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Migrations et mondialisation : frontières et horizons

In-betweenness: the (dis)connection between here and there. The case of Indian student-migrants in Australia

Un entre-deux : la (dé)connexion entre l'ici et l'ailleurs. Le cas des Indiens étudiants-migrants en Australie

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Résumés

English Français

In recent years the number of Indian international students in Australia has increased considerably, from less than four hundred in the early 1990s to close to a hundred thousand by the end of 2009. This phenomenal growth is, to a large extent, due to the fact that a majority of Indian student intends to apply for permanent residency after graduation for which the Australian state had designed clear pathways. As a result education and migration have become highly entangled in Australia. This paper will analyze what it means for young, middle class Indians, to be both students and migrants at the same time. I will do so using the concept of in-betweenness - falling in-between commonly recognized categories - often understood as an 'accidental state of being' in literature on migration and transnationalism. I will show, however, that Indian student-migrants very actively seek out this particular state of being as an end goal by itself. As a result this paper will be able to shed light on what - in the Indian case - the (de)coupling of the local and global means, both theoretically and in practice. I will finally make a case against hegemonic ideas of integration which still lean heavily on neoliberal push-and-pull migration models and argue that in order to understand current day migration we need to be open to the possibility that many migrants do not so much seek to integrate themselves in the local but

much more into the global.

Ces dernières années, le nombre d'étudiants indiens internationaux en Australie a considérablement augmenté. Ils n'étaient que 400 dans les années 1990 pour atteindre le chiffre de 100 000 à la fin de 2009. Cette croissance phénoménale est dans une large mesure attribuable au fait que la majorité des étudiants indiens a l'intention de demander une résidence permanente après leur diplomation, un cheminement que le gouvernement australien soutient. En conséquence, en Australie, l'éducation et les phénomènes migratoires sont très étroitement liés. Le présent article examine ce que cela signifie pour les jeunes Indiens issus de classes moyennes d'être à la fois des étudiants et des migrants. Nous ferons cette démonstration en utilisant le concept d'entre-deux (« in-betweenness »), un entre-deux conceptuel habituellement défini comme une « manière d'être accidentelle » dans la littérature consacrée aux phénomènes migratoires et au transnationalisme. Nous montrerons, cependant, que les Indiens étudiants-migrants recherchent activement cette manière d'être, qui constitue une fin en soi. Par conséquent, le présent article sera en mesure de faire la lumière sur ce que signifie, dans le cas de l'Inde, le (dé)couplage du local et du mondial, à la fois sur les plans théorique et pratique. Nous montrerons enfin que les idées hégémoniques sur l'intégration, qui s'inspirent fortement des modèles néolibéraux « push and pull », ne tiennent pas la route. Nous arguerons, par ailleurs, que pour comprendre les phénomènes migratoires actuels il est nécessaire d'être ouverts à la possibilité que de nombreux migrants ne cherchent pas tant une intégration locale, mais tentent plutôt de s'intégrer à un monde mondialisé.

Entrées d'index

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Texte intégral

¹ In recent years the number of Indian students going to Australia for higher education has increased considerably; in the early 1990s there were little less than four hundred, by the end of 2009, however, there were close to a hundred thousand Indian students in Australia. Compared to 94,563 in the US, 31,000 in the UK, 6,937 in Canada and 6,000 in New Zealand, it is clear that Australia has become a giant player in the world of international education (The Age, June 8 2009). Almost forty two percent of the foreign students who are currently in Australia are from China and India (The Australian, June 3 2009), meaning that Indian students now account for one-fifth of all international students in Australia (Outlookindia.com, June 15 2009).

² As I have shown in various publications (Baa, 2006, 10) the majority of Indian students have plans to apply for Australian permanent residence after graduation. This is also one of the main reasons for the phenomenal growth of recent years (see also Birrell, 2005, 7). As a result education and migration have become highly entangled in Australia. One could even argue that the migration and education industries are, in fact, no longer separate industries or businesses since they increasingly target the same 'customers'. Put together they also engross a considerable income for the Australian economy. For the state of Victoria (with the city of Melbourne as its capital, the site of my research), education was the biggest export earner: 4.5 billion Australian dollars in 2008 (The Age, June 8 2009). For Australia in general the industry comes in third place after coal and iron

ore, making it thus bigger than tourism (Wall Stree Journal, June 3 2009). At the end of 2006, the Australian education industry was estimated to be worth 9.8 billion Australian dollars. The industry has been valued in-between 15.5 and 18 billion Australian dollars in the recent years, on which a rough estimate of a 125,000 jobs depend.

- 3 This paper will have these figures and findings feature in the background of the analysis of what it means for young, middle class Indians, to be both students and migrants at the same time. I will analyze the way they experience this by using the concept of in-betweenness, falling in-between commonly recognized categories. Often this falling in-between is understood as an accidental state of being ('because of circumstances beyond control', for instance) in literature on migration and transnationalism; but I want to move beyond this understanding and show that that these students very actively seek out this particular state of being as an end goal by itself. Part of the answer of understanding what the purpose is of this can be found in the desire to be transnationally mobile - one could perhaps even speak of a 'transnational habitus' - which is very strongly present among the Indian middle classes. In order to investigate this in a detailed way I will connect these student-migrants' migration 'memories', as well as imaginations of the future - to what is currently going on in Australia. This will shed light on what - in the Indian case - the (de)coupling of the local and global means, both theoretically and in practice. I will finally argue against hegemonic ideas on integration which still lean heavily on push-pull models for understanding migration, and argue that in order to understand current day migration we need to be open to suggestions that many migrants do not so much seek to integrate themselves in the local but much more into the global. This is a definite shift away from earlier forms of migration.

