

# **Walking for Leisure: The Translocal Lives of First-Generation Gujarati-Indian Men and Women**

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## **Abstract**

Walking as a leisure pastime is particularly popular amongst first generation members of the South Asian community. In this paper, walking is used as a vehicle to explore the connections that these Gujarati Indian men and women have to the spaces/ places of their local communities and 'home'. Whilst the lives of younger generations of South Asian men and women have tended to be at the forefront of academic debates, this has had the unfortunate effect of reducing the subjectivities of older groups to more narrow and fixed ideas about South Asian traditions and cultures. Thus limiting an understanding of their identities as also being hybrid, multiple and in-process. Additionally, much of the research about the leisure lives of migrant groups has been based upon research about the subjectivities and belonging of men, the histories of women have been relatively ignored. In order to address these absences, this research utilised participatory methods to explore first generation Gujarati Indian men *and* women's experiences of walking. The research findings revealed that the spaces/places that they walked through and across as part of their daily routines whilst relatively ordinary, were deeply meaningful, they enabled the participants to forward the translocal character of their identities over time and across space.

## **Introduction**

In 1996 Avtar Brah, in her seminal text *Cartographies of Diaspora*, claimed that diasporic communities like South Asians living in England, despite the dream of a return 'home', would probably not make the journey back to the places of their ancestral roots. She argued that such settler communities have established strong ties that bind them to England and their particular places of 'home' within the nation. Yet their belonging, and representative-ness of the nation, are constantly questioned by an assortment of public opinion-makers. Since 9/11

the moral panic about South Asian/ Muslim communities (often conflated together as a homogeneous group) has found expression through discourses in England that represents them as culturally backward, insular, living parallel lives to the established 'white' (meaning English) community, and of being susceptible to radicalisation (Tufail and Poynting, 2013). Arguably, the longing articulated by many diasporic groups of people for their ancestral 'homes' may in part be a response to their feelings of not belonging, resulting in an unassured presence within the borders of England despite the social, cultural and economic contributions that they have made (Ramji, 2006a). Thus, belonging is not just about citizenship and the social rights that emanate from holding a British passport, but also about feelings of attachment to both national and local spaces of 'home'. Arguably, 'home' is an imagined construction that evokes particular images of a nation and community which, to varying degrees, no longer exist. Thus, what is perceived as 'home' is ultimately a temporary manifestation of how perceptions of local-global spaces are translated, subjectively<sup>1</sup> understood, and developed within and across different locations of being and belonging (Kalra, Kaur and Hutnyk, 2005).

Some writers have tried to show how the tensions of being and belonging across multiple spaces of 'home' can be regulated by politicians and media commentators, and enforced through state policies and practices within and across different spaces of leisure (Burdsey, 2015). Through such regulation, national identity is constructed in terms of narrow and fixed signifiers of 'home' and belonging. In this context, the South Asian body continues to be a site of public and political scrutiny. Accordingly, much scholarly attention has been afforded to the vibrant cultural identities of younger South Asian groups, who stake claim to the spaces/ places of their 'home' from within England as 'theirs' by the virtue of birthright

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<sup>1</sup> In this paper I use the term subjectivity to give the power of self-definition to 'agents' whilst recognising that 'identity' is often used interchangeably in scholarly debates, signifying how social categorisations of being and belonging may be understood as well as operate as sites of political mobilisation (Barker, 2000).

(Brah, 2006). While second and third-generation South Asians continue to be seen as hybrid citizens - identities configured through a 'Brit-Asian' mash-up (Ali, Kalra, & Sayyid, 2006) - their first-generation migrant parents are often regarded as symbols of an unmoving culture rooted to a 'home' and life within the Indian sub-continent. Thus, the evolving politics of first generation settlers to England is less well-known but of equal interest and importance (see below). Puwar (2012) has shown in an article about the leisure lives of older South Asian groups in England that they are certainly not passive actors of social life: they are dynamic, flexible and resourceful citizens who have carved out and continue to fashion spaces of belonging in/through their local spaces of 'home' and community (see below). This resourcefulness has often been shaped in response to prevailing institutional, cultural and everyday experiences of racism and discrimination

