Robbins, Sarah R., Sabine H. Smith, and Federica Santini, eds. *Bridging Cultures: International Women Faculty Transforming the US Academy*. Lanham: UP of America, 2011. Print. 230 pages.

Jennifer Sano-Franchini

Bridging Cultures centers on the timely and under-investigated topic of international women faculty and their experiences in the US Academy. This topic is particularly relevant as it coincides with the 2012 publication of *Presumed Incompetent: The Intersections of Race and Class for Women in Academia* (reviewed by Hui Wu in Peitho 15.2), which, while not centered specifically on international women faculty, does the work of considering how cultural identities that may at times be based on nationalisms impact the work of women of color in the Academy. These texts further coincide with news reports of Wang Ping and Lulu Sun, international scholars who brought lawsuits against their respective institutions—Macalester College and the University of Massachusetts at Dartmouth—on the basis of discrimination in the promotion process. More recently, Nicholas Close Subtirelu published "She does have an accent but…" which explores how multilingual teachers from Asia may receive lower scores in clarity and helpfulness on RateMyProfessors.com, raising concerns about bias in institutional evaluations. These culminating events illustrate how different forms of bias can and do materially affect international women scholars in the US, who "face the double jeopardy of both their 'foreign' status and their gender" (xii). *Bridging Cultures* further speaks to the timeliness of this work on international women faculty in the US, citing a growth in numbers—"International faculty members are steadily becoming a more visible presence at US universities, both private and public" (xi)—alongside some of the challenges international faculty and women faculty face, including adaptation to a new US academic culture, students' expectations of forms of instruction that are based on US norms, institutional bureaucracy, and salary inequity (xii-xiii).

The book raises awareness about the fact that the topic of international women faculty in the US academy is also under-investigated. While it is easy to find information (such as country of origin) about international students, the opposite seems to be true regarding international faculty. The most detailed data set, cited in the Preface by Robbins, is the number of male and female "non-resident aliens," as reported by the National Center for Education Statistics (xi). The details of these groups, including ethnicity and country of origin, are either not tracked or not publicly available. This lack of access to such information indicates a lack of attention to the complex needs and concerns of international faculty in the US. Furthermore, the editors argue that "the internationalization of higher education is…inadequately critiqued" (xxvi), and that there is a "shortage of interdisciplinary scholarship directly addressing international faculty women's place in the academy" (xxvii).

Intended for faculty and administrators interested in "faculty development and institutional change" (xv), the purpose of *Bridging Cultures* is to "imagine how the university, as a site of public culture-making, can benefit from […] personal and communal exchanges among international women faculty and, by extension, additional under-represented social groups" (xxii). The contributors work toward this goal through feminist and standpoint theories, relying on "autobiographical writing as a meaning-making vehicle," and as a "feminist-oriented practice of life-narrating" (xxiv), alongside Sandra Harding's framework for "standpoint projects," where one starts research "from the lives of structurally exploited groups, identifying conceptual practices of power, developing group consciousness" (xxiii). Such an approach is concerned with lived experience as a way of knowing, with "the potential to help move positions of resistance into social transformation ones," acknowledging both "the contingent nature of their findings…and the epistemological values their stories have for this particular topic" (xxiii).

To this end, *Bridging Cultures* is arranged in three sections: I. Memoirs on Bridging Cultures, II. Responses, and III. Building Aspirational Cultures. Working from disciplines like Psychology, Sociology, English, Foreign Languages, and Teacher Education, and coming from regions in Europe, South America, the Caribbean, Africa, and Asia, the collection's twenty contributors enter a dialogue within and across the text that is both visible and invisible: one of the more compelling aspects of the collection is described as its "invisible dialogue," a collaborative writing approach contingent on reflection and communal revision. The editors explain, "the authors of this volume's essays embarked on an intellectual journey that, ironically, required a patient stillness—giving themselves over to a sustained period of individual and shared reflection, supported by writing, then refined by collaborative re-writing, additional reflection, and extended communal revision" (xxi). Authors seem to have appreciated and individually benefitted from this approach, and the dialogue is described in the introduction, organized through the memoir and response sections, and followed up with a focus group in which authors discussed the writing process and the content of the essays. Such an approach has the potential to fruitfully yield more complex and multi-perspectival understandings of cultural positioning within an academic context. At the same time, such an approach may also risk imposing a unity where unity doesn't exist, reducing some of the complexities, tensions, and structural inequalities that come with a culturally diverse group.