Research among indian students in Australia

- 4 I became involved in the topic of Indian students in Australia in 2003 when I started observing that Australia was increasingly becoming an important study-abroad destinations for Indian students. Although I initially assumed that this was simply because of the increased spending power of the Indian middle class - as a result of India's economic boom - as well as tough competition on the job market for highly sought after jobs in, for instance, the IT industry, it did not take long before I realized that many of these students also had migration plans. Such options were discussed in details in newspaper and magazine articles and in general people seemed well-aware about this in India when I raised the topic. These observations led to my PhD which I conducted from 2004-8 and which included one year of ethnographic fieldwork in Melbourne, Australia.
- 5 During my fieldwork I collected data on 230 people, of which a 130 were Indian (international) students. Close to ninety percent of these students were doing their master degrees. Only a small number were involved in so-called diploma courses, or had come to Australia on a scholarship and were doing their master's by research or PhD research. It thus needs to be underlined that, at the time of my research, and this is also something which continued in the years to follow, only a very small

percentage of students were on a scholarship. The vast majority were full fee paying students who had taken out student loans with Indian banks to finance their stay in Australia. I interviewed all these students at least once, though often also twice. Interviews lasted in-between one and sometimes even as much as four or five hours. Besides that there were a number of different groups belonging to different universities in whose lives I participated more actively by spending time with them on campus, at home, or taking part in activities (playing cricket, for instance, or going to the *gurdwara* or temple). Besides the earlier mentioned 130 students I also collected data on a hundred other people who were all, one way or the other, involved in these students' lives. These included Indian community members and leaders, migration and education agents, lecturers and professors, social workers, marketing staff of colleges and universities, and so on. When I finished my fieldwork I stayed in touch with a select number of students whom I re-interviewed in India and Australia in the period of 2008 and 2011. With others I have stayed in touch by email and social networking sites such as Facebook, LinkedIn and Orkut.

- 6 In the period of 2005-6 while doing fieldwork in Melbourne, Indian students – and them possibly also being ‘migrants’ – was a topic of little interest in the general media. There were some scholars such as Bob Birrell and Lesleyanne Hawthorne who had conducted some (mostly statistical) work on the topic but in general *they* were not perceived as a problem. This would change considerably in the years to come. During the period of 2009-10 a whole range of violent and often racist attacks on Indian students and the way these were discussed in the Australian as well as Indian media made clear that the public perception of who these Indian students were and why they had come to Australia had changed considerably. Newspapers would report on the often abysmal housing situations among Indian students, as well as the low-paying jobs they were involved in (situations which reeked of exploitation and abuse), but also on so-called ‘PR [permanent residency] factories’ (see already Baas, 2006), colleges that were little more than shop-fronts for migration agents. This paper will not deal with the consequences this has had for the Australia’s education industry in general or for Indian students in particular, but it does highlight the importance of engaging in the question of how to understand Indian students’ desires to apply for PR and how they reflect on this themselves.

Concepts & approach

- 7 Statistics show that as more than sixty percent of Indians who have come to Australia to study in recent years, have ended up successfully applying for permanent residency (PR)¹ afterwards. As my research further shows, for many this was also the plan from the start. Their reason for coming to Australia is often equally about migrating as well as getting an Australia – interpreted as ‘foreign’ – degree. In some cases, studying in Australia is seen simply as a way to get a residency outside India. In order to better understand the reasons and motivations behind this, I make use of two other related concepts besides in-betweenness: imagined mobility and arrival points (see also Baas, 2010a). *Imagined mobility* is about the way young, highly educated migrants imagine themselves being/becoming transnationally mobile one day. An Indian


passport is often experienced as limiting when it comes to this, as crossing borders often involves going through lengthy visa procedures. An Australian PR could be the answer to this problem. This relates directly to a second concept which I make use of: *arrival points*. These are imaginary moments in the future when migrants imagine themselves as having arrived at where they intended to be by going through a particular (migration) process. This is when they imagine themselves as having achieved what they set out to. Like a *fata morgana* it seems clear when this moment will be, but in practice it often turns out that this kind of arrival never quite happens. The concept will act as a tool through which we can better understand how migrants experience the migration process they are undergoing as well as how they cope with success and failure along the way.

- 8 The moment Indian students enter Australia they embark on a journey of, on average, two years. This journey is often supposed to result in what could (also) be understood as a permanent stay out of India. Yet, the idea of permanency is problematic as I will show in this paper. A question which I feel needs to be put central from the start is: *is the P (of permanent) in PR (permanent residency) a necessary element in the equation?* Although many others have shown that Indian students are thus very likely to (successfully) apply for PR, such research often pays little attention to the question of how students see this themselves. One of the questions I have engaged with over the past few years was not only trying to understand Indian students' motivations for embarking on this journey but also why they continue on the journey once it has begun. I want to refer back to the violent and often racist attacks of 2009-10 here. Although they brought to light the often difficult situation students live in Australia - in terms of living conditions, jobs, social accommodation and integration - they managed to obfuscate that already much had happened in the years previously such as a hunger strike of Indian students at Central Queensland University in Melbourne² and a number of protests by taxi drivers (mostly Indian students who did this as part-time work) because of poor safety at night. Although such incidents did not exactly contribute positively to the idea of 'permanently' residing in Australia, it did not seem to have had that effect. A simple answer could be that since many students had come to Australia on heavy student loans which they sought to repay after graduation by staying onwards in Australia, this is often not the (only) way students would frame it. They often talked about PR (also) in very different terms. So what does a PR actually mean to them?

Migration studies and their rational claims

- 9 In order to better understand the way the process of migrating abroad by first becoming international students in Australia is experienced (and takes shape over time) I will make use of theoretical engagements that all relate to people on the move.³ Key terms will be: migration, mobility and transnationalism. Mobility is not solely place in the middle for alphabetical reasons however. It is my specific aim to locate the idea of mobility, of mobile people, in between the two other theoretical realms mentioned. Where migration often assumes the situation of migrants

crossing borders to build new lives in another country, the study of transnationalism typically engages itself with the question of what happens next. It is my argument, however, that the way this process takes shape remains under investigated and undertheorized.