For this paper, I have chosen to focus upon the lives of Gujarati Indians, specifically from the geographic area of Kutch, who currently live in England. In contrast to most other South Asians, they are relatively distinct as twice migrants with experience of starting a new life, in a new country, before migrating to England. As such, their experiences provide a useful lens to explore national belonging as multiple and in-process. I begin the paper by arguing that walking as a popular leisure pastime for Gujarati Indian first generation migrants, some 30 years after they initially arrived to England, is a context in which the subjectivities of these citizens can be critically debated. Linking sociological debates and insights from geography and mobility studies research, I build upon an understanding of both diasporic and transnational identities to include theoretical insights about translocalism. The findings of this paper therefore adds knowledge to the limited body of leisure research examining the experiences of migrant groups in England (Spracklen, Long and Hylton, 2014). However, the

studies that do attend to the leisure lives of diasporic groups have tended to be about the identities and belongings of men, and their leisure pastimes, rather than what women do for leisure, with whom, where and for what purpose. As a result of such limited research, nationhood is predominantly perceived from a male perspective and women are often cast as passive bystanders to various national projects (see Ratna, 2011). As a point of departure from much of this research, I draw upon the notion of ‘gendered geographies of power’ to further question key social and spatial divisions. I then analyse the empirical findings of the study.

### **Walking for Leisure**

Many Gujarati Indians, of Hindu faith, even before any religious needs were addressed the Samaj (a community centre set-up in North-West London) provided an important meeting point to spend what little leisure time they had aside from work commitments and domestic duties, socialising with their relatives and/or other migrant friends and families. In the case of first generation Gujarati Indians, who are considered to be a relatively established group compared to some other South Asian collectives in England, arguably leisure has been critical to their settlement and wider senses of belonging (Ramji, 2006a). The Kutchi community, which represents a cluster of 24-villages from Gujarat, have particularly held annual gatherings. At these social events, various forms of entertainment have included dance performances, music shows and football tournaments (Ramji, 2006b; SKLPCFootball, n.d.). Yet despite the importance of leisure for migrant communities in England, there has been little examination of the range of activities and cultural pastimes that constitute their leisure time (Spracklen, Long, & Hylton, 2014).

Walking as a popular leisure activity in recent year has been endorsed by industry professionals as a feasible way of improving health, preventing the onset of various diseases and losing weight (Cross-Bardell, George, Bhoday, Tuomainen, & Kai, 2015). In much of this research, South Asian men's and women's bodies are predominantly re/presented through medical discourses as requiring public intervention, without any real understanding of the multiple relationships that different South Asian groups have with their bodies nor of engagements with changing traditional and/or westernised cultures, interests, food choices and leisure pastimes (Dyck, 2006). Unsurprisingly then, the cultural assumptions within such health discourses are largely unquestioned, and continue to promote change at the level of individual lifestyle. Furthermore, the social factors which may deter different groups of South Asian men and women from accessing public spaces of leisure, more generally, are ignored (Scraton & Watson, 1998). Critical engagements with public health discourses have thus called for a broader understanding of active lifestyles, beyond an approach that pathologises the bodies and cultures of ethnic minority groups, and recognises the need to challenge broader structural inequalities (for further debate, see Mansfield and Rich, 2013; Nazroo, 1998, 2003; Pike, 2011). Arguably, the popularity of walking for many South Asian groups of men and women may serve a purpose beyond addressing just health needs. In relation to this point, Crust, Keegan, Piggott, and Swann (2011) have claimed that very few studies about walking actually consider the social benefits of this activity. For instance, there is a level of socio-ability that can arise through walking that can enhance outsider groups' relationships to each other as well as attachments to local spaces/places. The study by Burgess et al (1988), for instance, suggests that walking through the local park reminds some South Asian groups of 'home' from within the Indian sub-continent. Thus their leisure lives in this country gain a deeper meaning as something that is part of their cultural history (Mansfield and Rich, 2013; Tolia- Kelly, 2004).

## **Transnationalism and Belonging**

King (2012) argues that transnational studies seek to consider both the homing-desires *and* the mooring practices of diasporic groups, exploring the active social fields that are generated by such tensions over time and across a multiplicity of spaces (Hannam, 2006). Brah (1996) is one of a few scholars whose expression of ‘diaspora space’ captures a sense of transnationalism, as she addresses the tension that is (re-)created by living in and between ‘home’ and ‘dispersion’ (see also Ramji, 2006a; Gilroy, 1993; Hall, 1990). Other scholars also recognise the overlapping understanding of diaspora and transnationalism, and suggest that South Asians as a diasporic group, occupy both a transnational space and mindset (Ramji, 2006b). Furthermore many mobility studies scholars choose to prioritise the term transnationalism, emphasizing the active production of various trans-national circuits of being and belonging, which enable migrant communities to live across two or more nations, all at the same time, and at once (Crang, 2003). Hannam et al. (2006) explain that such circuits may not just involve movement or communication between people across time and space, but also involves the constant exchange and flow of money, goods, news and ideas. These multi-faceted international connections are suggested to form the milieu of diasporic groups’ everyday lives (Bricknell, 2012; King, 2012). The experience also creates social, cultural and political resources which enable subjects to respond to changing socio-political circumstances (Ramji, 2006b). In her study about the Chinese abroad, Aihwa Ong (1999: 6) particularly focuses upon the ‘the cultural logics of late capitalist accumulation, travel and displacement that induce subjects to respond fluidly and opportunistically to changing political-economic conditions’. By using her conceptualisation of ‘flexible citizenship’, Ong is highlighting the agency of migrant groups to respond to feelings of being out-of-place

