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Speaking the Unspeakable: Marital Violence among South Asian Immigrants in the United States

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America, construct identities within various spaces to demonstrate their resistance to racism and to pressures to assimilate. He effectively demonstrates how these spaces are not simply settings of action, but serve as agents to create a Filipino lifestyle for the communities. Bonus also balances a diasporic approach to immigrants while historically grounding their identities in their American racial context.

The fieldwork takes place in San Diego and Los Angeles. The four major spaces are Filipino-American "Oriental" stores, community political group meetings, beauty pageants, and newspapers. In each space, the actors express their ties to the Philippines, their place within the U.S., and their resistance to marginalization. For instance, the political clubs offer members a chance to address their local issues, but just as importantly are spaces where Filipino Americans will not be criticized for not speaking perfect English. The stores and beauty pageants not only remind them of "home," but also create environments where they feel in control, in contrast to mainstream public settings, and give participants opportunities to raise money and awareness of issues both locally (such as Proposition 187), and in the Philippines. Similarly, the newspapers not only share information but also let Filipino-Americans voice experiences overlooked in mainstream Southern California media, including the difficulties of being in the U.S. The reader sees Filipino-Americans building ties to the homeland not only for cultural purposes, but also in reaction to anti-Asian and anti-immigrant attitudes.

Yet, a few minor problems appear in the argument and conclusion. Bonus is more interested in the relations between Filipino-Americans and non-Filipino Americans than in variation within the community. So, while he mentions diversity in members' attitudes regarding ethnicity (more than other community studies), those statements serve more as footnotes than as voices representing different ethnic identities. For instance, some women complain that the beauty pageants are sexist. But, how women

and men may define Filipina/o-American differently, such as by seeing different "spaces" as central to their identities, is not elaborated upon.

Also, Bonus concludes that Filipino-Americans' identity constructions challenge assimilation and the dominant definition of "America" as a homogenous country. The argument against Filipino-Americans' eventual assimilation uses data on the first generation, which is not as relevant to assimilation as data on later generations. Also, European-American immigrants encountered cultural resistance and built institutions that have generally disappeared. While the assimilation of a minority (versus Caucasian) community may generally be unlikely, Bonus cannot authoritatively speak to this issue. Further, Bonus uses the spaces to demonstrate that Filipino Americans are constructing both a Filipino and an American identity, which demonstrates their agency in the face of narrow, homogenous definitions of the nation, such as by Arthur Schlesinger. Yet, the growing popularity of multiculturalism questions the dominance of this conservative definition of the nation that Bonus relies on. As multiculturalism potentially opens up the meaning of the nation, Bonus could benefit from placing his work more deeply within that discourse, rather than primarily assimilation or narrow nationalism, to see how Filipino Americans' racial, ethnic and political identities may challenge various multicultural ideologies. Even with these concerns, this book speaks well to topics of community formation, immigration, space, and Asian America.

*Speaking the Unspeakable: Marital Violence among South Asian Immigrants in the United States.* By Margaret Abraham. New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2000. Pp. 234.

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Margaret Abraham's insightful book draws on interviews with twenty-five women who have

suffered marital violence and on her own experiences with Sakhi, a pioneering organization for South Asian women in New York. Defining marital violence against South Asian women immigrants as any form of coercion, power and control perpetrated on a woman by her spouse or extended kin, she then provides descriptive materials on South Asian forms of marriage and family (chapter 2) and on U.S. immigration policy and regulations (chapter 3) as causes of or contributing factors to such violence. Then she shows, with detailed illustrations from the interviews, the forms marital violence takes and the factors which contribute to it or fail to stop it (chapters 4, 5, 6). Chapter 7 highlights resistance strategies used by the abused women, while chapter 8 returns to the macrolevel to examine South Asian women's organizations in the U.S. that address marital violence. Finally, chapter 9 argues for a progressive politics of empowerment by critiquing the 1996 power struggle within Sakhi; the critique is a guarded one but does suggest that second generation activists seeking to broaden the agenda deserve more attention in future work.

Abraham refers often to the causes of or contributors to these problems of marital violence, namely the South Asian patriarchal institutions of marriage and the family that oppress women and the U.S. capitalist, racist, and gendered immigration and other policies and regulations that also end up oppressing, or at any rate not helping them. Thus, her broad call is to challenge and reform "the family, the economy, education, law, the state, media, and politics that perpetuate violence against women in general and against immigrant women in particular" (p. 162).

