

# Roots and Routes



**GRFDT**  
Global Research Forum on  
Diaspora and Transnationalism

Monthly Newsletter of the  
Global Research Forum on Diaspora and Transnationalism

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## Editor's Message

Dear Friends,



Communication technologies have played a transforming role in civilizational evolution. From book publishing to mass communication technologies of newspapers, radio, Television and now computer-mediated and social media-enabled mobile telecommunication, the codes of human interaction and social group formation are being re-written. The social groups, which are able to communicate and interact with its members more effectively, are the ones which survive longer and have been found to be resilient and materially more prosperous in the long run. The phenomenon also finds a parallel in the nation-state interaction and in the formation of strategic alliance during the time of crisis. Social Media has further intensified this interaction process leading to instant formation of interest groups among sections of societies, including the diaspora communities.

The New Media, as it is being called, has special relevance to diaspora communities. One of the traditional handicaps faced by diaspora communities has been the snapping of vital communication network with their homeland and also about the need of forming new social groupings in a host country. The New Media has bridged this gap at both the counts. An inexpensive and instant establisher of communication network, it has helped in the formation of new groups based on social, religious and political affiliations. It has also proved quite handy during the time of mass exodus or hate-crimes, to which diaspora communities are vulnerable and are more exposed to.

As Social Media is a new phenomenon, there have been few studies on the subject, especially when it comes to theorizing and conceptualizing the issue at a trans-diasporic level. Some of the earlier works have already delineated its application in inter and intra communication in Jews Diaspora, community formation amongst the Chinese student and homeland political participation as in the case of Indian Diaspora. There is a considerable gap when it comes to its utility in knowledge sharing, religious group formation and communication and new business formation amongst the diasporic population.

This issue of Roots and Routes tries to explore the possibility of Social Media and its application by various diasporic populations by bringing together research in the related domain. The lead article of the newsletter, "Diaspora in the age of New Media" deals with the rising use of New Media by the Diaspora community for reimagining, redefining and renegotiating their identities and work space. The second article - "Student Migration from Punjab and Challenges of Assimilation in UK" by Rahul Kumar explores the problems and challenges encountered by students from Punjab, who go to the UK on students' visas. The author has brought in some first-hand narrations of the students, to highlight their lived in experience and the attitude of the natives towards them.

This issue of our newsletter also contains an interview with Dr. Janroj Yilmaz Keles who is an authoritative voice on the New Media of the Diaspora. His insight into embedding of New Media in the contemporary diasporic identity is of special relevance to scholars working in this new emerging domain.

As part of collaborative attempt to exchange ideas, thoughts and incidental occurrence of New Media phenomena, we invite researchers and professionals to participate and share their experiences with us and enhance the understanding of this emerging area of knowledge. We wish you a happy reading of this issue of Roots and Routes. We also look forward to your comment, suggestions for a meaningful engagement on the subject.

**Vijay Kumar Soni**

**Guest Editor**

## Diaspora in the Age of New Media

Vijay K Soni

Technology may not govern our lives, but we do govern our lives with available technologies. To this thumb rule, Diaspora is no exception, which has redefined and re-imagined its unique position in the new global information order. Historically, technology played a key facilitator in mass human migration. The slave trade during the ancient Greek and Roman empires and the indentured laborers in the 19th and the 20th century during the colonial period made use of marine engineering for mass human transportation. The civil aviation was continuum of the same process for the white collared work migrants during the ongoing age of globalization. When we delineate the contours of Diaspora's intra and inter communication technologies, between the members of the mother and the host countries, a similar pattern is discernible from print media to radio to Television to now the new age of digital media. The latter governed by logarithms has added new dimension to the interaction between the Diaspora and the new media technology.

While the Diaspora has remained constant during the techno-chronological eras, it's the medium that has transformed itself thereby influencing the norms, behavior and politics of diasporic movement. In fact, the influence of new technology has been so pervasive that it has led to the coinage of a new category of Diaspora called Knowledge Diaspora. They are the group of Diaspora community who have thrived on Information technology and have been able to mushroom in different parts of the developed world as their skills came to be highly prized. A large number of Knowledge Diaspora community belongs to countries like India and China, who already had a sizable presence in these countries and in the process have reinforced their numerical strength with news sets of professional expertise.

The Diaspora is interlinked with new media at two different levels. One, at the professional level as it has opened new vistas of economic opportunities and the other, as a technological means of interpersonal and mass communication. It is the latter which concerns us as it has repositioned the community in the changing socio-political matrix. As a result of new media, the Diaspora community is no longer an isolated, alienated mass but a highly interactive and realigning community. They have been renegotiating their identity and relevance with the use of new medium. The new media has also equipped them and has simultaneously opened new channels of communication between their home as well as the host countries. These twin cultures of the East and the West are well amalgamated in their daily conversation and have become part of their cultural expression. Not surprisingly, the two cultures are not in conflict but in congruence and part of their dual and multiple identities, which the Diaspora community has so ingeniously been able to manage and live with.

