

# Book Reviews

## I

**Deepak Unnikrishnan (2017), *Temporary People*, Brooklyn: Restless Books, ISBN-9781632061423**

Deepak Unnikrishnan is the author of the fiction novel- '*Temporary People*', published in 2017 by Restless Books. The author compiled twenty-eight short stories and divided them in three parts titled Limbs; Tongue. Flesh and Veed. The author was born to migrant labourers in the Gulf. In 2016, Deepak Unnikrishnan won the inaugural Restless Books Prize for New Immigrant Writing, with his then-unpublished manuscript, *Temporary People*. He grew up in Abu Dhabi, but his parents are pravasis.[\[1\]](#)

Deepak Unnikrishnan's debut novel *Temporary People* takes the readers through migrants' journey to the United Arab Emirates. *Temporary People* is about a set of experiences unique to the Gulf and to its system of migrant labour. The novel explores the lives and experiences of immigrants in a succinct way despite the context of chaotic, fragile lives of migrant labourers living in foreign countries. The author captures the hopes; desires and sufferings of an immigrant who flees his country in search of work. The novel is accentuated by the fact that such life histories are often not heard by the common man, or it is not published in public eye. The tone of the story is set by the statement of an anonymous person that serves as an epigraph for '*Limbs*': "*There exists this city built by labour, mostly men, who disappear after their respective buildings are made*" (p. 12).

The revolving theme of the novel is on the lives of immigrants. The word pravasi is used regularly throughout the novel. Unnikrishnan the lived experiences of the immigrants as he focuses on their dreams and expectations when they go to work in the Gulf countries. They dream of making money and returning home with rich status to live a luxurious life. These

dreams are broken eventually when they face cruelty of their host country.

The first story in the novel is about a woman who glues together and fixes broken, dying people. These people are primarily on-site labourers responsible for the construction of buildings for the city skylines. Basically, they are the invisible, non-citizens of a global enterprise which pumps the productivity out of them. For anyone who has spent a considerable amount of time in a foreign country be it out of necessity, loneliness becomes a constant companion. According to Unnikrishnan, foreign nationals make up to 80 per cent of the population in UAE countries. They contribute significantly to the economy but still they feel alienated.

Unnikrishnan explains in the introduction that as a son of pravasis, his departure from Abu Dhabi was inevitable: ***'The UAE does not grant citizenship to its foreign labour force or their children.'*** The novel uses short stories which incorporate a variety of forms such as official reports; transcripts of interviews; lists-to build up a kaleidoscopic portrait of migrant workers working in the UAE. These include a girl who has been sexually abused in an elevator. What does it mean to be a pravasi? Unnikrishnan does not provide a definitive answer. While he did not provide a definition, he tried to use language to define and illustrate the typical lived experiences of a pravasi. Unnikrishnan suggests one way where pravasis hang onto their own selves by conjuring a language so lively that it defies the numbing effects of being belittled and dishonoured.

In another story *Nalinakshi*, the author further explores these sentiments by using the word Pravasi which in Malayalam means foreigner or outsider. But more than anything else, pravasi is about the forgotten ones and the absent in this novel.

*Temporary People* digs into the lives; imaginaries; myths and vocabularies of the Southeast Asian nations and Filipinos who make up the UAE's subaltern class. Unnikrishnan creates a vivid bottom-up vernacular history of the modern Gulf oil state. The strength of Unnikrishnan's writing is in his

ability to take readers to another place. The stories linger into the mind for long. Many of Unnikrishnan's stories allegorically depict what life is like for the temporary workers within the UAE.

Unnikrishnan puts emphasis on the use and importance of language throughout the novel. There is a mix of the mother tongue of the immigrants with that of English which makes this novel more interesting to read. In the story *Monseepalty*, the author writes about a group of Indian migrants playing soccer together in empty parking lots. '*For a few hours we were all temporary inhabitants of Monseepalty*,' the narrator explains. The vision of community and unity, however, is eventually shattered once the police arrive to break and stop the games. It is interesting to read when the Indian migrants scatter and hide while a shirtless boy from a group of Arab players walks boldly towards the patrol car. The kid and the police then shake hands, share a joke and then the Arab boys return to playing soccer. The Arab boys not only have cultural status but also a command over Arabic signifies their belonging in the community.