within a nation as well as to resist forms of discrimination. Ong further suggests, this agency often occurs within the limits of state regulation, which continues to control and shape subject positionings (e.g. in relation to class, gender, race, diaspora and ethnicity). Thus, ‘bottom-up’ constructions of national identity and self-hood are often publicly/ politically made meaningful in relation to ‘top-down’, narrow and fixed, monikers of racial group categorisations (cited in Ong, R.J. 2014: 36; see also Burdsey, 2015; Crang, Dwyer and Jackson, 2003).

### **Trans-local Spaces/Places and Gender**

Recognising then that diasporic groups metaphorically live in and between various national spaces, inevitably raises questions about national and social belonging. Yuval-Davis (2006) refers to the politics of belonging as specifically related to citizenship rights as well as emotional senses of belonging expressed through place attachments, e.g. to the immediate vicinities of house, neighbourhood and community. Thus, a number of scholars ‘ground’ debates about transnationalism, asserting the prevalence of the local in questioning cross-national ontologies and ways of living (Antonsich, 2010; Bricknell, and Datta, 2011; Greiner, 2013; Massey, 1994). Moreover, they have argued that diasporic communities understand their sense of nation in and through their movements across *local* spaces and places. Saar and Palang (2009) and Manzo (2003) specifically suggests that places (whether they be home, street, neighbourhood, café, pubs and/or even sport or leisure venues) represent the local character of how outside forces come together in different ways, reflecting broader national, global, political, cultural and economic processes, structuring how people see themselves and their lives in relation to those places. What is being argued is that the meanings of particular places are constructed across varying registers of scale including the



immediate locality, and regional, national and global imaginaries, which bound and shape the characteristics of that sphere as hybrid, contested and in-process. That is, places may be physically grounded to the local, but they represent broader signifiers of being and belonging which both determine and are determined by the people who inhabit them (Hall, T 2009; Manzo, 2003; Massey, 1994; Saar and Palang, 2009). Thus, the term translocality has increasingly been used as a way to give primacy to local-to-local cross border exchanges. Voigt-Graf (2004) explains that India, for example, is too vast a country to represent a single 'node' or point of reference for migrant transnational networks. Moreover as the Indian diaspora is so widely spread across the world, points of contact and exchange may include localities within India as well as across the diaspora. Thus, borrowing from the insights of Manuel Castells (1996), Voigt-Graf (2004) argues that urban centres and cities can become boundary-less spaces that mark the inter-connectivities of people and places. Furthermore, 'this in turn allows a sense of place which is extroverted, which includes a consciousness of its links with the wider world, which integrates in a positive way the global and the local' (Massey, 1991: 28 cited in Voigt-Graf, 2004: 27). In sum, national belonging can be experienced as both grounded to actual places of the local as well as inter-connected to other cross-national spaces, localities, imaginaries and group affiliations. Indeed, Harrow in North-West London has been twinned with Bhuj, a city in Gujarat, by patrons of the Samaj, exemplifying the development of a particular translocal connection (Ramji, 2006b).