The Diasporas' online identity and the one in the new media, especially Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp find a common platform where various identities are communicated, transformed and merge to give a uniform meaning to their diasporic existence. The workspace, mediaspace and personal space have come to occupy a common space in the New Media. Unlike the traditional media, which does not afford the malleability of space as it is governed by public space, the new media is more flexible and open-ended. The application of these mediums by the old and the new immigrants can be easily deciphered, both in terms of its usage and effectiveness. The old Diaspora, which was exposed to traditional media, had less opportunity for vertical movement, unlike the new generation of immigrants that have been able to form more cohesive and purposive communities.

There are however, two ramifications of the Diaspora-new media relationship that calls for some soul-searching. One, about the very stability of the digital communities formed in the age of new media and second, about the ghettoization of communities as a result of restrictive intra-group communication. The permanence and transience of digital communities is often determined by ethnic affiliation or by the formation of common interest groups. The digital ethnic groups are more stable and permanent because members of the communities are mostly known to each other by virtue of sharing some commonality like nationality, religion, language or culture. Even when the members are not known to each other, they sometime share ideological leaning as in the case of political affiliations which are formed and propagated in the digital media space.

Digital communities formed on the basis of religion share common ritualistic and belief systems but are too diverse in terms of language and culture and consequently less cohesive. Conversely, an exception to this notion could be found in the case of minority Diasporic religious communities, which are intricately woven and more cohesive. They have been found to make use of new media to safeguard their constitutional rights and existential security. The Diaspora digital communities that espouse a cause or propagate an interest are often less permanent and ephemeral as its very *raison d'être* depends on transitory impulses. Some example of this could be seen during election campaigning, fund-raising and on critical issues when ethnic diasporic groups are formed and once its target is achieved, it is quickly dismantled. Nonetheless, such digital communities are able to achieve the target in reaching out to members of the group and creating awareness on such purported issues.

Diasporic ethnic new media has been found to be quite successful in helping out members of its communities in finding employment, accommodation and guiding the new Diaspora in a host country. The cases of Chinese and Indian students in the US and the UK are some of the ex-

amples, which have a strong digital presence. In the time of crisis, especially when haunted by racial discrimination or racial cleansing, traditional media had played information multipliers. In the case of new media, the speed of information reproduction is much higher but at the same equally vulnerable to misinformation. While new media is quite handy, it's not without its inherent imperilment.

For the diasporic community, new media has given an opportunity for exponential growth of information, while at the same time making it more parochial and close-ended as a result of confined intra-ethnic communication. The phenomenon has led to the growth of ghettoization of diasporic communities. The ethnic groups remain colonized by intrinsic value-system of their community and have been seen less open to and adaptable to outside influence. This is contrary to believe that new modes of communication provide greater opportunity of mass mingling and acculturation. There is less empirical evidence to suggest that the new media has helped in expanding the world-view of the diasporic population by helping them become part of a larger global community, undermining the restrictive practices of nationalism, race, religion and culture. The other school of thought that believes in retaining the unique ethnicity and strong identity as a differential distinctiveness in strengthening globalization does not find an equal expression in the new media. On the contrary, it's believed that the new media has compartmentalized the ethnic groups within their own identity experience. Whether the new media has imprisoned the diaspora mind within the bounds of digital screen experience, thereby giving them less opportunity to get exposed to interracial and inter-cultural influence, remains to be debated and discussed.

The contrast between the usage of new media by the Diaspora and the natives of the host country is diametrically opposite, as each have their own audience and members,

message and the content. There are issues that are dear to the natives but may be of little interest to the Diaspora. In certain cases, diaspora is held responsible for encroaching upon the natives' resources. In European countries, for example, where migrants are in sizable number, they are blamed for worsening the education and healthcare system of the country. This leads to the strengthening of prejudices against the immigrants and often finds expression in the new media amongst the natives. As a reaction, the Diaspora too behaves in a similar manner in their intra-ethnic group messaging, thus ensuing a blame game between the two.

The so-called ghettoization of information can be witnessed in the form of same visual and sound bytes circulating in the inbox and mobile screens of the diasporic communities with similar content and themes. This could have serious implications in the form of strengthening of parochialism and prejudices of an ethnic group. As a Diasporic population is already vulnerable in a host country, its further alienation from the natives could jeopardise its interest. The rise of Donald Trump in the US on the fear of job loss to immigrants well illustrates this assumption.

For the Diasporic population to prosper and thrive in a host country, new media could play a critical role in opening new channels of communication between the natives and immigrants. Unfortunately, there are few instances where this has been applied for pragmatic effectiveness. For the process of Diasporic movement to continue, it is important that new media proves a tool of dialogue between different communities, thus bridging the gaps between the two contrasting world-views.

