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Chapter Author(s): Gijsbert Oonk

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1 Global Indian Diasporas

Exploring Trajectories of Migration and Theory

Gijsbert Oonk

Introduction

There are currently approximately 20,000,000 people of South Asian origin living outside of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, with the majority in Africa, the Caribbean, and Oceania.¹ Although there are regional variations in their adaptations, in many ways, they display a common 'Indian' identity.² They may want their children to prosper in their adopted countries, but at the same time they may prefer them to adopt Indian family values, marry other Indians, and share their common culture. In other words, many South Asians living overseas tend to reproduce their Indian culture, values, language, and religion as much as possible.³ Moreover, many South Asian migrants are currently trying to re-connect with their homeland, either through modern mass media, the Internet, or personal visits. These re-connections are often seen as romantic rendezvous with the historical past and their 'original roots'.⁴

Within, academic 'Indian diaspora' literature, the reproduction of culture in an often-hostile environment and the relation to the homeland are key features of the diaspora concept.⁵ Nevertheless, in this collection, we emphasise a rather different approach. The authors, during their fieldwork and archival research, realised that there were quite a few overseas Indians who were not interested in re-connecting with the homeland. They felt that the Indian Government was excluding them from their historical roots, as in the case of many Muslim Indians after Partition and Indian Africans after their expulsion from Uganda by Idi Amin. In the case of 'twice migrants' like the Hindustanis in the Netherlands, we find that they may identify with both India and Suriname. Moreover, it has been shown that in cases where Indians do reconnect with their ancestral villages, the relationship with family members has grown ambivalent and is sometimes experienced with noticeable discomfort. In other words, re-connection with one's homeland is not self-evident. It happens or it doesn't. Though some of

these findings are not new, they do shed some fresh light on the diaspora concept as a whole.

Thus the main aim of this collection is to gather sociological, anthropological, and historical perspectives on the 'Indian Diaspora'. The papers published in this volume present new empirical research on South Asian migrants world-wide. The authors share a strongly ambivalent feeling towards the mainstream issues highlighted in the 'South Asians in diaspora' discourse, such as the emphasis on the migrants' relation to their homeland and the reproduction of Indian culture abroad. In this sense, this book can be read as a first attempt to focus on the limits of the diaspora concept, rather than on its possibilities and range. From a comparative perspective, with examples from South Asian migrants in Suriname, Mauritius, East Africa, the UK, and the Netherlands, this collection shows that in each of these regions there are South Asian migrants who do not fit into the Indian diaspora concept. Thus we attempt to stretch the concept beyond its current use by highlighting empirical cases, which raise the question about the limits of the effectiveness of the diaspora as an academic historical/sociological concept.

This introduction begins with an outline of four different migration patterns from the South Asian continent, because the causes of migration vary, as do the length that migrants remain abroad. This will be followed by a short historiography of studies on the 'overseas Indian communities'. Here, the transition from labelling South Asian migrants 'overseas Indian communities' to 'South Asian diasporas' is highlighted. In the final section, the various articles and their perspectives are introduced.

Various Migrations, One Diaspora?

The South Asian migrants, or their ancestors, left the subcontinent as part of various migration patterns. In general, four – sometimes interweaving – currents of South Asian migration are emphasised. Each of these currents has had its own specific background, characteristics, and conditions. Some of which caused variations in the way migrants reproduced 'Indian culture' abroad and/or how they were received by the host societies. Moreover, these patterns differ in terms of age, numbers, and the historical contexts in which they emerge. In some areas, like East Africa, South Asian communities have lived for six or more generations, while in other areas, like the Gulf States they are recent arrivals. In most areas, they comprise small minorities, although in Mauritius and Fiji they are politically and economically dominant.

The first and eldest migration flow was that of traders who began leaving the South Asian subcontinent in the earliest times and continue to do so until today in search of trade and business. Not surprisingly, Indian coastal communities had already developed all kinds of profitable ties with East Asia, East Africa, and Central Asia in pre-colonial times. One of the key characteristics of this so called 'trade diaspora' may be the fact that most of it consisted of 'temporary' or 'circular' migration. Sons were sent to search for trade elsewhere, but also to eventually return. These traders acted as filters through which other cultures were linked with their own. Frequently, they developed a more cosmopolitan lifestyle due to their exposure to other cultures. Nevertheless, perhaps it is fair to say that it was only in the nineteenth century that substantial permanent South Asian trading communities settled abroad. In the literature, the emergence of long-distance trading connections – including the circulation of capital – the changing role of women, and the notions of 'trust' became important issues.⁶

The second important current was that of Indian Indentured labourers who left to replace the freed slaves in the nineteenth-century plantation economies. Although most of them may have intended to return to the sub-continent, in fact, many ended up staying to create new homelands abroad. The main difference with the trade diaspora, however, is the fact that much of this migration was 'forced' and not voluntary. The main focus, thus far, has been on the travel and working conditions of the labourers, the nature of the contracts, and the number of returnees. Though recently, the interest in the reproductions of Indian culture abroad has grown.⁷ In the same period, some Indians migrated as clerks and teachers to serve colonial Governments overseas. They are mostly described as being part of the colonial expansion system, where Indians contributed by collaborating with the British.⁸

