

BELIEF ACROSS BORDERS

Religion as Networked Social Capital

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1. Introduction

This paper uses data gathered through interviews with Indian transnational migrant workers in the greater Durban¹ area in the province of KwaZulu Natal, South Africa and uses the analytical lens of social capital to contextualize their religious practices in a transnational space. The paper argues that, within the context of the transnational lives of the migrant workers, religion, and religious ritual and activities, can perhaps be understood as (re)emerging in the form of social capital that helps build cohesive bonds and ties amongst the migrants.

In the case of diasporic and itinerant migrancy, studies unveil² that people with transnationalised lives tend to simultaneously inhabit what can be construed of as multiple spaces that reveal their simultaneous experiences of heightened connectivity and heightened dislocation. Writers like Gardner and Grillo³ and Levitt⁴ point out however, that despite a

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¹Indians in South Africa are descendants of the large numbers of Indians who accepted the British passage to South Africa in the 19th century to work the sugar cane plantations in the coastal province of now KwaZulu Natal. A small number are the descendants from Indian (predominantly Gujarati) traders who migrated to South Africa, following the initial indentured workers. South Africa has the largest population of people of Indian descent outside of India, who are born in South Africa, with Durban home to the largest concentration of Indians in the country.

²See P. Levitt, "Redefining the Boundaries of Belonging: The Institutional Character of Transnational Religious Life" in *Sociology of Religion* 65, 1 (2004), 1-18; C. Peach, "South Asian migration and settlement in Great Britain, 1951-2001" in *Contemporary South Asia* 15, 2 (2006), 133-146; K. Leonard, "Transnationalism, Diaspora, Translation: Comparing Punjabis and Hyderabadis Abroad" in *Sikh Formations* 3, 1 (2007), 51-66; S. Vertovec, *Transnationalism*. New York: Routledge, 2009.

³K. Gardner and R. Grillo, "Transnational households and Ritual: An Overview" in *Global Networks* 2, 3 (2002), 179-190.

⁴P. Levitt, "You Know, Abraham Was Really the First Immigrant: Religion and Transnational Migration" in *International Migration Review* 37, 3 (2003), 847; P.

broad spectrum of research on transnational migration and diasporas, many aspects of the personal social lives that draw the curtain on the contexts of connectivity and dislocation of transnationals have been accorded less consideration than they deserve; religion, and the religious lives of transnational migrants being one of them. The proverbial bottom line is that the transnational practices of migrants, other than issues of remittances and reciprocal help to the sending homeland, and aspects of their involvement in economic and or political activities, remain under-scrutinized in the literature.⁵

The term *transnational* can perhaps be better explained as involving flows that are exchanged through networks of institutions, ideas, and as in this study, through the networks of individuals. The working migrants in this study are seen as spanning two geographic and cultural spaces in their porous movement back and forth between the ‘sending society’ or homeland (Pakistan, Bangladesh, India), and places of employment in the ‘receiving’ suburbs of Durban, South Africa. The paper seeks to show that the migrants cope with the sense of heightened dislocation from the families and familiar socio-cultural spaces back in the sending society, by constructing or seamlessly entering networks of friends and acquaintances with other migrant workers from India and Pakistan or Bangladesh. These networks help build cohesive ties of heightened connectivity. The paper argues that religion, worship, participation and sharing in religious activities and festivals with other migrants in the receiving homeland, is to be construed as a form of social capital that the migrant workers tap into, to connect with one another.

2. Background to Study

The paper makes use of participant observation and interviews that attempt to capture aspects of the participants lived experiences through conversations, interviews and time spent together. The paper draws on the data gathered over a fifteen month period, mid January 2008 to April 2009 for two other studies, (see Naidu 2008 and Naidu 2009) with migrant Hindu and Muslim workers from Pakistan, India and Bangladesh.

Levitt, ‘Transnational migration: taking stock and future directions’ in *Global Networks* 1, 3 (2000), 195-216.

⁵Gardner and Grillo, 179.