The characters in the novel do not reappear from one chapter to the next. Each chapter in the novel conveys the experience of temporariness and shows the fragmentation of the community. The voices in the novel are rich and varied. The range of bonds are fragile where it was shown that friends betray friends; brothers betray brothers; mothers abandon children and children leave parents behind; pravasi, the foreigner, outsider or an immigrant who forsakes his own culture for another and thus can never be trusted. The stories of Temporary People render an invisible community visible. These stories help understanding about home and as well as past and future. Yet the novel simultaneously details the effect "temporary" status which has on cultural as well as familial bonds.

Through storytelling, Unnikrishnan reveals to the reader what has been left behind by migrants and as well as what they have created. These stories introduce readers to Malayalee labourers who eventually rebel against their

masters. Unnikrishnan uses his own cultural experiences and adds Malayalam diction (his mother-tongue). The novel is a refreshing read as it beautifully captures the unique experiences of immigrant workers.

However, despite being a fantastic read, there are two notable weaknesses in the novel. Firstly, the stories deserve more than one read to fully grasp all the complexities. Secondly, some of the stories are long and feel like they take too long to finish. Nevertheless, the stories are powerful and challenging and will remain in the mind long after it is finished. Deepak Unnikrishnan rightfully titled the novel where the stories are interconnected with one another and fits the entire theme about people who are temporary. Unnikrishnan was the right choice to win the first New Immigrant Writing prize where his voice amplified the experiences of immigrants. The powerful yet unique narrative is the main highlight of the novel and provides with excellent information about the immigrants. Accordingly, it makes it an in-depth source of information for students; researchers, policy makers or anyone who has interest in understanding narratives and life-stories from the lens of immigrants.

[1]Pravasi is the Malayalam word for migrants and temporary workers.

Source: Deepak Unnikrishnan (2017), *Temporary People*, Brooklyn: Restless Books, 9781632061423, 243 pages.

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## II

### **Reece Jones (2016), *Violent Borders: Refugees and the Right to Move*, New York: Verso, ISBN-13:978-1-78478-474-4**

Forced migration has been a growing concern for governments and scholars across the globe for the last few years. As of the end of 2020, the UNHCR accounts for more than 34 million forcibly displaced people between refugees and asylum seekers, changing countries' migration responses and making it imperative to study not only the migration phenomena but the problems that caused it and its repercussions.

Reece Jones *Violent Borders* explores the refugee crisis through the recent country border protection evolution, emphasizing in new government's policies effects not only on migrants' movement but in the mounting violence they have caused.

Jones is an American political geographer. He has been focusing his studies on borders walls, geopolitics, and immigration. His work is considered to be one of the most influential in his area by his peers, winning international honors and awards during his career. He is a Guggenheim Fellow, a highly competitive grant awarded by the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation to professionals with demonstrated exceptional capacity. Jones is currently the editor-in-chief of the journal *Geopolitics* and the co-editor of the *Routledge Geopolitics Book Series*.

*Violent Borders: Refugee and the Right to Move* is divided into seven chapters, grouped at the same time into two sections where the author offers statistical secondary data together with practical qualitative cases to support his views of sovereignty, movement, and violence in migration.

The first section revolves around current border policies practices, with two chapters focusing on the European Union and the United States – Mexico

borders. Linking concrete examples with analytical data, Jones argues how the last government actions supposedly aimed to protect their sovereignty have exacerbated the already complex refugee crisis. In the European Union, he reviews policies and alliances with third nations that are designed to create a hostile environment with the purpose of deterring migrants from even attempting to cross, as well as making migrants escaping war-like situations asylum claims more difficult. Jones highlights how all of this helped the growth of migrant traffickers, worsening migrants' risks. The chapter further describes how the European nations, despite their historically claimed adaptations of the Schengen area and freedom of movement within their borders for European citizens, are today at the forefront of the migration crisis, with spiking migrant dead numbers since 2005.