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## CfP IPSA World Congress Brisbane 2018

### Panel: "Migrants' Access to Welfare in the European Union: Policy Transformations and Migrants' Experiences in Times of Crisis"

Panel description: This panel aims to address the recent transformations of welfare policies towards EU and non-EU immigrants in Europe and their impact on migrants' lives. Following the financial and economic crisis and the so-called "refugee crisis", several European democracies have started to witness fierce debates on the connection between migration and welfare systems. However, the way in which this politicisation of migration translated into policy changes in terms of migrants' access to social protection in the EU has not been sufficiently explored so far. Furthermore, the extent to which these transformations of the welfare systems of EU Member States affect migrants' lives is still largely unknown. This panel aims to fill this gap by focusing on two aspects. Firstly, to explore how European welfare systems are adjusting to increased mobility by paying particular attention to the transformation of social protection policies towards migrants at the EU level and in EU Member States. Secondly, to discuss

migrants' individual experiences in terms of accessing social protection in their EU (home and host) countries, thus trying to identify the specific role that formal welfare entitlements play in migrant social protection strategies. We welcome empirically and conceptually based contributions.

The paper proposals should be sent via email to Jean-Michel Lafleur (JM.Lafleur@ulg.ac.be) and Daniela Vintila (Daniela.Vintila@ulg.ac.be) by 1st of October 2017 (midnight GMT). The paper proposals should include the title of the paper (no more than 25 words) and the abstract (no more than 350 words).

For more information about the congress, please visit: <https://wc2018.ipsa.org/events/congress/wc2018/home>

## Student Migration from Punjab & Challenges of Assimilation in UK

Rahul Kumar

### Abstract

*Current debates at large have shown profound concern about Punjabi students migrants on study visa to United Kingdom. The craze for obtaining foreign degree among the Punjabi students have been in vogue for the last few years. Relaxation in admission process and eligibility criteria by UK colleges and universities further give impetus to migration of Punjabi students from Doaba region of Punjab<sup>1</sup>. There is no current, comprehensive data available cataloguing the Punjabi students in the UK. According to media reports, international students bring more than £10.7 billion to the UK economy. This paper examines the Punjabi students lived experience while studying in UK colleges and universities for undergraduate and higher studies. It tries to understand their struggles in an alien environment while applying an interpretative sociological framework to their narrative accounts. This paper seeks to examine the challenges of Assimilation<sup>2</sup> among Punjabi student migrants while studying in UK. It is argued that assimilation is the sole upward mobility for migrants from Asian countries who are studying and residing in UK. This article finds that Punjabi Students tremendously encounters social, emotional and psychological problems while assimilating in a multicultural society of the UK.*

**Keywords:** Student Migrants, Education, Assimilation, Phenomenology, Narrative research.

### Introduction

Migration can be considered as a process as old as civilization. Britain, like France, is a former colonial power, whose immigration and citizenship policies reflect in a complex manner the legacy of colonialism. Historically, Britain has been a country of emigration, not immigration, its settlers laying the foundation for the US, Canada, Australia and New Zealand (Anca Viocu, 2009)

The world is witnessing an era of unprecedented human mobility. In 2010, an estimated 214 million people migrated internationally (World Bank, 2011). International migration has been rising over time in response to global economic and political integration. Although only about 3 percent of the world's 6.8 billion inhabitants resided in countries outside their birthplace in 2009, the impact of population movement is highly uneven<sup>3</sup>.

Today, between 9 and 10 percent of the population living in developed regions is foreign-born compared with a meager 1.3 percent in developing regions. The UK's foreign-born population is between 9 and 10 percent<sup>4</sup>. The 2011 Census showed 12.9% of the UK population reporting a non-white background. The UK is a truly multicultural society with a large Asian Community. Currently, eight million people, or 14 percent of the UK population, are from ethnic minorities (The Daily Mail, 2017)<sup>5</sup>. According to Aswini Kumar Nanda, project coordinator at the Centre for Research on Rural and Industrial Development CRRID, Chandigarh, "Migration to foreign countries has become a question of identity for Punjabis. It has become a status symbol" (The Indian Express, 2016). Punjab live today in Britain, the country housing the largest number of Punjabis outside India (Raj 2003; Singh and Tatla, 2002).

The literature is firmly imbedded in Max Weber's interpretive sociology and its associative onus to attain what Weber terms *Verstehen*. The study is informed by interpretive theoretical traditions, particularly Phenomenology,

Existential Sociology, and Reflexive Sociology. Narrative research attempts to understand how people define their identities by exploring this temporal space "in terms of what is viewed as changing and remaining the same" (Bamberg, 2012).

Classic assimilation theory is rooted in the work of Robert Park & Ernest Burges, who viewed assimilation as the process through which ethnic minorities become incorporated into the mainstream culture. Similarly, Milton Gordon viewed the entry of ethnic minorities into primary group relationships with number of the dominant-which he called 'structural assimilation'-as the key to attaining full assimilation. Gordon also argued that, acculturation which he defined as the minority's group adoption of cultural patterns of the host society (including language, dress, modes of emotional expressions, and personal values) (Ramiro et al., 2006). Poyrazil et al. (2004) conducted research with 141 international students at various universities in the U.S. The students participated in surveys measuring social support, demographic variables and acculturative stress. Findings indicated that international students with higher social support and English language proficiency experienced less acculturative stress, particularly those who developed social relationships with host nationals. A sudden loss of familiar cultural norms and familial support often make international students more vulnerable to experiencing 'culture shock'<sup>6</sup>. The process of adaptation and adjustment in a host country is challenging and social interaction and friendship (Belford, 2017).

