



Rituals of Ethnicity: Thangmi Identities Between Nepal and India, by Sara Shneiderman

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To cite this article: Sondra L. Hausner (2017) Rituals of Ethnicity: Thangmi Identities Between Nepal and India, by Sara Shneiderman, South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies, 40:3, 683-685, DOI: [10.1080/00856401.2017.1342905](https://doi.org/10.1080/00856401.2017.1342905)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00856401.2017.1342905>



Published online: 20 Aug 2017.



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discrimination for centuries, but who escaped through reservation policies for STs that ‘enabled material changes and generated aspirational practices’. This conclusion is extended to the Gujjars, a community in Rajasthan who demand ST recognition. Their controversial agitation shows that ‘the politics of inclusion...is about the continued importance of making demands in ways that are neither militantly separatist nor entrepreneurial, but aspirational’ (p. 176).

The book provides an excellent analysis and new angles for feminist studies, while also casting fresh light on patterns of inequality and social mobility. Moodie’s study shows how one might use ‘the tools of ethnography and the global scope of anthropological research to reorient the center of political theory toward those places where the struggles over collective aspiration are most obvious and India today is one of those places’ (p. 173). Scholars working on South Asian subalternity will enjoy the detailed ethnography and the many references to everyday exchanges and experiences as well as the rare photographs of Dhanka life.

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<https://doi.org/10.1080/00856401.2017.1342904>



Rituals of Ethnicity: Thangmi Identities Between Nepal and India, by Sara Shneiderman, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015, 328 pp., US\$75.00 (cloth), ISBN 9780812246834

Rituals of Ethnicity is a text that describes, in wonderful detail, just that: the rituals by which an ethnic identity is brought into being. The main point, carefully crafted, is that ethnicity is ritually produced, at many levels, by many actors, with multiple interlocutors, in historically contingent ways. Whether in the hills of Nepal or the historic tea plantations of Himalayan India, Shneiderman’s argument is that the Thangmi community—historically disenfranchised and still marginalised—has used ethnic identity itself as a mobilising force in the two countries in which they make their homes, articulated in different modes so as to resonate with each national political frame. In the absence of material indicators that can be abstractly held up as evidence of ethnicity, or indigeneity, as is so often the case—there were no masks or sculptures, no cloth prints or concrete ritual implements that could become artisanal icons of this tribe—the identity of the ‘Thangmi’ has become, Shneiderman suggests, the very object to be held aloft as the marker of both self and community in the double act of Nepali and Indian identity politics, each in their own national terms. The production of ‘Thangmi-ness’, therefore, has been a passionate and sometimes belaboured one, with Thangmi political activists in Nepal and Thangmi political activists in India each looking towards and informing the other in order to establish what, precisely, such an identity entails.

The book is both a classic ethnography—incorporating kinship patterns and life-cycle rituals—and a modern study of migration and changing livelihood, as well as, most importantly, an account of political activism around the category of mobilisation of identity in Nepal and

India, in their different configurations of state and tribe. Shneiderman takes care to indicate that migration and its relation to livelihood are not later developments in Thangmi life, but as integral to them as marriage and religion. This is an excellent combination and, interestingly, traditional and modern come in reverse order, as if to prove the point that the separation would be false.

Shneiderman's argument is particularly good on the relationship between practice and performance in ritual studies, and on the insistence that activism around the definitions of identity formation—through collective associations and the political process they engage in—needs to be seen in tandem with cultural and religious practice and performance as joint aspects of the ritual production of collective selfhood, namely ethnicity. This double process—practice and performance, presented and represented, cultural and political—is, she argues, essential to the complete production of the ethnic group as well as to its conception or consciousness of itself. Her refusal to distinguish between religious and secular, or first-order and second-order consciousness of an ethnic self, means that her ethnography is offered at the service of first-rate theoretical work: she argues that there is no inherent distinction between cultural practice on the one hand and political performance on the other, and insists rather that, as analysts, we are obliged to see these forms as intricately linked in the production of not only identity, but also ethnicity itself.

There is a subtle, lingering tension, however, between the main protagonists of each form: the gurus who engage in ritual practice that classically reproduces 'Thangmi-ness' and the activists who rely on cultural performance to represent that identity to each other and to the state, who do not always see eye to eye; it emerges rather late in the story that the activists find the gurus a little tedious anyway. This is excellent ethnographic nuance, highly plausible as a contested element of identity production, but it is never fully resolved, and perhaps part of Shneiderman's point is that it never can be. The theoretical seamlessness between practice and performance as equally valid means of ritual production does not seem quite so integrated on the ground: if there are stark debates between actors engaging in these different orders of ritual, is their equivalence as forms of action not called into question? In practice, they may not be as neutrally combined as we might have it analytically: performance appears to grow uncomfortable in the face of practice.

