

The Mobile Global Subject: Mobility and Transnationalising Hinduism

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ABSTRACT

The contemporary global condition is one of heightened movement that positions us in various contexts, in varying degree, as mobile, global subjects; as migrants, as tourists, and as transnational workers. While transnationalism, migrancy, diaspora and mobilities have become buzz words in the social sciences with an explosion of work in the fields of transnational and diaspora studies, and the several issues of transnational and diasporic identities and nation-state, migrant labour, remittances etc., there has been substantially less work done in the field of transnationalised religion. And while the religious identities of the various diasporic communities has received ethnographic and theoretical scrutiny, this has been less the case for itinerant transnationals seen to commute across increasingly porous borders, weaving back and forth between geographic and cultural spaces for the purposes of work.

This paper seeks to narrow the gaze on the transnationalised lives of migrant Hindu workers in their attempt to articulate their sense of being Hindu in a transnational context. The first part of the paper argues that the Hindu transnationals are to be understood within a wider discourse of commoditized labour, and against a paradigm of mobilities. The paper shows that the Hindu transnational workers are to be understood as commodities positioned in global consumption in a world where labour is increasingly mobile and flexible. By referring to a particular ethnographic illustration the second part of the paper unveils that this flexibility comes with a price for individuals who wish to continue articulating their religious Hindu identity in a new transnational space. The paper shows that, placed as they are as a kind of global commodity or service product as salon workers, their flexible and mobile context as migrant labourers, forces them to make their religion equally portable and flexible.

Introduction: The Global Mobile Condition and that thing called Religion

The contemporary global condition is no longer inertial but rather one of heightened movement. John Urry (among others, Cresswell, Kauffman, Featherstone et al.) has over two scholarly decades written extensively on what culminates in his rather eloquent and erudite unfolding of a new paradigm in the social sciences based on 'mobilities'. There is also, in the tenor of general scholarship, much enthusiastic talk about the 'mobility turn' in the social sciences, and of borders made porous by mass communication and the various patterns of migration. Urry unfolds in his seminal work '*Mobilities*' (2007), the many contexts and nuances of mobility as being crucial and key to comprehending the multiple aspects of (post)modernity. The gaze in this paper however, is drawn narrowly on individualized mobility which is very quickly becoming the most important social trend of the developed world¹ as Wellman in his (appropriately) flattering review of Urry's book puts it.

In the case of migrancy, either as diasporic migrant or itinerant, studies (Levitt 2004; Bastos and Bastos; Peach 2006) unveil that people with transnationalised lives, tend to simultaneously inhabit what can be construed of as multiple spaces that reveal their experiences of heightened connectivity as well as often times, heightened dislocation. The global (mobile) condition is thus, amongst the many other things it connotes, also one of heightened vulnerability for many people, given the horrors of genocidal ethnic cleansing, racist or terrorist attacks as well as other more subtle vulnerabilities experienced by migrants as they attempt to articulate their religious and cultural identities in a transnational space to which they have no claim as citizens, and where they are in turn forced to make their religion flexible. These working migrants are seen as straddling two geographic and cultural spaces in their movement back and forth between the 'sending society' or homeland, in this instance Gujarat India, and place of employment as salon workers in the 'receiving' suburb of Reservoir Hills, South Africa. The paper explores the migrants attempt to engage culturally in the new transnational spaces and explores how Hinduism comes to be flexibly practiced within this mobility.

As pointed out, the literature reveals that the transnational practices of migrant families, other than remittances and economic activities, remain under-investigated. Some work has been done on the transnational dimension of religious belief systems, but the micro-politics of religion has been in most part ignored, and Gardner and Grillo (2002: 179) note

that there has been little discussion of transnational religious practices or rituals at the level of households and families, especially the comparison of local practices to that performed by migrants back in their countries of origin. Household-level analyses of the performances of and meanings of the transnational ritual space offer valuable insights to understanding the meaning of the relationship between place and culture among migrants in a transnational world, and in so doing, are able to illuminate contemporary processes of globalization (Gardner and Grillo 2002: 179). Culled from the work of Hannerz, Friedmann and Werbner on cosmopolitanism and transnationalism Leonard (2007: 52) spells out that transnationals are people who, while moving, build encapsulated cultural worlds around themselves, most typically worlds circumscribed by religious or family ties, while cosmopolitans on the other hand are people who familiarize themselves with other cultures and know how to move easily between cultures. Leonard (*ibid*) likens these respectively to more and less successful processes of translation that do not or do narrowly emphasize, one's own religion, as a core element of identity in the diaspora, or in this instance, the transnational migrant space.