The second chapter is dedicated to the US-Mexican border, where the author discusses how these have now become deadly spaces for crossers since changes in regulations allow the use of deadly force from migration patrols. Jones narrates the gruesome crossing of a Mexican teenager that resulted in his passing, evidencing a despicable treatment of migrants at this border and the difference in the usage of force in comparison to American citizens. In both cases, he emphasizes the increase in funding for border security, reaching the billions of dollars yearly, supposedly justified behind preserving countries' authority, while in reality, it only translates in the decease of millions of migrants. The first section of the book closes with a chapter dedicated to borders practices outside of the western hemisphere, narrating violent migration stories and their repercussions in migrant life. In this way, Jones brings a global perspective on the changes in the borders, showing how migrants' movement has been affected not only in developed countries but worldwide.

The second section focused on establishing boundaries beside borders, and how they have contributed to movement restrictions. Jones debates on how these have served to control the movement of the poor and maintain the privilege of some nations. He gives a summary of the evolution of movement

restrictions through history, highlighting the enclosure of land into private property and states, as well as the oceans into economic zones with the introduction of the Law of the Sea. This section also aims to correlate poor working conditions in third world countries with the implemented movement restrictions, using the case example of the Rana Plaza factory collapse in Bangladesh. In the final chapter of the book, the author provides his views on the current and future problems, like climate change, and how borders seem to uphold the established power of developed nations before humanity.

Overall, the book centers on how western countries' borders policies have contributed to the countless deaths of migrants, either by "militarizing" the border itself or by implementing specific strategies intended to worsen the condition and preclude migrants' movements. While Jones does not deny the right of world states to protect their people, and resources from threats by controlling their borders, he invites the reader to reflect on the importance of movement in humanity, upholding it to Human Rights basis. The author firmly sustains that this principle is in jeopardy by the introduction of new border policies, where the construction of barriers to prevent "illegal" passing seems to be a focal function of the state. Jones goes further stating that today's border system "seeks to preserve privilege and opportunity for some by restricting access to resources and movement for others".

Even though his views could be categorized as liberal from a political standpoint, in reality, he defines a much bigger issue: world preservation. The author not only reviews history but links the current migration crisis and the way it has been treated with the crisis to come, and the importance of revisiting nations' border control policies in order to ensure our subsistence. He justifies his opinion on freedom of movement has a part of human nature, which has served as a pivotal player in world advancement throughout history. "In the era of globalization, as the gap between the wealthiest and poorest states has grown, states around the world have deployed new security infrastructure along borders, designed to detect and prevent the movement

of the world's poor." Jones writes (p. 46) Jones successfully explains how borders inevitably originate violence around them, inviting the reader to think beyond the current policies and focus on the consequences for the people behind them.

While the book presents a clear argument about the amounting violence refugees are facing today in their journey, it mostly focuses on very specific examples, Melilla for the European border and El Paso for the US-Mexican one, where the author offers detailed stories as a frame to the underlying problem. In the same way, Jones centers his discussion around the occidental region borders, offering an overview on how the refugee treatment replicates around the world, leaving space for a more comprehensive analysis of the African and Asia region. The book particularly covers the refugee migrant population, without a particular emphasis on gender, and even though the authors' opinions are well proved and documented, additional case examples and data disaggregation for women and other forcibly displaced populations will be fundamental for future studies.

Whereas first published in 2016, the presented arguments are as relevant today as they were six years ago. Jones *Violent Borders: Refugees and the Right to Move* while focusing specifically on refugees, sheer a light on the broader and persisting problem of movement across the globe. One that needs to be addressed not only by scholars but engaged by the general public as well, in order to rearrange our priorities, reassess the current situation, and ensure proper management of migration.

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### III

**Sunil S. Amrith (2011), *Migration and Diaspora in Modern Asia (New Approaches to Asian History)*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, ISBN: 9780511985706**

The book '*Migration and Diaspora in Modern Asia*' is written by Sunil Amrith and comprises five chapters. Historian Sunil Amrith has demonstrated various migration patterns across South and Southeast Asia. He attempted to articulate how migration has shaped history and the narratives and how human mobility has played a significant role in allowing ideas of nationhood and nationality to spread across Asia. This book encompasses 150 years of history of the people on the move. This book also raises questions on the freedom of migrants, cultural consequences of mass migration, and the process of formation of multiple Asian diasporas. The author discusses changing regulation and governance of migration over time and notes that migration history provides a tool for thinking about Asia in new ways.