Section 1, "Memoirs on Bridging Cultures," consists of six personal narratives intended to employ "locality and specificity" as a starting point for larger recurring issues (xxxi). Chapter 1, "Professing in a Foreign Tongue: A Central European Perspective on English Studies," by Katarina Gephardt, may be of interest to those in rhetoric and writing as Gephardt describes how her "own struggle with academic writing in the Anglo-American academic context alerted [her] to the peculiar organizational structures and rhetorical 'moves' that were culture-based rather than logical or natural, which is the way that they are often presented in composition instruction" (14). Drawing on the work of Ulla Connor and contrastive rhetoric, Gephardt explains how the "phenomenon of the thesis required an explanation that accounted not only for cultural difference, but also for the peculiarity of academic culture," highlighting the importance of understanding language as always embedded in a cultural context.

Chapter 2, "East Meets West: An Asian Woman Teacher Educator's Journey Enacting Global Pedagogy in the American South," by Guichun Zong, describes the author's upbringing during China's Cultural Revolution and her movement from a position of relative privilege in China to that of a minority in the US. Zong also describes teaching strategies meant to facilitate global and cross-cultural learning, including a trip to Super H-Mart, a Korean-owned grocery chain. From this trip, "students not only experienced Korean culture, but also learned about the intricacies of globalization" (32). Of note is how one African American student "observed that the people working in this Korean store were either Asians or Latinos," and "asked the store manager why there were not many black people employed there" (32-33). This moment with the African American student seems important and the experiential learning activities seem worthwhile, but it is not clear how the trip was scaffolded, how the student's observation was unpacked, what students learned from the trip, or what aspects of Korean culture the students experienced. Teachers interested in trying an activity like this in their own classes might consider including elements that may help veer away from a cultural tourism approach to learning about Others. Teachers should consider Edward Bruner's work on the subject, and encourage students to reflect on the limitations of what they might be able to know based on their experiences, the rhetoricity of a grocery shopping experience, and how power and privilege might operate within such a situation, particularly in relation to the "tourist's gaze."

"Perfectly Ambivalent: How German Am I?" by Sabine H. Smith is perhaps the most genuinely reflective among the essays, as Smith examines, contextualizes, and problematizes her own subject position within a variety of contexts—as a daughter who grew up in post-WWII Germany, as the first academic in her family, as a formally educated speaker in a male-dominated conversational environment. At one point, while describing her fraught relationship with her father, who was a WWII veteran on the German side, she explains how she wrote all of her graduate papers on the Third Reich in English, in part so that her father would be unable to read them. Intriguingly, she says, "I can speak more easily in English about difficult and emotional topics. Arguably, English and my 'American' voice have afforded me emotional distance and freedom to express myself" (47). Smith's essay points to the ways in which efforts to develop intercultural competencies will be hindered if we don't also manage the inevitable ambivalences in our personal and professional lives.

Chapter 4, "The Stranger in the Classroom: The Professional Acculturation of Three Romanian Scholars," by Darina Lepadatu, Cristina Gheorghiu-Stephens, and Gilbert Lepadatu, describes how the authors navigated the transition between "the old-world elitist Romanian system of higher education faced with modernization challenges and the American system of mass higher education designed for critical thinking and a commercial approach to teaching and learning" (61). The authors draw on Georg Simmel's work on "the stranger," explaining, "Simmel argues that strangeness is a positive attribute in human interactions and should not be rejected as an alienating condition. The stranger as a social type has the benefits of mobility, free thinking, objectivity, non-stereotypical thinking, and non-conformism" (64, emphasis original). It is to be noted, however, that these qualities have come into question post-modernity, and that such a lens risks treating the complex experiences of international scholars and teachers in a way that is ultimately reductive.