A reader might wonder why Shneiderman does not more explicitly align herself with the Durkheimian school on the process she describes: that ethnicity is produced through ritual action—or, to put it another way, that a group cements and articulates its identity in ritual contexts that rely on shared symbolic forms—is a classic Durkheimian position. No doubt Shneiderman helpfully layers this baseline, bringing her case squarely into the modern world by considering how the self-consciousness required to assert ethnic selfhood in national and international frames creates a kind of ripple effect: here, Thangmi activists actively engage with the totemic category that they both manifest and know they need to create for political ends. Although clearly and cogently written, there are times where the prose can feel repetitive, such as when the author takes her readers through the more subtle shades of argument using the same turns of phrase repeatedly: ethnicity is always the 'sacred object' and the process is always one of 'objectification', a slightly opaque term made more so in its over-use.

The ethnography is designed as a case study for a more theoretical discussion of the production of ethnicity in South Asia, and it deftly achieves this aim. Shneiderman is not one to lose the forest for the trees, to her great credit, but there are moments when the granularity of the case supersedes the frame that would also account for the way in which ethnicity has come to be the pivot of people's identity—and the necessary grounds for their collective mobilisation—in both India and Nepal come the turn of the twenty-first century. Whence the collective focus on ethnicity as the primary 'object of identity' in South Asia in the second half of

the twentieth century? How and why has it come to be that ethnicity is held up as that ‘sacred object’, above and beyond religion, nationality, region or political affiliation? Historicising ‘ethnicity’ as a primary category of value in South Asia is clearly a different project—so the call for a broader historical context is not so much a critique of the current text, densely packed with associational histories, mythic narratives, ritual cycles and personal anecdotes—as a hope that there is more, at a global level, yet to come. Here, the theoretical forest is a vibrant canopy for the ethnographic trees. And yet the overriding sense is that we are in the heart of an ethnographic rice-field at the edge of a lush theoretical wood.

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<https://doi.org/10.1080/00856401.2017.1342905>



Landscapes of Accumulation: Real Estate and the Neoliberal Imagination in Contemporary India, by Llerena Guiu Searle, Chicago, IL, The University of Chicago Press, 2016, 304 pp., US\$27.50 (paperback), ISBN 9780226385068

Llerena Guiu Searle’s book, *Landscapes of Accumulation*, provides brilliant insights into an understudied field of action that crucially shapes urban renewal in India. The author analyses the attempts of international investors and Indian real estate developers to create new opportunities for capital accumulation in the booming Indian real estate sector. The book is based on nearly ten years of field research spanning from 2006 to 2014. Referring to Harvey’s formulation of urban renewal in the (late) capitalist era as a process of ‘accumulation by dispossession’, Searle rightly points out that the process of dispossession has been frequently addressed in recent years, while accumulation has received far less attention (p. 8). To fill this gap, the book explores the ways in which international investors and Indian developers transform land in India into a globally tradeable financial asset. It follows the endeavours of various stakeholders and the problems they encounter as they seek new ‘routes of accumulation’.

The book critiques a dominant perspective that conceives of capitalism as a system with predetermined rules. Instead, Searle offers a careful analysis of local permutations, which allows for a more heterogeneous image of global capitalism. Capital—the author asserts in Chapter 2—is not an agent in and of itself (p. 58). Capital accumulation has to be understood as the result of the concrete work performed by various actors. It is this work and its varying, unpredictable effects that the author delineates throughout the book.

Chapters 2 to 4 examine the agency of ‘stories of growth’ as crucial tools in the making of markets. People engaged in real estate marketing create real effects in the world by devising, telling and retelling stories of growth. Searle refers specifically to what she calls the ‘India story’ that fuelled industry aspirations and triggered fantasies of an ever-expanding Indian real estate market that promised infinite profits for foreign investors and Indian real estate developers. This story of growth worked as a self-fulfilling prophesy by aligning expectations and aspirations and condensing them into a coherent and convincing narrative that encouraged investment in Indian real estate. The author links the invention of the ‘India story’ to other image campaigns that depicted the countries of the Global South as untapped markets offering attractive investment opportunities for international investors (Chapter 2). The story proved to be especially convincing in the Indian context, because reliable statistical data on