Amrith has broadly discussed and delineated the various mobility patterns from the densely populated regions of South Asia. Amrith tries to highlight the nineteenth century as a period of the mobility revolution in Asia through this book. Amrith also periodises migration history, which he has categorised into four phases starting with the **first phase** from 1850 to 1930, the peak of Asian migration. The **second phase** is marked from the year 1930 till World War Two, which witnessed the disintegration of the system of inter-regional migration that had developed in the 1850s. The period from the 1950s to the 1970s, categorised as the **third phase**, witnessed the emergence of new nation-states in Asia. This era saw a reduced level of international migration. The **fourth phase** started in the early 1970s with further internal and international migration expansion with restrictions that became widespread because of rising new destinations across the world,

the oil boom in gulf countries, and urban revolution across the South Asian nations that attracted migrants.

Chapter one, ‘**Asia’s Great Migrations, 1850-1930**’, focuses on the significant flows of migration across Asia between 1850 to 1930. The author talks about the movement of thirty million people from India to present-day Sri Lanka, Burma, and Malaysia. Amrith also highlights the mass movement of about 19 million people from China to Southeast Asia and more than 30 million people from northern China to Manchuria. With the advent of regular steamer services across the China Sea and the Bay of Bengal, migration flow soared in the 1870s. Amrith further discusses the pre-colonial movement of people across the port cities as captives and slaves followed by European expansion, which stimulated Asian mobility. The key component of this chapter is the argument that explains how this can be called a mobility revolution. Amrith has explained the argument explicitly by remarking on the societal transformations, the industrial revolution, transport, and communication. By the 1870s, another way of transformation was plantation-based production of commodities for export which was well established on Asia’s frontiers. All these transformations facilitated the mobility revolution.

In the second chapter, ‘**The Making of Asian Diasporas, 1850- 1930**’, the author emphasises the formation of the Asian diaspora within Asia. The author interprets the narration about diasporas by keeping in mind the relative proximity between homelands and destinations and the dominance of sojourning circular migration<sup>[1]</sup>. This chapter also shows that Asians who moved between 1870 to 1930 took with them not only their skills, capital or labour power, but also ideas, cultural practices, sacred symbols, and ways of life. Amrith further states that mobility has brought a sense of difference in culture, even national distinction among the migrant community.

In the third chapter, ‘**War, Revolution, and Refugees, (1930-1950)**’, the author mentions three successive transformations which made millions of

Asians move to other places. The first transformation was a global economic crisis. The second transformation was the reversal of migrant flows coincided with the war, which displaced tens of millions of Asians and the third transformation was a direct consequence of warfare. This was the period when migration had become the centre of all discussions regarding the cementing of the new borders. He further extends his argument by putting other causes into discourse like the great economic depression of the 1930s and disconnection, repatriations, and new imperial laws that restricted labor migration. Further, the author elaborates on the violence against migrants and minorities, war refugees in Southeast Asia, forced labours in the war-time Japanese empire, etc.

In chapter four, ‘**Migration, Development and the Asian city,**’ the author discusses the impacts of mass movements of Asians in post-war years. He has explicitly examined the effects after the formation of new national borders, which led millions of people to migrate to the other side and its close association with the development and urbanisation in newly born South Asian States like India; China; Pakistan; Sri Lanka; Burma; Philippines Indonesia and Vietnam. This new transformation of settlement and mass migration has created complex issues on citizenship. This phenomenon often referred to as ‘orphans of the empire<sup>[2]</sup>’ is the key revelation of this book based on the most recent research and publications in the relevant areas.

Chapter five, ‘**Asian Migrants in the Age of Globalisation,**’ is dedicated to Asian migration since the 1970s, the age of globalisation. This chapter identifies the contemporary “mobility revolution”<sup>[3]</sup> (p 4) that has pervaded Asia since the 1970s. This chapter discusses several significant trends and themes such as the dimensions and ramifications of Asian urbanisation in the wake of contemporary globalisation; export of skilled labour and professionals to countries within and beyond Asia, the feminisation of Asian migration (p 205) as well as refugee movement.

