
In his new book, Lomarsh Roopnarine sets out to reconceptualize the much-used concepts of migration and identity in the context of the Indo-Caribbean diaspora, arguing that we should study migration as a form of movement that can take place within and across state borders, on both macro and micro levels. *The Indian Caribbean* is unique in including attention to recruitment for indenture, movement between plantations, escape from plantations, (temporary) settlement, return migration, migration within the Caribbean and from the Caribbean to Europe and the United States, and nonindentured migration from India to the Caribbean—all in one analytical framework. The study takes a comparative, regional, and long-term perspective and includes both the better-researched contexts of Trinidad, Guyana, Suriname, the United States, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom and the little-explored Indo-Caribbean communities in Barbados, the Virgin Islands, and St. Lucia.

The book adds significantly to our thinking about interconnections between different forms of Indian movement and migrations to and within the Caribbean. Through review of the literature, archival research, and interviews, Roopnarine is able to bring into view the varied impacts of migration—both positive and negative—on societal cohesion and identity formation. For example, his chapter on Indian migration within the Caribbean shows how emigration from one country to Europe or North America encouraged an influx of migrants from another place. And his interviews with local residents reveal the way in which incoming—mostly Indo-Guyanese—migrants were perceived and treated. These interviews show that perceptions are different depending on the context; the more well-to-do migrants who arrived in Trinidad are well-received, while poorer migrants in Suriname and Barbados experienced prolonged stigmatization.

The inclusion of nonindentured Indian migration in this study can be considered groundbreaking. Roopnarine identifies a paradoxical relationship between so-called Nonresident Indians (NRIs) and the established Indo-Caribbean population. “NRI’s do not recognize the achievement of these early pioneer Indians of maintaining some semblance of Indian identity, and they engage in debates as to who is a real Indian and who is not a real Indian.” Others “deeply admire Trinidad Indians for holding on to their past Indian culture” (p. 12). It is these kinds of observations that underline the value of an ethnographic approach to Indo-Caribbean migration. At the same time they may make readers curious about the full extent of the interviews since the grand...
sweep of this study only allows for a small selection of the material to be referenced. Roopnarine effectively points out a number of areas of research that are relatively underdeveloped. Besides the topics of intraregional migration and immigration of nonindentured Indians, we know very little about return migration of Indo-Caribbean people to the Caribbean or about transnational migration between Europe and North America. This study only begins to fill these gaps and it would be impossible for the void to be filled in a single study.

The last chapter constructs a conceptual framework for the study of identity formation aimed at accommodating the multiple levels—including ethno-local, ethno-national, trans-Caribbean, and ethno-Indian universal—at which processes of identity formation take place. While I agree with the importance of taking these different levels of identification into account, I think it is a pity that Roopnarine does not propose a bottom-up approach to studying identification with a more open-ended outcome. Foregrounding ethnicity as the primary category of identification appears problematic to me, given the number of studies that have shown the significance of class, religion, gender, and sexuality. Furthermore, the individual level is not included in the proposed framework, despite the fact that the negotiation of identities takes place at this level as well. How to balance the ties felt to family, friends, neighbors, and cultural or religious bonds?

*The Indian Caribbean* is a welcome addition to the existing historiography on Indo-Caribbean communities because of its ambitious scope. It should provide researchers with an impetus for engaging with unexplored strands of the Indo-Caribbean diaspora and raise their appreciation for its multidirectional nature.

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