Chapter 5, "Disclosure, Dialogue, and Coming of Age in the Academy," by Gertrude Tinker Sachs, Pier Angeli Junor Clarke, Wanjira Kinuthia, Ewa McGrail, and Geeta Verma, is a collaborative memoir by authors who spent their formative years in the Bahamas, Guyana, India, Kenya, and Poland. Four of the authors identify as women of color, and three represent the African Diaspora. Of note is how the chapter works to "problematize the use of the multicultural framework to theorize [the authors'] collective experiences," emphasizing how their "experiences are much more complex than being a member of an ethnic group" (83). The authors grapple with the process of coming to understand themselves as Other—as "minority," "diverse," "junior," and "new"—in their transition to the US Academy. An interesting tension occurs when the authors touch on how hegemonic discourses on race have negative implications for white international women faculty as well: the one Caucasian collaborator "considers herself an international faculty member but is considered a part of majority culture by her academic institution. Some of her struggles come from not being able to tap into institutional programs and benefits typically offered to faculty members belonging to minority groups" (93, emphasis original). As a reader, I understand that there are shared challenges among international faculty across race; however, I wonder how the reality of white privilege is taken into account within such statements. Even though the Caucasian faculty member may not have access to "benefits" geared toward "minority" faculty groups, and though this is a real problem that should be addressed, there is also a risk of covering over the advantages afforded by white privilege.

Chapter 6, "Language is the House of Being," by Federica Santini, continues to explore pedagogical differences between educational institutions across national boundaries, focusing on the author's experiences in Italy, the Netherlands and the US. The chapter is primarily a "series of notes [...] aimed to define at least some points of [the author's] journey between two worlds and two languages" (104). Using continental theory on language via the works of Heidegger, Marx, de Saussure, Derrida, Lacan, and Freud, alongside female poet Rosselli and Cixous, Santini discusses how her conceptualization of language has shaped her work in translation. While the author states that she hopes that the chapter may be a "source of further reflection on the part of [her] readers" (104), the chapter would have benefitted from more explicit connections to the purpose of the collection or the concerns of its audience.

The second section, "Responses," consists of shorter response essays by a male international scholar, a male Asian American scholar who teaches in Japan, a female Austrian doctoral candidate who studies globalization in academic culture, a male US provost, and a female international administrator from Brazil. The first essay, by Satya P. Mohanty, is the strongest of the responses, particularly as he provides a more nuanced view of nationalisms as they mobilize in and out of the Academy, and in relation to other identity categories. Specifically, Mohanty suggests that we

> unpack the notion "international faculty" by looking at it through the lens of social identity. [...] we don't exist in relation to just the academy; we are also members of this society. Whether or not we like it, we are defined socially by our class, our gender, our sexuality. And there is probably no place in the United States where we international faculty would not also be defined by what is called 'race.' The daily experiences of a dark-skinned Malaysian-American professor are likely going to be much less pleasant than those of a light-skinned Ukrainian faculty member, and that has nothing to do with the talents and capabilities of the two individuals in question. The fact that they are both 'international faculty' says very little in many contexts, and it is only by looking at the way they respond to their racialized social identities, as residents of the United States, that we will write a fuller story of what

> happens to international faculty on our campuses and in our society. My own experiences as a naturalized American of Indian origin tell me that of all the cultural factors that we immigrants are taught—and even urged—to deny, the most salient one is race—the color line. Denial of race brings rewards in this society; acknowledgement of race can be costly […] To live in the United States is to be racialized, no matter what the color of our skin is. Once we fully acknowledge the implications of this basic social fact […] we begin a journey that is sometimes painful but also immensely fulfilling. (120-121)

This point about the urge to deny race as a contributing factor in one's experiences gives cause to re-think some of the perspectives presented in previous chapters that do not always attend to international faculty's racialized experiences. For instance, one author surmises, "I also feel that I am credited with a higher level of objectivity [because of my strangeness, or foreign-status] when we discuss 9/11, the war in Iraq, racial and ethnic discrimination, and even topics such as universal health care," without considering how it might not be just her foreign-ness, but also her whiteness that helps people to entrust her with this "higher level of objectivity" (65).

The third and final section of the collection, "Building an Aspirational Culture," consists of a reflective epilogue and set of questions that invites readers to consider their own experiences in relation to previous chapters for the purpose of "Reflection, Discussion, and Cultural Change." In so doing, the authors end the volume with a non-ending, allowing for continued engagement and conversation about the issues raised within the collection. They even explicitly invite readers to "participate in ongoing conversations" by emailing the collection editors and sharing thoughts about "how the book can be useful in a range of academic settings and/or with comments on how the essays have been most helpful to their own professional development" (174).