Overall, this book is remarkable in terms of precise demonstration of the

subject and justification of arguments. Consequently, the book has opened up potentially fruitful vistas for further multidisciplinary research and systematic study on the interconnectedness between migration, society, economy, culture, and politics. The author further points out the gap and methodologies for the scholars of South and Southeast Asian history. This book is a major contribution to the field of migration and diaspora in South Asia. Author Sunil Amrith's engaging and deeply informative book crosses the vast terrain from the Middle East to India and China, touching the core aspects of state formation in Modern Asia, the drawing of imperial and national borders; development of new ideas about citizenship; states' increasing concern with knowing and acting upon their populations. Through this book, Amrith has put his suggestions and regards for further studies in the field of migration and diaspora in Asian history. It would be beneficial for scholars who intend advance their studies in this domain.

[1] J. Schneider and B. Parusel (2015) have defined circular migration as “A flexible form of repetitive movement between different destinations”.

[2] .Robert Cribb and Li Narangoa, ‘Orphans of Empire: Divided Peoples, Dilemmas of Identity, and Old Imperial Borders in East and Southeast Asia’, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 46, 1 (2004): 164-187.

[3] Sunil Amrith has marked the period from 1870s to 1930s as Mobility Revolution’.

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#### IV

**Ramona Vijeyarasa (2017), *Sex, Slavery and the Trafficked Woman: Myths and Misconceptions about Trafficking and its Victims*, Routledge, ISBN 9780815377665**

‘Sex, Slavery and the Trafficked Woman,’ written by Ramona Vijeyarasa, contains a systemic analysis of human trafficking and the conventional notions about the nature and characteristics of its victims, which are dominated by narratives of the victims being extremely poor, illiterate, and female. The author is a human rights lawyer and academician who delves deeply into gender issues and social justice. The book spans 284 pages, contains nine chapters divided into three sections, and was first published in 2016. Appended at the end of the book is a questionnaire to the refugees under study, an overview of the data collected, and an exhaustive bibliography with references to the important arguments and conclusions. The book attempts to deconstruct the complex issue of trafficking in persons in the light of empirical evidence derived from extensive fieldwork in Ghana, Ukraine, and Vietnam.

Part one of the book, which consists of three chapters, delineates the most important aspects of human trafficking and outlines the viewpoints and conclusions of the main stakeholders in the issue. The second part, which has four chapters, aims at disproving the belief that the quintessential victim of trafficking is poor, uneducated, coerced, and female. Part three offers alternative approaches and possible solutions to the problem.

The author, in the first chapter, presents an overview of the mainstream trafficking framework and of the structure of the book. The second chapter analyses the agendas of the various stakeholders, namely, the media, governments, religious institutions, and international organisations, which exert tremendous influence in shaping the academic and legal discourse on human trafficking (p. 19). Based on these agendas, different archetypes of

victims, which are, the poor, the female, the uneducated, the coerced, the weak, and the naive, are created. This stereotyping approach which gives preponderance to sexual exploitation, leads to the marginalization of equally important concerns like forced labour in men and women.

In the fifth chapter, the author's research work in Ukraine and Vietnam is widely cited for dispelling the traditional notion that naiveness and lack of education of the victims are prime factors that act as causes of migration (p. 101). It is found that the migrants from Ukraine who end up in exploitative situations are generally more educated than the average Ukrainian. Many of them have a university education and are graduates. The lack of opportunities in the home country and the desire for better prospects motivate them to make the decision to migrate. This natural human desire for a better standard of living in a foreign country motivates the educated Ukrainian to confront risks. Why the educated Ukrainians and Vietnamese do not find satisfactory accommodation in their respective societies is partly explained by the low quality of education in these countries (p.109). In Ukraine, particularly, the lack of qualified teaching staff and infrastructure is cited as one of the reasons for the poor outcome of education. Thus the better educated Ukrainian and Vietnamese, knowingly and aware of the consequences, take the decision to migrate. Another interesting aspect of the issue is that it is often the better educated, and the younger siblings decide to migrate, landing themselves in risky situations. The level of education plays a role in the decision-making process of the would-be migrants, which means many migrants voluntarily choose to migrate. Thus, the preconception that the victims are enticed to accept these exploitative conditions through coercion and misrepresentation is also disproved (chapter 4).