Geographer and feminist Doreen Massey (1994: 149) has also argued that people are tied in different, changing and particular 'geometries of power' across space and time, specifically related to categories such as those of gender. Mahler and Pessar (2001) further have coined the term 'gendered geographies of power' to analyse how 1) gender relations operate at a

range of social and spatial scales (global-local) and can be experienced through the body and family relations as well as reproduced through state policies and institutional practices; 2) social differences between men and women affect access to and use of gender power and are also connected to privileges of race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, age, generation, social location and able-ness; and 3) individuals have the agency to respond to macro-level gendered processes (e.g. migration) and are thereby not merely victims of forces beyond their personal control. In terms of the leisure literature, very little is known about gendered geographies of power in relation to the lives and identities of diasporic racial ‘Others’. Moreover, studies that do question ‘race’ and diaspora, have tended to be about the national identities, belongings and activism of men, and their leisure pastimes. We very rarely hear about the activism of women particularly in regards to South Asian groups, as it unhinges taken-for-granted public perceptions and media portrayals of them as victims of a supposedly ‘barbaric’, and unchanging patriarchal culture which keeps “them” (as a whole) passive (Ratna, 2011). Arguably, whilst wider feminist-informed sociological studies have examined the positions and agencies of women in/ through debates about transnationalism, citizenship and belonging (Anthias & Yuval-Davis, 1992; Silvey, 2004; Yuval-Davis & Werbner, 1999; Werbner, 2002) there is much further scope to critically examine the racialised *and* gendered constructions and contestations of space, ‘home’, locality and leisure. For this research, I wanted to inspect more closely gender relations of power as they imbricate across discourses of race, space/place and belonging, specifically through the leisure context of walking.

### **Walking and Talking Methodologies**

The research was participatory in nature, shaped by the desire to centre the narratives of Gujarati Indian men and women and to involve them in what was ‘found, told and shown’

(Puwar, 2012: 126). Interestingly, walking as a methodological tool has become an increasingly popular way to examine how spaces/places are shaped and, used by different groups of people. Such methods range from observations and interviews ‘on the move’ (Anderson, 2004; Edensor, 2000; Evans & Jones, 2011; Ingold, 2008; O’Neill & Hubbard, 2010) to more technologically-advanced visual and creative practices of data collection including photo-elicitation (for further debate, see Fink, 2011; Packard, 2008; Parry and Johnson, 2007). Whilst the scope of this paper limits further discussion of these different approaches, it is argued that they generally enable researchers to capture a ‘feeling’ at any moment in time, which is intimately connected to being in and *of* a particular space (Parry and Johnson, 2007). Risbeth and Powell (2012) suggest that the opportunity to note immediate sensory reactions to a space helped them in their study to capture how non-European migrants in England, connected to particular spaces/places negatively and/or positively. They suggest that the movement through and across space helped the participants to recall memories which revealed deeper narratives about their ‘stories so far’ (Massey, 2005: 9). Thus, how spaces are used and experienced – in terms of the sensory affects of seeing, smelling and hearing – ‘is a way to engage the body through the world and the world through the body’ (Anderson, 2004: 258; see also Edensor, 2000; Middleton, 2010; O’Neill and Hubbard, 2010; Vaughan, 2009). Anderson (2004: 258) further explains:

As key areas, landmarks and places were bimbled through, the relaxing, relatively aimless purpose of the exercise could open up the senses to allow the recalling of incidents, feelings and experiences that were constitutive of the individual’s understanding of the life world.

He further suggest that through this process, new and old inscriptions of places/spaces could be both created and recited. For this paper, the senses aroused were critically analysed in

terms of how places/spaces were accessed and used, by whom, and for what purpose. In addition to this, thinking about the oral story-telling traditions prevalent within the Indian community (Guha, 1996 in Puwar, 2007), I wanted to set-up an environment that would capture moments in time when the participants were walking and talking among themselves, about things relevant to their social beings.

It is important to add that the research was mostly conducted in the Gujarati language, not because the participants could not speak English (they all spoke fluently) but because Gujarati is part of their everyday vernacular. Moreover, the participants were able to use terms and phrasings which articulated feelings in their own 'bhasha' (language) (Brah, 1999). As Kim (2013: 341) suggest the translation of text and research data especially from a 'peripheral language' to English reveals wider dynamics of power between the Global North and South; and the mechanisms by which colonial, racial and gendered regimes of power are controlled and re-scripted through this process. Thus, translations may alter and abuse intended meanings as well as potentially re-affirm stereotypes (Kim, 2013). But by being cognisant of how language can be both used and abused, extra care was taken to transcribe the participants' words. Arguably, the bi-lingual skills of the author and research assistant were imperative to communicating effectively with, and interpreting the views of, the research participants.