10 The question of 'why migrate' is central to most studies of migration one way or the other. Although scholars are increasingly aware of the simplicity of (neo-classical) 'push-pull' models in order to explain this, it still inform the approach most scholars take to the matter. Functionality and rationality are key her; the popularity of the terms 'economic' and 'political' migrants also testifies to this. However, such an approach - oriented at explaining migration in logical/rational terms ('making sense') underscores that there might be reasons beyond the economic and political realm for leaving one's country behind. As a result - and as I will argue far more problematic - is that this creates a rather firm belief in the idea of permanency. In short : people leave to stay (somewhere else). 'Returning home' is not part of the equation. Sure, issues related to return have featured frequently in migration studies - certainly in the form of a *myth* where migrants indicate that they will return home one day yet in fact never do (Bolognani, 2007; Walton-Roberts, 2004) - yet, it needs to be underlined that ultimately the study of migration revolves around the concept of permanency  elsewhere. Both 'political' and 'economic' approaches to migration do not really consider the idea of return beyond it being problematic, hindering integration or assimilation.

11 While the idea of 'returning to' is largely absent from migration studies, 'settling in' is one of the central topics that migration studies engage with. One of the dominant paradigms in migration theory (especially within anthropological studies) is the assimilation model. (Brettell & Hollifield, 2000, 15) This connect particularly well with current-day popular discourse on migration in western nations, which increasingly zooms in on questions of integration and assimilation. Such discourse is often laced with the idea that once migrants have crossed the border they are basically there to stay. It is not difficult to trace this back to neo-classical explanations of migration that are, in essence, largely about bettering oneself in material respects. (See Arango, 2000, 284; Fog & Sorensen, 2002; Zoomers 2006, 12⁴) Rational choice is key here; concepts such as utility maximization and wage differentials are central. Migration can, for instance, be explained as an outcome of wage rate disparities between countries. "Migration is the result of individual decisions made by rational actors who seek to improve their well-being by moving to places where the reward of their labour will be higher than the one they get at home..." (Arango, 2000, 285). Stephen Castles also argues that the most obvious cause for migration is wage level disparity, employment opportunities and differences in "social well-being" (2000, 272). Of course scholars such as Castles are quick to argue that the causes of migration are more complex than that, yet point of departure is located in the land of rationality and functionality.

12 The question of why Indians migrate to Australia was also point of departure for my own research. And this question could not do without its twin: why do they do so by first becoming international students? This second question was an equally if not more important one since it showed, in very concrete terms, why a logical/rational explanation does not 'explain' all that much. The majority of Indian students finance their study-abroad (in Australia) by taking out student loans of which it is perceived to be hard to pay these back upon return in India. This makes

staying on - by means of applying for PR - a logical decision. But if a PR is about paying back a loan, not having a loan would not make a PR necessary. A couple of important remarks here. One, not all Indian students ('only' a majority) have loans to repay. Yet, I also encountered a considerable number of students who had not taken out a loan but still intended to apply for PR. Two, not all loans were equally high. Loans depend on the course and/or university/college enrolled in. Sometimes family in India had also decided to finance part of it with private money. Three, loans need to be understood not so much as taken out (and thus transferred in a bank account) but as 'sanctioned', thus 'to be used'. Such a sanctioned loan was necessary for the student visa application but not all students were planning on actually using (all of) the loan. Instead many attempted to make as little use of it as possible by working part-time during semesters and more than full-time during holidays. Loans, thus, do not explain all that much. Nor do other explanations such as one revolving around 'wage level disparities'. True, Australian wages are higher than Indian ones, and true, Australian living conditions are (arguably) better than those in India, but this obscures the fact that most Indian students hail from the country's affluent middle classes who have always been known to live rather comfortable lives in India.⁵ This paper does not have the space to go into the intricacies of the differences between middle class life and lifestyle in India and life (lived abroad) in western countries such as Australia, however it does further complicate the way we approach the question of 'why migrate'.

Defining transnationalism, locating agency

- ¹³ The study of transnationalism - born out of observations that migrants no longer simply cross borders to live elsewhere, but regularly turn crossing borders into a lifestyle - has increasingly infused ideas on 'settling', or ironically: 'not settling'. Theoretically, living a transnational lifestyle entailed having developed long lasting ties between locations in both country of origin and destination, sometimes even incorporating third/other locations - often in countries with a considerable migrant population of the same country of origin - and then regularly traveling up and down between these various locations. Such a life is popularly characterized being 'neither here nor there' and frequently associated with ideas of uprootedness and un/disconnectedness. Yet it also seems that such lives are also clearly rooted in and connected with all these different locations which are bounded by transnational (social) space. Most commonly used definitions of transnationalism build upon or elaborate on the one produced by Basch, Glick Schiller and Blanc-Szanton (1994). They defined transnationalism as a process by which immigrants forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement. They, furthermore, emphasized that many migrants today build social fields that cross geographical, cultural, and political borders. Involvements are in both home and host country (see also Portes, 1997). It was their aim to introduce a new approach to understanding current day migration (Kivisto, 2001). When dissecting Basch *et al's* definition it is hard not to notice how much of this definition is meant to reflect/summarize a certain

observable 'new' behavior or 'state of being', which we were now able to label in (much) clearer terms. Studies conducted by Luis Guarnizo, Peggy Leavitt, Alejandro Portes, Steve Vertovec, and others who worked with them make this further explicit.⁶ This 'need to identify' clearly came from experiences in the field that had led to questions about what sort of 'new' migrant behavior was being observed.