### Methodology

The use of Internet-based data has become widespread in many academic fields, especially health research and education; Farrell & Peterson (2010) state that the use of internet based data has become wide spread in many academic field especially health research and education. The research carried out through online closed-ended questionnaire sent to the students studying in various UK Col-

lege and Universities and posting calls for respondents on social networking site pages and forums.

Some students were contacted via Skype. The sample of respondents consisted of seven students who are currently studying in their first year of a degree course. These respondents have migrated to UK on study visa from Punjab, India. Out of seven respondents five male and two female, aged 19-25 years old. The approach was to include students having different experiences. These respondents are from different locations including Northwest, North-west, Midlands and Southeast of UK. Respondents were told through initial communication and a more detailed information sheet that the aim of the survey is to understand experiences of students in multicultural society of UK. Online interviews were digitally recorded, transcribed verbatim and then analyzed thematically. To safeguard respondent confidentiality, all names in the survey are pseudonyms.

### Education

Studying in a foreign country can impose numerous challenges on international students, including linguistic, accommodation, dietary, academic, financial, interpersonal, and intrapersonal problems (Jieru Bai, 2016). According to some studies, there has been a steady annual rise of 7% Indians travelling overseas for a degree. More than 53,000 Indians went abroad in 2000 and at the end of the decade, the count shot up to 1.9 lakh. Between 2000 and 2009, the count of Indian students in Europe has increased from 3,348 to 51,556, with the UK separately logging a rise from 3,962 to 36,105. (TOI, 2012). The UNESCO Institute for Statistics demonstrate the global number of foreign students pursuing tertiary education abroad increased from 1.6 million in 1999 to 2.8 million in 2008. Children who migrate alone are especially vulnerable, as work requirements, poverty, poor health, and language barriers easily exclude them from schools (UNDP, 2009). Nationality and identity influence societal acceptance in the host society. Bhupinder Singh described his experience as such:

*I came to Southall on study visa and joined undergraduate college to pursue a degree. I faced tremendous racial slurs such as Paki, vulgar, clown in the classroom especially from non-white classmates which distracted me greatly from my studies. In the classroom I felt myself as an outcast sitting in the last row deliberating about my academic career in UK. [Singh]*

In a similar vein, Gurpreet Kaur reveals a heart touching incident occurred with her in Birmingham:

*My uncle a citizen of UK has invited me to study in Birmingham. I joined undergraduate college. I was quite new to the culture of United Kingdom. My female non-white classmates used to abuse me in English which, in the beginning, I could not fully comprehend. Most of the derogatory comments ascribed to my Punjabi dress. Male non-white classmates used to throw ink on me. There is hardly any mechanism under which ethnic students could take up the matter with the college authority. I feel depressed*

*while telling that I had to quit my studies under tremendous mental and emotional stress [Kaur]*

Kulwinder Singh's story has different connotations. The key difference between Singh and Kaur's stories is that Kulwinder Singh did not experience racial isolation firsthand, he avoided attending a social function on the experience of other Punjabi students who had encountered bad experience:

*In our college, we celebrate Annual Function. On the same morning I had to go around with a list of students who are going to attend the function. And all of the non-white said they are not going. On asking I came to know that they were knowingly avoiding non-white students. My other friend told me not to go, you will be uncomfortable. The white classmates mingle with the white students and the Black students mingle with the Black students. [Singh]*

### Assimilation

Assimilation of new comers into the UK society is a great challenge. For the United Kingdom many immigrant youth are of Asian origin. Immigrant youth in UK undergo various stages to get integrated into the host society. Sloboldan Djajic (2003) argues that assimilation of immigrants is a multi-dimensional process of enormous complexity. Racial violence around the world against the ethnic minority people has assumed a dangerous proportion. The UK government Assimilation policy ensure equality and justice for all immigrants. According to W.E.B Du Bois, a critical social theorist, "Race is an ideological, discursive, and material force".

The introduction of "the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE)" in 1976 which came into force in 1977 is a non-departmental body in United Kingdom which aims to address racial discrimination and promote racial equality. To protect and safeguard the interests of minority ethnic group is a milestone in this direction. The Act prohibits discrimination by way of direct, indirect discrimination and victimization. The Department of Education and Science (DES) saw multicultural education as enabling "all ethnic groups, both minority and majority, to participate fully in shaping society ... whilst also allowing, and where necessary assisting the ethnic minority communities in maintaining their distinct ethnic identities within a framework of commonly accepted values" (DES, 1985).