Transnationalism designates a relatively recent shift in migration patterns. Where previously migration was understood as directed movement with a point of departure and a point of arrival for the transnationals, in contemporary terms it is seen as an ongoing movement between two or more social and religio-cultural spaces, thus re-spatialising how migrant labour can be bartered.

This movement, facilitated by inter-continental jet travel, various technologies of virtual contact such as Facebook, E-mail and Chatrooms etc. are claimed as shortening the scale of distances travelled and acts as an example of what van der Veer refers to as the "death of distance" (2004: 4). Conceptually, death of distance can perhaps be seen as sharing kinship with notions of 'global village', 'global economy' and 'global culture' within the larger matrix of the multiple processes of globalisation that bring the various corners of the world (in some respects anyway) in closer encounters with each other. While the definition(s) of globalisation lend themselves to an array of discourses, that lie outside our immediate discussion, Scholte's (2000: 3) unpacking of the term, as referring to a "supraterritoriality" is one that can be comfortably, it is felt, embraced in the context of transnationalism. Such supraterritoriality is a reference to the spawning and spread of social spaces in which distance, borders, locations even, have become relatively irrelevant in a world that is fast becoming a 'single place'. (Van Ree: 2003), Not least within this single space or place, is the articulation of enormous dislocations of

contemporary labour that has at once become highly flexible and highly mobile.

In the past, migrants were expected to most likely set down roots in the countries of reception. In contemporary times however, they are more likely to retain significant and ongoing ties with their countries of origin (Gardner and Grillo 2002 181). What perhaps the concept of 'death of distance' does not account for is that, in this new world that has become a 'single-space', are still vast distances or cartographic space in as far as issues of religious expression and cultural identities may be concerned.

For transnationals travel with much more than merely their flexible and mobile skills and labour, they travel with their luggage of dreams and aspirations for a more comfortable life for themselves, and often their families back home, and most importantly, they travel too with their complex of religio-cultural traditions. At the time of boarding their flights much more than their skills in various fields are 'checked in' at the departure counters for travel abroad.

There is however, in the transnational space of Reservoir Hills, and as revealed in the responses of the migrants, an absence of a 'homing' desire to return to the homeland of India, because, simply put, they *are able to do so*. Equally, there is an absence of the 'imaginary' of Motherland India, since *they are from the Motherland* and not part of a diasporic community that has never seen India. In the absence of both the 'homing' as well as the 'imaginary' it is one suggests, a vision of a better life that is for the labour migrants, one of the most important elements that catalyse their migration. That vision, although economic, is, as Van der Veer (2004: 15) claims, and as evidenced by the Hindu migrants, also to a substantial extent, culturally embedded within a larger matrix of a religio-cultural identity or 'Self', which seeks articulation. The movement of the migrant labourers can be seen as revealing their lived realities as mobile subjects. This context of mobility in turn spawns a kind of flexi-Hindu as the workers move between transnational spaces.

Making that Salon Appointment and Getting that Hair Cut: Ethnographic Windows

It is perhaps a safe assumption that Arjun Appadurai would not mind a borrowing of his elegantly phrased understanding of anthropology, which speaks of anthropology as the archive of lived actualities (1990: 11). This description of *what anthropology is*, captures emblematically the way I feel, where a visit for the long overdue haircut for the school-going son,

