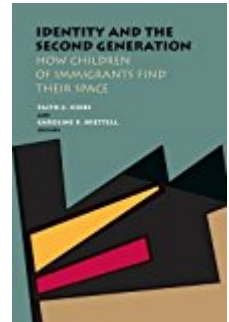


Faith G. Nibbs, Caroline Brettell, eds.. *Identity and the Second Generation: How Children of Immigrants Find Their Space*. Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2016. 240 pp. \$27.95, paper, ISBN 978-0-8265-2069-2.



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For much of the twentieth century, American sociologists primarily understood immigrants' experiences through the rubric of assimilation, a concern that continues to haunt studies of immigrants, especially immigrant youth. While not explicitly pathologizing youth, the emergence of the so-called "new second generation" youth as an object of study in the mid-1990s was undergirded by an implicit "social problem" theme that anxiously echoed the focal concern: Are these youth assimilating? In their worst iterations, these studies ignored structural barriers and propped up white supremacy by implicitly asking of immigrants, Why *aren't* you assimilating? Like it or not, a work focusing on second-generation immigrants and identity must contend with the dominant thread of assimilation. Faith G. Nibbs and Caroline Brettell's edited volume, *Identity and the Second Generation: How Children of Immigrants Find their Space* is a key work that pushes the immigration literature forward, with nine case studies exploring in depth the variations and complex-

ities of identity and belonging amongst youth in the United States and Europe. Each of the authors, along with the editors in their introduction, and Louise Lamphere in her afterword, problematize and critique the assimilation paradigm and, at their best, overturn its core assumptions and tenets. This is achieved through the authors' reliance on long-term participant observation, unstructured interviews, and life histories, and their inclusion of rich and historically contextualized ethnographic data in the space of each short chapter.

Many of the critiques of the assimilation rubric, at least from an anthropological perspective from which most of the authors of the volume are situated, deservedly focused on the essentialism embedded within the paradigm. Immigrants were assumed to be united in their reified and bounded "cultures" irrespective of class, age, gender, race, and historical context of migration, with "host" or "mainstream" cultures just as problematically conceived. Nibbs and Brettell take this es-

sentialism to task early in their introduction, distinguishing their volume from the static, rule-governed synopses of social life, and announce the volume's attention to the complexity and nuance inherent in everyday life experience. Takeyuki Tsuba's chapter, "History and the Second Generation: Differences between Prewar and Postwar Japanese American Nisei," is well positioned as the first contribution. Rather than a frontal assault on assimilation, Tsuba takes down its edifice via its foundational concept of generation. Tsuba convincingly illustrates the poverty of predictive studies built on this ahistorical formulation. In his opening vignette, he describes a WWII commemoration event on a college campus where older *nisei* poignantly recount their experiences in internment camps. The ambivalence of the young *nisei* college students (the ones who bothered to attend) is not the result of some generalized youth apathy, but rather because they are products of a different historical era. As one participant exclaimed, "I am also Japanese American, but I have a different history" (p. 19). The significant differences between the loyalty and service of the older prewar *nisei* generation and the transnational identities of the more recent postwar *nisei* are a result of "different historically constituted spaces of interaction and belonging," and cannot be understood through a construct "based on family birth order or distance from the country of origin" (p. 10).

Generation is not only unsuitable as an etic category. As Lisa Haayen demonstrates in her chapter, "My Friends Make Me Who I Am: The Social Spaces of Friendship among Second-Generation Youth," generation is not a relevant emic category for the Mexican youth whose identity construction practices she explores. With close attention to gendered pathways, Haayen shows how teens navigate the contradictions of their belongings along with their friends, and co-construct "fluid, reflexive and situational" (p. 78) belongings of Mexican-ness and American-ness. Other chapters also challenge mainstream assimilation's unilinear trajectories and static and fixed identities.