The third current includes various migrations after the Second World War. First, many Muslims migrated from India to East and West Pakistan, while Hindus departed from Pakistan to migrate to India. Hindus in Pakistan as well Muslims in India did not feel that the new governments were able to protect their minority rights. Meanwhile, many highly educated professionals left India to find jobs as teachers, lawyers, and doctors in the Europe (especially the UK), the US and Canada. This has recently occurred again with the exodus of many IT professionals. Furthermore, numerous migrants have found work as construction workers or housekeepers in the Middle East since 1970s. Here again, some of them may have been 'temporary migrants', whereas others – intentionally or unintentionally – never returned.⁹

Within this Post War period a fourth pattern also developed, that of the 'twice migrants' or second- (or third-) time migrants. They include Indian indentured labourers in Suriname who eventually settled in the

Netherlands or those who were expelled from East Africa and ended up settling in the UK and Canada. They left their host countries for political rather than economic reasons. However, interestingly enough, most of them never considered re-migrating to India. They may have felt some cultural ties with the so-called 'motherland', but the economic, political, and family ties sent them elsewhere. This group was highly diverse and consisted of traders, labourers, as well as professionals.¹⁰

Bringing these various migration patterns together under the unifying label of 'Indian Diaspora' is no easy task.¹¹ The patterns vary regarding the causes and consequences of migration, the numbers of migrants, the periods of migration, the numbers of returnees, the manner in which they were received by their host countries, whether or not circular migration was transformed into permanent settlement and family reunion, and the questions of whether locally there was an emerging 2nd-, 3rd- and higher-generation of 'Indian migrants' as opposed to intermarriages and cultural alliances with the local communities.¹² Furthermore, there is a wide variety of religious, regional, and ethnic backgrounds of the migrants. They are labelled 'Hindus', which, of course, entails, a variety of castes, sub-castes and '*jatis*'. There is a great variety of sects and beliefs among the South Asian Muslims (Sunnis, Ismailis) as well and the other religious/ethnic groups such as the Sikhs, Jains, Goans, among others. Moreover, there is also a broad variety of regional and language backgrounds: such as the Gujaratis (Hindus and Muslims) from northwestern India, Telugu migrants from the South, Bhojpuri-speaking peoples from the north east and central India, and so on.

Generally speaking, then, this mosaic of Indian identities abroad is presented as the mirror of India itself. India is diverse, and so too are its migrants. It is acknowledged that Indian migrants abroad tend to reproduce their own religions, family patterns, and cultures as much as possible. At the same time, however, they adjust to local circumstances. Caste and language issues have to be negotiated in new environments. This is not a natural process, but one in which great efforts need to be made – sometimes in an effort to maintain one's own culture, but also with regard to the host society. In other words, these migrants differ in their cultural and religious backgrounds, in the causes and durations of their migrations, and the extent to which they adapt to local societies.

This collection discusses two basic problems concerning the Indian diaspora. One is the prefix 'Indian'. And the other is the term 'diaspora'. The implication of the first is that there is a single India with its people, who are somehow united under one flag. This is far from

obvious. India has been described as a 'nation and its fragments' or an 'invented nation'.¹³ In this literature, the unity of India is a construction or, at best, referred to as 'unity in variety'. This is even more the case for South Asians abroad, who have had to experience various processes of integration and assimilation in very different host countries. Moreover, Indians abroad do not so much identify with India as a nation but with the 'homeland', that is, the specific region where the migrants – or their descendants – come from. They often refer to themselves as Bengalis, Gujaratis, Telugus, or to their specific sub-castes, such as Patels, Lohanas, and Cutchis. Inasmuch as they have created a 'myth' about their 'homeland', it appears that region and locality are much more important in structuring the migrants' identities than 'religion' or 'nationality'. Claude Markovits rightly asserts that migrants from Gujarat, whether they were Hindus, Muslims or Jains, had more in common with each other in their experience of migration than Gujarati Hindus had with Bhojupuri Hindus, or Gujarati Muslims with Bojpuri Muslims.¹⁴ However, this is not the case for many South Asian migrants in the Caribbean, or the 'twice migrants' living in the UK and the Netherlands. They are descendants of Indian indentured labourers who migrated from India to the Caribbean, and from there to the UK or the Netherlands. Most of today's descendants of these migrants are barely aware of their regions of origin, be it Bihar, Bengal, or Uttar Pradesh. However, they continue to maintain, a vague notion of 'India'. Meanwhile, South Asians in the Caribbean, UK, East Africa and elsewhere are often referred to as 'Indians', while the region from which they come does not play a role. This suggests that the prefix 'Indian' has a local meaning, but not so much in terms of 'self-identification', but more as a label used by natives in the host nations. Many non-Indians, do not see India as fragmented, and the geographical masses of the sub-continent somehow presupposes a cultural unity.

