



Transnational Lives: Beyond Return

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Outline of session

1. Transnationalism vs. return migration
2. Impact on development
3. Punjab-UK migration
4. Trans-net project
5. Research objectives
6. Small group discussions & plenary

Transnational lives

- Conventional dichotomy: migration is a one-off event, distinctions between emigrant/immigrant
- However: rather than settling or returning permanently, many migrants are seen to develop continuing, intense long-distance, border-crossing connections over years and over generations
- Political, economic, familial, religious and linguistic ties; ‘bifocality’ or multiple orientation
- Affects long term residents and recent arrivals
- Not all migrants develop transnational practices; many do so in one sphere of life; some cut ties

Factors driving new patterns of international migration

- Increase in the transnational mobility of people: long-term, temporary, seasonal, posted, irregular, back-and-forth or permanent state of being
- Globalisation: ties between states and economies
- Historically unprecedented mobility in context of new technologies of travel and communication, making cross-border contacts more rapid and easy
- May change over years and over generations
- Role of immigration laws/institutional framework

Implications of transnationalism

- Highlights that migration is not a one-off event but a dynamic process, sequence of events across time
- Emphasis on circular flows of persons, goods, information and ideas within transnational spaces
- Goes beyond conventional dichotomies of emigrant/immigrant countries
- But also involves this conventional dichotomy, as in the case of South to North migration: unequal interdependence, colonial ties and gross and continued imbalances of political power, economic development, and cultural penetration

Transnational practices vs. return

- So: what migrants may do is not simply return once and for all to their country of origin but develop transnational mobility
- Migrants frequently unwilling to see return as a one-off, no-going-back event
- They desire a degree and the possibility of coming-and-going; if people are restricted in their movements they will not go back to their country of origin; are more likely to return voluntarily if allowed to move back-and-forth
- Development consequences are not limited to regular migrants or people with legal status

Transnational practices vs. diaspora

- Transnationalism implies active contacts and practices eg sending money, participating in politics, visits, frequent phone calls
- Diaspora is a sense of orientation or consciousness; feeling part of a community
- That community may be located in a number of different places, not only in the country of origin
- Sense of belonging to a community in the country of migration might not entail any direct or long-standing relationship with the country of origin
- Transnational practices and sense of maintaining connections may change over time, according to the migrants' life course, and between generations

Transnationalism and development

- Conventional dichotomy: people either migrate forever, or temporarily and then return
- However: transnational coming-and-going has consequences for development
- Remittances, investment, philanthropic activities
- Transfer of knowledge and technologies
- Building intangible social and cultural capitals; multifarious contacts; can foster entrepreneurship
- Long-term across years and across generations

Punjab-UK migration



Brief history of Punjabi migration

- Largest stream of migrants from India
- 1930s: door-to-door peddlers (Bhatra) in Cardiff
- Post-war mass migration: small- and medium-scale peasant farmers (Jat), artisans (Ramgharias) and some landless labourers (Chamars, Chuhuras)
- Incorporated as unskilled industrial labour
- Mid 60s: middle-class, professional East Africans
- Today: marriage, professionals, irregular migrants
- Long-standing, defined spaces and infrastructures
- 3-500,000 Sikhs; 54,000 Hindu Punjabis

Distinctive forms of transnationalism

- UK is largest country of residence outside India but complex global diaspora; multiple transnational connections, especially with East Africa, North America, the Gulf and Australia/NZ
- ‘Twice migrants’, ‘multiple migrants’
- Differentiated by education, class and caste legacies; regional economic histories in the UK; and era of migration, state policies on migration
- Majority now of second, third, fourth generation who maintain some transnational practices and a strong sense of diasporic belonging
- Racial difference ‘immigrant imaginary’



- Three-year research project funded by the EC
- Partnered with Indian researchers (CDS Kerala)
- Clarify complex process of transnationalism, with a focus on transnational networks and political, economic, socio-cultural activities and education
- *How do migrants' activities across national borders emerge, function, and change, and how are they related to the processes of governance in increasingly complex and interconnected world?*