The first study,⁶ Naidu 2008, showed that the Hindu transnational salon workers in the Reservoir Hills area of Durban, South Africa, could be understood as ‘commodities’ positioned in global consumption, and held a mirror to certain aspects of transnationalised Hinduism. The paper sought to focus the enquiry on the transnationalised lives of migrant Hindu workers in their attempt to articulate being ‘Hindu’ in a transnational social space. The second study⁷, Naidu 2009, widened the sample net to include both Hindu and Muslim transnationals working in a number of salons, restaurants and tailoring ‘shops’ in the suburbs of Durban in KwaZulu Natal. The paper worked through the sociological concepts of “networking” and “knowing”⁸ to show how the Indian⁹ and Pakistani migrants came to settle into particular contexts of labour in the greater Durban area. The paper reflected upon the discursive pathways of the Indian and Pakistani migrants’ transnationalised working lives and probed how linkages of labour and social acquaintance occur at the individual level through the closely knitted processes of knowing and networking.

While writing the papers, I was struck by both the bi-focally lived lives of the Hindu and Muslim migrants who straddled particular geo-cultural spaces as they weaved back and forth between their homeland and the receiving land, as well as the articulation of their lives along particular networks and ties in their efforts to re-territorialize themselves locally (see Naidu 2009). It appeared that networks were vital to the social lives of the migrants. It also appeared that these networks (with other migrant friends, families and acquaintances) functioned as a kind of ‘social glue’ and worked to bring the migrants together to share time in a common articulation of religious beliefs and practices (among other social practices).

⁶M. Naidu, “The Global Mobile Subject: Mobility and Transnationalising Hinduism” in *Nidan Journal for the Study of Hinduism* 32, (2008), 16-32.

⁷Naidu, M. “Tied to Each Other: Transnationalised Work and Workers” in *The Anthropologist* (2009), forthcoming.

⁸J. Urry, *Sociology Beyond Societies: mobilities for the twenty-first century*. New York: Routledge, 2002 and Urry, J. *Mobilities*. Cambridge UK: Polity Press, 2007.

⁹‘Indian’ in the South African context and the way it is used in this paper is used to refer to people who were originally from what are now Bangladesh, and thus the experiences of the participants from Bangladesh is subsumed under ‘Indian from India’. The geo-political label of ‘Pakistani’ is retained as the local South Africans see this particular distinction.

Transnationalism as a “social morphology”¹⁰ can be seen as evolving increasingly finer grained scholarship, and Voigt-Graf¹¹, also Portes¹², point out that there are particular typologies of transnational flows. Guarnizo and Smith¹³ speak of ‘transnationalism from below’ or the routinized daily activities of transnational individuals. Religious practices, one contends, are to be seen as part and parcel of such ‘routinized activities’. And the fact that there are numerous small enclaves of transnational migrant workers scattered throughout the suburbs of Durban, bears out the contention that the ‘transnational’ does not necessarily connote large numbers of individuals. These scattered numbers¹⁴ of individuals typify, increasingly, movement of many kinds, but especially migration for work or refuge¹⁵. Within the context of this study it was also found that this form of individualized migrant mobility, where the migrant workers chose to come without the supporting entourage of the rest of their families, parents or wives, was noticeably ‘masculinized’. Thus all thirty participants (both single and married) in the initial 2009 study were male, between the ages of twenty two and thirty five. In a bid to allow the reader a greater sense of ethnographic ‘seeing’, the participants’ names (with their permission) are used when narrative examples are drawn from the participants’ experiences.

3. Religion (in Transnational Spaces)

Kelly states:

People travel internationally and live temporarily in other countries for leisure and work-related activities that may have nothing to do

¹⁰S. Vertovec, “Migration and Other Modes of Transnationalism: Towards Conceptual Cross-Fertilization” in *International Migration Review* 37, 3 (2003), 641-665.

¹¹C. Voigt-Graf, “Towards a Geography of transnational spaces: Indian transnational communities in Australia” in *Global Networks* 4, 1 (2004), 25-49.

¹²A. Portes, “Introduction: the debates and significance of immigrant transnationalism” in *Global Networks* 1, 3 (2001), 181-193.