This idea of a South Asian subcontinent 'unity' is nowadays reproduced in the vast and growing literature on the 'Indian diaspora', which emphasises how and to what extent 'Indian' culture was reproduced in the various host countries. Furthermore, the often ambivalent relation of migrants abroad to their homeland is highlighted. In this literature, the word 'India' is often rightly substituted for 'South Asian' to refer in particular to the pre-independence migrants whose origins lie in contemporary Pakistan or Bangladesh. Despite this, the Indian Government has recently made a strong effort to reconnect to its '*Indian* diaspora' migrants. Here, the word 'Indian' is – again – clearly intended to unify the migrants whose origins lie within the current borders of the Republic of India. This means that the prefix 'Indian' has been defined – though not without problems as we will see in this collection – by the Indian State. At the same time, we realise that these

problems beg the question: how far can the construct of a comparative Indian diaspora take us?

The second problem is the term 'diaspora'. Despite the growing acceptance of the word as representing migrant groups beside those of the Jewish diaspora, social scientists continue to disagree on two basic questions regarding diaspora studies. One is: *What* is a diaspora? What are we studying? And the second: *Who* is a diaspora? In other words, do all international migrant groups belong to a diaspora? Moreover, should we consider a diaspora as a static and unchanging phenomena, or is it constantly changing? And if so, how and in what direction, and why? Moreover, from an academic point of view, the question is: What do we gain by using the 'diaspora concept', however it may be defined? Can we expect any new insights or is it just another buzzword? Obviously, the popularity of the term itself is related to the increasing relevance of representations of 'identity' and 'culture' in international politics.¹⁵ The diaspora debate over the past decade has experienced two extreme positions: One being that the term and concept refers to the specific migration of Jews, which occurred under very unique historical circumstances; while the other is that of a more universal application to all cases of migration and settlement beyond the borders of native nation-states, irrespective of the migration circumstances.

A diaspora refers to a particular kind of migration. Most scientists agree that at least a few of the following characteristics are crucial to describe a diaspora. (1) Dispersal from an original homeland to two or more countries. The causes for the dispersal may vary from traumatic experiences, as was the case with the Jews, or the African slaves, to the search for work, or the pursuit of a trade or other ambitions. (2) There must be a collective – often idealised – memory/myth of the homeland. In some cases, there is a commitment to creating and/or maintaining this homeland, as is the case with some Sikhs and their efforts to create an independent Kalisthan, or the Jews and their relation to Israel. (3) A myth of returning to one's homeland (be it now or in the future, temporary or permanent). This myth is grounded in a strong ethnic consciousness of migrants abroad, which may have prevented them from assimilating in the local society. (4) There is a sense of empathy and solidarity with similar groups elsewhere in the world and/or with events and groups in the homeland.¹⁶ Diaspora, then, is a contemporary term used to describe practically any population considered 'deterritorialised' or 'transnational', whose cultural origins are said to have arisen in a nation other than the one in which they currently reside, and whose social, economic, and political networks cross nation-state borders and, indeed, span the entire globe. According to Vertovec, for instance, intellectuals and activists from within these populations in-

creasingly use this term, emphasising that the 'Diasporic language' appears to be replacing, or at least supplementing, minority discourse.¹⁷

From 'Overseas Indian Communities' to the 'South Asian Diasporas'

The study of South Asian migrants overseas is not a new phenomenon. In fact, the British Colonial Government itself was among the first to systematically observe, count, and describe the number of Indian migrants, their religious backgrounds, working conditions, and so on, in the British Colonial Empire. These reports, the correspondence and the diaries are still the main sources of South Asian migration history. This means that the migration is often seen by outsiders and not by the migrants themselves. In addition, the themes studied were allied to the knowledge of colonial officials and the desired information for the colonial rulers in the centre of the empire, London. They included such themes as numbers of migrants, questions related to travel permits, settlement conditions, tax payments, trade licenses but also typical colonial obsessions such as *sati*, Indian sexuality, child marriage, arranged marriages, and religion.

In the 19th and early 20th centuries, the word 'diaspora' did not appear in these reports. The general denominator was 'overseas Indians' and this was also the phrase used by academics after Indian Independence in 1947. The first two comprehensive academic overviews on the history of South Asians overseas were published in the early 1950s by Kondapi (1951) and Cumpston (1953).¹⁸ Nevertheless, the interest in the overseas Indians changed once the colonial empire had collapsed. The most popular theme then became cultural persistence, the ability of Indians to retain, reconstitute, and revitalise the many aspects of their culture in an overseas setting. These studies dealt with the processes of acculturation, adaptation and, in the end, the perspective of a plural society, which was first advocated by Furnivall (1948).¹⁹ Early examples include regional studies by Palmer, Gillion, and Griffit.²⁰ On the macro level, neo-Marxists developed a centre-periphery model of the global development of capitalism, which focussed on the changing push and pull factors which determined the causes of South Asian migration. The emergence of unbalanced regional economic development may have hampered, hindered, or promoted migration.²¹