Research methods

- Content analysis of policy documents
- Semi-structured and life-course interviews with a diversity of transnational people, including labour migrants, posted workers, family-based migrants, humanitarian migrants, overseas students and second generation born and brought up in UK
- Ethnographic, observational work with small number of informants
- Localised fieldwork to understand context of migration and settlement

Qualitative research objectives

- Understand nature and forms of transnational lives
- Communication, exchanges and visits
- Ethnic, racial, linguistic, religious and status identities; how expressed; relationships – family, friends, school/workplaces/neighbourhoods
- Following politics; participation; voting; workers/professional organisations; religion; popular culture (sports, arts); philanthropy
- Incorporation into labour market; entrepreneurship; remittances; assets in Punjab
- How education produces migrants; aspirations for children; transformations taking place in schools

Socio-cultural transformations

- Importance of caste, kinship, marriage practices and religion; questions of ‘continuity and change’
- Identities ‘caught between two cultures’ → complex identities; intersection with class, status, education, gender, generation, region
- ‘Code-switching’, ‘hybridity’ → more complex, cultural exchanges and opaque subjectivities
- Production, circulation and consumption of goods; objectifying of identities through material world
- Overlooked significance of friendships from neighbourhood, school, workplace and shop-floor

Political transformations

- Indian Workers Associations and Congress; representation and power struggles within gurdwaras; factions following splits within Indian party politics; labour organisation
- Sikh ethno-nationalist activism initially unwelcome but shift even before 1984
- Deterritorialised Sikh identity challenging nation-state; key role of diaspora in Khalistan movement
- Links ‘from below’ to political change in Punjab
- Contestations within ‘invisible public sphere’

Economic transformations

- Incorporation into industrial labour force; economic restructuring; unemployment; fragmentation of labour movement
- Shift into self-employment; transnational exchanges; vitality of ‘ethnic enclave economies’
- Inequalities of gender and generation
- Remittances, investment, philanthropic activities
- How transnational economic activities are predicated on class, precarity, ir/regularity
- Ideas about economic feasibility of ‘return’

Educational transformations

- Inequalities in educational achievement; multicultural education and ‘assimilation’
- Improvements in educational achievement; social mobility; differentiation from Muslims
- ‘Ethnic capital’ – family; transmission of aspirations and attitudes; norm enforcement
- Schools as a site for identity transformations
- Parental aspirations for children’s education
- Education enhancing chances of migration; educational entrepreneurship; ‘brain circulation’

Issues for European policy-makers

- Transnational links of Indian-origin UK citizens span far beyond UK/India nexus, but include wider geographical spaces, typically East Africa, North America, the Gulf and Australia/NZ
- Networks increasingly include a number of other European countries (Germany, Italy and France)
- New transnational migrants, students and professionals, might move over time across a number of different European contexts to seek training and work experience; and then move on

Issues for UK policy-makers

- Intra- and inter-generational differences amongst Indian-origin transnational migrants
- New generation of professionals might come to study and work for some time in UK, but intend eventually to settle back in India or North America; as opposed to Indian-origin brides/grooms who intend to settle permanently in UK after marriage with Indian-origin UK citizens
- Educational needs of Indian-origin UK citizens might be met in a number of different locations

Small group discussions

1. How can we harness the potential of transnational connections for development purposes – not only for the countries of emigration but also with respect to the UK?
2. What sort of challenges do transnational practices pose for governance – with respect to citizenship and entitlements to movement?
3. How do the concerns of the Trans-net project relate to your work? Are there any perspectives or questions that you think are missing, or need be given greater emphasis in the research?

Development → transformations

- Increasing recognition that development is not only about economic growth, and of interconnections between economic growth and political and socio-cultural transformations
- Transformations perspective: offers broader focus on the differing ways in which globalisation affects local communities and national societies with diverse historical experiences and contexts
- Differing effects on various regions of the world

Three transformations arising from transnationalism: Vertovec

- Transmigrant practices involve modes of transformation in three basic domains of activity:
 1. Perceptual transformation affecting what can be described as migrant orientations ‘bifocality’
 2. Conceptual transformation of meanings within a triad of political ‘identities-borders-orders’
 3. Institutional transformation affecting forms of financial transfer, public-private relationships and local development in the economic domain

Geographical distribution of Sikhs in Britain by area, 2001