and a eagerly awaited trip to the favourite sushi restaurant, for the same son one adds, reveals an archive of actualities that lend themselves to the anthropological gaze. For increasingly, perhaps, understandably so in the case of the sushi bar, and now perhaps, surprisingly so for its increasing frequency, at tailors and salons and similar small businesses situated in various Indian suburbs, we are met with staff that are from other cultural spaces of the globe. Such transnational scatterings of individualized migrant labour are to be found in many other economic nook and crannies of the, in a sense, ‘respatialized’ country, with foreign faces offering otherwise routine services. These offer interesting foci of study as they carve up space in a unique way that now commands scholarly scrutiny in as much as did previously, colonial arrangements of global space. This is not so much a case of the ‘*Empire striking back*’ or Said’s ‘*Orientalism*’ *stepping into the Occident*, in as much as it is perhaps, a powerful illustration of individualized mobility and grassroots globalisation. This grassroots globalisation is attractive to the anthropological eye as it proffers opportunities to capture ethnographically, the migrant’s experiences of rupture and continuity as Hindus within the web of interactions and lived experiences from which they inscribe their social and cultural experiences.

The paper seeks to understand certain features of the transnational face of Hinduism through ethnographic snapshots allowed by the participants, three salon workers from the state of Gujarat India. The transnational participants Kamal (28), Rakesh (26) and Tushar (22) are all three from Surat in the state of Gujarat, who have been here for between a year and two and half years. The migrants are referred to as ‘Gujarati’ in the sense of being *from* Gujarat, and the local Hindus, as Gujarati-speaking. All three are able to converse in English, although Tushar, as the only one to have attempted college is most comfortable in this tongue. While Kamal struggles and is successful in his bid to be understood, Rakesh also struggles and is spectacularly unsuccessful and relies more on Tushar to translate in both directions. All, are most at ease in their native language of Gujarati, and use this language almost exclusively, except when faced with or forced with having to talk to a client (or interviewer like me) in English. Bidwas (2004: 271) points out that, social scientists at times fail to study certain migrant communities closely, because “the isolated and often numerically small foreign enclaves are, if not worthy, at least less ethnographically important or theoretically interesting.” This was certainly a consideration for me, not so much the logistical difficulty of the participants being remotely placed, as they were, relatively speaking, close to my own domestic space, but that the context presented a fairly small number of participants. However, as the methodological approach

was longer and more sustained ethnographic contact, rather than directed toward quantitative analyses that worked with once off interactions with the participants, the three transnational individuals presented a vital ethnographic window to tease out and examine elements of a transnationalised Hinduism.

The study extended over a ten month period with the initial visits coinciding with 'functional' visits for a haircut for the sons. The invariably and inevitable but fortuitous (for me anyway) long queues provided rich opportunities for participant observation, if but stretches of tedium for those awaiting their turns at the scissor. Later interactions¹ were scheduled interviews, themselves structured flexibly as conversations, given both the participants' long work hours, and the fact that English was not their native language. Given the language difficulties and a certain level of (cultural perhaps) shyness by, more so in the case of Kamal and Rakesh, and less so in the case of Tushar, that had to be penetrated with time, the 'conversations' moved slowly until a certain degree of rapport had been established. Many issues emerged in the 'conversations as interviews' that lie outside the inscribed parameters of this paper. These issues dealt with the fears that accreted around the legalities of the extended stay of the migrants, their 'socialisation' into the country, caste and marriage, their feelings about black South Africans etc. Much of the religio-cultural engagement or the attempt at that engagement in the global cities of the world is often reactive to the enormous dislocations of modern flexible capital and labour. The Hindu transnationals, I argue, can be seen to emerge as constructed commodities within this dislocation.

Understanding Hindu Transnationals as 'Commodities'

The three workers have become positioned as 'commodities' placed into a labour market that, while being small-scale and individual, is nevertheless no less global. While working as what one might refer to as the traditional barber, these transnationals are able to turn out the most recent trends in male hair styles. These three Hindu transnationals are additionally able to offer us glimpses into their transnational lives as Hindus outside of their motherland India.

The migrant Hindu transnationals circulate as, what can be construed as valuable 'products' or commodities. Commodities themselves are understood as objects of economic value (Urry, 2007: 3) Simmel cited by

¹ I would also like to acknowledge two student research assistants who spent two days doing participant observation with the three participants at the salon and shared important insights with me.