It has been especially since the mid-1970s that historians, geographers, and anthropologists started producing research in the field of what we now call the 'South Asian Diaspora'. F.N. Ginwala, for example, introduced the notion of the 'Indian South Africans'. The notion of local space and the embedding of Indian culture was studied by S. Shah and S. Winchester.²² However, it was, not an 'Asianist' but rather a world historian by the name of Phillip D. Curtin who proposed an

important shift towards the construction of the South Asian Diaspora. In his book *Cross-Cultural Trade in World History* (Cambridge 1984), he introduces the term 'trade diaspora,' including that of the South Asian 'trade diaspora'. Moreover, he emphasises the relation of cross-cultural traders to their hosts, with each other, and the way that they organised cross-cultural trade.²³

This growing interest eventually culminated in a unique international conference on 'South Asian Communities overseas'. The conference and the proceedings transformed the rhetoric of South Asian migration and the history of 'Indians overseas'. Note that the word 'diaspora' was not used at this Oxford University conference until 1987. The published proceedings (1991), however, do use the term 'diaspora'.²⁴ The book is edited by Steven Vertovec, who also used the term 'diaspora' in his introduction, which highlights the British interest in the history of South Asia in general. It especially emphasised the contribution of Oxford University Press academics. There is no reference to the concept of diaspora in its contemporary sense [see page 14]. None of the other papers use the word 'diaspora', either in the titles or in the articles themselves.

It was in the period from the late 1980s to the early 1990s that the term 'diaspora' became fashionable. Its connotations were no longer monopolised by the Jewish diaspora. The question was raised whether other groups of migrants could be labelled as a diaspora. Politicians and representatives of overseas communities started using the term 'diaspora'. Africans, Armenians, and indeed Indians and Chinese migrants began to refer to themselves as being part of a 'diaspora'. Moreover, the academic field began wondering how the word 'diaspora' could be useful in understanding migration, migrants, and the relation between the motherland and the host societies. This was highlighted in particular by the establishment of the *Journal of Diaspora Studies* in 1991.

The point of departure for the *Journal of Diaspora Studies* is well formulated by its general editor Khachig Tölölyan, who notes that the concept has been related to a growing field of meanings, including processes of transnationalism, de-territorialisation, and cultural hybridity. These meanings are opposed to more 'rooted forms' of identifications such as 'regions' and 'nations'. This implies a growing interest in the discourse of 'rootedness', changing identities and the relation between the local and the global. Some articles in the journal use broad 'checklists' of factors that define the groups in diaspora, including the dispersal to two or more locations; collective mythology of one's homeland; and alienation from the host nation, among others.²⁵ These checklists facilitated a debate that arose in the early 1990s on the question of whether the Jewish diaspora was unique or whether it could be com-

plemented with an 'African', 'Chinese', Indian, Armenian, Greek, or indeed any other transnational migrant group.

This question obviously could only be answered by making a comparison *between* different ethnic diasporas. One of the outcomes was that it might be fruitful not to compare these diasporas based on their ethnic origin but based on the *causes* of migration such as being victimised (Jews, slaves) or looking for employment (indentured labour and the migration of semiskilled workers).²⁶ At the same time, by broadening the field of diaspora studies beyond the Jewish diaspora, the question, ultimately, is: What is the usefulness of a concept that can hardly exclude transnational migrants? In other words, who in today's US cannot be defined as being part of a diaspora according to the available checklists and definitions? Indeed, contemporary studies include titles related to the Irish diaspora, the Caribbean diaspora, and so on. In other words, the question here is: What do we as social scientists gain from the concept of diaspora? How does it help us – if at all – to better understand particular aspects of migration?

A few years later (1995), Peter van de Veer edited his highly-praised volume *Nation and Migration: The Politics of Space in the South Asian Diaspora*. Van de Veer and other contributors questioned the radical modernity of the experience of displacement, disjuncture, and diaspora. Migration has its own particular ambiguities, based on what Van de Veer calls the dialectics of 'belonging and longing'. Here, the theme of belonging juxtaposes rootedness with uprootedness, and establishment with marginality. Longing, then, was related to the desire for change and movement. In this volume, these topics were articulated in two interrelated areas of importance: nation and migration, and nation and religion. The book presents the diverse forms and dynamics of the 'politics of space'. Interestingly, however, none of the contributors – at that time – questioned whether all South Asians abroad are part of a diaspora. South Asian migrants abroad are presumed to be part of a diaspora by definition. The question is: by which definition? The definition according to the researchers, in their desire to be precise, or according to the subject themselves?

As the diaspora concept has matured, alternative definitions, different approaches, and new suggestions for more research are emerging. Steven Vertovec (2000) proposes three meanings of Diaspora: as a *social form*; as a *type of consciousness*, and as a *mode of cultural production*.