It is important to acknowledge that the research assistant – my father – is a long-term friend of many of the walkers included in the study. Indeed, his close relationship to the research participants helped secure their agreement to be involved in the study in the first place. I also know some of the participants as family friends. Thus, the research to me was/is not just

about producing another research article (Puwar, 2007) but was/is about my life and that of my parents (who were also participants of the study). For me, growing-up as a young Gujarati woman with first generation elders, who spoke about a range of national, local and social influences to their lives, I wanted to delve deeper into their lived histories: I wanted to tell the stories of ‘mara manso’ (meaning ‘my people’). Positioning myself within the research, and working with my family/friends adds to the complexity of the process. Yet I argue that this type of research is important to confronting the taken-for-granted knowledge production hegemonies operating in academia (Tolia- Kelly, 2009) and requires a high-degree of reflexivity (Christou, 2011). Moreover, I feel compelled to use the social and cultural resources available to me, as a minority ethnic female scholar, to better interrogate and make visible gendered and racialised vagaries of being and belonging. I therefore undertook the challenge of reflecting on my own positionality and other relations of power in order to critically examine on-going as well as emerging points of contention (see below).

## **The Research**

The research adopted a multi-method approach, linking the use of mental mapping, photo-elicitation, participant observations and semi-structured interviews. The rationale for adopting a combination of methods was to yield rich and thick descriptions about where participants walked and why; capturing feelings of being in a certain place/space at a particular time; to facilitate an interrogation of both the racialized and gendered dynamics of leisure spaces; and the identities, belongings and agencies of Gujarati Indian men and women. The group of Gujarati Indian people included in this study were five husband-wife couples (NB all participants gave permission to use their first names and photos of

themselves)<sup>2</sup>. The participants usually walked twice-a-day (morning and evening) together and/or separately. On occasions, especially in the evening, some of the couples would agree to meet at a local park, to sit at a bench and talk (see Figure 1) before either walking together as a group or resuming their walk as a couple. The research unfolded as follows: initially, Ramji met each couple to brief them about the study; to pass over an information sheet and to ask them to sign a consent form; and also, to pass over two disposable cameras. One camera was for the wife and the other for the husband. At this time, Ramji also set-up dates and times for joining the couple on two walks, one morning and one evening. It is important to note that these walks were directed by the participants, giving them control over the direction of the walks in addition to what was found and discussed at/across different sites.

As one of the couples included was my father, Ramji, and my mother, Kesar, I suggested that he let her dictate the direction of their particular walk(s) in order to avoid the accusation that he (as the research assistant) was steering the study to meet his/my pre-conceived objectives. Ramji also kept a field diary to record the particulars of each walk, for each couple, including the conversations that they had with one another. Each person was also asked individually to draw a mental map to represent a walking route of their choice. They were also asked to illustrate anything of significance to them on the map. The participants were not given any further instructions, the aim of this activity was to allow them the freedom to represent various spaces/places in a way that made sense to them. After reviewing the field-notes, mental maps and photos, I then conducted semi-structured interviews with each participant, separately, to speak to them about their experiences of migration, processes of settlement,

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<sup>2</sup> Whilst I am aware that this may possibly risk their well-being if targeted by far-right groups who may read this paper, the nature of the research and my links to the participants meant that it would difficult to overcome or limit this risk. This issue was therefore discussed with the participants as part of the process of seeking informed consent.

perceptions of 'home' in North West-London, and also their reasons for walking and where they walked to/from. During the interviews I went through the photographs taken by each couple. By reviewing them together, the research participants were given the chance to elaborate on their perceptions of spaces/places, signalling reasons why they stopped at certain places and/or walked through others.

Before and during the research I was conscious of the possible impact of unequal gender dynamics, in light of which I took three precautionary measures. The first involved briefing Ramji before the study to ensure he understood my Black feminist politics about gendered and racialized constructions of identities, cultural representations, the complex operation of power and oppression, and the concepts of agency and resistance, so that from the outset he was sensitised to issues I deemed relevant to the study. I also reviewed field-notes with him, particularly highlighting gendered aspects of what he chose to note as significant and/or failed to grasp as important to the study. Second, as I did not want to assume that the South Asian men involved in the study were all over-bearing patriarchal figures (as often stereotyped in public thought), but being cognisant of wider gender geometries of power, I decided to give each participant instructions to complete their own mental maps and photos. As it transpired, the photos and mental maps were *all* usurped by the male participants of the study. This became clear during the interviews when the women participants would admit as much. However, I am not suggesting that these wives were powerless, dominated by their husbands, but rather that they chose not to exert their agency as to begin with the research was perhaps not of interest to them. However, during my interviews with the women, when I got the chance to tell them more about the study myself, I found that they spoke articulately about their lives, histories and walking experiences. Key themes garnered through the

research were then identified and included the following: the social significance of walking; walking as a means to facilitate translocal connectivities; and walking to shop for food.