Faith Nibbs's "Too White and Didn't Belong: The Intra-ethnic Consequences of Second-Generation Digital Diasporas" explores conflicts surrounding authenticity amongst Hmong diasporic youth in the United States and Germany that play out on social media. Like the youth in Josiane Le Gall and Ana Gherghel's chapter, "Living in Transnational Spaces: Azorean Portuguese Descendants in Quebec," she shows how young people are carving out identities beyond the dichotomizing of belonging inherent in assimilation theory. Tsuba, Haayen, Nibbs, Le Gall, and Gherghel contribute nuanced case studies to conceptualizations of transnationalism, and to the generally acknowledged truism that identities and belongings can only be understood as processes—situational, historical, and fluid, not as things.

The bracketing of historical and local social contexts is second to the most noxious aspect of the assimilation paradigm—the elision of politics. As Steven Steinberg trenchantly argued about the Chicago school of sociology, "from the perspective of the oppressed, we see a system of thought that provides erudite justification for oppression. Indeed, while pretending to be 'neutral,' the model concocts such an inversion of the truth that the oppressed are made responsible for their own oppression." [1] Much like the race relations paradigm, assimilationism served a depoliticizing function by analytically euphemizing race; with groups' varying "success" figured largely as a result of their agentic choices. [2] The volume's best chapters are those that fully politicize identity, and place the concept in relation to emerging literature on citizenship. The strongest of such chapters is Bruno Riccio's on the political spaces and associations of second-generation Italian youth, "Political Spaces: The Ambivalent Experiences of Italian Second-Generation Associations." Riccio draws on recent rethinking of the concept of citizenship beyond the universalist and liberal notions of a legal and civic category, to one that considers the bottom-up and top-down sociocultural processes of subject formation—the everyday

practices of boundary-making that are inherent in any notion of belonging to a community.[3] The Italian youth in Riccio's study articulate their political claims fully aware that many of the problems facing the racialized second generation of the Global North are not encompassed by notions of formal citizenship. As the leader of G2, one of the most popular second-generation organizations in Italy explained, "We are often asked about our 'integration' into Italian society, but we do not have this problem, we do not need to 'integrate,' we full belong to this society, [and] we just need to be considered its citizens" (p. 112). Riccio's contribution documents youth's attempts to normalize "the idea of what it is to be a black Italian or an Italian Muslim" (p. 117), thereby challenging the foundational racism embedded in membership of modern nation-states. Riccio documents the emergence of the technologically savvy cross-group associations amidst global, national, and local political-economic shifts. His analysis of the strengths and limitations of organizing through virtual space, as well as the challenges of representation in creating a collective voice is a particularly notable contribution to current scholarship and politics of immigrant-youth mobilizations.

Equally compelling in terms of thinking through the relationship between citizenship and belonging is Linda Ho Peché's chapter, "Religious Spaces: 'Boat People' Legacies and the Vietnamese American 1.5 and Second Generation." At first glance, readers may wonder how a piece about diasporic Vietnamese paying tribute to their ancestors and performing burial rites at a former refugee camp in Indonesia might contribute anything meaningful to our understanding of politics in the current moment. Employing the term "sacrosapes" to refer to the increasing number of such pilgrimage sites across Vietnam and Southeast Asia, Peché helps carve open a space for inquiry into new contexts in which political subjectivities are forged. Peché's account includes her own experiences as an ambivalent participant and observer on this collective journey in which

she was dubbed a "funny Vietnamese,"—a "second-generation half Vietnamese half Mexican American who needed translation assistance throughout the tour" (p. 153). Like many of the other participants, Peché was "spiritually, socially and ideologically transformed" and began to see how the journey was "about delineating the contours of what constitutes 'being' Vietnamese." She illuminates what is at stake in claiming a diasporic Vietnamese identity, and reclaiming and resignifying the label of "boat people." Tracing the various links that make this meaningful becomes an exhilarating journey that zigzags in time and space, illustrating how these practices are crafted against dominant state narratives—the erasure of trauma on the one hand (Vietnamese state) and that of grateful refugees rescued by benevolent empire on the other (US state). Peché argues, "Invoking a boat people identity is both an act of empowerment and potential subversion (p.164), a "conscious reclaiming ... from a trope of shame, secrecy, rape, violence, illegality, and displacement to one of pride, connection, dignity, legacy, and home" (p. 165). Her analysis provides scholars and students an exemplary model from which to think through links between extraordinary and everyday practices of identity and belonging and the construction of political subjectivities from the bottom up, even when explicitly political claims are not being made. Peché's analysis is revelatory for it elucidates the answer to a question that is rarely asked—why is identity good to think with?