The sixth chapter examines the stereotype of 'poverty-driven migration.' The main cause of internal migration, that is, mainly migration from rural areas to urban centres remains the poverty and lack of employment opportunities. This urban migration is an age-old phenomenon. Poverty induces people in Ghana to sell their children to recruiters and traffickers (p.118).

Many of these children end up as conscripted child labourers in the fishing industry. Obviously, the reason is extreme poverty. However, there is a category of migrants who do not live in abject poverty yet, are not satisfied with their life, and opt for migration (p.123). This is the proverbial case of ‘searching for greener pastures. Economic refugees who are found in Western European countries and North American countries mostly belong to this category. These migrant families are not tormented by extreme poverty. However, they look for a better standard of life, the image of which is instilled mainly by the media. So, the two categories of the poor- the very poor and the relatively poor, are vulnerable to temptations of migration which may entail sexual and labour exploitation.

Chapter eight deals with the present-day legal framework provided by international agencies like the UN and national criminal justice systems and focuses more on organized trafficking (p. 172), where the trafficker is considered a violator and is sought to be prosecuted. This prosecution-oriented approach tends to ignore the victim-oriented perspective. Thus, if it is proved that the victim has given lawfully valid consent to the transaction, the trafficker has loopholes to escape from indictment and punishment. In such a situation, it is the burden of the prosecutor to prove that consent was obtained through coercion, misrepresentation, or other illegal means. This procedure again offers the victims the proclivity to deny having given consent even when they originally were aware of the possible consequences of the consent they originally gave (p. 44). Thus, the general tendency of international and national legal systems to regard migration mainly as organized trafficking and to focus on prosecuting the organised traffickers is flawed.

In the final chapter, the author makes some important suggestions to rectify some of the flaws in handling the issue of migration. From a legal point of view, the thrust of the migration protocols on fixing responsibility on the trafficker is justified. However, this criminal justice approach can be supplemented by adding a contractual angle between the victims and the traffickers and transporters (p. 176). Thus, when the agreement between

the trafficker and the victim at the initial stage is considered a contract, all the usual legal factors that invalidate a civil contract, like coercion, fraud, misrepresentation, etc., in the deal become relevant and helpful.

The attempt of the author to take a comprehensive view of the issue of human trafficking is definitely commendable. Instead of looking at it from a criminal perspective, the author highlights the relevance of poverty and illiteracy as the primary motivating factors. The author reiterates the importance of considering the rights of the victims as human rights deserving a humane approach even in cases where the victims voluntarily opted for migration but eventually landed in situations of exploitation and injustice.

This book is a welcome departure from the run-of-the-mill approaches to the problem of migration. The author has succeeded in disproving certain assumptions that have long prevailed in studies on this issue. Thus, the author opens new perspectives in the discourse. New studies in the field will certainly benefit from the findings of the author.

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## V

**Simu Liu (2022), *We Were Dreamers: An Immigrant Superhero Origin Story*, United Kingdom: Harper Collins Publishers, ISBN 9780008546489**

### **Introduction**

*We Were Dreamers: An Immigrant Superhero Origin Story* takes us through the life of Simu Liu – a Canadian actor and stuntman who is also now the author of this book. This memoir is honest, inspiring, and relatable as it shows Liu’s origin story of growing up in China, immigrating to Canada, beginning to pursue an acting career, and all the challenging experiences with stereotypes grounded in identity, which ultimately led him to where he is today.

### **Summary of the Book**

It can be said that Liu’s memoir breaks new ground as he emphasizes the immigrant perspective. This distinguishes his memoir from many others, as most celebrity memoirs are usually written for a traditionally western audience, whereas Liu’s is not. In effect, this memoir has strong connections to migration. For instance, it begins with the migration of Liu’s parents from Harbin, China, to Canada for further studies when Liu was only eight months old. Most of Liu’s early life was spent in the care of his grandparents – his yéye and nǎinai. He immigrated to Canada when his father came to pick him up at the age of four. Liu later immigrated from Canada to the United States of America so that he could focus on his career. This shows how migration and the constant movement from one place to another have played a vital role in his life. As a result, Liu’s memoir tells “a story about growing up between cultures, finding your family, and becoming the master of your own extraordinary circumstance.”

