in field sites defined by “closed doors, indirectly accessible estimations, and calculations about future strategy,” the anthropologist could not possibly engage her subjects as a privileged observer. Amrute thus extended her ethnographic insights by scrutinizing pertinent cultural data derived from an analysis of political cartoons, advertisements, and reports on white-collar IT work. In moving beyond a study of coding practices confined to office life, Amrute moreover selected a cohort of twenty Indian IT programmers, who became her primary and most reliable sources of ethnographic information for the private worlds of play outside of work and for establishing rapport with members of the IT community in Berlin. As

the author notes, her study invites a theorization of neoliberal regimes of work as linked to the desires, dreams, thoughts, and experiences of laboring bodies in the era of global capitalism.

By investigating the worlds of work, leisure, the “politics of pleasure,” family, and friendship, Amrute reveals how the racialization of Indian programmers in Germany intersects with class mobility and labor migration. She shows how Indian programmers occupy a contradictory position: as a source of cheap labor in Europe and the United States, as racialized subjects in Germany as temporary migrant workers, as rising professional elites, and as members of an expansive middle class in India. Such class aspirations also position Indian coders as desiring citizen-consumers who aspire to build on the promise of a prosperous, global, and economically powerful India from within diasporic spaces. The ways in which Indian IT workers in Germany accept and resist the premises and conditions of their short-term employment contracts, as Amrute suggests, point to alternative visions of living and laboring in neoliberal economies. By showing how these Indian coders’ cognitive work realigns race and class, Amrute theorizes the intersections of personhood, migration, and nationality within global capitalism in novel ways. “Encoding Race, Encoding Class” by Sareeta Amrute is a fascinating study that is both informative and narratively compelling. Situated in the era of digital globalization, this complex ethnographic project makes a major contribution to European anthropology and pushes forward the insights of critical race theory, international migration studies, and the sociocultural dimensions of science and technology. In accompanying Indian technoelites on their diasporic journey to Germany, a journey marked by precarity, uncertainty, and risk, readers are privileged to gain a deeper understanding of elite professionals, who, in Amrute’s words, are “striving to make a life on the terrain of fluid capitalism” in a globalizing Europe.

Uli Linke

Andaya, Barbara Watson, and Leonard Y. Andaya: *A History of Early Modern Southeast Asia, 1400–1830*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015. 363 pp. ISBN 978-0-521-68193-3. Price: £ 24.99.

Over the last few years, quite a few textbooks on the history of Southeast Asia have been published. The present synthetic overview, aimed at students new to the field,

is written by a husband and wife team of two long-serving professors in the history of insular Southeast Asia who have both made a name for themselves as foremost researchers of the premodern period. Being experienced teachers, they present an illuminating and clearly structured narrative, enlivened by 29 black-and-white illustrations and 7 maps. Most helpfully, the book also provides a commented list of selected further literature for the Anglophone reader (347–353). One thing worth noting here, however, is that the index (354–363) could be more comprehensive and detailed to allow for an easier searching – despite this not being uncommon for textbooks of this sort. For example, although there is an entry for “Tamil traders” (252), references to “Tamil ruler” or “Tamil power” (both appearing in the main text on 17) or “Tamil inscriptions” (20) are lacking; there is also no separate entry for “inscriptions”.

The introduction (2–11) briefly discusses the general ideas behind the book, conceptualizing the principal terms “Southeast Asia” and the “early modern” period, which are both subjects of debate and contestation among scholars. The first two chapters subsequently broadly set the scene for what is to follow: chapter 1 (12–40) discusses the geographic environment of the region, whereas chapter 2 (42–81) sketches the antecedents of the early modern societies, covering the period from roughly 900 until 1400. The subsequent five chapters take the reader in chronological order through the history of Southeast Asia, 1400–1830. This period is divided into five segments displaying particular noteworthy developments: the beginning of the early modern era, 1400–1511 (chapter 3, 82–129); acceleration of change, 1511–1600 (chapter 4, 130–180); expanding global links and their impact on Southeast Asia, 1600–1690s (chapter 5, 182–235); new boundaries and changing regimes, 1690s–1780s (chapter 6, 236–280), and finally, the last phase of early modern Southeast Asia, 1780s–1830s (chapter 7, 282–333). The chronologically arranged chapters all have the same rigorous, pedagogically helpful structure, first providing a timeline and a brief overview of the significant general features of the particular period under discussion, after which the historical developments are narrated, separately treating island and mainland Southeast Asia; a conclusion wraps up each chapter. The book as a whole also closes with a general conclusion (335–343).