The diaspora as a '*social form*' refers to the process of becoming scattered. It draws on the Jewish model, and it looks at how social ties were cemented, at the process of maintaining a collective identity, at the institutionalising networks, and at the social and economic strategies as a transnational group. In addition, it focuses on their political orientations, their inability – or unwillingness – to be accepted by the

'host society'. Especially now, where communication and transportation are relatively easy and inexpensive, the diaspora as a social form may be characterised as a 'triangular relationship' between (a) the 'globally' dispersed, yet strongly transnational organised group (b) the territorial states where groups reside, and (c) the Indian State or imagined homeland.

The diaspora as a *type of consciousness* emphasises the variety of experiences, a state of mind, and a sense of identity. This is described as *dual or paradoxical nature*. This nature has various connotations. First, it refers to the experience of discrimination and exclusion, and at the same time, the positive identification with the highly-praised historical heritage of the Indian civilisation. Second, the awareness of multi-locality, the notion of belonging 'here and there' as well as sharing the same 'roots' and 'routes'.²⁷ The awareness of the ability to make a connection here and there, making the bridge between the local and the global. Third, double consciousness creates a 'triple consciousness', that is, the awareness of the double consciousness and being able to use it instrumentally. In addition to the identification with the host society, and the homeland, there is the identification with the locality, especially in the discourse of multiculturalism. Indians in Southall, London include the awareness of being 'Southallian', emphasising their multi-racial character, within the discourse of the multi-cultural character of their local environment.²⁸

The diaspora as a *mode of cultural production* emphasises the currents of cultural objects, images, and meanings back and forth, and the way these transcend, *creolise*, and change according to the wishes of the customers and artists. It refers to the production and reproduction of transnational social and cultural phenomena. Here, the position of youth in diaspora is highlighted. They are socialised in cross-currents of different cultural fields and form an interesting market for 'diasporic cultural goods'. Moreover, they are the ones who receive and transform these new ideas and developments. Furthermore, it is clear that modern media are used to reformulate and translate the cultural traditions of the Indian diaspora. The popularity of episodes from the *Ramayana* or the *Mahabharata* among the migrants has led to new ideas regarding 'Indian' culture'. The Indian diaspora has also found its way into the virtual existence of the Internet, with its numerous discussion lists, 'find one another through school pictures sites' and transnational marriage agents.

The Indian Government itself has recently become a factor in the diaspora debate. It generally tends to overestimate the importance of Indian 'diasporic feelings'. In its recently published Report of the High Level Commission, it states that 'Since India achieved Independence, overseas Indians have been returning to seek their roots and explore

new avenues and sectors for mutual beneficial interaction from investment to the transfer of economic skills and technology, to outright philanthropy and charitable work. This trend has become more marked in the last decade, as the Indian economy has opened up, giving rise to a new range of opportunities for emerging generations'.²⁹ But this is, in fact, far from true and more the consequence of wishful thinking. The main aim of the commission is to explore the possibilities of improving the relationship between India and 'Persons of Indian Origin' [PIO] and 'Non Resident Indians overseas [NRI]'. This is, of course, the result of the Indian Government's disappointment felt in the role that PIOs and NRIs have played until now. But it is not just the Indian Government that wants to re-connect with overseas Indians. The Bollywood fashion designers use the newly available cheap media techniques, one way or the other, to advertise their products to potential buyers in the Indian Diaspora. Bollywood videos and music are sold world-wide. And there are numerous Internet sites where Indians in diaspora can share their views, discuss politics, and reunite with the 'homeland', virtually. Indian fashions can be purchased not only in India, but also in the UK, Canada, and anywhere else with a sizeable 'Indian' community.

The Indian Government and industry's re-connection with the Indian Diaspora has to be seen from an instrumental perspective. That is, they choose what and who to re-connect with and they have their own reasons for doing so. Thus, for political reasons, the Indian Government chooses not to focus on 'Indian' (PIOs) Hindu and Muslims who now reside in Bangladesh and Pakistan. They do not invite them to invest in India or share dual citizenship. Moreover, some PIOs suggest that the Government focuses on the well-off PIOs, rather than the poorer ones. However, the Government denies this. It is interesting to note that the very existence of the Indian Government creates an actor with regard to the notion of 'diaspora' that barely exists in the diaspora of Africans. Nevertheless, the fact that the Indian Government followed the Chinese example of reconnection the diaspora may find some attention in western African nations in the near future. The question remains: Who is and who is not responding to these messages and why? Especially, the more negative and ambivalent responses, which have until now in particular been underestimated in the diaspora discourse, will be highlighted in numerous contributions in this collection.

The issue of inclusion in or exclusion from the diaspora is even more complex from a historical point of view. Historical sources are mostly related to particular geographical areas. In general, they are more focused on the local migrants' issues and than their social or cultural ties to their homelands. Therefore, making it extremely difficult to deduce

the social, economic, or cultural relations with the homeland. In short, the question here is why and when do South Asian migrants overseas consider *themselves* as part of a 'South Asian diaspora' and what do they gain from it in economic, sociological, or cultural terms? How should researchers respond when they themselves do not feel comfortable with the terms and definitions of the diaspora framework? Each article in this collection formulates its own responses to these questions, and together they present a continuum from essentialist views to modern mosaics of impressions.