### **Analysis of the Book's Structure**

Liu has arranged the structure of his book through twenty-five chapters that are split into three acts. The first act contains seven chapters that focus on the time from his birth to travelling with his father to Canada at the age of four. Interestingly, chapters two to six introduce readers to the life of Liu's parents. These chapters dive into their family history and provide meaningful insights into his parents' upbringing in the midst of natural disasters, the Cultural Revolution, and preparation for various entrance exams so that they could leave their lives in China and begin a new one in Canada so that they could create a better life for their family. Liu included his parents' story in his memoir, which other authors often exclude, so it was a lovely experience reading and getting into the mind of his parents. He ends this section by meeting his father after four years where he seemed more like a stranger than his own father and then travelling across oceans to finally reunite with his mother and begin their life as a family of three.

The second act contains nine chapters spanning the struggles of living as a family. This was due to the sudden change in family dynamic from his loving grandparents to his hard-working and tiresome parents, which resulted in harsh words and hurtful feelings as they were new to the idea of balancing work and raising a child. These chapters take us through Liu's childhood years, where he got the best academic achievements and made his parents proud. However, his college years saw him becoming completely disillusioned with what his parents had laid out for him. This section then looks at the beginning of Liu's career as an accountant and ends with him being laid off at the mere age of twenty-two. This section emphasized how though "related by blood, [Liu and his parents] were separated by culture, language, and values," which made growing up in Canada hard.

The final act also contains nine chapters, and these chapters delve into the newly acquired acting path that Liu chooses for himself. Liu views him being laid off as a blessing in disguise as it meant that he could pursue what he

was truly passionate about as a career. However, Liu refrains from informing his parents about this as he knows that they would be disappointed in him. This section shows how with nothing else left to lose, Liu embarks on a new journey into the world of show business, acting, and all the behind-the-scenes action that happens. However, Liu experiences more rejection and mishaps, but that does not stop him from continuing along this career path. In effect, he finally begins succeeding as an actor and unknowingly starts reconciling with his parents. As a result, this section emphasised the struggles of a new Asian actor during a time when representation and diversity were not given much importance in Hollywood.

### **Analysis of Methodology**

Throughout the process of writing his memoir, Liu collected many photographs and, with the help of his friend Adrian Lee – who is also the editor of this memoir – conducted interviews with his parents and Liu where they spent many painstaking hours talking through their relationship. Liu included various pages of photographs within each act. The chapters are also quite short, which shows how readers could complete the book in one sitting if they wanted to. Interestingly, Liu himself has recorded the audiobook version of his memoir, which can help readers gain more of a personal perspective. These short chapters can be seen as a strength. Another strength of his memoir is how he sheds light on the second-generation Asian American/Canadian experience. This is something that many migrants can relate to. In particular, Liu mentions how mainstream media sparsely covers Asian diasporic life, “but what about the experiences of second-generation kids like us – like feeling ashamed of the lunches our parents packed us because they were too “ethnic”? Or having to translate things for our parents because our English was better than theirs? Or struggling to communicate with our relatives in our home country because our Mandarin/Cantonese/Hindi/Korean/Viet was absolute horseshit?” (p.265). This quote in itself is something that hits home to many. In effect, this shows how all migrants, whether Asian or not, can relate to and find aspects of their lives reflected in Liu’s memoir.

The audience is kept intrigued and hooked throughout the memoir to learn more about the untold aspects of Liu's life. However, there was a missed opportunity in this memoir as aspects of his reconciliation with his parents were excluded. It also felt like the memoir just ended without going into detail about the true beginning of his acting career. This shows how there is room for a sequel of some sort to be made to continue Liu's story. A future sequel would enable the audience to gain insight into an Asian perspective of reconciling with parents and family, as these parts are often neglected

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, Liu highlights the immigrant struggle, something that all audiences can relate to and even learn from. The memoir, titled 'We Were Dreamers', can inspire people to refrain from seeing things as mere dreams and make that dream a reality which is exactly what Liu does. Therefore, it is worth reading.

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