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PATRICK EISENLOHR, *Little India: Diaspora, time, and ethnolinguistic belonging in Hindu Mauritius*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006. Pp. xv, 328. Pb \$29.95.

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This book is about ideologies of ancestral language and their role in the formation of diasporic identity among Hindus in Mauritius. “Little India” refers to a “cultural politics in which the performance of diasporic traditions and allegiances to India as a land of origin becomes a basis for cultural citizenship in Mauritius” (p. 5). Little India is a field of political action carved out by Hindus of North Indian ancestry, the main ethnographic subjects of this book, who comprise about 40% of the Mauritian population and have been the politically dominant ethnic group since independence from the British in 1968.

Patrick Eisenlohr is concerned with understanding diasporization as an ongoing creative cultural process of space and time making, rather than framing research in terms of continuity or change regarding the linguistic habits of Indo-Mauritians. This creative engagement with history, the book argues, is mediated by understandings of Hindi as an emblem of religious and cultural tradition. The author skillfully demonstrates how such an emblemization of language in the discourse on ancestral tradition is at odds with the complexities of everyday multilingual practice. Through an ethnography that deftly moves back and forth between descriptions of large-scale mobilizations around language and religion, and everyday strategies of communication, this book also begins the important work of analyzing multiple experiences of temporality at play in the experience of ethnicized nationhood. I can recommend this book as an exemplary attempt to bridge the study of linguistic form in a multilingual context with social theoretical questions regarding the role of temporal imaginaries in nationalism and in the global politics of religion. Eisenlohr tells a complicated story with grace and clarity.

After an introduction placing the book’s arguments among the concerns of diaspora studies with issues of creolization, and within the tradition of research on language ideology, the first two chapters map the sociolinguistic and political fields in which the politics of Little India is unfolding. What comes as an initial surprise, motivating the ethnography that follows, is that sanskritized Hindi is being promoted by Hindu nationalists as a language of ethnic affiliation in a place where very few people control it. Hindi is not used in everyday interaction but is mainly associated with Hindu religious contexts, which are documented in greater detail towards the end of the book. Bhojpuri, the most widely spoken

South Asian language in Mauritius (spoken by 20 to 25%), is not promoted as such, but rather subsumed under the category of Hindi in the eyes of those who play the politics of Hindu nationalism. This global political movement attempts to place Indo-Mauritians within the larger Hindu world through the performance of connection to India.

Hindu/Hindi nationalism forms the basis of an exclusionary politics contrasting markedly with efforts to promote Mauritian Creole, the language that is actually spoken by nearly all Mauritians, as a national language. In the politics of Hindu diasporization, Creole speakers of African descent are left without an ancestral language tying them to a homeland outside the island. English and French, meanwhile, continue to dominate in formal education and in the mass media. Tamil, Telugu, Urdu, and Marathi have all been marginalized, and whereas South Indian Hindus might have spoken Bhojpuri as a second language in the past, these speakers are now switching to a more solidly Creole repertoire for everyday talk. The author could not have picked a better site from which to interrogate the politics of officializing discourses on language in relation to the social fact of heteroglossia.

As one might have imagined, the state-backed politics of ancestral language has been received with a degree of ambivalence among Indo-Mauritians. For many, the experience of economic progress since independence has meant a shift to Creole away from Bhojpuri, and away from the life of work in the sugarcane industry that has long been associated with the latter language. A resulting sense of loss of tradition, or what some Mauritians call “deculturalization” (53, 208), appears to have opened the way for the promotion of Hindi as an ancestral language through the politics of Hindu nationalism, thus separating questions of ethnolinguistic belonging from everyday vernacular practice. This dissociation between unmarked practice and the discourse on ancestral ethnolinguistic belonging is Eisenlohr’s main thematic thread in the first part of the book. He attempts to make sense of this ideological phenomenon through an analysis of the spatio-temporal relationship between ethnic communities and their imagined homelands, a relationship that comes to the fore in the second half of the book.

Chapter 3 brings our attention to what the discourse on ancestral language might mean, if anything, for the micro-politics of everyday interactions in this multilingual environment. The chapter begins with a particularly lucid explanation of the relationship between identity formation and performativity in linguistic narrative before moving on to concrete examples. In one example, switches to Bhojpuri in a conversation among friends carried out primarily in Creole reveal different alignments to the “little people” associated with the former language. In another example, Bhojpuri is invested with deeply ethnic associations through hindiized speech in a nostalgic discourse on the loss of tradition. Eisenlohr does a good job socially situating his speakers so as to highlight the fact that

purists tending towards hindiized Bhojpuri, marked with a more elaborated system of deference, are generally from the middle classes, who are less likely to use Bhojpuri in everyday interactions.

If Hindi provides one pole of attraction, swinging Bhojpuri toward more “purified” Sanskritic models of language among some speakers, French acts as a force pulling everyday Creole toward another, more highly regarded register that Mauritians call *Creole française*. In most interactions, it seems, there are at least three relevant code-affiliated registers available for speakers to indicate social positioning and subjective stances, through switches that are often marked primarily by phonology and lexical items. The examples provided in this chapter give evidence of purist performance as well as effective illustrations of the ways in which speakers might distance themselves from ethnicized ideologies of ancestral language. This is where the question of ambivalent reception takes sharper form. Drawing on Kathryn Woolard’s (1998) work on Castilian and Catalan bivalency, Eisenlohr interprets speakers’ resistance to linguistic ethnicization by highlighting a conversational strategy consisting of “the simultaneous voicing of two social identities, and a weakening of linguistic boundaries between two languages” (132).