The Articles

The articles in this volume all deal with general issues related to the local identity of the 'Indian' migrants, including their attitude towards India. They emphasise that the identity of 'South Asians' is neither an unchanging, primordial identity, nor an infinitely flexible one that one can paint, fill in, or reuse at will, depending on the circumstances. The identity is constantly being negotiated in changing contexts. This assumption is true in South Asia as much as it is in the South Asian diasporas. The authors in the following articles all highlight and determine *how* this identity is negotiated in various parts of the world. Therefore, they focus on regions populated by South Asians, their relation to their host countries and their homeland, as well as the length of time they spend abroad.

People in diaspora are part of both a global history and a local history. Historians should emphasise the dynamic processes of changing attitudes towards the homeland, the host country, and the diasporic community itself. A historical and comparative approach may help us to understand some of these dynamics. The first section of the book is devoted to the historical perspectives of the Indian diaspora. Here we deal with the problem of a concept that was not yet in use during the period being researched. Scott Levi investigates the concept of diaspora as an analytical tool by exploring the emergence of an Indian trading diaspora during the course of the seventeenth century. He focuses on the Indian merchant communities of 'Multanis' and 'Shikarpuris' who dispersed across Afghanistan, Iran, Central Asia, the Caucasus, and much of Russia. This article shows that the definition of diaspora as used by Abner Cohen and others helped him to understand both the emergence and the social organisation of the diaspora. Here, the term 'diaspora' implies that the Multani and Shikarpuri communities maintained an identity with their homeland. Nevertheless, this homeland was not India. Nor did the traders themselves identify themselves as part of the Indian diaspora. The author applies the concept to empha-

sis particular aspects of migration; in this case, identification with the traders' geographical origins and their ambivalent relationship with their host society. He concludes that the ability of both Hindu and Muslim traders to maintain thriving communities in Central Asia may be attributed to the fact that they were widely respected as large-scale trans-regional traders, whose fortitude and commercial connections were valuable resources for the local regions. However, he also cites some exceptional cases that show that this relationship was not always a harmonious one. Levi ultimately links this century-old trade diaspora to the modern world and the Indian diasporas of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, including its association with the socio-economic trauma which was provoked by the Partition.

In the second article, Gijsbert Oonk applies 'the perspective from below'. Taking the agent's viewpoint he argues that the first generation of Hindu Lohanas of East Africa remained close with their home villages in western India. They regularly went back for family visits, trade and marriages. However, the process of settling in led to fewer and fewer visits to the homeland as their economic and cultural orientations shifted from India to East Africa. Oonk reveals how Lohanas in East Africa initially promoted the reproduction of Gujarati language and culture during the colonial period. Nevertheless, the second and third generation of migrants lost their abilities to read, write, and speak Gujarati, despite the efforts of some Hindu organisations and the wishes of the elderly members of the community. Moreover, they learned English – instead of Swahili – and this became an essential aspect of Indian education in East Africa. In other words, the second and third generation Lohanas consciously chose not to reconnect with India, Indian languages and culture and developed a more 'Indian African' identity. Oonk, therefore, argues that 'the diaspora concept with its strong emphasis on rootedness, homeland, reproduction of Indian culture abroad, cannot help us to understand the history of the Lohana community in East Africa'. This article reveals that the process of identifying with one's homeland is not without its struggles, and that it has both local and global significance. While, Levi could not stress the process of 'self-identification' due to the nature of the sources, Oonk shows that the Hindu Lohanas in East Africa do not consider themselves as part of the Indian diaspora, preferring instead to focus on a local Asian-African culture. By taking the perspective of the migrants themselves, this article shows that the re-linking assumed by the concept of diaspora and the Indian Government may have a strong instrumental flavour.

Meanwhile, Chandrashekar Bhat and T.L.S. Bhaskar discuss some theoretical implications of the diaspora concept. They present the idea of an 'old' and a 'new' diaspora and how this affects the degree of inter-

action with the motherland. Here, the Telegu language is seen as one of the most important carriers of culture and identity and that Telugu migrants find it much easier to replicate caste and regional identities related to the 'original' Andhra Pradesh, because of the emergence of modern mass media and the Internet. They reveal that those who migrated in earlier generations may have identified more with their respective host countries. Furthermore, it shows a fruitful example of how identity formation can be compared within the same group. In this case, that of the Telugu migrants in the US, Mauritius, and Fiji.

The most critical contributions related to diaspora concepts are yet to come. Ellen Bal and Kathinka Kerkhoff's article forcefully integrates three diaspora perspectives. They utilise the diaspora concept as an analytical tool not unlike how academics and the Indian Government use it. Moreover, they highlight the importance of a perspective 'from below', that is from the migrants themselves. They also emphasise a comparative perspective by focussing on cases in Mauritius and Suriname. They emphasise the fact that Muslims are often excluded from the Indian diaspora category. Muslims have identified themselves in their own ways over time and geographical locations. South Asian Muslims in Suriname have long desired an undivided homeland called Hindustan, whereas in Mauritius, Muslims of British-Indian descent prefer local inclusion as a separate ethnic community. The results of this empirical research has stimulated their criticism of academics as well as of the Indian State in the way they incorporate, or exclude, Muslims in the Indian diaspora. This, again, shows the importance of localised empirical research.

