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Ethnic Return Migrations—(Are Not Quite)—Diasporic Homecomings

***Diasporic Homecomings: Ethnic Return Migration in Comparative Perspective*. Ed. Takeyuki Tsuda. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009.**

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In February 2004, in preparation for the publication of our co-edited volume, *Homecomings: Unsettling Paths of Return*, Anders H. Stefansson conducted a search of book titles on Amazon.com. That search revealed 7,575 titles under the subject heading of "immigration/emigration." Of these, a mere 157, or 2%, reappeared in the "return migration" category. Some five years later, I replicated that search. This time, 19,700 titles were listed under immigration/emigration, and 20% (4,027) of these turned up as publications about return migration. By the first decade of the twenty-first century, from an under-researched curious footnote, return migration has transmogrified into a "clearly recognized . . . significant global phenomenon" (Brettell 2006, 989). Anthropologists and sociologists, storytellers, statisticians, economists, and political analysts have delved into, and are researching and writing about the return of diasporic people(s) to their ancestral homelands.

One of the latest explorations into this "significant global phenomenon" is Takeyuki (Gaku) Tsuda's 2009 edited volume, *Diasporic Homecomings: Ethnic Return Migration in Comparative Perspective*. The book's major strength is in the tightness of its focus and the unifying tone of its chapters. Perhaps it strives to do for ethnic return migration what Robin Cohen (1997) did for diasporas: to define, categorize, and compare them; to delineate common tendencies and unusual variations; to serve as a guide for policymakers, as well as a reference book for academics. In all these ways, *Diasporic Homecomings* differs mightily

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from its two immediate predecessors, the much more tentative and poetic volumes edited by Long and Oxfeld (2004), and Markowitz and Stefansson (2004). The titles of those volumes speak to the uncertainty of home and the unsettling cultural disruptions that accompany return migration. Conversely, Tsuda's title announces that there *are* diasporic homecomings, and defines them as ethnic return migration. The volume's chapters provide analytical descriptions of the social, political, and economic causes and effects of these phenomena as they occur at opposite ends of the Eurasian continent.

Throughout the 1990s, social scientists strove to define, classify, and understand diasporas (see esp. Safran 1991; Clifford 1994; Cohen 1997) and often looked to them as a way of busting the boundedness of nations (Basch, Glick Schiller, and Szanton Blanc 1994) and challenging the dichotomies of insider/outsider, native/alien, "us" and "them" (Brah 1996; Radhakrishnan 1996). At the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century, Tsuda has delineated a distinctive space within the migration and diasporas literature for what he calls "*ethnic* (sic) return migration" (1). Undergirded by Weber's classic definition of ethnicity, the book establishes itself as an authoritative resource that documents and explains the complex dynamics of diasporic people returning to places where they, their parents, and even grandparents never set foot. The book's fifteen contributors join with Tsuda to provide analyses of "most of the world's major ethnic return migrant groups" (1).

Diasporic Homecomings wastes no time in announcing its major findings. From the very first pages, the book disabuses readers of any romantic notions they might hold of ethnic solidarity. Tsuda states unequivocally, "Most ethnic return migration has been primarily a response to economic pressures" (3). One by one the chapters show that ethnic return migrants set off for the ancestral homeland not with the ideological goal of reuniting with the nation but motivated individualistically and instrumentally to improve their, and their children's, socioeconomic status (compare Pattie 2004, who provides a stunning example of a national reunification project among twentieth-century diasporic Armenians). Co-ethnicity provides these individuals with the means to their ends via favorable immigration policies (as is or was the case in Germany, Israel, Japan, and Spain), and/or shared language and the ease of entering the homeland (as in the cases of Finland Swedes' immigration to Sweden; Transylvania Hungarians crossing from Romania to Hungary; and Korean Chinese returning to South Korea). As varied as these peoples may be, both in the homeland and in diaspora, one after another the chapters document a remarkable uniformity: returning ethnic migrants disappoint and are disappointed by their sedentary hosts in the homeland (4).