### **The Social Significance of Walking**

The participants in this study all claimed that they mainly walked for health benefits. Moreover, since all of them had now retired, they had time to walk. Only Manji has been walking for a longer time as he stopped working due to ill-health in the 1990s. As noted by Amrat, Kanta and Ramji, prior to their retirement some of them had walked but only started walking for leisure once they had more free time:

Amrat: We have been walking for a long time, going outside, to the park etc. But we only began walking regularly after we retired from work. I developed a routine of walking every day. After dinner, I finish my kitchen work and then we [meaning with her husband] go for a walk.

Kanta: We have walked for many years, long time. Now we are at home [and not at work] so we do it more. For the last twelve years... in the morning and also in the evening, we go for a walk every day.

Ramji: Before there was no time to walk, after housework and going to work...Now we are free, so you have more time to pass, so you go for a walk in the morning and evening, and sometimes with friends.

Other reasons for walking included overcoming boredom or as stated by Hirji and echoed by others such as Premji, Ramji, Lux and Radha, to pass the time:



What can we do sitting at home in the evenings? We go for a change [of scenery], for half-to-three-quarters of an hour. Sitting at home you can get lazy, start sleeping. Instead, you might as well walk, to pass an hour or so.

The social significance of walking becomes more apparent as participants began to reflect on other reasons for walking. As explained by Ramji, the people they walk with are both old and new acquaintances:

A lot of them [other walkers] I know because they are from the same village [in Gujarat]... While walking we met some of them, some were older friends, others babysat my children - like Jasu Aunty. Hirjibhai and Premji we met on the way [whilst on a walk] so instead of walking separately we started to walk together.

Hirji picked-up on this point during his interview. While he did not know Ramji, or some of the other people that he walks with now, they would see each other regularly and eventually they struck-up a friendship. Interestingly, even though strangers in this country, they were connected as they shared mutual friends/family networks from the same village in Gujarat, exemplifying the operation of translocal networks:

Author: Did you know the people that you walked with before or not?

Hirji: When I bought the house, I did not know them. Some were not living here at that time. When I bought this home, there were only two or three upna<sup>3</sup> community houses, people from the gam<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> 'Upna' is a Gujarati term that literally means 'ours'. But it does not necessarily denote possession; as something belonging to someone. It is an expression which draws together people who belong to a certain community, even if they do not know each other. A better translation might be something close to the meaning of 'our people'.

<sup>4</sup> The translation of 'gam' is 'village'. Although the village that the participants are referring to is no longer a village but a town, yet this is how this particular 'gam' is remembered; untouched by a growing populace.

Author: So all these are your new friends? From the same gam?

Hirji: They are all people from the gam so you sort of know them. Like Ramji's brother-in-law, Khokhani, we are from the same gam, so we know them. His house and my house are on the same street.

Arguably, such translocal bonds for some of the participants provided important support mechanisms; people to spend time with, to maintain a healthy lifestyle by being active with a group of friends, and alleviating feelings of boredom as retired citizens. Furthermore, to provide opportunities for various convivial social encounters and the exchanging of important knowledge and news (see below).

### **Translocal Connectivities**

Being able to walk and talk with friends undoubtedly afforded opportunities for socializing but it was also significant in helping the participants live across time and space. For example, both Ramji and Kesar explained how they enjoyed walking with their friends as it enabled them to catch-up with 'news'. For Kesar, this kind of 'gossip' connected their lives across different registers of scale, from her local gam in India to their lives here. For instance, this 'gossip' pertained to:

Who died today? What is happening in India? What's happening here? All local [meaning, in England] and Indian news.

In their respective interviews, drawing on points of conversation recorded in the fieldnotes, Ramji and Premji identified the kind of news that they shared:

Ramji: ...holidays, going to India. 'When are you going?' 'So we can get tickets together?'

Author: So these are some of the things you discuss whilst walking? Like going back to India? What else do you talk about?

Ramji: Everything. 'What was cheap today in Lidl or Aldi?' General talk, 'what was in the news today?'

Author (to Premji): So what do you talk about when you are sat together (at the bench, during one of your walks)?

Premji: Like, 'what is happening in India?' 'What is the price of Jet Airways to Bhuj? Is it high now?' We just talk to pass the time and to gossip.