John Mattausch's contribution embraces the notion that the economic success of the Gujarati community in the UK is an accident rather than something due to structural factors. He takes a long-term historical perspective in order to show that the recent economic success of that community is just a very recent phenomena. This suggests that success factors mentioned in the academic literature, like the role of the extended family or the role of the community only become important in very specific socio-economic areas. He shows that the community's twin trajectories – diversely capitalist and traditionally Hindu – requires that we as social scientists consider the substantial analytical role that *chance* plays in explaining how the parallel developments occurred.

In the second section we focus on the sociological and anthropological research involving the Indian diaspora, which shares its 'perspective from below'. Mario Rutten and Pravin J. Patel introduce a 'two sited' approach as they integrate their research among Indian immigrants in the UK with that of the Gujarat villages of origin. They highlight the importance of the social environment of the migrants' locality of origin

and the social environments of the localities to which they have migrated. These transnational family relations should neither be considered homogenous, nor as separate communities. They reveal that the first-generation Patel community in London shows little interest in productive investments in India, but they do show some interest in providing some religious funding. They also highlight certain levels of ambivalence in London, in their mother country, and their home villages, which the elderly people visit three months a year. Ultimately, they do not feel at home in either London or India. This shows that the migration experience and the extent of local integration has an impact on an migrant's identity to the extent that the notion of home becomes ambivalent. Interestingly enough, the authors prefer to focus more on transnational contacts than on the concept of diaspora. The strength of this type of research is that it shows two sides of the same coin. The researchers studied their subjects in the UK and their families in India. This is in strong contrast with the bulk of the empirical research, which is usually based solely on the host country, which, in turn, is due to the financial and social constraints of anthropological fieldwork.

Anjoom Mukadam and Sharmina Mawani's article explicitly compares the 'self definition' [label chosen by an individual to express one's identity] of second-generation Nizari Ismailis in both Toronto and London. They argue strongly against the dominant migrant discourse because they emphasize that second-generation migrants did not migrate – they were born in the host countries – and have become part of a larger local identity more than of a Indian 'diasporic identity'. They make a strong argument for replacing dominant essentialist conceptions like 'between two cultures' and the 'half-way generation' with a more structuralist view. By emphasising the hybrid character of the Ismaili identity, they simultaneously reveal a tendency to define themselves part of Canada or the UK rather than as part of a diaspora. Mukadam and Mawani do not deny the importance of a diasporic identity, but prefer to highlight the self-emphasised 'national' identity. This raises questions about what we omit from migrant identities, when we focus too much on the 'diaspora' as an organising method of research.

Sanderien Verstappen and Mario Rutten take a different angle. They reveal that while media are discussed in the diaspora literature, it is usually under the assumption that transnational media help reconnect diasporic communities to their home countries. However, the assumed link between media *from* the home country and viewers' identification *with* that home country is problematic and must not be taken for granted. Indian movies are very popular among Surinamese Hindustani's in the Netherlands. The audience, however, seems strikingly disinterested in the actual realities of the South Asian subcontinent itself.

This article describes the reception of commercial Bombay cinema among Hindustani youngsters in the Netherlands.

The last article by Brit Lynnebakke shows that in the case of Hindustanis in the Netherlands, the diasporic images of the homeland do not fit the general positive connotations as suggested in the literature. These 'twice migrants' [arriving via Suriname] do not freely interact with the 'direct migrants' from India in the Netherlands. Meanwhile, the 'direct' migrants have managed to develop an image of the traditional 'Surinamese Hindus', because they have preserved the Indian tradition even better than those in India. Suriname Hindus are offended by the fact that they are not considered reliable marriage partners because of their Surinamese and/or Bihari backgrounds. Lynnebakke focuses on why a 'pan-India' identity has failed to emerge in the Netherlands. Migrations trajectories as well as educational and class differences seem to be the main reasons.

In contrast to the mainstream diaspora literature, the articles in this book emphasise the ambivalent relations of the migrants with their Indian homeland. Their migration trajectories vary from region to region; from circular migration to permanent settlement; from free migration to forced migration. While some may visit India frequently, others have settled permanently in their new host countries. Some may have created a 'cultural India abroad', while others may develop a more global outlook. The Indian Government as well as the earlier Indian Colonial officials, all responded differently to the various migration trajectories, all of which makes it very difficult to unify the migration of South Asians under a single concept of Indian diasporas. In his 'afterword' Claude Markovits emphasises that this in itself is not sufficient reason to reject the concept out of hand. And he is right, of course. But instead of focusing on the possibilities of the concept, he shows how two types of migrations (the migrations of traders and workers) may intermingle and create less analytical distinction as suggested by the diaspora literature. Therefore, this collection prefers to explore how we can interpret these various trajectories. Grounded in fieldwork and archival research, these papers share a strong feeling for a 'history from below' with an eye for nuance and variation. The authors collectively argue that empirical, contextual, comparative, and historically well-defined research will refine our understanding of complex historical as well as contemporary processes of migration.