Young students in a diverse, complex society of the UK reproduce their own identities and understand that identity within their peer groups and communities. Punjabi culture and tradition encompasses distinctive attire and cuisine. Turban (also known as the Dastar, pagri or Pagg) is an essential part of everyday life and reaffirmation of Sikh faith. Sukhwinder Singh & others stated:

*My social interaction with the people in UK started when I went for the first day to the college. Everyone was suspicious about my turban. On the very first day, I had to answer to many classmates about turban and what does it stand for. Many of my classmates relate my Sikh identity to Afghani*

and Taliban. I explained to them but all in vain. One day I got up fed up and cut my hairs. To integrate in different culture is not at all easy task. One has to adopt the culture of the host country culture to survive. I started invited my classmates to my home and celebrated local festivals.[Sukhwinder Singh]

I stick to my roots while living in UK. I used to visit Sikh Gurdwara and met many Sikh students who were taking assistance for settlement from the trustees of the Gurdwara. I could hardly mix up with the white or black students because of cultural differences. My parents were traditional in thinking and did not allow me to go with a white or a black friend to night parties.[Ranjit Kaur]

Racial violence is common violence against Asians in UK. The white people hate us. I do not go alone in the night even for shopping. I am always escorted by my relative hence I feel safe and secure. An incident happened with my Punjabi classmate scares me a lot. My Punjabi classmate was mercilessly beaten by the white ruffians on the street merely on the pretext that he tried to emulate western style. We students never feel safe in secluded public parks. [Kartar Singh]

We live a segregated, unequal, stigmatized Western culture where our cultural aspiration are suppressed. Neither we go to attend Sunday prayer in Christian Church nor they come to our Gurdwara (religious place). There is a deep schism between whites, blacks and Asians in UK. Exclusion and assaults of white supremacist culture is daily affair of UK life. Student-teacher relationship is quite sensitive. [Deepak Kumar]

## Conclusion

The finding shows evidence based on the academic, personal and social experiences of first year undergraduate Punjabi students studying at the UK universities. Assimilation in the host society has a number of dimensions (social, political, cultural, and economic) Racial Discrimination is a social fact in all societies. Racial Discrimination at various levels with migrant youth affect the educational and employment achievements. The ethnic, cultural and religious diversity is a social reality of Britain multicultural society. Social, cultural and religious segregation slow down the process of Assimilation. Language is usually the first introduction migrants have to their new society and, together with practical skills training, it is also expected to help settled communities to further their Assimilation. English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) is an innovative idea to stimulate inclusive assimilation. Intercultural communication and friendship promote assimilation. Finding from the online survey reinforce the importance

of social interaction and friendship among international students. It is important to rework on the current policies on racial discrimination in place and need to strengthen the law enforcing agencies through strong legislation to curb the incidents of racial discrimination against the ethnic minorities groups especially the Students.

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## New Media Contributing to Formation of Deterritorialized Nationalism Among Diaspora, says Janroj Yilmaz Keles

Dr Janroj Yilmaz Keles wears many a hat when it comes to research on path-breaking and emerging subjects like impact of new media on diaspora, digital identities, nationality and social networking. A Research Fellow at the Department of Leadership, Work and Organisations at Middlesex University, Dr Keles has worked extensively on Iraqi – Kurdish people living in the UK. His book *Media, Diaspora and Conflict* is highly acclaimed. He is currently working on transnational mobility and digital social networking, which is funded by the British Institute for the Study of Iraq.



Dr Keles believes that new media has become a critical tool in facilitating cross-national digital participation and also in the flow of knowledge, information, providing multiple supports and imparting a sense of belonging, sociability and constructed identities to diasporic population. In an email interview, Dr Keles deliberated on various issues related to new media and diaspora. Excerpts from the interview:

**You have done some of the pioneering works in the field of media and diaspora. How has New Media played a transforming role in the lives of diasporic population?**

In sociology of migration, the concept of “diaspora” and “transnationalism” have been deployed to understand the major population movements including all forms of dispersed peoples and later labour migration and the complex process of the reproduction, maintenance and negotiation of diasporic cultural, linguistic and political identities, networks/activities amongst and between diasporas and settlement societies as well as across the boundaries and borders of the multiple nation-states.

Historically, diasporas have communicated with their homeland through the exchanged of letters, telephone and visiting their homeland at some point. Until the 80s, the diaspora population consumed only print media and the TV programs of their country of settlement where they have either been ignored, stereotyped and categorized as a separate group, as opposed to the nationally defined hegemonic discourse ‘us’ in the countries of settlement. Video from the homeland entered into migrants’ lives in the 1980s. But the turning point came in the late ‘80s and ‘90s, when, cable television production, transnational satellite TV, the internet and digital technologies inter-connected people from different geopolitical spaces and took them virtually ‘home’. The Internet and its applications such as social media have also revolutionized the way migrants communicate transnationally.

