

des notes de cours), aux nouveaux établissements d'enseignement tels l'École Normale de l'an III, l'École centrale des travaux publics, Muséum, Collège de France, etc.

L'ouvrage se termine par une conclusion de Boris Noguès et une postface de Dominique Julia qui en plus de faire ressortir les apports des contributions et de souligner leurs liens transversaux, proposent de nouvelles pistes de recherche. Cet ouvrage remarquable rend compte des recherches innovantes dans le champ de l'histoire des universités à la période moderne et représentera une référence obligée pour qui veut aborder l'université et la ville.

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AMRITH, Sunil – *Crossing the Bay of Bengal: the Furies of Nature and the Fortunes of Migrants*. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2013. Pp. 353.

Sunil Amrith announces the central argument of this compellingly crafted work in its first sentence. The Bay of Bengal, he says, “was once a region at the heart of global history” (1). Suffused with nostalgia for what once was, *Crossing the Bay of Bengal* tells us the story of the growth, both cultural and economic, of this “densely woven together” region during the centuries of European imperial dominance, followed during the 1940s and 1950s by a collapse of “astonishing rapidity” (3). In the end the Bay fragmented into two distinct global regions—labeled South Asia and Southeast Asia—governed by a patchwork of jurisdictions with little in common among them.

Much of this story is of course well-known, and, from the era of the trading companies through to the crisis of the Second World War, it has been the subject of much research over many decades. At one level, Amrith’s account effectively brings together this existing scholarship. At another, he pulls the reader into a richly textured narrative, based on extensive original research that gives the story a fresh, even exciting, telling. At its heart are the two themes identified in the subtitle: the challenges of nature, and the experiences of overseas migrants. The work is fundamentally chronological in its organization.

The Bay of Bengal is of course the eastern half of the much larger Indian Ocean, and it cannot be consistently kept separate from its western half, linking India with Africa and the Middle East. As Amrith makes clear in his opening chapter on “the life of the Bay of Bengal”, the monsoons, arising in the western ocean, shape the life of the entire oceanic basin. Migrant flows too went west, to Mauritius and beyond, as well as to Burma and Malaya. Kerala and Gujarat looked westward much as maritime Bengal and the Coromandel coast looked eastward. Linking the two oceanic halves is the island of Ceylon (Sri Lanka), where one can stand, as I did recently, on the ramparts of the Portuguese fort at Galle, and look both east and west across the sea. Still, the Bay of Bengal possesses

a coherence of its own, and Amrith sensibly keeps his focus on the coastal traders, merchants, and migrants, who crossed that vast body of water. For many people over many centuries, the “far shores of the sea’s littoral” were “closer—culturally, economically, imaginatively—than their own hinterlands” (27).

Throughout, Amrith endeavors, wherever possible, to give the reader a sense of the life of the ordinary Indian who ventured across the Bay. Initially these migrants were predominantly merchants, like the Tamil Muslims who settled in the Straits, married local Malay women, and financed shipments of textiles, rice and pepper. From their marriages, and those of Chinese merchants, emerged the mixed Jawi Peranakan community of the colonial era. These merchants too, as they built shrines in the form of those they knew from Tamilnad, made of the Bay’s littoral “an arc of holy places” (88). The coming of steam, and with it an imperial order seeking access to the resources of the region, vastly increased its “human traffic” (the title of chapter 4). This movement, from the 1840s, Amrith insists, “took place amid servitude”, involving various kinds of recruitment and indenture, and was often propelled by famine in India (111). Most of these migrants traveled to the three rapidly growing colonial territories of Ceylon, Burma, and Malaya. In each chapter Amrith moves back and forth between these three territories as he assesses the fortunes of the migrants who settled in each. In Ceylon and Malaya, brokers or agents employed by estates “used a combination of inducement, coercion, and above all debt to mobilize workers in South India, and then immobilize them on plantations” (115). In Burma, by contrast, many of the migrants, known as Chettiars, were well-to-do merchants, who established banking firms to finance rice cultivation for export.

Amrith sensitively explores what he calls the “collective memory” of Tamil workers who found themselves in Malaya. They at once “searched for the familiar”, he says, and sought also to make of their new homes a “land where they belonged” (125, 143). In what is perhaps the most original chapter, entitled “oceans’ crossroads”, Amrith skillfully evokes the lives of those who moved from the plantation to the city in the interwar years. It was, he argues, an encounter that produced “new forms of urban life and a great deal of cultural mixing” (146). Using oral histories and memoirs, he finds the 1930s remembered as “an experience of modernity”—marked by cinema shows, newspapers, bicycles, food stalls, and a cosmopolitan diversity of peoples (160, 179).

Economic upheaval, the rise of nationalism, and finally Japanese invasion snapped the cords that for so long had bound together the world of the Bay of Bengal. A chapter aptly titled “crossings interrupted” tells a tragic tale of refugees, of brutality, and of starvation. Once the war was over, independence for these former colonial territories reinforced the focus on the land rather than on the ocean. As Amrith writes, the sea had become an uninhabited “empty space” (190). Meanwhile the resident Indians scattered around its shores found themselves engaged in a desperate struggle for citizenship in what were now their own homelands. Amrith concludes the book with some unsettling reflections on climate change and the ecological transformation of the region under the pressure of development. With its low lying coasts, subject to devastating tsunamis and

monsoonal fluctuations, the lands around the Bay of Bengal will, he argues, be among the hardest hit by the “rising waters” produced by a warming earth (266). Perhaps, Amrith wistfully hopes, looking forward, these threats will “open a small window” for “reimagining” the Bay of Bengal as an integral whole (284).

Already a prize-winning book, *Crossing the Bay of Bengal* at once opens up the history of this often neglected region, and demonstrates how scholarly writing can be made accessible to all. A masterful work, this book deserves a wide readership.

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BOUCHARD, Gérard (ed.) – *National Myths: Constructed Pasts, Contested Presents*.  
 London: Routledge, 2013. Pp. 306.

Our political identities and identifications are formed via processes at once communal and deeply psychological, the result of multifaceted historical, sociological, and cultural forces. As Seymour Martin Lipset (1959) wrote many years ago, the stability of nations, particularly nations existing through democratic consent, depends on *effectiveness* and *legitimacy*. Effectiveness refers to the performance of the state, primarily its ability to establish conditions for economic development and distribution. Legitimacy is more symbolic in nature, reflecting the support of the population for key institutions of society and how the political process prioritizes and addresses major issues of concern. Lipset underscored that, while effectiveness relies on instrumental assessment, legitimacy is more affective and tied to the maintenance of a common “secular political culture.” As Gérard Bouchard and his fellow contributors explore in this engaging collection of essays, a fruitful framework for understanding this symbolic and emotional connection between individuals and their political system is in terms of national myths, or the beliefs, values, meanings, memories, and ideals that are associated with the project of the state.

This volume consists of sixteen chapters, all but one of them examining the mythic dimensions of national identity in a specific country. The last chapter by Bouchard synthesizes themes from the constituent chapters and highlights topics for researchers going forward. The continents of North America, Europe, Asia, Africa, and South America are all represented in the book, although with certain selection biases. Canada gets two chapters; Japan has its own chapter and is also the focus of a chapter on Chinese attitudes; Australia, an interesting case for this kind of analysis, is omitted. In his brief Introduction, Bouchard explains that authors received free rein in regard to their definition of the concept of national myths as well as their focus on particular questions of mythic origins, functioning, impact, and evolution. While the result serves the editor’s aim of conveying “the richness” of this field of inquiry, it also presents intellectual and methodological inconsistencies bound to limit the collection’s appeal for some audiences.