14 From the start the study of transnationalism has been faced with criticism which mainly revolved around 'newness' (of the concept) and the 'vagueness' or 'broadness' (of its definition). How new was the idea of transnationalism really? Was it *truly* different 'behavior' what was being observed here? Connected to this the definitions that various scholars produced were under scrutiny. Did they not encompass too much? Should transnationalism not be defined more narrowly in order to clearly set it apart from what studies of migration looked at? It did not take long for a whole range of different conceptual elaborations and specifications to be introduced, ranging from transnational social spaces, -fields, -formations, etc. Thomas Faist (1999, 2), attempting to produce some 'clarity' in the maze of different conceptual ideas and elaborations defined transnationalism as sustained ties of persons, networks and organizations across the borders of multiple nation-states, ranging from weakly or strongly institutionalized forms. Transnationalism, according to him, is not about fleeting contacts between migrants and relatively immobile people in the countries of immigration and emigration. "Transnational social spaces and the other names we have given these phenomena are characterized by a high density of interstitial ties on informal or formal (institutional) levels." A similar attempt was made by Steve Vertovec who defined transnationalism it as a condition "in which, despite great distances and notwithstanding the presence of international borders (and all the laws, regulations and national narratives they represent), certain kinds of relationships have been globally intensified and now take place paradoxically in a planet-spanning yet common - however virtual - arena of activity." (1999, 447)

15 Just after the turn of the millennium, Adrian Bailey remarked that much of the early work on transnationalism described how transmigrants were able to simultaneously organize daily lives across national borders by maintaining multiple links between two or more places (2001, 416). This vastly increased the understanding of what could be labeled as transnationalism, as well as how to approach the topic (what sort of different elements [economical, social, political] there were to be studied). However, it could also be argued that these studies were fairly similar and in a sense also one-sided. In almost all cases migration to the location in question had started long ago and transnationalism was now the new denominator under which these migrants' lifestyles could be headed. These transnational lifestyles were largely the result of economical, social and political changes; in a sense reproducing all-too-familiar old-school push-and-pull models of migration studies. Although such studies made it seem as if they were about the process of transnationalization, this process was in fact already over since it had already produced a finished/end product. Such studies were rarely about people who were *still* in the process of becoming transnationals and/or building transnational lives. Although much has come out on the topic since earlier mentioned studies⁷ but it is remarkable how much of the study of transnationalism still revolves around identifying/labeling) certain 'migrant behavior' as 'transnational' and subsequently describing

this.

16 The lack of attention to the process itself, a process which could be understood in terms of 'becoming' betrays another problem in much of the literature on transnationalism: the lack of an engagement with the question of what it is supposed to lead to? What is the point of living a transnational life? What is the point beyond the obvious; the obvious being the 'logical' consequence of push and pull factors. The assumption most studies of transnationalism appear to work with is that of a full-fledged 'transnational' who has already reached a recognizable and thus easily definable end-state. How 'becoming transnational' was experienced seems to be a matter of looking back since the actual process is already assumed to be over. They are (already) 'transnationals' when we meet them. The mobility this comes with is, by itself, not considered to lead to something beyond what the definition describes or entails. It is simply seen as the unavoidable (push-and-pull) result of living an economic life on the margins, or because political instability prevents a more definite return home. Being transnationally mobile was *thus* never an aspirational affair in the sense of people actually having strategized towards this.

17 Bailey has argued that: "key questions of migrant agency and hybridity remain under-theorized." (2001, 413). This is precisely what is problematic with many studies of transnationalism. Where do we locate a transnational's agency in the way his/her life is placed under scrutiny? Hamann points out that "[t]he exercise of agency is implicit in transnational movement..." (2001, 34), however, where exactly can we localize this agency? Looking back at the preoccupation of the study of transnationalism with defending the concept as a *truly new one* - and that one could actually label migrants as such - it seems that it was, most of all, the researcher who was in charge of understanding life across and between borders as such.

Understanding student-migration

18 It is thus clear that locating agency in studies of transnationalism is a complicated matter. On the one hand does it seem that people have made very conscious decision to live a particular lifestyle, yet at the same time these decision seem to be the logical consequence of economic, political and related factors. The underlying 'mobility' is not something that is actively strived towards. How people imagine their lives abroad and how such imaginations change over time are questions that earlier mentioned studies do not really deal with. In the case of Indian students in Australia one could argue that what we are dealing with here is 'starting' transnationals who one day imagine themselves living (and of whom it could be imagined that they will live) the kind of lifestyles that the study of transnationalism describes. At the same time, though, perhaps it is too easy to think that they see this as an end-goal; 'ultimate arrival' does not just work the way horizons keep receding, the fixity-to-place it assumes is simply not something that these starting transnationals strive for. In that sense it reminds us of the tourist-concept introduced by Zygmunt Bauman. For Bauman, this figure of the tourist is quintessential to the post-modern condition: "The life of men and women of our time is much like that of tourists-through-time: they cannot and would not decide in advance what places they will visit and what the sequence of stations will

be; what they know for sure is that they will keep on the move, never sure whether the place they have reached is their final destination.” (1995, 268-269) I argue that it is this idea that needs to be further incorporated into the way we understand the (individual) process of transnationalization.

19 Transnationalism carries with it the aura of flexibility. One could even argue that the concept depends almost by nature on the idea of ‘flexibility’, not only in terms of interpretation but also in the way transnationals were observed or supposed to behave. There is something distinctly *idée fixe* about the whole approach. For one, Basch *et al* had spoken of a ‘process’, thus creating the assumption that people were active, creating social relations across borders and so on. But instead what their definition did was formulate borders that more or less trapped those to whom the definition was supposed to apply. Only those who fitted the criteria of transnationalism, as the definition had it, could be labeled as such. This certainly had to do with the study’s obsession to set itself apart from the study of migration, the scholars of which were more than ready to question the newness of the idea of transnationalism.

Middle class cosmopolitan dreams

20 Already more than ten years ago Appadurai argued that more people than ever before are able to imagine that they or their children will live and work in places other than they were born in (1996, 6). He also noted that: “[m]ore persons in more parts of the world consider a wider set of possible lives than they ever did.” (1997, 53). Imagination is key in this. It is the kind of imagination that is informed and infused with information that, because of the Internet, has become very easily available. What does this then mean for conceptualizations regarding the *here* and *there*, as in *arrival* and *departure*? When we give Appadurai’s claim about people’s imagination of the abroad further thought it is hard not to wonder what kind of ideas people with the intention of building a life abroad already have, and where these ideas then come from.