The rapid development of communication and transport technologies have led to wider opportunity and possibilities for people from a migration background to be part of cultural, political, civic and economic activities transnationally. The new media has become crucial tool in facilitating cross-national digital participation and inclusion through new and innovative virtual networks that con-

tribute to the interpersonal ties, which provide exchange, flows of knowledge, information, multiple supports, sense of belonging, sociability and constructed identities

Today, the interactivity within diasporic groups encompasses the spaces they live in and the spaces they imagine as their homeland through real transnational and virtual networks. These new multi-connected, multi-referential online relationships;

1. Contribute to reviving of strong diasporic identities in the countries where diaspora communities have settled and built strong political, economic and cultural spaces e.g. Sikh diaspora in Canada, Armenian diaspora in the U.S and France, Kurdish diaspora in Germany. Historically, certain diasporas particularly displaced diasporas have a strong ethnic identity and political affiliation and attachment to their imagined homeland because of the collective trauma of displacement, memory, loss, longing for the return to the real or imagined and mediated homeland. These diasporas use communication technologies, particularly the internet for re-imagining their own communalities, constructing a sense of community, belonging and solidarity among themselves. This process has led to the development of strong diasporic and new ethnic identities in the settlement countries. These virtual networks also enable Diasporas to share their resources and accumulate social capital and mobilize individuals and communities for social, economic and political benefits among themselves in their settlement country. In this context, the Internet facilitates digital bonding and bridge social and economic capital for the Diasporas.
2. Provide virtual spaces for the struggle of geographically displaced diasporas to create political awareness for the ethnic recognition in their settlement countries

and campaign for certain political aspirations and projects e.g. the Kurdish, Palestinian and Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora and their transnational political mobilizations for an independent homeland. The diasporic political mobilization is often organized through media particularly through social media and mobile phones. In this context, the Internet has become an institution for the stateless Diasporas to develop and disseminate their language, culture, and sense of belonging and political aspiration.

- 3.
4. Contribute to the development of the social cohesion and multi-culturalism in the settlement countries. Diasporas are not the passive audience or “victims” but they are able to create media content (ideas and opinions) and influence public spheres in their settlement countries through their interactivity via media, particularly new media. The new media facilitates spaces for diasporas to negotiate with the dominant mainstream society and culture. This negotiation of cultural differences leads to the formation of strong translocal, globalized, hybrid, cosmopolitan cultures and identities and social relations among differently racialized and ethnicized people in the settlement countries.
5. Facilitate new conversation between movers (diasporas) and stayers (people at the homeland). Because the Internet has changed the nature of ‘relationships’, compressing time and space as it removes the distance between “thereness” and “hereness”. It has connected people from different political and geographical spaces and created virtual conversations, which have led to the emergence of the deterritorialized and virtual social networks, or virtual digital public spaces, which make possible for diasporas to sustain a strong connectedness with their homeland. This connectedness influences the pathways of diasporas and their hope to return to their homeland and/or invest in their homeland e.g. investment of Sikh diaspora in the Punjab state of India or the return migration of highly skilled Kurds from Europe to Kurdistan-Iraq to participate in re-construction process of the de-facto Kurdish state.
6. Play a crucial role in the well being of people and that virtual connectedness prevents isolation of diasporic individuals; it enables Diasporas who miss their friends and family to establish contact and it is particularly important for individuals unable to visit their homeland or families because of the repressive and oppressive government in the homeland. So the new media removes the geographical and political barriers that have prevented geographically displaced diaspora from returning to their homeland and allow them to keep in regular contact with their co-ethnic group, religious community or family, and friends in the homeland.

#### **Do you think that New Media has helped in strengthening the feeling of nationalism amongst the Diaspora?**

The new communication technologies contribute to a new form of deterritorialized nationalism in the age of global-

ization. This form of nationalism can be witnessed among the diaspora during periods of extraordinary times in the homeland. e.g. if there is an ethno-national conflict in the homeland or if a dictator tries to take absolute power and persecute the critical voices in the homeland and in diaspora e.g. the mediated nationalistic discourse of the current president of Turkey, Mr. Erdogan, who attempts to mobilize his nationalist and conservative supporters in Europe against the critical voices who were forced to leave Turkey to exile. The discourse of banal nationalism is used in pro-Turkish government newspapers, TV stations and the social media to mobilize some nationalist and conservative Turkish migrant groups. However, we should not forget that diasporas have access to the multiple sources and they are usually informed by their ethnic media as well as by the media of their settlement countries. Therefore, it is not easy for the nationalists from the homeland to influence the diasporas through nationalistic ideas, discourses, and images.

#### **Ethnic identity is an important aspect of diaspora’s life. How has it been impacted by the digital media?**

The denied, subordinated and suppressed ethnic identities by the dominant ethno-centric nation-states in their homeland have been revived in the diaspora. For example, the modern Kurdish language has been developed by the Kurdish diaspora in Sweden. Digital media has connected the diasporas around the world and acts as an institution for the ethnic groups who are subordinated in their ancient homeland. In this context, the digital media has challenged the state policies, discourses, and practices that deny and/or suppress the subordinated ethnic groups in their homeland and made the state policies, discourses, and practices meaningless. The Turkish Constitution banned the use of the Kurdish language in public in the 80s. However, satellite broadcasting, the Internet and desktop publishing by the Kurdish diaspora in Europe has made Turkish law on Kurdish identity and language meaningless. As a result of this, the Turkish government has decided to broadcast in the Kurdish language to “protect interests” of Turkish state in Turkey/Northern Kurdistan

#### **Do think that religious identities and ethnic disparity of Diaspora brings them in indirect conflict with the people of the host countries?**

It depends on the host countries’ policies of incorporating ethnic and religious minorities into political and cultural participation and the labour market. For example, the Swedish government incorporated state-funded migrant associations as part of the decision-making process and considered them as social agencies with rights and obligations until the 90s. They were expected to reproduce their ethnic culture and provided help, advice to migrants to integrate them into majority society. However, this ‘Swedish model’ has increasingly been blamed by the far rights groups for creating ‘cultural differences’, ‘segregation’, ‘isolation’ and hindering migrants’ integration into Swedish majority society. Therefore, Swedish government policies moved from seeing migrants as part of a collective corporate identity to treating them as individuals, focusing instead on anti-discrimination legislation and integration, for example the 2003 Act to deal with discrimination

at work, education and in society.