With these ironies laid out so early in the book, the case studies cannot simply answer the question, "What happens when the diaspora comes home?" Instead they are challenged to present multilevel

descriptions of the clashes that accompany diasporic homecomings and explicate the ways in which they are (or are not) resolved. Tsuda claims that "new ethnic minorities" result from the contacts (11), but I would suggest that "re-" or "neo-ethnicization" is a more apt term. Instead of the seamless fit between co-ethnics anticipated by state policy and folk wisdom, newcomers and hosts tend to find fault with each other as they discover differences and then delineate boundaries that divide one reuniting nation into opposing cultural groups. These differences might be great or small. They may be linguistic—the inability of newcomers to speak the language of the homeland (as is the case with former Soviet Jews and Germans and many Japanese Brazilians and Peruvians), or the use of dialect sprinkled with diasporic inflections (e.g., Finnish Swedes and Transylvanian Hungarians). Even when language is not an issue, mannerisms, comportment, and attitudes toward work can and do establish lines of divide (as reported in Cook-Martin and Viladrich's chapter 5, Tsuda's chapter 9, and Takenaka's chapter 10).

Although citizens and state policies recognize that co-nationals who lived for centuries in foreign lands must differ in some way from those who remained in the homeland, every case study in the volume indicates that the "we" of the nation-state express some kind of indignation when returning diasporeans fail to exhibit cultural and linguistic sameness. Curiously, at the very same time, homeland hosts, and employers in particular, view returning co-ethnics, like all new immigrants, through a sedentary logic that places demands on newcomers to start over, no matter who they are or where they came from. Immigrants' knowledge and their way of being-in-the-world are discredited as out of place, which usually confines them to the least desirable jobs and housing stock. As they prove themselves committed to the sedentary life of the homeland, they receive increased opportunities for greater social acceptance and a higher standard of living.

From the point of view of returning diasporeans, precisely because they are co-ethnics, and usually co-religionists, even as they know that conditions are different in the homeland (indeed, those different conditions are what attracts them), they expect to be greeted as part of the nation and treated accordingly. They had lived their lives marked as ethnic minorities, who were viewed as originally from elsewhere. Even if they had retained only remnants of the ancestral language and culture, return to the homeland means joining the majority. Thus, diasporic Germans, Hungarians, Japanese, Jews, Koreans, Latinos, and Swedes anticipated, and not just imagined, an easy return migration, a home in the homeland and a satisfying post-immigration life. The realities of the chapters demonstrate, however, that state policies and lived-in cultures with their sedentary logic (Malkki 1992; Tölölyan 2005) thwart the seamlessness of diasporic homecomings and challenge long-cherished notions of ethnic unity.

Diasporic Homecomings

Let me now back up to describe how *Diasporic Homecomings* unfolds. It is a rather hefty 362-page book comprised of an introduction, which is followed by the three chapters of Part One, titled "The Causes of Diasporic Return." Next come Part Two, Ethnic Return Migration to Europe (five chapters); Part Three, Ethnic Return Migration to Asia (four chapters); and a conclusion. Takeyuki Tsuda authored the introduction; chapter 1 of Part One, a case study in Part Three, and the conclusion. The remaining ten chapters are contributions by anthropologists and sociologists whom Tsuda calls "the best scholars studying various ethnic return migrant groups from around the world" (5).

The volume's two introductions situate ethnic return migration (ERM) in the literature of migration and diaspora studies, and delineate the mainly instrumental causes of ERM. These are followed by two chapters that analyze state migration policies. The first, written by a team of four authors (Skrentny, Chan, Fox, and Kim), is a comparative overview of how the nation is defined through the immigration/citizenship regimes of over a dozen Asian and European states. In chapter 3, Christian Joppke and Zeev Rosenhek present a longitudinal comparison of the eerily similar ethnic immigration practices of Germany and Israel.

The ethnographic "meat" of the volume is found in Parts Two and Three. The five chapters of Part Two explore and analyze the changing ERM situation in Germany (Koppenfels), Spain (Cook-Martin and Viladrich), Sweden (Hedberg), Hungary (Fox), and, despite its problematic geopolitical placement, Israel (Remennick). Part Three offers four chapters that are devoted exclusively to ethnic return migration in Japan (Tsuda; Takenaka) and South Korea (Song; Kim). Although each chapter presents a unique case and salient analysis, the book's comparative perspective would have been enhanced with a broader Asian country base (e.g., examples from the budding literature on ERM to China, Taiwan, and the Philippines). The conclusion provides a fine summary that highlights the ongoing ambivalence that pervades the ever-changing policies guiding the sociocultural dynamics of returning diasporas.

How well does the book live up to its title's promise for a comparative perspective? The chapters nicely demonstrate cultural and historical differences between and within Western Europe and East Asia; they present long- and short-distance migrations, and consider state migration regimes based on *jus sanguinis* and those that rely on *jus soli*. Yet no typology or predictive laws of ERM have emerged, except perhaps that, at least in East Asia, co-ethnics from countries high on the global hierarchy experience more rewarding homecoming experiences than those from countries delineated as Third World. As Cook-Martin and Viladrich advise toward the end of their chapter, "students of ethnic return migrations should uncover rather than take for granted what officially defined commonalities portend for the mutual acceptance of natives and newcomers" (151). In providing a comparative perspective on ERM, the book succeeds splendidly.

