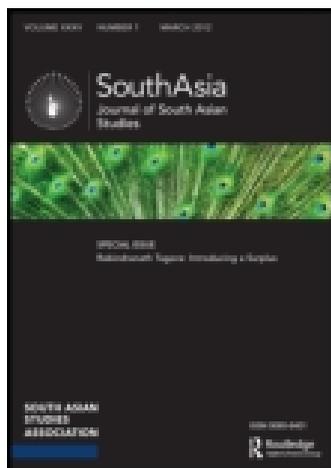


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Publisher: Routledge

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## South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/csas20>

### Colour, Art and Empire. Visual Culture and the Nomadism of Representation, by Natasha Eaton

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Published online: 13 Mar 2015.



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To cite this article: Katja Müller (2015) Colour, Art and Empire. Visual Culture and the Nomadism of Representation, by Natasha Eaton, South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies, 38:1, 132-134, DOI: [10.1080/00856401.2015.993012](https://doi.org/10.1080/00856401.2015.993012)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00856401.2015.993012>

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popularity and domestic use. The tailor's shop and women's use of sewing machines within the home became exemplary sites of use in the social life of this immigrant machine. And while Singer trade-cards might speak to the civilisational ethos of the manufacturers and their home audience, it was the practical utility of the machine and its congruence with local needs and values that counted most with consumers. A central question here is how colonial Sri Lankans received the messages produced by advertising, especially in the island's press. In the absence of more extensive local evidence, Wickramasinghe is often obliged to draw on material from elsewhere, from the United States, India and Japan, to ground her discussion about marketing and consumerism. Indeed, the question of sources is critical to this work, for the challenging theorisation of the book's 'Introduction' is not entirely sustained by the empirical material—or lack of it—in the chapters that follow. Perhaps this is unavoidable. Wickramasinghe refers to the paucity of scholarship on consumerism in South Asia and the lack of work on colonised people as a whole as consumers. But she does make use of Timothy Burke's pioneering study on Zimbabwe, *Lifebuoy Men, Lux Women* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), to show how consumers reimagined what manufacturers and advertisers provided; and in recent years there have been significant contributions for South Asia, including the book edited by Douglas Haynes and others, *Towards a History of Consumption in South Asia* (New Delhi: OUP, 2010). Wickramasinghe is keen to present modern technology as being not just outside the conventional frame of empire but also being capable of subverting its authority. This is perhaps more contentious than she suggests. Did Britain so rapidly and completely lose its hold on Sri Lankan technology and prestige? However received locally, sewing machines might project an image of American domestic modernity, but many other goods—bicycles among them—surely continued to peddle an image of British dependability. This is a fascinating book, rich in ideas about what we do with technology's reception and reconstitution in the colonial world. One only wishes there were more material to support its worthy ambitions.

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<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00856401.2015.993011>

Natasha Eaton, *Colour, Art and Empire. Visual Culture and the Nomadism of Representation* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2013), ISBN 978 1 78076 519 8, 405 pp., £68.00, hbk.

In *Colour, Art and Empire*, Natasha Eaton takes the reader on a fascinating journey through South Asia's colonial and post-colonial history, led by colour and art as a vivid leitmotif. The innovative and thought-provoking study portrays the aesthetic and political approaches to colour taken by artists, colour workers and scientists, colonial administrators, citizens and the Indian elite between 1750 and 1970. Eaton traces the impact and agency of colour in the fields of aesthetics, politics, philosophy, economy, ethics and materiality. Four chapters map chronologically what Eaton calls 'chromo zones', i.e. 'the transitions involved in the formation and remaking of a colonial, a nationalist and a postcolonial colour field' (p. 5). In the following I summarise a select few of the themes to provide a sense of the range of topics dealt with in this densely-written book.

In one strand of her argument, the author looks at colour as material form and pigment. Focusing on indigo, she describes the global rivalry for the raw material. The English East

India Company was heavily involved in the trade of this highly-priced commodity used for colouring uniforms and products of fine art. Through their involvement, the British broke the monopoly of the Portuguese and Spanish, and also contributed to indigo's dark 'mood' of producing the delicate plant as a cash crop through a 'system of bloodshed' (p. 38) and slave labour. In the late nineteenth century, indigo plantations began to be replaced by synthetic production that made a place for new contestations focused on the hazardous nature of new colour mixtures and produced new hierarchical orderings of colours. From marketing and large-scale production, the author shifts the focus to Indian dyers. She follows the un-making of their trade through the growing popularity of mechanical dyeing processes in Britain, and examines conflicts of choice between vernacular colours 'infused with magic, which colonial officials feared' (p. 123) and cheaper, brilliantly-shining artificial dyes.

Colonial relations with Indian fine arts provide another focus of the book. It explores how the colonial administration swayed between appreciating Indian fine arts as espousing a 'quiet beauty by the right employment of the most brilliant colouring' (p. 83), and dismissing it as 'unnatural Indian art' (p. 91). Mostly, political practice downplayed Indian fine arts as something less valuable than 'genuine' (read: European) art on the basis of its replicability. The Orientalists' oscillation between admiring India's great cultural heritage and dismissing it as never far from barbarity is also reflected in the sphere of art practice and colour usage, most notably expressed through exhibitions and the curriculum of the four colonial art schools in Madras, Calcutta, Bombay and Lahore (p. 97). They were designed to educate and civilise, imparting Western aesthetics and reducing and monitoring Indian painters' use of colour.