Notes

- 1 Figures vary from 12,000,000 to 26,000,000 depending on whether or not they include Non-resident Indians (NRIs), 'mixed' parentage and their offspring. In general,

- these figures do not include the People of Indian Origin who now reside in Pakistan and Bangladesh. Many statistics also exclude the number of 'Indians' settled in Sri Lanka, Myanmar and Nepal.
- 2 The limits of the use of the word 'Indian' and the fact that this process of adaptation is not a 'natural' process will be discussed further in this introduction.
 - 3 Recent examples include, G. Oonk, 'The changing culture of the Hindu Lohana community in East Africa', *Contemporary South Asia* (13) 1, 2004, 7-23. In this article, the process of cultural adaptation of migrants towards a new environment is described in terms of a process of stretching and closing preferences of identity from the migrants' perspective. See also, K.E. Nayar, *The Sikh Diaspora in Vancouver: Three Generations amid Tradition, Modernity, and Multiculturalism*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004. M. Gosine and D. Narine (eds.) *Sojourners to Settlers: Indian Migrants in the Caribbean and the Americas*, New York: Windsor Press 1999.
 - 4 G. Sheffer, *Diaspora Politics : At Home Abroad*, Cambridge 2003; W. Saffran, *Diasporas in Modern Societies*, *Diaspora* 1 (1) 1991, 83-99; W. Safran, 'Comparing Diasporas: A Review Essay', *Diaspora* 8 (3) 1998, 255-92.
 - 5 R. Cohen, *Global Diasporas*, London 1997, 26. Safran, *ibid.* 1998.
 - 6 S. Dale, *Indian Merchants and the Eurasian Trade, 1600-1750*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1994; C. Markovits, *The Global World of Indian Merchants 1750-1947. Traders of Sindh from Bukhara to Panama*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2000; S. Levi, *The Indian Diaspora in Central Asia and its Trade 1550-1900*, Leiden: Koninklijke Brill 2002; D.W. Rudner, *Caste and Imperialism in Colonial India: The Nattukotai Chetiaris*, Berkeley: University of California Press 1994; B. Sue-White, *Turbans and Traders: Hong Kong's Indian Communities*. Hong Kong: Oxford University Press 1994.
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 - 10 P. Bhachu, *Twice Migrants: East African Sikh Settlers in Britain*. London: Tavistock Publication 1985. M. Twaddle (ed.), *Expulsion of a Minority: Essays on Ugandan Asians*. London: Athlone Press 1975. R.S. Gowricharn, De duurzaamheid van het transnationalisme, in *Migrantenstudies* 2004, 252-268. C. Choeni and K. Sh. Adhin, (eds.), *Van Brits Indisch Immigrant via Suriname tot Burger van Nederland*. Den Haag: Samprehan 2003.
 - 11 See, e.g., Varma, Sushma J., and Radhika Seshan (eds.). *Fractured Identity: The Indian Diaspora in Canada*. New Delhi: Rawat Publication. 2005. Judith M Brown, *Global South Asians: Introducing the Modern Diaspora*, Cambridge University Press 2006.

- 12 K. E. Nayer, *The Sikh Diaspora in Vancouver: Three Generations amid Tradition, Modernity, and Multiculturalism*. London: University of Toronto Press, 2004; C. Choeni and K. Sh. Adhin, (eds), *Van Brits Indisch Immigrant via Suriname tot Burger van Nederland*. Den Haag: Sampreshan 2003.
- 13 Partha Chatterjee, *The Nations and its fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial histories*, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1993. G. Aloysius, *Nationalism without a nation in India*: New Delhi, Oxford University Press 1997.
- 14 C. Markovits, *The Global World*, 6.
- 15 Kim D. Butler, 'Defining Diaspora, Refining a Discourse', *Diaspora* 10 (2) 2001, 189-219. R. Cohen, *Global Diasporas: An introduction*, Seattle: University of Washington Press 1997; W. Safran, 'Diasporas in modern societies: myths of homeland and return', *Diasporas* (1) 1 1991, 83-99. S. Vertovec, *The Hindu Diaspora. Comparative Patterns*. Routledge: London 2000.
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- 17 James Clifford 'Diasporas', *Cultural Anthropology*, (9) 3 1994, 311.
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- 26 Cohen, *Global Diasporas*.
- 27 P. Gilroy, "There Ain't no Black in the Union Jack": *The cultural politics of race and nation*. London: Verso, 1987.

- 28 William Safran also emphasises that 'Diaspora consciousness is a particular kind of awareness said to be generated among contemporary transnational communities'. (Safran 1991).
- 29 The Indian High Level Commission, *Report on the Indian Diaspora*. See also: Lal, *India's Missed Opportunity*, London: Ashgate 2001.