21 The Indian students of my research almost all hail from what is now broadly understood as the Indian middle class(es). This paper does not provide enough space to discuss the internal and external complexities of defining what is a/the Indian middle class, but it needs to be understood that Indian students themselves explain that they are from this class of people. Studying in Australia requires a certain amount of money which lower classes cannot afford. It also appears that the popularity of studying abroad stands in direct relation to the recent economic boom in India. Because of this the type of air travel that has been common to western middle classes for years, has also become an option for many of families belonging to the Indian middle class. For that reason, crossing borders has become much more tied up with certain expectations of desired lifestyles as well. Yet while Indian money may now buy a ticket out of India, an Indian passport still does not guarantee an easy passage across the border. Young middle class Indians are clearly aware of the limitations of an Indian passport. Yet this is certainly not the only thing they are aware of. When discussing ideas of life abroad, Indian students would readily admit that they had been exposed to stories of life outside India (read: in western countries) for as long as they could remember. And in a similar fashion, information about migration has been around

them for years before they came to Australia. When I asked them to give me examples, they could come up with numerous scenarios. This was something they had clearly given some thought to at some point in their lives; in the sense of imagining such a scenario and where they would then end up themselves. As Castles noted: “even those who do not migrate are affected as relatives, friends or descendants of migrants; or through experiences of change in their community as a result of departure of neighbors or arrival of newcomers.” (Castles, 2000, 270) Although Castles is generally talking about poor people in search of better livelihoods, the situation is such that, in many countries like India, people know how other people have migrated. In some cases this has led to the situation where particular areas have become highly transnational, with remittances coming in from afar and almost everybody having a friend or relative somewhere else on the globe. As Levitt (2001) describes in her book *The Transnational Villagers*, not only do such people send money home but also ideas, so called social remittances. According to Levitt’s observations, these remittances influence people and lead them to picture themselves abroad.

22 Understanding and dreaming up a particular ‘elsewhere’, under the influence of others who can be understood as living ‘transnational lifestyles’, in combination with information flows that have become faster and more all-encompassing than ever before, has a clear impact on the idea of what it means to be mobile/global especially when it concerns young people who are still fixed (stuck, as they would have it) to a particular location. Being part of and having grown up in an Indian middle class family most of the time means that ‘abroad’ was present in one form or other; either because of direct links with family, friends or acquaintances abroad, or because of other people belonging to the same circle (caste, community, social layer). Ideas on (the quality of) life outside India often seemed to gain an extra dimension by the frequent romantization of it in Bollywood movies. The way students narrated their imaginations of ‘abroad’ during interviews was often framed in sentences such as ‘everybody was always talking about it’, ‘we would hear about it all the time,’ and ‘you always wanted to go there.’ Many Indian students described how news and details from abroad were part and parcel of their lives long before they had actually got on the plane and left. Such students had been part of ‘a culture of migration’ for most of their lives, though a less explicit one than studies have so far highlighted (Kandel & Massey, 2002; Deléchat, 2001; Tsuda, 1999; Massey et al, 1994; Gardner, 1993 and 1995).

23 A culture of migration can generally be understood as international migration having become so deeply rooted that migrating almost becomes a normative thing for young people to expect to happen at some point in their lives (Kandel & Massey 2002, 981). However, in the case of Indian students, this culture of migration was a much less concrete presence in the sense of a clearly established migration network that can facilitate ways out of the country and into another one (often connected to job prospects). While they had been influenced by it, it was clear they had to find a way out of India themselves. Although it is certainly clear that the way the Indian middle class thinks about and perceives their place in Indian society is influenced by the fact that many of its members have contacts abroad (see also Rutten, 2001), the desire students display to go abroad is often not the result of such very close or direct contacts. Many actually do not have such contacts and even if they do it does not

always mean that these are people who will help them go abroad. However, the way they would talk about what life outside India was supposed to be seemed highly influenced by images of and ideas about this very 'abroad'. Leela Fernandes argues that: "the notion of 'abroad' in middle-class discourses operates as a sign of a desire for class-based privilege... hence, the notion that 'abroad is now in India'... signifies the potential realization of middle-class aspirations of consumption, one that can now take place within India's borders." (2000, 612) Fernandes' focus primarily on consumer products here, yet I would argue that it is certainly not limited to this. 'Abroad' is a constant in Indian middle class lives, even if they do not have direct family members residing overseas. During interviews we would frequently engage in the question of how they had come to the conclusion that life was, in fact, better in Australia compared to India. What had led them to his conclusion? Answers were never very specific: they had looked it up on the Internet, seen it on TV or perhaps read about it in some magazine or newspaper. What seemed much more important though was that 'everybody' was always talking about it. Ideas about life outside India had constantly been floating and buzzing around them. Such stories had 'informed' them of lifestyles abroad, lifestyles which were clearly desirable and thus preferable to a life 'stuck' in India. The imaginary 'abroad' had thus played an intricate part in their lives in India.

Imagination in the process of transnationalization

²⁴ A returning topic of discussion in migration studies is the way diaspora or overseas communities 'imagine' their homelands. The idea of 'diasporic imaginary' has even been suggested in this regard Axel argues that "rather than conceiving of the homeland as something that creates the diaspora, it may be more productive to consider the diaspora as something that creates the homeland." (2002, 423-424) As Sandhya Shukla also argues: "imaginaries, in social life or fictional narrative, are a central fact of diasporas", (2001, 522) The 'ideas' and perhaps also 'myth' of return is part and parcel of this. Technological innovations such as the Internet, video and satellite television (Kaldor-Robinson, 2002, 177) play an increasingly important role in this. Gurharpal Singh has shown how Indo-Caribbeans' imagination of India is, for instance, strongly informed by Hindi films (Bollywood) and music (2003, 226). I do not hesitate to argue that this works the same way for young middle class Indians in the way they imagine their future lives abroad. Internet, cable TV, but also Bollywood and Hollywood movies play a crucial role in shaping the imagination when it comes to this.⁸ During my fieldwork in Melbourne the blockbuster Bollywood movie *Salaam Namaste* came out. The movie, set in Melbourne itself, was about a successful Indian chef who falls in love with loudmouth Indian girl who works as a DJ for a local radio station. Australia, here, is an imaginary if not stereotypical version of itself where the sun always shines, life is carefree and the Australians themselves generally relaxed (though also a little shallow if not downright stupid). Factually incorrect as a movie such as *Salaam Namaste* may be about life in Australia, it does not take much to imagine how such images become part of a much wider constellation of fictional

images of a 'generalized' (Western) abroad.