¹³L E. Guarnizo and S P. Smith, “The locations of transnationalism”, In: M. P. Smith and L. E. Guarnizo eds., *Transnationalism from below: comparative urban and community research*. New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1998, pp 3- 34.

¹⁴Poros also speaks of transnationalism at the level of the individual see M V. Poros, “The role of migrant networks in linking local labour markets: the case of Asian Indian migration to New York and London” in *Global Networks* 1, 3 (2001), 243-259.

¹⁵S. Castles and M J Miller, *The age of migration*. London: Macmillan, 1993.

with religion, and yet insofar as they are religious people, their religious beliefs and practices are involved.¹⁶

This is the point of insertion for this particular paper. The migrants in this study were not assembled into any large international or national congregational body attached to the homeland or sending society. The literature on transnationalism shows that for transnationals, religious networks often serve as networks of recruitment into civic or political engagement. This type of large scale organized transnational religious activity (amongst Asians practicing Hinduism or Islam) has been captured in many studies.¹⁷ However, the migrants’ transnational religious practices in *this* study are not to be understood in organizational terms, as articulating their religious worldview through large religious organizations. The paper holds that migrants’ transnational religious practices, are also frequently enacted *outside* of organized settings.

The paper attempts to show that, insofar as the migrants are people who come from the rich socio-religious landscapes of Hinduism and Islam, they can be seen as drawing from these backgrounds. They can be seen as sharing religious space and religious festival time as a kind of resource or capital that functions to keep them connected to each other in a foreign space. This sums up the position of the Hindu research participants and several of the Muslim participants. These migrants did not claim to be fervently religious. Nor did their behaviour suggest this in any overt manner. These transnational workers also did not have any affiliations with large national, international Muslim or Hindu religious bodies. But in so far as they were *practicing Hindus* and *practicing Muslims*, and saw themselves as *being Hindu and Muslim*, their religious beliefs and practices were *necessarily* involved.

¹⁶J. D. Kelly, “Time and the Global: Against the Homogenous, Empty Communities in Contemporary Social Theory”, In: Birgit Meyer and Peter Geschiere eds., *Globalisation and Identity: Dialectics of Flow and Closure*. Oxford UK: Blackwell, 2003, 239.

¹⁷See B. Williams, “Asian Indian and Pakistani Religions in the United States” in *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 558 (1998), 178-195; P. Kurien, “Religion, ethnicity, and politics: Hindus and Muslim Indian immigrants in the United States” in *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 24 (2001), 263-93; P. Levitt, “Redefining the Boundaries of Belonging: The Institutional Character of Transnational Religious Life” in *Sociology of Religion* 65, 1 (2004), 1-18.

Religion itself is not a fixed set of elements; beliefs, rituals, practices etc., but a dynamic matrix and web of shared meanings used in diverse ways, in diverse contexts¹⁸ and more increasingly, in the transnational spaces that are culturally foreign to newly arriving transmigrants. For the anthropologist Clifford Geertz, religion was a distinctive part of the cultural system. Religion was “a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms” through which we are said to “communicate, perpetuate, and develop” our “knowledge about and attitudes toward life”¹⁹. If we are to go along with Levitt’s contention that transnational migrants use religion and religious icons and sacred spaces and acts to mark and to delineate a “cartography of belonging”²⁰ we see that transnationals may well use participation in religious practices to communicate, perpetuate, and develop their ideas and attitudes about themselves, in a bid to re-territorialize themselves in the receiving country.

4. The Notion of Social Capital

Social capital, as a sociological concept, has emerged as something of a trendy label in the social sciences. Portes²¹ points out that the original theoretical development of the concept of ‘social capital’ by the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu and the American sociologist James Coleman centered on *individuals* or *small groups* as the units of analysis, and on the benefits accruing to individuals *because of their ties* with others. These theorists defined social capital in terms of a *resource* to which an individual has access to, and is able to use for his or her benefit. Simply put, social capital is a reference to the resource embedded in the connections (of goodwill that can be called upon) *within* and *between* social networks. For a community, frequent cooperation by its members leads to tighter social linkages and increased trust in one another, described as a “virtuous circle” of participation and trust.²²

¹⁸K. Gardner, *Global Migrants, Local Lives*. Oxford, England: Clarendon Press, 1995.