Urry (2007: 5) contends that value is never an inherent property of objects, but rather a judgement made *about* objects by others. These transnationals can be likened to the now famously recognizable Indian Head Massage, which can also be understood as a mobile product that has been porously made to cross borders, and in so doing, become positioned in global consumption. Indian Head Massage is said to have originated and alleged as practised for thousands of years in India as ‘*Champissage*’ or ‘*Champi*’ (Thiagarajan, 2005). A more muscular form, different from the early massage used by only the females, was practised by the barbers in India as part of the (male) haircut routine. The massage was generally thought in India, to have therapeutic benefits within Ayurveda and the system of *chakras* or energy centres which dealt with the understanding and healing of the body and mind, or rather what was construed in Indian healing as the body/mind complex. Narendra Mehta is credited as responsible for introducing the western world to the (reconstituted) Indian Head Massage. It is alleged that he travelled in the 1970’s to England to study and was surprised and disappointed when the *Champissage* was left out of his visit to the barbers. The story continues that in 1978 he returned to India to study the different techniques of *Champissage* as they varied from place to place and from family to family. He is said to have then put together his own massage and brought it to England as a holistic therapy, which could be used effectively to treat the whole person. The ‘new’ therapy of Indian Head Massage is said to have been introduced at the 1981 ‘Mind, Body and Spirit’ exhibition in Olympia, England.

The Indian Head Massage was thus taken across physical borders, eventually emerged in, and is now, through its transnational movement recognised in various parts of the world as a popular form of massage therapy re-contextualized outside of its land of origin, India. Indian Head Massage is thus now popular throughout the world, while the more traditional version as handed down generationally is routinely practiced by most, if not all barbers in India (and Pakistan) on their male clients. Similarly, the Indian and Hindu transnationals, as many interviews with the salon clients revealed, have become recognised and popularly identified with meticulous ‘workmanship’, methodical techniques and rather circuitously, *with performing the head massage itself*. It is for these abilities that the Reservoir Hills clients seek out the three transnational workers. All the clients interviewed echoed their praise of the workers’ skill and meticulous approach, and lauded the invariable culmination of the haircut with the eagerly anticipated head massage. In as much as the head massage is a commodity or product sought by the clients, so too had the migrant workers become a (transnational) product who had come to be constructed as a valued commodity. However, within this construction

where the migrants had become the subjects of a particular process of signification, were also, the 'lived' lives of the Hindu transnationals.

Transnationalising Hinduism: Commodities with a (Religious) Life

Kelly puts it perfectly when he states that,

People travel internationally and live temporarily in other countries for leisure and work-related activities that may have nothing to do with religion, and yet insofar as they are religious people, their religious beliefs and practices are sometimes involved (2003: 239).

This sums up the position of the three Hindu transnationals acting as our ethnographic windows. They did not claim to be overtly religious. Nor did their behaviour indicate this. They were not part of, nor had they become part of, in South Africa, any large Neo-Hindu congregation, or Sanatan Hindu group. But in as much as they *were Hindus*, their religious beliefs and practices were involved. It was their articulation of their Hindu beliefs and practices as simply their (Hindu) way of life that provided vital ethnographic glimpses.

While I did not attempt to marshal the discussion during the conversations and interviews solely in the direction of religious issues, and allowed a sharing of what can be construed as important to the participants, analysing the 'conversations' afterwards allowed a teasing out of vital elements of (transnationalised) Hinduism around issues of individual prayer, temple going, observation of household rituals and festivals, and language.

The Hindu migrants communicate that they spoke in Gujarati to the employer. My own observations revealed that although they spoke in English to the clients, they would still speak across the customers to each other, in Gujarati. It was apparent the migrants were most comfortable with the clients who spoke to them in Gujarati or even Hindi, and less communicative with those who spoke only English. With the former they spoke as if they were all good friends. There was also after the playing of the obligatory DVD for the employer, a nonstop playing till end of business at 7 pm, of Bollywood movies or audio DVDs that they claimed as being "good to watch and listen to". Of course Bollywood has indisputably travelled well hitching a ride with the processes of globalisation, and the music of Bollywood is documented as playing a leading role in an "aural imaginary" (Karim, 2003: 9) of the homeland. The literature shows that in diasporic communities, music plays an important role in the formation of cultural meanings and identities. It is

also well known that Bollywood movies are popular throughout the Indian diaspora; the South African Indian diaspora included, and are claimed as evoking the imaginary of India in the Indian diasporic consciousness. To the transnationals in the salon, their obvious and open relish of the sights and sounds of a, if not *real* India, but an India in ‘*reel*’ appeared to nevertheless serve as a palpable reminder of homeland.