25 Australia, as a specific country, only plays a relative role in the construction of the imaginary abroad though. For almost none of the students I met during my fieldwork had Australia been the first choice of a study-abroad destination, at least not in terms of how they had imagined their future life abroad. Australia was often a second or even third choice in this regard. As Madan also argued: "except for media coverage of international cricket, Australia has had little exposure in India, and as a result it has not figured prominently in the Indian imagination on in Indian popular culture." (2000, 23) Many students had initially thought of going to the United States but had found it either too expensive and/or too difficult to get a student visa. For many Australia had simply presented itself as a way out of India, but not necessarily into a 'permanent' stay in Australia. Australia was, at the time of my research, one of the few countries that offered a clear route to a permanent residency after graduation. Such a residency, it was imagined, might open doors that would otherwise remain locked. Not so much Australia appealed here, as much as a more general idea of 'abroad' of which Australia was considered part but certainly not the whole. Obviously this did not mean that Australia did not appeal to the imagination, to the contrary actually. The more students had read about Australia the more appealing it had seemed. Yet one should understand this in terms of Australia being part of a more general, perhaps even globalized, idea about how lifestyles are better outside India. And of course this is not limited to the Indian middle class, as Margolis describes for the case of Brazil: "Middle class and urban immigrants are, as are most Brazilians in New York City, predisposed to the lifestyles of the industrialized world, particularly those of the United States." (Margolis, 2001, 206) And not unlike Indian media : "Brazilian television and magazines transmit an unending stream of idealized images of American patterns of consumption and style, with an oblique message of their superiority to the home-grown variety" (Margolis, 2001, 2006), thus influencing and triggering the imagination of life lived elsewhere.

26 More and more people are aware of how they could, in theory, live life elsewhere. This also indicates that the sort of lifestyles, us, social scientists, have been describing for decades might now actually be a desired outcome of a particular migration strategy. And this has serious consequences for the way we approach the topic of people 'migrating' abroad. Especially countries with a history of out-migration (such as India), have not just acquired knowledge on how to leave one's country, but may increasingly perceive the idea of permanent settlement 'elsewhere' as a pathway towards a mobile life across and between borders. And this also has consequences for what *leaving* (India, home, family, friends, business, work) and *arriving* (abroad, in Australia, successfully setting up a new 'local life' there) mean in both imaginary and practical terms. It appears that these will increasingly be understood in terms of flexibility. What does this actually mean for the way 'life abroad' - in this particular case: in Australia - is actually experienced? When does one actually *arrive* in terms of having achieved all that one set out to achieve by following a particular route of one's own country? What such questions indicate is that we need to rethink ideas of temporariness and permanency. As the remained of this paper will show: it becomes increasingly difficult to understand both in terms of what their definitions tell us.

The permanency in permanent residency (PR)

27 The issue of permanency has been challenged before. Yang (2000), for instance, did so by bringing the sojourner hypothesis back into the discussion, basically arguing that Chinese immigrants in America were actually sojourners who intended to make and save money but who would, at some point, return to their home villages. Indian students would sometimes also talk about their plans in this way. Australia was seen as a place to make enough money not just to pay back a student loan but also to save some extra money which they would take home. Over the years I have also collected data on students who did this, and who returned to India with a considerable sum of money and have no intention of returning to Australia. However, they appear to be a relatively small group. For most, the idea of return seems mostly that: an idea, perhaps even a 'myth'. However, the way the 'myth' of return has been approached in migration literature so far, relies rather heavily on the process of migration itself leading to permanency (though simultaneously admitting that this goes hand-in-hand with imagining it as being temporary). Permanency, or if I would suggest we could also look at it: fixity, seems to be an integral part of this. A kind of inescapability of the whole journey seems to be implied. Takeyuki Tsuda ground-breaking study on Japanese-Brazilian migrants is particularly relevant here. He argued that "[a]lthough many of today's sojourners still end up settling in the host country, the initial intention to remain abroad only temporarily has a significant impact on their willingness to migrate." (1999, 1) Long story short : people appear to be more willing to migrate if they imagine it to be a temporary matter.

28 Research on international students has approached return mostly in terms of a problem. Especially studies conducted in the 1960s and 1970s have highlighted how students were expected to return to their home countries - after having completed their studies - in order to help local development and perhaps also prevent their countries from developing communist sympathies (see also Baas, 2010a). Now, the days of the Colombo Plan and comparable initiatives may be long over but public discourse on international students revolves by definition around the idea of it being temporary (see also (Kuptsch, 2005, 152). One could argue that this association with them being 'temporary migrants', 'temporarily staying', finishing their studies and then leaving, returning home, bare interesting similarities to the 'rotation and return myths' common to guest worker schemes of the past. Guest workers often did not seem to return to their home countries, although being expected, and also having the intention, of doing so. Yet rereading such case studies one wonders if the underlying 'myth of return' was not something that social researchers had started to believe in - as 'typical of migrant behaviour' - while migrants themselves may never have actually ('truly') believed in this themselves, knowing very well that return was neither an option nor the plan. The temporariness of their chosen paths (entering as guest workers, overseas students) probably dictates the 'myth of return' more than the actual way the most ideal form of 'arrival' is imagined. Without revisiting the actual research conducted in this regard here in detail, one is permitted, I would propose, to imagine a particular kind of reasoning: that of a guest worker translating his fears of having to return into a

desire in order to cope with the possibility. The reality, however, is probably much more plain: such a guest worker is likely to have hoped for a more permanent stay abroad which would leave the option, or perhaps it would be better to argue 'freedom', of return open. The idea of possible return might even make permanent settlement a more acceptable reality.