¹⁹C. Geertz, “Religion as a Cultural System”, In: Banton M. ed., *Anthropological Approaches to the study of Religion*. London: Tavistock (1966), 89.

²⁰P. Levitt, “You Know, Abraham Was Really the First Immigrant: Religion and Transnational Migration” in *International Migration Review* 37, 3 (2003), 861.

²¹A. Portes, “The Two Meanings of Social Capital” in *Sociological Forum* 15, 1 (2000), 2.

²²S. Janjuha-Jivraj, “The Sustainability of Social Capital within Ethnic Networks” in *Journal of Business Ethics* 47, 1 (2003) 32.

The concept of social capital is thus further encapsulated in networks, norms, and according to Farr, in the aspect of ‘trust’. For Farr, networks are dense and valuable, norms pervade the networks and social relations and trust is construed as psychologically complex. Farr²³ states;

Putting these elements together, social capital is complexly conceptualized as the network of associations, activities, or relations that bind people together as a community via certain norms and psychological capacities, notably trust...²⁴

Lockhart²⁵ spells out that ‘bonding’ social capital describes the strength of relationships where people demonstrate concern and support for one another. ‘Bridging’ social capital on the other hand, creates relationships over social divisions, such as those based on race or class, allowing people to gain assets beyond their usual social groups.

5. Religion as Social Capital

Resources such as financing, labour, information and other forms of support are often cited as examples of social capital available. However, later scholarship²⁶ has also revealed that social ties are developed through religious participation,²⁷ which often crosses status barriers and helps cement community cohesion.

Thieme²⁸ points out that worldwide, an increasing number of people are diversifying their income through international migration and through seeking employment in the global market. He adds though, that this particular kind of movement, out of the country, mainly involves only parts of the family migrating. Thus, people’s livelihoods are said to take

²³J. Farr, “Social Capital: A Conceptual History” in *Political Theory* 32, 1 (2004), 6-33.

²⁴Farr, 8-9.

²⁵W. H. Lockhart, “Building Bridges and Bonds: Generating Social Capital in Secular and Faith-Based Poverty-to-Work Programs” in *Sociology of Religion* 66, 1 (2005), 46.

²⁶See N. T. Ammerman, *Congregation and community*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1997; R. A. Cnaan, S. C. Boddie, E. Handy, G. Yancey R. and Schneider, *The invisible caring hand: American congregations and the provision of welfare*. New York: New York University Press, 2002.

²⁷Lockhart, 47.

²⁸S. Thieme, “Sustaining Livelihoods in Multi-local Settings: Possible Theoretical Linkages between Transnational Migration and Livelihood Studies” in *Mobilities* 3, 1 (2008), 51-71.

on a multi-local dimension. In all instances involving the 30 participants in this particular study, we find that they travelled looking for work in South Africa without the supporting entourage of family. Some of the migrants did have family members who had migrated a few months or a few years earlier, but they themselves made the passage across geographic borders, by themselves. To cope with their 'multi-locality' the participants in this study appear to have entered meaningful transnational networks with other migrant family and friends²⁹ within which they shared social and religious time.

The concept of social capital has also accreted to itself much conceptual opaqueness that in some instances, clouds the term because of the mutable and varying definitions imposed by different scholars.³⁰ The paper however, takes as its starting point that social capital is to be understood as working on the level of the individual and small group. The paper draws on the work by Adler and Kwon³¹ and extracts some salient points from their discussion on social capital and argues that religion and religious practices are to be understood as a resource drawn upon by the individual migrant workers. The argument is that religion (re)emerges in these particular transnational contexts and functions as a form of social capital to reinforce group cohesion in transnational spaces.