Packed with information based upon a very wide reading of all relevant research literature and full of insights, this well-structured and authoritative textbook will undoubtedly become a standard assigned resource for introductory classes dealing with the history of Southeast Asia during the early modern age. E. P. Wieringa

Aparicio, Miguel: *Presas del veneno. Cosmopolítica y transformaciones Suruwaha (Amazonía occidental)*. Quito: Abya Yala; UPS, 2015. 287 pp. ISBN 978-9978-10-231-2. Precio: \$ 20.00

For more than two decades now Brazilian ethnology keeps producing monographs, theses, and scientific articles on indigenous peoples of the Amazon that the rest of

the world still has to catch up with. This is by no means a mere quantitative argument, what impresses is, how these works emanate from the ever more cutting-edge theoretical matrix of Amerindian perspectivism. The theoretical development not only opened up a whole new panorama on the Amerindian societies of Amazonia but has contributed significantly to the so-called “ontological turn” in anthropology, and what is more, has instigated far-reaching debates on the planetary future of humans including other-than-humans. One main argument is the insistence on the “radical alterity” of Amerindian ways of worlding, an epistemological stance, which not only forces the anthropologist to seriously engage with his or her partners’ own anthropologies, an endeavor, which more often than not shakes (“de-colonizes”) the very foundations of Western worldview.

As Miguel Aparicio’s magisterially written book on the Suruwaha, a small (ca. 170 persons) collective of Arawā speakers in the Juruá-Purús area of Western Amazonia, shows, this exercise of deep immersion into the field coupled with theoretical brilliance yields excellent insights into the worldview of a people living in quasi isolation up to this day. Mind you, creative theory would not be such a thing if it would not raise new questions. This is all the more the case as Suruwaha life is prone to tragedy: the majority of Suruwaha persons die by ingesting *timbó*, a plant whose poisonous sap is normally used to catch fish in shallow ponds and rivulets. Suruwaha self-killing does not follow any apocalyptic script à la Jonestown but is an individual act, often triggered by banal causes with the persons involved showing a (for us) deeply disturbing emotional lability. Aparicio has shouldered the task to come to grips with an indigenous cosmopolitics, which challenges our most basic notion, that of life itself.

In the first chapters of his book Aparicio traces the impact of the historical onslaught that led to the formation of the social collective today known as the Suruwaha. Based on the astonishing genealogical memories of his interlocutors the author reconstructs a net of interrelated smaller collectives called *dawa*. Only part of these subgroups managed to survive colonial contact and was forced to retreat into “isolation.” Today these survivors live together in a single village, a social situation which seriously altered social relations and possibilities of cosmopolitics. Pre-Suruwaha collectives have actually made part of a much larger network composed of a whole spectrum or “*dégradée*” of Arawā speakers, whose way of life projected itself over the Juruá-Purús basins. With an astonishing wealth of myths and narratives at hand, Aparicio meticulously represents how this collective life is not only elicited by human interaction but just as much by dealing with other-than-human persons, including a sheer multitude of spirits within an agonistic scenario controlled by shamans. What defines spirits is their heterotopic condition, Aparicio explains, their constitutively “other” origin and perspective. One can only praise Aparicio’s ample use of myths and narratives to construct and support his arguments. Thus, it makes sense that this alterity, as produced in Suruwaha narratives, is actualized in the experience of hunting, where the (animal) other is transformed into