29 Skilled migration programs have now replaced the guest worker schemes of the past, though these programs are much more oriented towards highly or specifically skilled migrants. And much more than the old guest worker schemes such programs have a habit of being constantly revisited and revised. Skilled migration programs are supposed to be in tune with what the market wants (the needs of the labor market); at the same time they should acknowledge (in terms of policy) what the public at large feels and thinks. More than ever such programs have a very clear political dimension. All this adds a particularly 'temporary' feeling to the way such programs are experienced. The way skilled migration programs are topic of discussion are generally informed by others on the state and quality of education, the courses young 'locals' are enrolling in, and also with more demographically related issues such as the 'greying' of the local population, associated welfare-state issues and even what the nation should be *truly* about. Questions which one often encounters in regard to this are: What about 'our' national culture? Should migrants be expected to integrate into this culture? What is actually *our culture*? These are questions that this particular paper did not deal with in detail but which certainly fit in with the larger picture of a mobile world where migrants, on the one hand, seem to offer specific solutions to particular 'national' problems, and on the other challenge what is understood as national, defying and contesting the 'nation' at its core.

30 This desire to be mobile challenges the nation-state to the core, so it seems. Yet ironically a permanent residency is needed to become transnationally mobile. The Indian students I met in 2005-6 were still very much in the process of accomplishing this. They were not *there* yet; rather they were busy finding ways to cross the border, and then staying, building a life there, ensuring that going back to India remained an option rather than a threat. Flexibility was their main aim in this. The kind of flexibility required to be able to regularly move *back* and *forth* between both home country and chosen destination. Once one is free of India, or more accurately, free of an Indian passport, the world is perceived to be open (and to a certain extent also: welcoming, waiting, in anticipation). This desire to be in charge of a transnationally mobile life has clearly blurred the boundaries between a permanent and temporary stay abroad. 'Temporariness', in this regard, may come across as a confusing term but in reality it is not. What starts out as a two-year stay abroad will in the end become an indefinite period. And this 'indefiniteness' provides the students with a sense of agency; they can now decide themselves how long they will stay abroad, away from India, in another country, and so on. And this was also how imagined it to work out: while they would have the means to stay in Australia as long as they would want, in the end this was perceived to be a temporary matter. The important thing was that this was now a temporariness that they were in control of.

Arriving in mental and physical terms

31 The concept of arriving has significantly changed because of the study of transnationalism which argues for a kind of mobile lifestyle in-between. Physically arriving may still be about a particular place/country, mentally, however, arriving seems to be increasingly less about actual settlement. Migrants are observed to retain and maintain (regular) contact with relatives, friends and other (business) relations in their home country and other locations. Remittances are a key ingredient in this story: family back home simply depends on it and/or it is what keeps transnational flows - in terms of money, goods, services - running. Yet studies also seem to suggest that this was the reason for migrating in the first place; transnationalism is a consequence of this. With newcomers settling in areas where other migrants already live, migrant businesses mushroom, busy importing products directly from countries where their customers originate from, often making use of networks that have connections in both countries. Calling cards, DVDs from the countries of origin, religious products, otherwise unavailable vegetables, spices and other foodstuffs were all found to be easily available in areas with sizeable migrant populations.

32 Physically arriving has just also undergone a particular metamorphoses. Studies of transnationalism clearly show that arriving has much less become about arriving in a new and strange country - alone and away from all that was once familiar - and has become much more about arriving in a locally operating migrant community that caters to all the 'new' migrants' needs. Such findings also have a clear political dimension. It is argued that this is exactly what is keeping migrants from assimilating into a local culture. Although it may appear that such groups are integrated in 'the local' - though I would beg to differ about this too - studies clearly show that such migrants are very much part of 'the global'. It is also for this reason that new migrants are increasingly referred to as transmigrants since transnationalism has almost become an anticipated outcome. In a sense, migrants - or 'transmigrants' - are expected to "forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations" (Basch *et al*, 1994) between host country and country of destination. And with the world connecting on diverse and multiple levels, it has furthermore been observed that an increasing number of migrants who are originally from the 'same' country, but who now live in a variety of different countries, are connecting with each other, staying in touch, establishing business links and so on. The label of transmigrant (or 'transnational') has thus also very much come to stand for lived experiences that transcend the boundaries of the nation-state (see Bailey, 2001).

33 Yet we should not overlook the complexities of life lived across the border, certainly not in terms of ongoing measures (changes in rules and regulations) which aim to regulate and in a sense hinder or limit people's free movement. As Favell *et al* argue (2000, 1), despite market forces, "the control functions of states do continue to pose obvious obstacles to poorer international migrants." When it comes to highly skilled migrants, however, nation-states often (try to) create 'exceptions' to the rule. Global city theorists such as Castells (2000) and Taylor (2004) clearly show that the global networks of capital and trade, which are based on what could be understood as a virtual 'space of flows', require the type of 'transnationally' mobile persons that highly skilled migrants often are assumed to be (as discussed in Favell *et al*, 2000, 2). While it is true that

for highly-paid managers, IT workers (of special significance) and others⁹ who could logically be expected to fall in the same category, nation-states have made special arrangements (fast visa processing etc.), they only comprise a small segment of those who can be grouped under the heading of highly-skilled migrants. Many with the desire to go (work/live) abroad, still have to endure lengthy, difficult and expensive visa procedures that often require the help of professionals (migration agents and lawyers), especially if they are from countries not considered part of the 'western' or 'developed' world. And thus an interesting and in a sense ironical situation presents itself. On the one hand globalization seems to have (made) an impact on day-to-day life all over the world; making the world smaller, and thus easier to stay in touch, or to be informed of and aware about life 'elsewhere'. On the other hand, however, actually physically going 'elsewhere' is still very difficult for many. Sure, also in India, highly educated Indians who have found jobs in large multinationals (often in the business of IT) are regularly sent abroad, and are indeed the ones that keep 'the global networks of capital and trade' going. Yet if they would want to leave themselves, to go 'elsewhere', without their employers arranging their (temporary!) visas, they would still experience the limitations of their Indian passports, no matter if (and how easily) they could afford to go abroad.