I will use the remainder of this article to examine the best of the best—the chapters that most saliently reveal the puzzling dynamics of the various social actors—migrants, hosts, groups of employers and employees, and state institutions—embroiled in the politics, economics, and sociocultural meanings encoded in the nation, which result in the not quite diasporic homecomings of ethnic return migrants.

The Best of the Best

The tone of the first 72 pages of *Diasporic Homecomings* is quite straightforward, a bit pedantic, and rather dry. Then something startling happens on page 73. The first sentence penned by Christian Joppke and Zeev Rosenhek reads, "Fatefully entangled as victim and perpetrator during the twentieth century's darkest hour, Israel and Germany adopted curiously similar policies of ethnic immigration after World War II" (73). What a provocative way to begin an essay about the *jus sanguinis* definition of nation and its application by nation-states aggressively striving to rescue diasporic co-ethnics from hostile environments. The magic of this chapter is that it continually tacks back and forth between similarities and changes in both countries while also presenting citizens' challenges to their states' migration policies. The chapter ends brilliantly by contrasting the geopolitical situations of Germany and Israel to explain why, by the beginning of the twenty-first century, the former abandoned its decades-old policy of conferring automatic citizenship on co-nationals, while the latter persists in so doing.

By the beginning of the twenty-first century, reunited Germany hosted thousands of Turkish residents, whose children knew no home other than Germany, and spoke no language but German. Defined as Turkish nationals, these second- and third-generations of *gastarbeiter*s (temporary guest-workers) were, for all intents and purposes, Germans (the situation is of course more complicated than that; see Mandel 2008). At the same time, thousands of repatriated Germans from the former Soviet Union turned out to be Russian-speakers and carriers of quite a different code of civility than that practiced in Germany. Moreover, the world had changed dramatically in the sixty years following Germany's defeat—and division—at the end of World War II. Not long after the Berlin Wall tumbled down in November 1989, the German nation-state had reunited. By the beginning of the new millennium there were no longer German co-nationals at risk abroad, and within a matter of years Germany changed its immigration policy. Long-term residents who are not German nationals are now eligible for citizenship, while repatriating German co-ethnics are required to pass language tests and residency requirements before becoming citizens.

Israel's situation in the global polity has not changed nearly as much as Germany's. Although Israel has emerged as a strong military power and an even stronger economy, the Jewish nation-state remains

in a tense relationship with most of its neighbors. Demographically, Israel's Jewish majority is subject to challenge by the higher birth rate of Palestinians, who have as yet to establish their own state. Israel continues to serve as a symbolic and real refuge to the worldwide Jewish Diaspora, which remains sensitive to threats, if not actual harm, caused by anti-Semitism. The Law of Return that guarantees a place to all Jews and their families therefore remains a foundation of the Israeli state.

Joppke and Rosenhek's analysis of the changes in Germany's immigration policy is reiterated and reinforced in the case study by Amanda Klekowski von Koppenfels. Her chapter, "From Germans to Migrants," reflects the social realities that spurred and derive from recent decisions against granting automatic citizenship to immigrants claiming German ancestry, blood, background, or ethnicity. Their examination of the situation in Israel is likewise bolstered by Larissa Remennick's "Former Soviet Jews in Their New/Old Homeland." Remennick rightly points out that because Jewish bodies remain crucial to the Jewish state-building project, when Jews, half-Jews, quarter-Jews, and their not necessarily Jewish spouses enter Israel, they receive citizenship, health insurance, language classes, and financial assistance. But these gifts come with strings attached, including the demand for identification with the Zionist ethos, and service in the Israeli Defense Force (209–10). Thus, even if a significant proportion—and the numbers vary in scholarly research as well as in the popular imagination from 10% to 20%, up to 50%—of the "Russians" in Israel are not "really" Jews (i.e., according to *halakha*, Jewish law), it is in the state's interest to accept them into the Jewish population. Remennick's case study joins with Joppke and Rosenhek to suggest that were the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to end, Israel might very well follow in Germany's path, reassess its Law of Return, and change its immigration policy.