Participant observation proved illuminating as in all encounters with the three workers, they were seen to dutifully touch the ground four times before entering the salon at the start of business in the morning, thrice to the chest and once to the head. They shared that that this was for “work to go well” and out of respect for the shop, saying that they did this in India as well. They continued that “the same is also done when entering the temple”. Tushal claimed that “everyday, I touch the ground before I enter, then I light incense sticks and put on a religious DVD”.

All of this may appear more in the realm of ‘natural’ than ‘transnational’, until we realize that the religious DVD he is referring to is an Islamic DVD as he works for a Muslim employer, himself a transnational, but from Pakistan. They confess that they have to follow this routine of putting on the same Islamic religious DVD everyday from 8 am to 11am or 12 noon, because of the “boss being Muslim”. It is only thereafter that they may play any other DVD in Hindi. Marking out of a space as one’s own involves the fusion of that place with one’s own rhythms and the claim is that (re)territorialisation occurs through sounds and movements (Karim, 2003:9). The manner in which the migrants entered the salon and began their workday, and the playing of their (numerous) favourite Hindi movies can be understood as part of the process of infusing a medley of both sacred and secular movements and sounds to facilitate a re-territorialisation.

As the business was owned by a Muslim, there was understandably no Hindu shrine in the salon, instead several Islamic frames on the walls. All three workers who had worked in a similar field in their homeland, communicated that back in India, they would have, or indeed had worked in Hindu owned salons and would start their day ‘routinely’ (as opposed to religiously) with a quick prayer at the shrine inevitably installed in the business space. Many writers emphasize translation as a process, one that looks to societies evolving over time. To capture faithfully people migrating, Leonard, (2007: 52) points out that one needs to know the markings of their places of origin and the peculiar allegiances associated with their homelands. These markings, she asserts would be remembered, rejected or reinvented to suit the destinations of the migrants, saying they

would be, in other words, translated, pointing out that the receiving society would help *determine* the translations, or as in this instance at the salon, *necessitate*, the translations.

At a 'one on one' interview with Tushar he reveals that the three workers, who are all related as cousins and have come to the job literally through their nodal networking and associative ties with each other, live together, having rented living space from the employer's friend, and have a central Hindu lamp for domestic worship at their rented home. All three had apparently each brought their own Hindu worship lamps from India. They had given two lamps away to other friends, who were likewise from Gujarat, as they felt that these friends needed to also have a lamp at home. Tushar communicates that they all now pray at the one lamp. Tushar confides that his parents sent him from India with a lamp so that he would continue to pray. He added, almost in intuitive anticipation of my question, that had the parents not sent a lamp with him, he would have purchased one here. When asked as to what he prays for, he shares that he "prays for good business and for keeping well". It seemed that all three comfortably took turns to 'wash', 'shine' and 'apply kum-kum' to the lamp, all acts performed fastidiously in the households of Hindus, echoing Karim's studies of diasporic mediascapes that show that migrant communities endeavour to make homes, even if only temporarily, in milieus that "are away from the home(land)" (Karim, 2003: 9).

It is this in-between space (Bhaba, 2000) that mentally bridges the homeland and the new location. Karim asserts that diasporic reality is affected through the transformation of existence and that hybrid transnations have their being in the existential location of the milieu and not on physical territory (Karim, 2003: 9).

In the new troping of home and the world much appears to depend on the resonances of religious and cultural practices. The workers tell me that they pray three times daily, at home in the morning, in the shop (presumably with the makeshift 'virtual' shrine of burning incense) and again at the home lamp in the evening. Tushar mentioned that he also reads the *Hanuman Chalisa* at home and when he has time at the shop. All three observed the *Katha* and *Jundha*, at their (migrant) Gujarati family homes. They point out that in India they attended *Jundha* or the flag ritual at the temple and *Katha* as a household ritual.