The work of *Bridging Cultures* is valuable because it brings attention to a complex group that makes important contributions to the US Academy, but one that has not been paid enough attention in research and scholarship. At the same time, I suggest that readers encounter this text with a few caveats in mind. The biggest, for me, is the ways in which the collection does not sufficiently account for issues of race and representation. Among the issues I find troubling with the text, include the diversity (or lack thereof) of contributors, nearly half of whom—nine out of twenty contributors—migrated from Europe. Of the six memoirs, four centralize on European perspectives, one is written from an Asian perspective, and one presents an intercultural but primarily African diasporic perspective. All of the editors are tenured white women—two European, and one US-born with experience living overseas. Thus, while these essays may be useful for thinking about the diverse cultural backgrounds of academics of European ancestry, my sense is that the backgrounds of contributors do not reflect the actual make up of international scholars in the US Academy. Rather, issues of race seem at times to be engaged as an afterthought, and are best attended to in the response by Satya P. Mohanty and in Chapter 5 by Tinker Sachs, et al. For example, Tinker Sachs, et al. make a key point when they say, "The multicultural framework appears to be just and equitable, but it positions the mainstream versus the marginalized as dichotomous and thus not only privileges the inherent Euro-centrism but also underlines the hegemonic philosophical and epistemological assumptions of universalism" (82). This point could have been more deeply considered in the introduction, but is instead partitioned off in a way that ironically reflects the very problem of "multicultural" approaches. While it may be said that the current arrangement is truer to the collaborative writing process and that it may be helpful to learn how actual international scholars perceive the US and their experiences here, there is also the risk of structurally reinforcing the idea that administrators—especially white, male, and/or US administrators—are needed to validate and critique the experiences and ideas of international women faculty in the U.S. or to teach them about issues of race. Instead, I believe there is an ethical imperative for editors to provide authors with an opportunity to attend to these kinds of perspectives themselves through substantive revision, and the editors could have done more to include such perspectives in the introduction.

Perhaps as result of this limited engagement with issues of race, the editors deploy terms like "privilege" and "other" in a context about systemic inequality in ways that are not in line with existing scholarship on systemic inequality. For instance, the editors ask, "What if, instead, the uncertain space of suspension could be used as a privileged setting from which to actively participate in the global world?" (xxv, emphasis mine) The Introduction goes on to state, "our core essays' authors have a kind of epistemic privilege—a special capacity, by virtue of their personal histories, for developing their own bicultural identities as resources for knowledge-making" (xxvi, emphasis mine). However, a unique insight as a result of oppression is not a privilege, at least if we understand privilege in terms of its use in conversations about systemic inequality. This "privilege" is further referred to as a "positive vision of hybrid identity" (xxvi), without nuance in terms of the implications of reframing "privilege" or even "hybrid identity" in this way. As such, it seems that "privilege" is used as synonymous with "advantage," and this use may contribute to misunderstanding about what privilege via systemic inequality is and how it operates. This use of "privilege" may have also led to a lack of reflection within the memoirs with regards to the authors' actual privilege as academics, or as tenured professors, or as white women (or men), and how these privileges may have shaped their narratives.

As can be seen in the quotes above, the editors' seem to be primarily concerned with re-envisioning international women faculty, casting them in a more productive and positive light—as having the potential to yield unique and valuable cross-cultural perspectives. They consider:

> Like the pianist, migrants and ex-pats are often represented as permanently suspended between worlds, getting entangled in a net of regrets. What if, instead, the uncertain space of suspension could be used as a privileged setting from which to actively participate in the global world, to create interactive networks across space, by making connections or engaging with generative oppositions (core/periphery, inside/outside, high/low, East/West and/or North/South, patriarchal/feminist, white/non-white)? [...] Suspension, with its possibilities for ongoing reflection, can therefore be a source of strength. (xxv)