Alongside questions of colour trade and art policy, the book explores different ontologies of colour. For example, Eaton suggests that Sufism produced the 'shimmer' as a new form of colour for the sacred, an invention that resulted from experiments with imported colours and that can be read as a deterritorialisation of the aesthetics and technologies of colonial art (p. 61). She also explores the colour concepts developed at the beginning of the twentieth century as part of the Swadeshi movement. Abanindranath Tagore, Bengali artist and principal of the Calcutta Art School, was inspired by Sanskrit scriptures and treated colour as a fundamental element of existence; accordingly he was at a variance with the orthodoxy of the imperial art schools' governmental agenda. Tagore's pupil Nandalal Bose, too, adopted a traditional Indian approach to colour, as it appears in murals, ragas or parts of the sacred scriptures. By the 1930s and 1940s, he had become more radical than Tagore. Collaborating with Gandhi and the Congress, Bose painted 'patriotic frescoes' and arranged for art exhibitions and a model village, thereby openly resisting colonial subjugation in colour theory as well as art practice.

The book touches on many other issues of colour, elegantly moving back and forth between multiple perspectives on colour as pigment, dye, subject of intellectual discourse, aesthetical experience and topic in philosophy and medicine. It is densely written and will appeal particularly to people with prior knowledge in aesthetics and art studies. Most impressively, *Colour, Art and Empire* conjoins the narration of South Asia art history with the development of art theory. As Eaton puts it, it 'draws a thick line with pigment, a line which tries to navigate its way through a labyrinth of colour, violence, a cacophony of voices... [It] twists colour... makes it hang, knitted together, where entwined with many other forces at play it finds its own shape and means of becoming' (p. 3). While the plurality of narratives and perspectives are among the strong points of the book, the difference between various meanings and levels of debate and social fields is not always entirely clear. And thus there is a danger that the broader narrative gets lost in the many details and their intermingling narratives.

Overall this is a highly-sophisticated and very valuable resource for scholars of art history and art theory. The text offers new insights into the world of colour through the lens of

imperial history. It is equally recommended to those interested in visual culture and South Asian Studies, since it takes a fresh approach to colonial history, institution-making and subaltern politics and art.

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<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00856401.2015.993012>

Supriya Singh, *Globalization and Money. A Global South Perspective* (Plymouth: Rowman & Littlefield, 2013), ISBN 978-1-4422-1356-2, 242 pp., £15.95, pbk.

This book examines interpersonal flows of money in an increasingly connected and technologised world. It offers valuable insights into the complex ways in which negotiations around money shape and are being shaped by cultural practice. In contrast to the classical sociological attempts of Marx, Simmel and Weber that treat money mainly as an abstract rationalising force, here money appears as inclusive, personal and culturally coded. ‘The dollar sent is not the dollar received’, the author evidences throughout the book (pp. ix, 30, 178, 181). Readers of anthropology may wonder why there are no references to Marcel Mauss’s arguments about gift exchange and, in particular, Arjun Appadurai’s work on the social life of objects in different regimes of value. An explanation might be that Supriya Singh’s work is not primarily about money as a material entity and object of exchange, but about the integration of marginalised groups into virtual money worlds—which she considers to be a crucial means of empowerment.

After a short theoretical introduction into the sociology of money, the author explores in eight individual chapters the complexity of money exchange. Chapter 2 is largely written from the perspective of an analyst who reconstructs the social history of the global financial crisis. Chapter 3 shifts focus from the centres of finance to the ‘unbanked’, that is, groups of people without official bank accounts. Then follows a closer description of how unbanked women in different regions of the world manage the everyday activities of saving, spending, and distributing money. The chapter criticises gender inequalities in access to banking services. The remaining chapters (5 to 8) focus more specifically on different kinds of money exchanges, termed marriage money, electronic money, mobile money, and migrant money. The last chapter summarises changes and continuities in patterns of money-handling. Overall the author resists a simplified interpretation of money worlds and pays attention to the multimodality of the fields. For instance, whereas increased flexibility and speed in the payment of remittances is perceived as an improvement by some migrants, it becomes a source of pressure for others who have to deal with frequent urgent pleas for money.

The merits of the book lie in the combination of the author’s personal field stories and interviews with statistical data, public reports, and case studies of money usage in regional contexts as diverse as India, Malaysia, Australia, Kenya, and the United States. Singh evidences how marginalised groups may profit from new inclusive financial services: low-income earners, for example, gain access to small and flexible loans that suit their repayment capacity; family members can send financial support immediately when a sick sibling needs treatment; people in remote areas may now receive money via mobile phone which spares them long journeys to withdraw cash. Singh’s examples are mainly, but not exclusively, drawn from the Global South and provide understanding of the social effects of transnational family bonds expressed and sustained through money transfers. The reader gains insights into