**The concept of multi-culturalism is the British or Canadian governments' policies. So the multi-ethnic, multi-faith, multi-linguistic and multi-cultural aspects are part of the globalized and liberal countries.**

In recent years, there has been anti-immigrant feeling in some of the countries. Online social media fuels much of these conflicts. Do you agree?

Yes, I do agree that online social media plays a crucial role in shaping hostile political and policy discourses concerning migrants. Online social media discourse uses a certain and identical narrative structure and a range of hostile linguistic and visual characteristics to paint a misleading picture of migrants, particularly refugees and asylum seekers. The various research found that the themes with which migrants regularly collocates are, for example, "floods," "invasion," "criminality," "drugs crime", "crisis", "chaos", "criminals", "foreigners" and "illegal migrants" as threat to social cohesion.

Using the statements of the extremists and far rights' politicians concerning migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers, social media disseminates negative and hostile tendencies in tone and content and has served only to exacerbate public anxiety. It has been propagated in media, particularly social media in the UK, Germany, Sweden and other countries that the majority of society are "concerned", "angry", "alarmed" about the "mass immigration" and blames governments for "loss of control of the borders." However, media ignore the fact that a remarkable portion of ordinary people in Western countries has actively joined in the "refugees welcome" campaigns to help refugees and asylum seekers in 2015 and 2016. Moreover, they ignore the fact that without the work of migrants, certain sector such as health, food, IT and education will collapse. Far Rights groups have effectively used social media to disseminate their racist discourses and hate speech against migrants in many Western countries. These groups use particularly online social media to escape from a potential prosecution in some countries where the law forbids incitement of violence on the basis of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation or religion.

**Do you think the social media has become dysfunctional in maintaining social order?**

No, I do not agree. The Internet is under the control of the governments and the conglomerate capitalists who have control over communications, culture and social order. Yes, the new communications technology demonstrated a liberating potential for those whose identities were denied and for those who are subordinated, marginalized and

excluded from the participation in governance process in their country. The impact of the Internet, especially social media on the growth of online activism among young people has been widely discussed.

In recent years, particularly in the context of the Arab Spring, 2011 Occupy Wall Street movements, the 2014 Occupy Central protests in Hong Kong shows that social media plays an important role in facilitating people's social and political participation, their collective activisms through political movements, protests and forming an opinion. The Internet has made the mobilization of people possible for various issues in many countries. In this sense, social media becomes a hub for performing a new citizenry, constructing and expressing individual and collective identities, political opinion and positions, belonging and solidarity but simultaneously these issues are also constantly negotiated.

Virtual spaces may have a liberating potential, a new form of digital participatory citizenry and interaction between differently socialized, racialized and ethnicized people. However, it is important to mention that the information and services offered by these virtual communities are mainly consumed by those who are computer literate. Computer illiterate people become increasingly "information-poor" and are therefore confronted with exclusion and inequality. The differences in skills for utilizing the Internet are due to age, gender, ethnicity, poverty etc. This phenomenon is defined as the "digital divide" between "those in possession of the information globe and those that are not". The digital divide is related to poverty. Those who are computer illiterate and lack English language knowledge have problems accessing the Internet and using certain software programs to create content. They have difficulty in accessing information and digitalized governmental services and even economic resources, e.g. they may be unable to fill in job applications etc. On the other hand, having access to Internet-based information from multiple sources can give political and social status to certain individuals within the small but politically as well as economically active groups.

To sum up, the Internet provides opportunities to people for multiple issues but governments use their power to monitor all the Internet traffic and prevent any dysfunctionality. The governments have been criticized for increasing surveillance of citizens that are leading to the restriction of political and personal freedoms of the citizens.

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### **Call for Entries: 2017 Global Migration Film Festival**

The UN Migration Agency (IOM) is inviting professional and emerging filmmakers to submit perception-changing films about the migrant experience for the second annual Global Migration Film Festival (5–18 December).

The Global Migration Film Festival showcases films that capture the promise and challenges of migration for those who leave their homes in search of a better life and the unique contributions migrants make to their new communities.

The film submission period is from 3 July to 17 September 2017. Festival themes: The promise and challenge of migration, and the positive contributions migrants make to their new communities.