³⁴ It is the tension, and also duality, but maybe even more so the awareness of this, that contributes to the a certain desire to live a more flexible life in terms of being able to cross borders. Indian students are clearly aiming for such a flexibility which at the same time produces a rather paradoxical narrative on arrival. Arrival, a certain imagined point in the future, not only relates to a permanent settlement elsewhere, but also to the idea of 'permanency' providing flexibility towards *in-betweenness* and *temporariness*. And this is, finally, not simply about not having to commit oneself to just one country, it is in fact much more about having to commit to any one country in particular.

(Dis)connect *here* and *there*

³⁵ This paper argues that Indian students are, in essence, in-between; they are neither *here* nor yet *there*. Their quest for mobility is an ongoing one that urges us to look beyond the borders that have framed the way we have understood migration and transnationalism so far. New migrants of today may cross borders with a specific idea of arrival in mind; in practice they will often not quite do so. And this is also what characterizes the way they live and perceive their lives 'elsewhere'. From the perspective of the state this is also where the greatest challenge lies. Although the nation-state is far from obsolete, defining to a large extent what is possible in terms of living transnational lives, it is also the challenge such not-yet-arrived migrants pose that puts them in a very difficult and often awkward position. Migrants are often seen as 'solutions' to national problems (the skills crisis, the ageing of the population) yet they also challenge 'the national' by living lives transnationally which is at odds with what the nation-state is supposed to stand for. With more and more commercial interests tied up with such desires (dreams, fantasies, imaginations) of mobile lives, the challenge facing 'the national' and 'the local' seems more complicated than ever.

³⁶ In order to understand the way migrants experience life abroad, we

must approach the topic as an ongoing process, one which does not necessarily have a clear beginning, lacks a clear end-state, and is, above all, characterized by individual strategies that can largely be understood as a desire for mobility (in the sense of being able to cross borders, either for political, economic, social/cultural reasons or simply because 'others' can). This process of (personal/individual) 'mobilization' is highly colored by the involvement of all sorts of institutions, organizations, government bodies and commercial enterprises that are also aware of people's desire to be (able to be) mobile and who draw up their own plans to benefit from the situation. This then means that we need to start investigating how 'migrancy' itself comes into being, in the way DeMaria Harney & Baldassar (2007) conceptualised it. Migrancy, as they understand it, privileges movement, and this urges us to pay more attention to the interconnection between movement in both space and time. In addition, migrancy decentres the nation and brings the agency of migrants back into the story. Yet most important of all, it privileges the notion of movement and process rather than stability and fixity. (DeMaria Harney & Baldassar, 2007, 189) This also gives proper weight to the concept of in-betweenness, which I have demonstrated is relevant to understanding the process and transformation these students undergo. Ralph Grillo (2007) probably phrased this in the most original way by speaking of the 'betwixt and between' state of transmigrant trajectories. These ponderings also connect to what Fog & Sorensen (2002) argued about 'mobile populations': people do not necessarily migrate to start a new life elsewhere; rather they do so to seek out new opportunities that could enhance and diversify livelihoods practiced and valued back home. (Fog & Sorensen, 2002, 1) Although the focus is here on the impact back home, I argue that this also counts for the individual fulfillment along the way, already having crossed the border. And this, then finally, shows the ambivalence of the (dis)connection between *here* and *there*; one can leave to stay, and stay to one day leave; something that makes the local relative to the global, leading, finally, to an integration in the latter instead of the former.

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Notes

- 1 PR will always mean Permanent Residency in this situation, and thus never public relations or something else.
- 2 A large number of mostly Indian students has failed an exam which meant that they had to take and thus pay for the subject in question again. They claimed that they had been failed on purpose so that CQU could make extra money.
- 3 Of course this does not mean that I will not analyse studies that have been produced on studying overseas, overseas students, and the internationalisation and/or commercialisation of education as well. See in particular chapter four.
- 4 Annelies Zoomers refers to it as the Harris-Todaro model. See, for instance, Harris J.R. & M. Todaro (1970). 'Migration, Unemployment and Development: a Two Sector Analysis.' *American Economic Review*, 60: 126-42.
- 5 See for an interesting take on this Mario Rutten and Sanderien Verstappen's illuminating documentary 'Living like a Common Men' (2011) about the lives of Indian 'students' in London.
- 6 Studies on Colombian transnational migration (Guarnizo & Díaz, 1999), the Otavalo trade diaspora (Kyle, 1999); Haitian transnational social fields (Glick-Schiller & Fouron, 1999), Dominican transnationalism (Itzigsohn *et al*, 1999) and Salvadoran transnationalism (Landolt *et al*, 1999), Guatemalan Mayan migration (Popkin, 1999) and finally Mexican migration to the US (Roberts *et al*, 1999) all show a relatively similar approach.
- 7 See for instance: Deborah Bryceson and Ulla Vuorela on the transnational family (2002); Helen Sampson on Filipino seafarers (2003); Taiwanese immigrant entrepreneurs in Canada (2004); Robert R. Alvarez Jr. on Mexican business transnationalism (2005); Damián J. Fernández on Cuban transnationalism (2005);

Julie Y. Chu on Fuzhounese migration (2006); Dalia Abdelhady on Lebanese immigrants (2006); and so on.

8 In a study on the culture of migration among Muslims in Hyderabad, Syed Ali writes: "The culturally rooted desire to migrate was often enhanced by such things as enjoyment of Western music and lifestyle depictions through various Indian and Western media, including MTV and the pan-Asian satellite channel 'Channel [V]'. Western soap operas, the widespread showing and popularity of Western films in cinemas (shown in English and also dubbed into different Indian languages), and the depictions of Indians living in Western countries in Hindi films (one of which featured the hero and heroine dancing in a suburban office parking lot), all built up familiarity with Western popular and entertainment culture. It was also common to see this desire reflected simply in the adornment of their motorcycles with stickers of American, Canadian, British and Australian flags." (2007: 48-9)

9 See Jonathan V. Beaverstock's paper (2005) on the British highly skilled inter-company transferees in New York City's financial district for more on this group of people.

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Droits d'auteur



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