In the new troping of home and the world much appears to also depend too on the (*dis*)sonances of religious and cultural practices. This further illustrated their flexibility, some of which was forced by circumstances,

as in the less frequent visits to the temple, some of which they bent and flexed by choice. For although the migrants were still influenced by the cultural conditioning and taboo on pork and beef, they did feel comfortable experimenting with and consuming meat and chicken (alcohol even) although their family's religious orientation meant that they were vegetarians back home. Most of the meals locally appeared to be traditional Indian dishes, and the obligatory *roti*, or Indian flat bread which they prepared themselves. Breakfast, taken at the salon because of the relatively early (for a salon) opening hours, seems also more in keeping with the traditional Indian *tiffin*.

Tushar informs me that he did not perform the *Pitra Paksh* or ritual to the ancestors here, meaning South Africa, and elaborated that it was over a protracted nine days (in the local context of daily work at the salon), and also because they he had no time due to the long hours that he worked. He points out that he would perform it in India as his immediate kin, who were "around" him did so. Kamal said that he did not observe *Pitra Paksh* because his "family is not here." He had thought it futile to even observe the obligatory fast for *Pitra Paksh* claiming that it was useless here (in South Africa) as they are "not going to do the *actual* prayer". He stated that his parents were aware that he did not fast for *Pitra Paksh*, and were not too happy about this. He said that when he does pray he did not place the sacred ash on the forehead as he would have done back home as he (as opposed to the employer) did not "want that kind of appearance for the business, and the clients". He added almost coyly that he also did not think the clients would quite, "like it".

The conversations as interviews made less opaque their ethnographic experiences of rupture and continuity. When asked as to why they did not visit the temple often here as they did in India (Kamal and Tushal had mentioned that in India they visited the temple everyday on their way to school and even upon completion of studies, quite routinely, still visited daily). His response was that in India, every street had in the very least, about two temples, making temple-going "near and convenient". "Here in South Africa" they pointed out that the temple was "too far" and the long working hours compounded the situation.

They shared that they visited the temple during the festival of Diwali, but, only at night because during the day "they are working" and the "boss, being Muslim does not give time off for Diwali". The transnationals appeared to perceive a kind of religious alterity or *difference* (which they were not able to fully articulate) in the kind of Hinduism practiced by the local Hindus. While commenting that their interactions were relatively

limited, and while in no way posturing religious superiority, all three commented that festivals like “Diwali and such is not the same in South Africa” because aside from the parents and family not being with them, in India, Diwali was celebrated over 5 days. Everyday of these 5 days, huge celebrations are said to be held. In their homes lamps are lit, similarly to South African homes, and rangoli (colours) used to decorate the house, perhaps not so common in the local context. Appadurai (1990: 12) talks about *situated difference* or difference in relation to something (in terms of migrant) local, embodied and significant. While this difference or alterity deserves more sustained examination than the inscribed parameters of this paper, suffice it to say that it was a point of awareness, although not one of discernable tension for the three migrants. It did not serve to prevent them visiting the local temple.

Kamal and Tushal narrate that every Sunday they visit the Sapta Mandir or Temple, further up the same road that the salon is on. Rakesh quips that *he* goes to the temple just during prayers and festivals, adding that there is no time to go regularly. He spells out that in India he would go every day, and says “it was easy then because they had transport to go to the temple”. This particular temple seems to have been pointed out to them by a Gujarati-speaking client and was patronised by the predominantly Gujarati-speaking community in the suburb. However the migrants did not appear to have a special relationship with either the (Gujarati-speaking) priest or the local Gujarati-speaking congregation here.

It emerged that the migrants did not feel comfortable enough to socialise or interact much with the local people. They claimed that from what they could tell however the “fasting is different, prayers are different and celebrations of festivals e.g. Diwali is differently celebrated”, adding that “in India extra things were done, which are not done here”. Kamal shared that notwithstanding, the temple reminded him of home.

All three claimed that in South Africa, they “have a social family” (of Gujarati friends and relatives), but in India they “have a biological family”. They appear to have created their own networks of mainly Gujarati family and friends, or joined existing ones. At first Tushar had lived with his aunt to get ‘on his feet’ then later moved out to live with Kamal and Rakesh and they have their own migrant Hindu and Muslim friends in and around the area that they socialise with, in the little free time they were afforded.