Chapters 4 and 5 are both concerned with the question of how ancestral languages are objectified as such. In chapter 4, a history of colonial education is used to illustrate how the reification of ethnic communities was mediated by ideas about language. Eisenlohr shows how British efforts to anglicize this formally French colony resulted in a failure to provide education in South Asian languages, while maintaining the dominant status of both English and French. Nevertheless, through the colonial debates on education one can see a process of language-based identity formation such that, with the rise of Indo-Mauritian political power in the postcolonial era, the conditions had been set for an ethnized understanding of ancestral language as a part of state policy. The book returns to the question of objectified language in the following chapter through an analysis of attempts to “purify” broadcast Bhojpuri in television programming. Eisenlohr investigates the genre of the televised *pravacam* (Hindu religious discourse), and argues that the mass-mediated representation of a hindiized Bhojpuri standard is actually accelerating a shift away from Bhojpuri toward Creole.

The book’s theoretical argument regarding culturally mediated senses of time and processes of diasporization comes together most forcefully in the final ethnographic chapter on religious pilgrimage. In the Shivratri festival, Hindu Mauritians of North Indian ancestry produce diasporic attachments to India through iconic replications of Hinduness (*hindutva*) in language and ritual spatial practice, and by locating this quality in ancestral time. Eisenlohr uses the phrase “calibrations of displacement” to describe this process by which attachments to Hindi-speaking North India and to Hindu tradition are produced by ideologies of

language and ritual that mediate between multiple orientations to time. Expanding on Michael Silverstein's (1993) concept of "nomic calibration," this chapter argues that the Shivratri festival is calibrated to the time of the ancestors, which is "imagined to be characterized by a spatial and temporal remove that is then minimized in the context of pilgrimage" (263).

Eisenlohr argues that this form of calibrating the present to an ancestral past resembles Walter Benjamin's (1968:263) understanding of "messianic time," which stands in contradistinction to the concept of "homogeneous empty time" that Benedict Anderson (1991) has borrowed from Benjamin to characterize the conditions contributing to the rise of modern nationalism. Eisenlohr had already articulated a language ideological critique of Anderson in chapter 1 (25), by arguing that discrete languages do not form grounds for nationalist affiliation as prior conditions, but that linguistic communities must themselves be imagined into being. Eisenlohr's critique in chapter 6, on the grounds of an anthropology of ritual temporalities, however, would benefit by engaging with the context in which Anderson was presenting his original argument for the paradoxical "objective modernity" of seemingly ancient forms of national identification, against common nationalist assumptions of primordial community (Anderson 1991:5). Eisenlohr's close attention to the heterogeneous character of experiential time, underpinning an imagined diaspora in the making, is nevertheless useful. It brings phenomenological attention to how changing horizons of the present bear on the ways in which ethnic and linguistic plurality is produced and managed across potentially conflicting senses of time. Eisenlohr shows that Hindu Mauritians experience both a sense of communal progress over linear time AND the desire to ground their sense of ethnic self in a primordial realm, and that these two modes of experience are furthermore connected in the narrative of linguistic "purification." The book concludes with a discussion of media technology, using materialist approaches as a foil against which to present what is ultimately an argument for hermeneutic explanations in general, and for a language ideological semiotic approach in particular.

Overall, this is an ethnography of language that cuts across disciplinary and subdisciplinary divisions in a number of useful ways. It stands as a model of method for anthropologists who would like to bring recent social theoretical work on globalization and locality to bear on an analysis of the cultural politics of language. Eisenlohr seeks to give the reader a sense of national politics from a number of ethnographic locations. Particularly illuminating are Indo-Mauritians' impressions of India, the ancestral homeland, marked as they are by a deep ambivalence. Eisenlohr's work in a country in which diasporic Indians are numerically dominant (compare with Trinidad, Fiji, or Guyana), also stands as an important contribution to theories of creolization and diaspora. Finally, this book has played a role in opening up an exciting line of inquiry into what a deeper engagement with phenomenological and historiographic theorizations of temporality might bring to the study of language and identity.

## BOOK REVIEWS

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LANITA JACOBS-HUEY, *From the kitchen to the parlor: Language and becoming in African American women's hair care*. Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press. 2006. Pp. 194. Pb \$24.95.

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In *Language and becoming in African American women's hair care*, Lanita Jacobs-Huey aims to provide an “ethnographic multi-sited account of how Black women use language to negotiate the significance of hair in their everyday lives.” Utilizing an anthropological linguistic approach, for over six years she collected data through participant observations in beauty parlors, at hair care conventions, and at cosmetology schools. She also conducted interviews and collected texts. She uses these data to examine the meanings that hair holds for African American women. In seven loosely connected chapters, Jacobs-Huey allows us to listen in on conversations that take place in beauty salons in South Carolina, northern and southern California, in hair care seminars, at a Bible-study group of African American cosmetologists, at comedy clubs, and on Internet discussion boards. She examines the contexts in which hair gets discussed, the individuals who engage in these conversations, the gendered talk surrounding hair, what these conversations reveal about the ideological stances and the political and racial identities expressed, and what inter- and intracultural conversations expose about the politics of Black hair and identity.

In addition to discussing the purpose of the study, laying out its guiding questions, and briefly describing the multiple locations where she collected data, the introductory chapter discusses some of the conceptual, theoretical, methodological influences as well as her personal ties to the topic. An African American academic, Jacobs-Huey began her research with a six-month pilot study in her mother's beauty salon. This initial study and the subsequent research examined in the book are grounded and informed by the literature on African American women's discourse practices that she characterizes as “sociocultural pragmat-