This attempt to reframe the oppressed positions of international women faculty in a more positive light—to re-see oppression as a source of strength and privilege—may send the message that a viable solution for better integrating internationalization efforts at postsecondary institutions is to simply re-see international women faculty as the valuable resources that they are. A critique is to be made, however, that this "solution" may serve as a way of side-stepping actual systemic problems integrated within university structures; in other words, when we are primarily concerned with transforming the ways in which we ourselves see "the Other," we may never get to thinking about how transformations to specific institutional policies, resources, spaces, and other structural elements might better address the needs and concerns of international women faculty in the US. While it is important to critically rethink how we see others, it is also important to talk about how university administrators should be held responsible for actively creating space for the perspectives of international women faculty, attending to their needs and concerns, and supporting their valuable intellectual contributions.

As a reader, I was left wanting for more specificity in terms of how precisely international women faculty transform the US Academy, beyond having unique perspectives that bridge cultures. This lack of specificity in terms of the implications of this work might have been due in part to a framing that does not adequately account for its specific context. For instance, one area that the editors could have pushed in an interesting way is the relation of place to some of the ideas presented. Readers may notice that a large number of the contributors—sixteen out of twenty—have been employed by postsecondary institutions in Georgia, and ten are or were affiliated with Kennesaw State University specifically. This pattern may not have been an issue had there been a more explicit connection between Georgia institutions and the wider US academy in the collection's framing pieces. After all, student body and institutional culture can vary substantially depending on a variety of factors, including location. Are some of the conclusions that can be drawn from these memoirs actually more specific to Georgia or the South? This collection may have had a different sort of depth had the memoirs been discussed in relation to place and Georgia specifically, perhaps in relation to the New South.

Finally, I am wary of the ways in which international women faculty are at times described as resources to be mined. For instance, "imagine how the university, as a site of public culture-making, can benefit from such personal and communal exchanges among international women faculty and, by extension, additional under-represented social groups" (xxii, emphasis mine), or, "Such a strategy banks on diversity as a powerful cultural capital rather than viewing 'difference' as a problem to be overcome " (xxvi, emphasis mine). Later, respondent and Provost of Arcadia University Steve O. Michael makes some effort to persuade readers that international faculty tend to be talented individuals with much to contribute, while also referring to them as "institutional international assets" and "assets awaiting discovery" (139-141). I wonder, rather than viewing our colleagues as "assets" to be mined, what would it look like to view them as human beings who are part of an intellectual community, and who have intellectual contributions that do not exist just for our benefit?

Bridging Cultures contributes to the discussion on international women faculty in the US, and brings with it a unique approach to interdisciplinary collaborative writing. At the same time, issues relevant to international women faculty have not been entirely missing from the scholarly literature, and *Bridging Cultures* would have benefited from better attention to the scholarship on transnational, postcolonial, and third world feminisms, including the works of Gloria Anzaldúa, Lisa Lowe, Ien Ang, Gayatri Spivak, Chandra Mohanty and Rey Chow, amongst others, which would have led to a more nuanced view of power and culture in an institutional setting. It may have been especially fruitful had contributors, in their collaboration, read and discussed some of this work together, prior to, or as they were writing their memoirs. While the text does suggest a transformation of the institution of higher education, at times it seems like the primary goal is to re-think diversity as good, rather than to substantially alter the system at large.

Works Cited

Lam, Mollie. "Lulu Sun v. University of Massachusetts, Dartmouth." *American Association of University Women (AAUW)*. July 2014. Web. 16 March 2015.

Subtirelu, Nicholas Close. "'She does have an accent but…': Race and language ideology in students' evaluations of mathematics instructors on RateMyProfessors.com." *Language in Society* 44.1 (2015): 35-62. Print.

About the Author

Jennifer Sano-Franchini is Assistant Professor of English at Virginia Tech, where she teaches professional writing and intercultural communication. Her research interests are in cultural and digital rhetorics, Asian American rhetoric, and information design. She has published in *Computers and Composition*, *Present Tense*, and the *International Journal for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*, and her most recent publications include a chapter in *Rhetoric and the Digital Humanities* (University of Chicago Press, 2015) edited by Jim Ridolfo and Bill Hart-Davidson, as well as a chapter in *Cultures of Copyright* (Peter Lang, 2014), edited by Dànielle Nicole DeVoss and Martine Courant Rife.