Abraham wanted to reach "a wide spectrum of readers" and also be "an agent of change through my work" (p. 200). Her most likely targets for change are the organizations aiming to end violence against South Asian women; an abused South Asian immigrant woman would, given the testimonies here, not be likely to read this book. In fact, the reader notes a tension between her individual-level, qualitative data and the organizational-level materials and participant-observation

data that runs throughout the book. Abraham initially says she makes women's narratives central (p. 4); she later (accurately) says the interviews were used not to generalize but to demonstrate her points about processes (p. 201). The mix does accomplish her goal of making "private matters" into a "social issue," and the organizational level emerges as the author's primary, not secondary (as stated on p. 203), focus.

There is another tension, or perhaps ambivalence, in this book concerning Abraham's views about the preservation (or construction) of a South Asian "community" as separate from, although situated in, wider U.S. society. She refers, seemingly with approval, to "the social construction of a national culture in a foreign land" (p. 7), and, talking of the Chicago organization, *Apna Ghar*, she remarks that its use of state resources "necessitated including non-South Asian representatives as board members" (p. 160). Yet, elsewhere she decries American public and institutional ignorance about South Asian immigrants and the immigrants' isolation from American society. She asserts that the U.S. uses "model minority" ideas to deny assistance to South Asian and other immigrants (p. 10), but elsewhere she makes persuasive cases for immigrant women's unawareness of or inability to reach relevant assistance. She also asserts that some abused women, "aware of the racial and ethnic discrimination in American prisons, do not want their abusers to spend time in jail" (p. 127). Such statements produce an impression of continuing South Asian separatism and also give a negative impression of an abused woman reader's chances of achieving changes in her life, caught as she is in an apparently no-win situation.

The qualitative data perhaps could have been used more powerfully, and there is no attention to possible patterns in the interviews (13 Hindus, 9 Muslims, 2 Christians, and 1 Sikh). The text says that only 3 of the 25 abused women made love marriages (p. 41), but the table shows 4 love marriages, 3 of them by Muslim women (p. 200). And she asserts that the South Asian women's

organizations were “usually the most important contact for abused immigrant women” (p. 147) but undercuts that by footnoting that she contacted most of her interviewees through such organizations. Perhaps we really have two books here – clearly Margaret Abraham has much more to say about organizational struggles and conflicts. But this is a fine introduction to both sets of materials and the book will be widely used for both teaching and research.

*Dance Hall Days: Intimacy and Leisure Among Working-Class Immigrants in the United States.* By Randy D. McBee. New York: New York University Press, 2000. Pp. 293.

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The title of Randy McBee’s book is a misleading one. It is not clear whether he is talking about immigrants themselves or the second generation. It appears that he is more often discussing the children of immigrants rather than immigrants themselves. Moreover, leisure – specifically social clubs activity other than dance halls is discussed, but the author does not deal with many other aspects of the emerging commercial leisure of late nineteenth and early twentieth century immigrants and their families. While dance halls come in for the lion’s share of discussion, the author does not touch upon sports, saloon life, motion pictures and amusement parks, to name but a few. Why just social clubs are included, as opposed to other forms of amusement, is not presented in a convincing way.

The generational issue is especially important because in the last chapter the author stresses the conflict between parents and children when he discusses how much freedom the youth have when it comes to the all important issue of marriage. McBee is convincing in telling the reader about the limits that young couples faced when deciding to choose a spouse, and in some cases escaping the crowded apartments of their parents and siblings. Thus, in spite of the

freedom that dance halls gave the younger generation, when it came to marriage the parents still exercised an important role. If, indeed, the American-born generation joined the social clubs and frequented dance halls in American cities, then the book is really about generational conflict and not simply how the working-class immigrants patronized the new forms of leisure.

The reader should also be aware that his discussion of immigrant life and that of their children is limited in geography. In dealing with this new culture for young people in early twentieth-century America, his discussion focuses on large urban centers stretching from Chicago east to the Atlantic Ocean. For rural areas, the South and smaller cities, the same forms of leisure might have lagged. In short, some of the sweeping statements should have been tempered.

What, then, is the value of *Dance Hall Days*? McBee is interesting and convincing in describing the growth of dance halls in urban areas with large immigrant populations. His detailed analysis give a clear and informed view of what the dance halls were and why they were so popular. He gives agency to women and how they were able to help shape dance hall culture. In giving the reader an understanding of this culture, he is adding to those important historians, such as David Nasaw, Elizabeth Ewen, Lizabeth Cohen, and Kathy Peis, who have opened up the field of consumer and leisure culture. If the author would have stayed with dance hall culture and developed more fully its meaning in generational terms, *Dance Hall Days* would have been a stronger book.

*Virtuous Transcendence: Holistic Self-Cultivation and Self-Healing in Elderly Korean Immigrants.* By Keum Young Chung Pang. New York, London, and Oxford: Haworth Press, 2000. Pp. 229. \$29.95.

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