For the participants, this type of local-global news became a resource, it helped them to maintain their social, political and economic interests across translocal spaces. For example, Lux suggested during his walking and talking excursion with Ramji that such news may have also included who is in political power in England, and India, for instance, which would have implications for their passport preferences (British or Indian) and freedom as tourists to travel and to move across national spaces/places. Lux also mentioned in his interview, that sharing knowledge as first generation migrants with other people, which helped them individually and as a group deal with the challenges arising from accessing housing, welfare, education opportunities and employment. Kesar briefly also spoke about sharing strategies of resistance with her Gujarati-Indian friends, who she now walks with, in order to successfully challenge experiences of racism at her workplace (as a school cleaner). Ramji in his interview spoke about understanding through conversations with his walking friends, healthcare policies across different translocal places. Access to and the cost of healthcare

provisions very much influenced his personal choice to live across translocal places, rather than permanently return 'home' to his place of ancestral origin.

Interestingly, Kesar and Kanta both indicated a gendered aspect of walking and talking as whilst some of these conversations happened together (as couples of men and women), at other times the couples sat separately as either groups of men or groups of women. While some benches were 'shared' spaces (see Figure 1), other sitting down areas at local parks 'segregated' the men and women (see Figure 2). In reviewing Figure 2 with Kesar, she claims that she and her women companions are sitting together on a bench further along.

Figure 1 here

Figure 2 here

Commenting on this photo Ramji suggested that the women like to sit together so that they 'can talk their *own* talk' (emphasis added). Although as indicated above, in relation to the views of Kesar, Ramji and Premji, many of the discussions points were similar regardless of the gender of the participants. Some of the participants suggested that they did at times walk separately from their wives/husbands, specifically to meet friends of the same sex: e.g. Hirji walked with a male relative to a community centre to play cards with other men; Amrat (his wife) walked to her sister's house; Kesar went walking with a female friend to go clothes shopping; Lux walked to the library to meet his male friends there; and Premji went walking

with male relatives to a local park. Most of the couples regarded this as reflective of their own autonomy which was respected by their partners, rather than a form of gender division, as they still desired to walk with each other as a couple, but perhaps at other times in the day. However, further questioning revealed that for at least one of the couples this did reflect a deeper gender division of labour, as the female partner was attributed sole responsibility for food shopping:

Author: Your wife doesn't come with you (for a walk) during the week?

Hirji: No, my wife has her own things to do. She has to buy fruit and vegetables, go shopping. She does her own work. In the evening, we are together.

Moreover, as noted in Amrat's statement above, she would not go for a walk until her kitchen (and house) 'work' was done. However, as this gender division was not common across the couples, it could be argued that there was some gender parity in undertaking house chores or in terms of walking to go shopping together (see below). Going back to Hirji though, during his first walk with Ramji, he began to talk about his daily walk (without his wife) to the *Jaspar Centre*, an old people's community centre – for upna people – not far from where he lived (see Figure 3).

[Figure 3 here](#)

The purpose of this trip was to meet friends there, where members can get together to play cards or karem (Indian board game) and do yoga. The centre is open to men and women but they tend to socialise in separate spaces. Hirji says this is so the men do not disturb the

women by making ‘too much noise’ when playing games. However, as an aside, in Puwar’s (2013) research, many South Asian women actually chose to use different spaces of a community centre from men in order to participate in fairly raucous and licentious singing and dancing with other women. For Hirji then, walking to and from this community centre gave purpose to his day, he especially enjoyed the social interaction he got there with other men who he knew or had got to know from the local village in India. Thus the sociability of mingling and speaking to men from ‘home’ while living here facilitated old and new translocal connectivities. The centre also serves as a symbolic reminder of the established rooting of first generation migrants, and claims to local places as ‘theirs’ and ‘for them’, which becomes an important socio-spatial and political site to celebrate their evolving cultural traditions.

## **Shopping**

All of the participants, irrespective of gender, discussed going walking as a means of also going food shopping. This not only helped them to pass the time but also gave them the opportunity to meet other shoppers. Radha explains the following:

If you want to buy something then we buy, otherwise we walk past it. We come back empty handed, just to pass the time.

Many of the places walked through were typical high streets, home to a number of shops as well as particular South Asian grocers (Figures 4).