Adler and Kwon's³² discussion on social capital raises many important points. Three points are extracted to put into a conversation with the issues in the paper. The points listed below all 'bleed into', or organically lead one into another as they are closely related, and are:

- Social capital is encapsulated in 'solidarity'.
- Social capital is 'appropriable'.
- Social capital is 'convertible'.

²⁹Naidu 2008; 2009.

³⁰See R D. Putnam, *Bowling alone: The collapse and revival of American community*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000; Portes, 2000; F J. Schuurman, "Social Capital: the politico-emancipatory potential of a disputed Concept" *Third World Quarterly* 24, 6 (2003), 991-1010.

³¹Adler and Kwon (2002) P S. Adler and S. Kwon, "Social Capital: Prospects for a New Concept" in *The Academy of Management Review* 27, 1 (2002), 17-40.

³²Adler and Kwon, 21-22

6. Social Capital Is Encapsulated in ‘Solidarity’

“Important forms of solidarity can emerge from strong ties and even from weak ties, or at least weak ties that bridge otherwise unconnected groups.”³³ Perhaps one place to begin is with the Hindu religious proverb, *vasudhaiva kutumbakum*, or ‘the world is one family’. This ‘family’ as we come to see,³⁴ is one of dense networked connectivity. Tushar is a young Hindu male, having arrived in South Africa about two and half years ago. He had initially lived with his uncle (from India) with whom he already had ties with. He had later moved out to live with his work colleagues, the two cousins Kamal and Rakesh from the salon that they all worked in. The salon worked as a bridge linking Tushar to the cousins. The ties with Kamal and Rakesh had been forged in their common work place and had led to a more intense connection amongst the three, fed by their mutual Hindu backgrounds (in Gujarat) and their interests as young twenty-something year olds. With Tushar, Kamal had also found someone, who would (more readily than Rakesh) accompany him to the *Sapta Mandir*, or temple that was within walking distance of the salon. The participants tell me that they had been told about this temple by some of the local Gujarati-speaking Hindus. Although the ties with the local Hindus appeared weak³⁵ these weak ties helped bridge and connect Tushar to Kamal. When two local Hindus asked why *only* Kamal came to the Temple, Tushar was alerted to the proximity of the temple. As this was prior to Tushar sharing accommodation with Kamal, this was an important piece of information, and acted as a bridge that drew Tushar closer to Kamal. Kamal and Tushar later narrated that they visited the *Sapta Mandir* which sat further up the road from their work place, every Sunday.

Social capital’s sources lie, according to Adler and Kwon³⁶ in the social structure within which the actor is located, and is the resource available to actors *as a function of their location* in the structure of their social relations. Adler and Kwon³⁷ additionally point out that social capital is ‘located’ not in the actors, but *in their relations* with other actors. At a ‘one on one’ interview³⁸ with Tushar, he talks about his communal living

³³ Adler and Kwon, 30.

³⁴ Naidu, 2008; 2009.

³⁵ Naidu, 2008.

³⁶ Adler and Kwon, 18

³⁷ Adler and Kwon, 22

³⁸ See Naidu, 2008.

arrangements with the other two Hindu transnationals. All three had arrived at their employment, literally through their nodal networking and associative ties with each other. He shares that they have a central Hindu lamp for domestic worship at their rented home. All three migrants had apparently each brought their own Hindu sacred “*Lakshmi*” lamps from India. They had given two lamps to other friends, who were likewise from Gujarat, as they felt that these friends needed to also have a lamp at home. This aspect of identifying with each other and sympathizing with each others needs seemed to surface in much of the interactions amongst the migrants. This mutual recognition appeared more pronounced around certain aspects of the migrants’ professed religion. Farr³⁹ notes that amongst transnationals, sympathy was a capacity “that could be cultivated to understand and identify commonalities with others”. Although they claimed not to be “too religious”, they confessed that they liked to both socialize amongst one another, as well as enjoying observing aspects of Hinduism amongst each other. They claimed that “this felt good” and “reminded” them of how they “would feel back home”.

