

**Cynthia vanden Driesen and T. Vijay Kumar, eds. *Globalisation: Australian-Asian Perspectives*. New Delhi: Atlantic, 2014. 412 pp. ISBN 978-81-269-1857-7.**

Globalisation, as noted by the editors of one comprehensive overview, “is easily among the most important and contested topics within the contemporary social sciences” (Dean and Ritzer 1). The ubiquity of the concept over several decades in both academic and public discourse is such that it may now be over-loaded with associations and competing interpretations. Globalisation has been understood as a “condition” or linked to the complex interplay of “cultural, political, social, and economic processes” but in almost all explorations of the topic there has been an emphasis on greater interconnectedness and interdependence across space – facilitated by technological change and the dynamics and contradictions of capitalist development – in a world defined by “flows of people, capital, and ideas” (Dean and Ritzer 1)

Because globalisation has become such a generic term, it is perhaps best understood with reference to its associations and interpretations within specific national settings and cultural configurations. Jeffrey and Harriss’s *Keywords for Modern India* is a recent attempt to explore the multiple meanings and deployment of various common English language terms in the Indian context. They note that globalisation is associated variously with the greater prominence of India as an international actor in the global state system; its denser integration with trade and communication networks which has uneven and unequal economic effects; cultural flows and influences both to and from India, including (largely fictitious and often politically motivated) anxieties as to cultural erosion and “Westernization”; and globalisation deployed as a shorthand for marketisation or in ideological terms as a “synonym for neo-liberalism” (Jeffrey and Harriss 84-86).

While the book reviewed here uses globalisation as a framing theme, its title suggests a similar intent to explore perspectives and vantage points on the meaning of globalisation in specific contexts rather than to provide (yet another) general and comprehensive interpretation and exploration of the concept. Indeed, many of the papers in the book are situated around themes of borders, flows (of ideas, people and capital) and the fluidity of identity in a transnational age. It is also noteworthy that the conference that produced this volume featured the subtheme of “vanishing borders,” an evocative and no doubt contentious choice of words which seems to have been posed as an open question rather than a settled assertion. The book is a collection of 24 essays that were first presented at the 5th International Conference of the Association for the study of Australasia in Asia (Hyderabad, India, 2011) and its

contributors are, in the main, drawn from India and Australia and situated in a variety of disciplines and professional backgrounds.

This latter fact is one of the most enjoyable aspects of the book as it provides chapters from scholars based in disciplines such as economics, history, literature and cultural studies as well as contributors with a professional background in medicine, law, and education. The book comprises of a plurality of perspectives on the relationship between globalisation, borders and identity and the personal narratives and the reflexive positionality of the authors is engaging and stimulating. Liberman, for instance, based on a dual professional identity as a writer and a doctor reflects on the theme of “vanishing borders” with special reference to medicine. Concluding on a pessimistic note, the essay suggests that – despite the global dimensions of disease and the role of the “moral, duty-conscious, well-intentioned doctor and other unselfish and heroic humanitarian workers” (68) in responding to global crisis and the needs of humanity – borders, nationalism and territorialism continue to produce destruction and conflict that erode the humanistic principles of medical care. Mohan Ramanan, a Professor of English at the University of Hyderabad, provides a critical perspective on the meaning and relevance of an “English” department/discipline in the contemporary Indian University. While increasing attention to regional literatures, technological change and the turn to cultural studies has challenged and redefined the role of the discipline, he argues there is continued value in the pursuit of excellence in a deep understanding language and writing and a need to “resist reductionism, accept the genuine play of difference, and manage it intelligently” (104). The intriguing notion of “international regionalism” is explored via two essays on the poetry of John Kinsella and Glen Phillips – where cosmopolitan and international affinities with other peoples and places extend out of a deep connection and understanding of the uniqueness of a particular place and space (the “wheatbelt” region of Western Australia). There are also several essays that explore indigenous experience and knowledge including a personal account from Pat Lowe of her collaborative work and personal relationships with Australian Aboriginal people; an analysis of the relevance of the concept of Spivak’s concept of “strategic essentialism” as a form of cultural politics in asserting identity and ethnonationalism; and a comparative analysis of origin myths in Dalit and Australian Aboriginal folklore.

Two of the essays address directly the theme of globalisation and its relationship with “borders” and national sovereignty. Both are among the strongest contributions to the collection, although they approach the topics with different intentions and conceptualisations. Hasluck provides an insightful essay on universalism and particularism with regard to human rights, and does so by means of a discussion of a short story by Kafka on the Great Wall of China, concluding that it is “too early to suggest that borders between countries

are steadily vanishing” and noting that any international right will “be conditioned by the context in which it is to be exercised”(16). Ashcroft, in an essay that explores nationalism as the “force that keeps borders in place” and borders as maintaining a global “system of inequality” also points to the inability of borders and hard definitions of “nation” to capture the complexity and transnational flows that comprise the actual life-worlds of people, meaning that “within every nation state lies another ‘imagined community’” that he describes as the “transnation” (153).

This insight is in certain respects evident in several essays in the collection that explore the complex interplay between migration, mobility and identity in specific national and cultural contexts. These include an overview based on historical studies and literary sources of Indians in Aotearoa/New Zealand and a critical reflection on the idea of “diaspora” with reference to South Asians in North America where the author notes a “growing awareness that culture, identity and geopolitics meet at the critical *intersections* of multiple major and minor diasporas” (177). There are also several essays that approach the themes of movement, identity and nation and the ruptures, displacement and change produced by globalisation via critical analysis of fiction by Amitav Ghosh, Adib Khan, Thomas Keneally, Nam Le and Judy Fong Bates.

The book also features chapters that are either policy focused or directed towards analysis of economic institutions and change, including studies of Islamic Banking; regional economic development in South Asia; education policy in Australia with special reference to the idea of “Asia literacy”; and the growth of open access publishing as a response to the “scholarly communication crisis.” While these contributions are worthwhile in and of themselves, they do contrast with the discursive style and broader analytical frame of other chapters. Nonetheless, it is clearly the intention of the editors to present a multidisciplinary and eclectic set of studies around a central theme rather than to adopt a more bounded approach. It is also noteworthy that the writing in each and every chapter is of a high standard, which is to the credit of the editors and the authors and, unfortunately, is perhaps more the exception than the rule in many academic publications today.

Finally, in a book based on the theme of globalisation it is surprising that there is a dearth of contributions that address in a direct way questions of class and various forms of structural inequality. One exception is a critical analysis by Rano Ringo of Adiga’s *The White Tiger* a novel that juxtaposes the structural violence of poverty, class and inequality against an act of physical violence. Ringo’s reading suggests the violence perpetrated by the oppressed protagonist in the novel does not presage a broader politics of change and contestation but rather a reinforcement of the ruthless and amoral logic of individualism under neoliberal globalisation. Similarly, Kulkarni’s analysis of the so-called “chick lit” fiction genre in India suggests that despite gestures towards the idea of a

“liberated female subject” this literature largely celebrates neoliberal individualism and consumerism and fails to challenge the “hegemony and unequal relations of race, class, gender and sexuality” (376). Perhaps another collection is required to explore whether there are more optimistic readings and interpretations of the possibility of effective political and institutional responses to social inequality in the time of globalisation.

### **Works Cited**

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