As Van der Veer (2004: 5) shows, migrant communities at the end of the 20th century, are indeed differently placed from those at the end of the 19th century, because the wonders of the telephone, internet, television and high speed planes bring them not only more proximate to home, but also more proximate to members of the (migrant) community in other places. It is true that the cultural distance with the traditions of 'home' can therefore not be conceptualised in the same ways as before (ibid) but, notwithstanding their calling long distance every third day to talk to family, we witness an enactment of connectivity with other migrants and simultaneous dislocation from those at home. And although there is a sense of a 'death of distance' with the internet having reached the most unheard of corners, it is still not accessible to all, for the three migrants share that it is easier to phone home as they have to make the long way into central town for internet facilities.

Conclusion

The Hindu transnationals as mobile, global subjects can be seen to have shaped a particular way of inhabiting a transnational space. Instead of forming singular migrant communities that attempt to keep in touch with home, these migrants have slipped into networks with a multiplicity of nodes. They have not joined a religious congregation or international religious network like the VPH so prominent in the USA, especially for its efforts in globalising Hinduism. Nor did they seek out a community through which to assert their Hindu identity, rather they have become part of networks with a multiplicity of nodes that allow them to both socialise, and enunciate their 'being Hindu' amongst other Gujarati family and friends as they share communal religious festival time like Diwali and ritual space at times like the *Katha*. The new 'space of flows' that occur in global networks can be seen to allow social relations to be disembedded from their (original) locations and to be carried out at long distance (Karim, 2003: 6), or in this instance, re-spatialised with other Gujarati transnationals. Social network theory unveils how *nodes* or the actors in the networks and *ties* or relationships between the actors function within various networks. Critical concepts of 'degree' and 'cohesion' allow a further unpacking of *how* the migrant participants are connected, and to *whom*, with the concept of cohesion being vital in our understanding that other transnational Gujarati relatives (however immediate or distant) connect the migrants cohesively and directly through household rituals like the *katha*. Although as suggested, it is best to understand the migrants within a discussion of 'commodities', the nodal networks and ties assist in extending their lives beyond commoditized labour(ers). In their self-styled counter narrative the

migrants are aware of their dislocation, but attempt to live as fully as possible through the multiple nodes of connectivity available to them, thus excavating potential marginality as mobile subjects who may otherwise have lived completely outside the Hindu diaspora in South Africa.

As much as they miss their family (which they voice), and as much as they are aware of having to “do Hinduism” differently here, (which they also voice), and as well as sharing that they would not live here permanently, attachment to the homeland, is rather interestingly, no less ambivalent. The migrants claim to enjoy being here and appear to discernibly enjoy their freedom(s), again, through their new networks. These freedoms they asserted would not be available to them in the home space of Gujarat. It is revealing too that although they appeared to relish the networks enjoyed locally, in their once or twice yearly visits home however, they revert to observing all dietary taboos, and fully and willingly, eagerly even, participating in all household rituals and social festivals. As they shed, literally their facial piercings and tint back the (original) hue into their hair, by now devoid of the ubiquitous gel, they *appear*, as porously as their transnational movements, to slide from one enunciatory religious position in Hinduism, of circumstance imposed flexibility, to another of more familial orthodoxy and observance, relocating their (flexibly articulated) Hinduism out of the transnational space back into the (more orthodox space of) homeland.

Looking through the ethnographic windows they have allowed, one sees that they have to a large extent, succeeded in making (flexible) sense of their religio-cultural landscape and their shifting mobile world. They have also rendered more permeable the otherwise (in their narrative) inflexible and orthodox landscape through their mobility. Through a networking of an equally, mobile (as themselves) and woven together social and religious life, what Urry (2007: 274) refers to as “interspatial” religious and social, they have re-territorialised the local space into meaningful space, or ‘home’ of sorts. Urry (ibid: 280) points out that it is the person that becomes the “portal” in the network, and in so doing avoids frictions of religio-cultural distance. This is certainly valid for the Hindu migrants who are seen to have managed translating, in both sacred and secular terms, transnational space into a kind of flexible and mobile ‘home’ space.

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¹ Barry Wellman’s (Centre for Urban and Community Studies, University of Toronto), review of John Urry’s book.