Tushar communicates that they all now pray at the single lamp. Tushar confides that his parents sent him from India with a lamp so that he would continue to pray. He added that although he was “not very religious”, had the parents not sent a lamp with him, he would have purchased one in South Africa because “it was important”. Their narrative reveals that all three friends took turns to ‘wash’, ‘shine’ and ‘apply kum-kum’ to the lamp, all acts performed fastidiously in most Hindu households. Rakesh later confides that if he were living alone, he might well have been lazy to “take very good care of the lamp”. It seemed that the communal context of being amongst other Hindu friends provided an impetus for the sacred routine around “taking care” of the lamp. It was also, more importantly, a focal point around which the three migrants gathered. They also confide that although their prayers were simple prayers asking for “good health” and “good business” etc., it was also a time when they felt “more as one”, and connected to each other. It seemed that they were attempting to articulate a sense of belonging, solidarity and connection with each other and the loved ones they had left behind in the sending society.

³⁹Farr, 10.

Thus, while these were all religious ‘tasks’ that they would have certainly also performed back home, it appeared that these same observances assumed greater meaning in the transnational environment. In the circumstances of having to inhabit a foreign transnational space, these ‘small’ religious rituals and activities were performed with a heightened awareness and worked to connect the migrants empathetically and emotionally to each other.

With transmigration, groupings and networks may well take on a new significance or perhaps acquire a significance they previously did not have, with their members drawn together by the rituals (no matter how ‘small’ or ‘routine’) in which they participate.⁴⁰ The migrant workers communicate that they pray three times daily, at home in the morning, in the workplace and again at the home lamp in the evening. Tushar mentioned that he also reads the *Hanuman Chalisa* at his rented home, and when he has time at the salon, although he confessed that he was “too lazy” to do this back home. He tells me that these acts keep him “closer to home”. It seemed that it was not so much that the migrants were claiming that they were keeping their religion alive, but rather that they were keeping alive, *their connection with their family*, through such observances.

All three migrants also observed the *Katha* and *Jundha*, at their (migrant) Gujarati family homes. They point out that in India they attended *Jundha* or the flag ritual at the temple and *Katha* as a household ritual. They felt that it was important to attend such rituals and prayers here in South Africa because it was a time that they ‘met up with family and good friends’, or just as importantly “made new friends” from amongst the acquaintances of mutual friends. The participants are meaning of course family and friends, as in other transnational friends and family, wherein they felt there was present, trust and norms of reciprocity.

Instead of forming singular migrant communities that attempt to keep in touch with home, these migrants have slipped into smaller networks with a multiplicity of nodes. They have not joined a religious congregation or international religious network like the VPH so prominent in the USA, especially for its efforts in globalizing Hinduism. Nor did they seek out a community through which to assert their Hindu identity, rather they have become part of networks with a multiplicity of nodes that allow

⁴⁰Gardner and Grillo, 182/183.

them to both socialize, and enunciate their ‘being Hindu’ amongst other migrant Gujarati family and friends as they share communal religious time, that also supports a connection with those left behind in the sending societies. If ‘goodwill’ forms the substance of social capital, it’s “effects flow from the solidarity that such goodwill in turn makes available”⁴¹.

7. Social Capital Is ‘Appropriable’

Like physical capital, which can be used for different purposes social capital is appropriable in the sense that an actor’s network of, say, friendship ties can be used for other purposes, such as information gathering or advice.⁴²

All three participants, Kamal, Rakesh and Tushar claimed that in South Africa, they “have a social family” (of migrant Gujarati friends and relatives), but in India they “have a biological family”. The transnational migrants appear to have created their own networks of mainly Gujarati family and friends, or joined existing ones. The migrants speak about being “one family” and that it is a “small world”, where many “come to be known to each other”. Their (small) world appears as a cohesively networked “multiplexed” world, where workers are sometimes linked also by family or acquaintance ties⁴³ within which there is frequency of group contact and reciprocal favours.⁴⁴

Kamal, Rakesh and Tushar routinely “swop” around their weekly day off so that they may run errands or stand in for the friend who may be ill. Although initially coy about telling me, they later confide that they frequently have each other in their prayers. This was also borne out by many Muslim transnationals who worked in the adjacent tailoring “shop”. Mubarak, who owned the tailoring establishment, next to the salon, and the Muslim waiters from Bangladesh who worked at the restaurant also sitting adjacent to the salon, all seemed to both socialize and worship together. They too offered and reciprocated such favours by standing in, or working extra shifts for the friends that they worshipped with. In many instances the migrants, both Muslim and Hindu referred to their close migrant friends as their “brothers”. While the Muslim and Hindu

⁴¹Adler and Kwon, 2002.