One of anthropology's noteworthy contributions to the citizenship literature has been the collective push to think about citizenship in more localized spaces and expanded contexts. Generating insights about the complexities of identities from unconventional spaces is indeed one of the volume's main themes, and its editors link their collection to the "spatial turn" in the social sciences in their introduction. While the deployment and theorization of space in the volume as a whole will not particularly impress geographers, the at-

tention to the specificities of space as crucial to the politics of belonging is sufficient to move the second-generation literature forward considerably. For example, Caroline Brettell's "Confronting Identities and Educating for Leadership among Asian Youth" demonstrates how identity matters for political engagement in the familiar but overlooked context of the college ethnic student club. She demonstrates how these organizations do more than "provide cultural validation," but are sites of mobilization and contestatory politics. Erin Moran's "Legal Spaces: Failed Asylum-Seeking Children in the Irish Homeland" uses the case of a nineteen-year-old Olunkunle Elunhala's deportation to explore the fissures and contradictions in the construction of the modern nation-state. Analyzing the drama from various perspectives (including state representatives in the Ministry for Justice, religious figures, activist student groups, and Elunhala himself) as it unfolded and in its aftermath, Moran maintains that the law is also a moral space of representation that partly creates the conditions that immigrant youth must navigate. Moran illustrates how the particulars of asylum-seeking migrant children (here defined in accordance with UN Convention on the Rights of the Child as persons under the age of eighteen) places the modern nation-state in a quagmire—at once having to defend its territory against unwanted Others but also obliged to protect children. These are the contradictions that activists exploited in their (ultimately failed) attempts to frame the issue as a humanitarian one and to keep Elunhala in Ireland. Stéphanie Larchanché also examines the importance of immigrant representations, although exclusively from perspective of school officials and mental health officials in the fraught space of the clinical referral in "Health Spaces: Representations of French Immigrant Youth in Mental Health Care." Her contribution explores the processes through which well-meaning state officials must classify certain youth as facing educational "difficulty" in order to provide services. Although they often refuse racial-

ized tropes of cultural difference, their efforts to provide care within the thicket of recently updated rules, regulations, and classifications puts them in a double bind that unwittingly reproduces stigmatizing representations of immigrant families. This is a key experiential context to consider when trying to understand the increasingly toxic conditions in which French youth construct identities and belongings.

Identity and the Second Generation is an important contribution to the interdisciplinary scholarship of migration, identity, youth, and citizenship. The manner in which theoretical insights emerge from rich ethnographic vignettes, in which participants appear as three-dimensional people, ensures that the volume will serve as a useful text in a variety of undergraduate classrooms, particularly courses in sociology and anthropology of migration, youth, globalization, and citizenship. Although citizenship is explicitly taken up in only a third of the contributions, the politicizing of identity and belonging is a theme throughout the work that will allow scholars and students to make those implicit links. Within the classroom, the at times undertheorized portions of the book (citizenship, political subjectivities, space) become an asset rather than a liability. The textured case studies provide a lively springboard for students to discuss, compare, and connect the dots, in the end a much more productive way for students to understand that citizenship, subject formation, identity, and belonging are not mere scholarly abstractions but about one of the most fundamental aspects of social experience—how we live together on this planet.

Notes

[1]. Stephen Steinberg, *Race Relations: A Critique* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007), 73.

[2]. Vilma Bashi Treitler, "Social Agency and White Supremacy in Immigration Studies," *Sociology of Race and Ethnicity* 1 (2015): 153-165.

[3]. Sian Lazar, "Introduction" in *The Anthropology of Citizenship: A Reader*, ed. Sian Lazar (West Sussex, UK: John Wiley and Sons, 2013), 10.

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