Another rich essay in the collection is Cook-Martin and Viladrich's chapter, "Imagined Homecomings: The Problem with Similarity Among Ethnic Return Migrants in Spain." Their study of the return migration of Argentineans to depopulated regions in Spain reveals that Spaniards expected the newcomers to relish the opportunities offered to them in these rather desolate areas. But the Latin Americans had exited Argentina to maintain their social standing and improve their economic status and were incredulous and dismayed that their Spanish co-ethnics related to them in the same demeaning manner they used toward agricultural workers from North Africa and East Europe. The authors explain this paradox by pointing to the "problem of similarity," a primordialist belief in the equivalence of co-nationals, which creates unrealistic expectations of compliance on the part of the hosts, and yearnings, on the part of the newcomers, for the same middle-class lifestyle enjoyed by most Spaniards. With hopes dashed on both sides, many Argentineans remigrated back to South America, while rural

Spaniards pushed for the recruitment of Romanians to labor in, and perhaps repopulate, their villages and towns.

The chapters in Part Three show that this very problem of similarity occurs in East Asia, but outcries from natives and immigrants are not nearly as loud or strong as in Europe. Tsuda (chapter 9) shows convincingly that Japanese Brazilians focus on their instrumental goals and even exaggerate their Brazilianness by waving flags, dancing the samba, and opening ethnic restaurants in the midst of their immobile, and seemingly unfeeling, Japanese hosts. For their part, the Japanese find their co-ethnics from Brazil incomprehensible, and rather than struggle with discomfort, they prefer to ignore them. In chapter 10, Ayumi Takenaka hints that the contact situation is actually easier when the newcomers are phenotypically different, as is the case with many intermarried Japanese Peruvians, than with those who look like Japanese but act like Latinos. Here the problem of similarity is (partially) solved as a difference in appearance alerts hosts to the fact that behavior might be different as well. Perhaps the problem with similarity will force a reappraisal of Japan's and Spain's ethnic affinity preference programs as people express the illiberal common sense that has accompanied the march of human history: It is easier to dominate and oppress others than one's own.

In Europe and in Asia, whether designed to offer refuge to conationals beyond the borders of the state; repopulate depleted regions in the homeland; or attract cheap labor or wealthy benefactors; state-directed ethnic return migration results in gaps between policy goals and actual practices. Comparatively speaking, ethnic return migration is not quite—we might even say, is never exactly—tantamount to diasporic homecomings.

Why Are Ethnic Return Migrations Not (Quite) Diasporic Homecomings?

Beyond the answers that derive from probing the "problem of similarity," the book does not entirely resolve this question. One reason might lie in the volume's structure: the two chapters that consider government policies at the core of ethnic return migration are placed in a section of their own at the beginning of the volume. This textual structure replicates what used to be the norm for many ethnographic monographs, a theoretical introduction, followed by a mandatory chapter on historical background. That chapter established a bedrock of facts, and then, on with the ethnography! Instead of separating out how "the nation" constitutes ethnic-preferential state immigration policies from the case studies that show their results, the book's central arguments would have been strengthened had each of the chapters focused more pointedly on the linkages between state policies and the mutually frustrated social actors—sedentary citizens and returning migrants—

whom these policies bring together. The chapters by Kopenfels and Remennick; Fox; and Cook-Martin and Viladich are those that succeed best in this venture.

These authors also include a small dose of reflexivity, even humility, in their contributions, which manifests most strikingly in the recognition that their work is of limited time value. Fox, for example, notes toward the end of his essay that with the 2007 accession of Romania into the European Union, the precarious process of Transylvanian Hungarians using tourist visas to cross into the more prosperous Hungary and then letting those visas lapse, is no longer an issue. This reminder is one among many that the dynamics of migration and citizenship are fluid, dependent on local experiences and national and regional agreements.

So, yes, *Diasporic Homecomings* has underscored the fact that ethnic return migration has become a significant global phenomenon that occurs in Europe and Asia, and not only in Mexico and the Caribbean. Yet it behooves us to remember that ERM still pales in comparison to its opposites, the large numbers of people who are fixed in not very hospitable places, or are impelled by war, poverty, and discrimination to create or join diasporas elsewhere.

Remember my October 2009 Amazon.com search that revealed 19,700 titles listed under "immigration/emigration," and 4,027 in the "return migration" category? These numbers are hardly significant when compared to the 166,363 listings for "refugees." Ethnic return migration comes nowhere near to balancing the power of conquering armies or nation-states that expel residents, forcing them to seek shelter far from the ethnic homeland. It is in diaspora that nostalgia for better days in the ancestral homeland is nurtured and becomes the launchpad of ERM. But as *Diasporic Homecomings* so vividly shows, even when repatriation to the ancestral homeland is complete, the cycle of migration can all so easily begin again.

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