⁴²Adler and Kwon, 21.

⁴³Portes, 1995, 10.

⁴⁴S. Vertovec, “Migration and Other Modes of Transnationalism: Towards Conceptual Cross-Fertilization” in *International Migration Review* 37, 3 (2003), 647.

transnationals, effortlessly and seamlessly crossed ethnic to socialise together, they chose not to attend the communal prayers and festivals of each other’s religious affiliations. It seemed that while both socializing and worshipping acted to bond them together cohesively, it was the many embedded acts of religious observances that further and more deeply cemented their cohesiveness.

While the Muslim participants communicated that they were also fastidious about the prayer routine back in Pakistan or India, they shared that it was especially important in the transnational context as they felt that these religious rituals anchored them with other members of the transnational family, even in the “tougher times” in a foreign country. The ‘family’ becomes a site of belonging according to Chamberlain and Leydesdorff⁴⁵. This (family) site, in the context of transnationals, is fluidly reconstructed between the different domains of work and home and beyond discernable kinship belonging. As “actors in networks of exchange relationships”⁴⁶ the transnational workers, Gautam, a Brahmin and Kumar a non-Brahmin, like Kamal and his friends, had circumvented, traditional cleavages of social status and had established their own circle of migrant friends in and around the area. They socialized weekly with these friends, and shared festival time such as the celebration of *Diwali*, and ritual time such as the religious *Katha*.

Shabir was a Muslim male from Surat, India who had come to South Africa three years ago and worked as a waiter working in the popular *My Diner* chain of restaurants. Although missing his wife and family who were back in Bangladesh, Shabir confessed to be content in South Africa as he had many “relations” here, “to help” him. He joined the other Muslim migrants when visiting the local mosque, many of whom were also the same co-workers at the restaurant. Mdalom, a Muslim transnational from Bangladesh, also worked as a waiter in the *My Diner* restaurant. He reveals that his cousin had helped him “get the job” as waiter at *My Diner* where he had now been for a few months. He shares that it had been relatively easy for the cousin to help him with employment as this particular cousin attended the same mosque that many waiters from the restaurant gathered for worship. Additionally the owners of *My Diner*,

⁴⁵M. Chamberlain and S. Leydesdorff, “Transnational families: memories and narratives” in *Global Networks* 4, 3 (2004), 232.

⁴⁶K. S. Cook and J. M. Whitmeyer, “Two Approaches to Social Structure: Exchange Theory and Network Analysis” in *Annual Review of Sociology* 18, (1992), 115.

themselves well established Muslim transnationals from Bangladesh, attended the same mosque, making that particular space a fortuitous gathering hub for transnationals wishing, among other things, to move into positions of employment.

8. Social Capital Is ‘Convertible’

Moreover, social capital can be ‘converted’ (Bourdieu, 1985 cited in Adler and Kwon 2002) to other kinds of capital. The advantages conferred by one’s position in a social network can be converted to economic or other advantage.⁴⁷