Figure 4 here

Ramji explains that places such as Kingsbury High Road have become a central spot for Gujarati people from different translocal spaces from Indian and Kenya to get together and to shop. He claims that people come from quite far specifically to purchase various South Asian foods and goods. Kesar talks further about the relevance of shopping as part of her daily walking routine. She walks in a number of places around her local area of Kingsbury but also further afield (via bus) like Wembley and Hatfield. Jasu and Manji also walk around Willesden market, and Radha and Lux around Burnt Oak Broadway to buy 'upna food from India and Kenya' (Radha). Kesar further remarked in her interview that the practice of buying food every day was reminiscent of village life in India. In this way, Kesar and some of the other participants, re-created daily practices from India which were/are made meaningful to their lives in England. Moreover, the opportunity to buy 'upna' foods from local South Asian stores is indicative of how settled the community has become in England, as the spaces that they walk through and across cater to their particular tastes.

As with comparing flight prices, the participants were concerned about getting 'a better price' (Premji) for things connected to their everyday material needs (see also Ramji's testimony above about finding cheap food in Lidl and Aldi). Kesar also notes she spends frugally as she is saving money for 'old age'. However, in some of the other interviews, for instance, Kanta talked about walking to Tesco to spend her money on stocking-up on discounted luxury food items. In addition to this, Kanta and Premji as well as Hirji and Amrat talked about spending their money on holidays across various tourist destinations in Europe, India and elsewhere, something that they could afford as they shop to a very tight budget. It is important to note that although many of the participants articulated a working-class identity as new migrants,

they now lead more middle class lives based upon consumption for personal pleasure and leisure e.g. eating nice food and going on regular visits back to the gam and other holiday destinations. Yet the frugal nature of their purchases is a working class habit that has enabled them as a migrant community to economically survive and thrive despite experiences of institutional discrimination (see above).

## **Conclusion**

This paper was based on a study about the walking practices of first-generation Gujarati-Indian migrants in England. It included a number of research methods in order to capture participants' rationales for walking, and the significance of particular places/spaces. Whilst the maps were not as useful, only Hirji annotated his map, the photos did provide a useful visual aid during the interviews. However, while the research aimed to centre both Gujarati Indian men and women's accounts of home and belonging, it was difficult to circumvent some gender relations of power with the men choosing to take all the photos. The interviews at least enabled the women participants to discuss their own walking practices. Moreover, they were able to point at things that were missing from the male presentation of some photos. Thus, for this study rich and thick data mostly emerged from spending time with the participants and talking with them. The interviews particularly gave power to both the men and women participants to tell their 'stories so far' which articulated their *senses*, expressed in their own words (in Gujarati) of walking as a desired aspect of their leisure pastime. Thus, centring the voices of both the men *and* women participants cannot be underestimated, especially if the racialized and gendered constructions of identity and places/spaces are not to be over-looked and thus ignored from debates about the leisure lives of racialised, diasporic migrant groups.



From the study it emerged that the participants walked for health reasons, to pass the time, and to shop but also to connect with one another and to share news. Indeed, exchanging information about cheap food and airline tickets, for instance, was of vital importance, helping them to maintain their working class habits at the same time as expressing their growing middle-class preferences for buying luxury food items, going on holidays, and saving money for their futures. Sharing knowledge also helped the participants individually and collectively respond to institutional forms of discrimination as well as to make decisions about their lives in relation to changing global-local political, economic and welfare policies and provisions. It becomes apparent that the participants in this study do not necessarily walk miles and miles (like a rambler or 'serious' walker might do) but to fairly mundane places around the local areas of where they live, mainly residential streets and local parks, which involved undertaking menial tasks such as food shopping, quite a lot of gossiping, and as it happens, sitting down. Yet, for all the participants, their daily walking rituals were significant above and beyond the practice of walking; they mattered in terms of facilitating convivial social encounters. Through the active use of various mundane places, this also enabled them to mark these local environments as 'theirs'. Thus by analysing the ordinariness of their everyday actions, rather than just the spectacular and extraordinary, such an insight could be gleaned, expanding understandings of belonging separate to the narrow re/presentation of South Asian men and women as racially 'Other'. At certain times, and to various extents, gender divisions within certain places was evident (e.g. park benches and at the Jaspar centre) but I would be hesitant to suggest that this was indicative of deeper cultural differences amongst people of Gujarati Indian heritage. Arguably, gender variations exist across minority and majority ethnic groups in England and this is not something peculiar to the Gujarati community. As with other cultural groups, sharing places and 'hanging out' in

same-sex groups of your peers may be a favourite element of people's leisure lives. It also became apparent through the study, that the participants' desire to sustain and fuel translocal networks whilst being physically connected to places of 'home' in North-West London, was not necessarily out of a need to survive in a foreign land (like when they first arrived) but as a choice in-and-of-itself, reflective of their changing needs and cultural subjectivities.

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