Social network theory unveils how *nodes* or the actors in the networks and *ties* or relationships between the actors function within various networks. Critical concepts of ‘degree’ and ‘cohesion’ allow a further unpacking of *how* the migrant participants are connected, and to *whom*, with the concept of cohesion being vital in our understanding that other transnational relatives and friends (however immediate or distant) connect the migrants cohesively and directly through routine rituals of worship. Mohammed, a Muslim transnational from Bangladesh reveals that when he arrived in Durban, he did not know many people. Mohammed narrated that he came across many other “Muslims from India and Bangladesh” in his weekly visits to the local mosque. By praying together communally a certain level of familiarity and trust had become established and these meetings for prayer were also important times when information regarding potential employment was shared amongst the migrants. In other words a certain level of ‘converting’ (of capital) was taking place. The unemployed transnationals were able to convert their friendships erected through communal prayer, to networks of information sharing, that placed them potentially closer to employment showing how even communal worship time and space can act as mechanisms that come to constitute social capital. Exemplifying Smart and Smart’s⁴⁸ words that bodies are indeed “located in particular [transnational] places”, Yunus, a thirty year old Muslim from Gujarat in India shares that he too “heard of work” in one of the weekly prayer gatherings. Employment opportunities appear to thus develop around communal meeting spaces for worship, building on social capital to generate mutually beneficial relationships that are able to satisfy

⁴⁷ Adler and Kwon, 21.

⁴⁸ A. Smart and J. Smart, “Urbanization and the Global Perspective” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 32, (2003), 274.

multiple needs. The naturally assembled hubs or sites of ‘gathering’ (as in the mosque) within the network allows for cliques or spaces with a greater coherence and density of transmigrants than that of other parts of the network, and a corresponding density of social capital. Many scholars point out that social capital is the fungibility channel, through which one form of capital can be changed into another, which benefits the individual.

Closely knitted social networks are seen as pools of popular agency and are embedded in popular relations of solidarity and reciprocity that allow transnational individuals (or marginalized groups) to circumvent structures of exclusion within the wider society.⁴⁹ The migrants are aware of their dislocation (from those at home as well as in some instances, from the local people), but attempt to live as fully as possible through the multiple nodes of connectivity available to them. They thus excavate themselves out of potential social and economic marginality as they articulate their social selves within the web of interactions and lived experiences *with other migrants*.

Networks are of course not in any way permanently stable but are rather fluidly being socially constructed and altered by newly arriving members. However, the networks still manage to maintain their cohesiveness and closure. Adler and Kwon⁵⁰ emphasize that strong social norms and beliefs, are “associated with a high degree of closure of the social network”. This closure is of course maintained in this particular context, by the religious commonality of the Muslim transnationals who reciprocate with opportunities of employment and often, also accommodation.

9. Conclusion

One needs to recognize the considerable availability of informal pockets of support structures that exist outside of large institutional religious networks, and look inside smaller enclaves or groups of people who share religious space or religious time. According to Gargiulo and Benassi⁵¹, the members of a (small) knitted network can trust each other to honour

⁴⁹K. Meagher, “Social capital or analytical liability? Social networks and African informal economies” in *Global Networks* 53, (2005), 220.

⁵⁰Adler and Kwon, 29.

⁵¹M. Gargiulo and M. Benassi, “Trapped in Your Own Net? Network Cohesion, Structural Holes, and the Adaptation of Social Capital”, *Organisation Science* 11, 2 (2000), 184.

various obligations across the domains of work and their social lives. These kinds of ties are important for the benefits they offer to individuals, as revealed by the ethnographic narratives of the participants. Religion is a social capital 'resource' that inheres in the social network, "tying focal actors to other actors"⁵², as in the case of the migrant businessmen at the mosque, who were able to offer other migrant workers employment, or in the case of the Hindu transnational Kamal who was able to introduce Tushar to the sacred temple. Farr⁵³ talks about social capital as the 'statuses that individuals accrued or lent as a result of their group activities. Thus, inherent within the social networks is a level of "functionality of the flows between the nodes"⁵⁴. Worship rituals, whether large scale and social as in festival and religious celebrations, or the everyday routinized activities and practices of daily or weekly congregational worship at a temple or mosque, as well as the domestic household rituals and observances, offer a window into understanding that religion reemerges in a transnational context and works to connect the migrants.⁵⁵ These observances of rituals and festivals, and communal worship emerge as crucial transnational socio-religious enactments, enhancing group collectivity and cohesiveness.

⁵²Adler and Kwon, 19.

⁵³Farr, 8-9.

⁵⁴Schuurman, 999.

⁵⁵Gardner and Grillo 2002: 183.