For more details about IOM's Global Migration Film Festival and the i am a migrant campaign, email: migfilmfest@iom.int

### The Sacred and the Profane: Diaspora Religion and Historiography

Vijay Kumar Soni

The Indian Diaspora: Hindus and Sikhs in Australia | Purushottama Bilimoria, Jayant Bhalchandra Bapat, Philip Hughes | D.K. Printworld, New Delhi, 2015 | ISBN-13: 978-8124608128 | Pages: 496 | Price: \$26.79

The world of research is the world of world-views. The way we perceive, think and interpret empirical data is often fraught with interpretative errors. The Indian Diaspora: Hindus and Sikhs in Australia is a fine example of how to avoid these inadvertent aberrations of perceptual errors and look at the facts with greater clarity. Let me elaborate my hypothesis for the sake of avoiding culpable flaw of 'trendy' historical research.

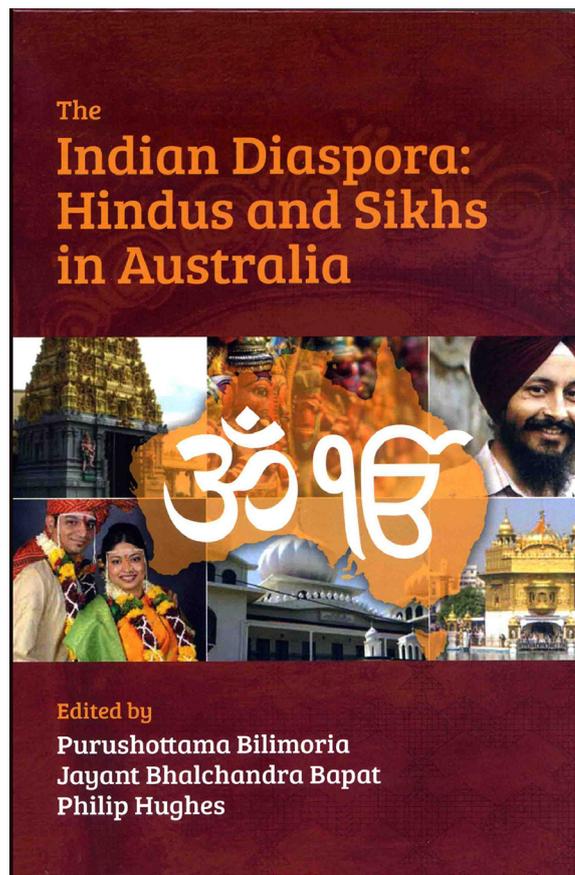
It was since Renaissance that the concept of secular studies, of separating religion from other rational and scientific subjects, received special emphasis and religion became an untouchable child. The trend continued into the 21st century. For social science, it was a welcomed step. Incidentally, the countermovement, which was taking roots with every passing century, was little paid attention to.

We forgot to learn lessons from internecine and bitter religious battles of the Middle Age and the role it played in human lives. As a result, religious resurgence hit us back with lethal repercussion in the form of terror attacks in 21st century. Had we taken a balance and impartial view of the impact of religion on human societies, many of these tragedies could have been avoided. A better understanding of religion and its symbolic expression equips us with necessary tools to deal with these crises.

The Hindus and Sikhs in Australia is a secular study of religious expression of these two communities and should not be confused with the theological studies. As the book points out, the study of religions was a latecomer in social science research. It was the late historian Ninian Smart, who with this seminal article in 1987 brought the issue to the fore. We now realise how prophetic and guiding a research could be, if we to listen to its wisdom.

The author, to give a 360-degree view of the subject, has divided the book in three broad sections - The Hindu Diaspora, the Sikh Community in Australia and a separate section on general reflections on Indian Diaspora in Australia. It also deals with comparative case studies on women and gender identities. It covers 150 years of Indian migration to Australia - from mid-19th century with the arrival of Afghan and Indian camel drivers, hawkers and colonial indentured laborers to 21st century's Indian students and IT entrepreneurs.

The book, while dealing with various issues of identities, keenly observes religious symbolism in the form of increased construction of Hindu temples and Sikh Gurdwara in Australia. It however does not instances of minority religious practices coming in direct conflict with the majority Christian ideology.



The Hindu temple, which is called mandir is abode of divinity. Likewise, the author has instead of using popular gurudwara has used the term Gurdwara which means surrendering oneself to the Guru's abode. Both the terms, apart from being external manifestation of religious expression, are an attempt to dwell on the internal strength of the Diaspora community. It helps the community in retaining their identity and also in understanding the ethos of external reality in a host country.

Rich with archival research and rare visuals from the mid-19th century, the author has given a fair treatment to racial discrimination and prejudices of the White Australia that opposed South Asian migration during the initial phases. The author notes that Indian immigrants' contributions were significant, especially of 'Afghan Camaleers' without whose skills and labour the arid interior of the Australian continent would have remained inaccessible to white colonists.

It would be pertinent to say that the book gives a holistic overview of these two communities in Australia, not only from religious, but also from demographic, cultural and material perspectives. The author has done a commendable job by including an Appendix on 'Afghan Cameleers' and 'Indian howlers' by Richard Forster. It highlights historical reasons for the preference of Indian servants in the colonists'. It is enlightening to know that Indian elite of the 19th century also contributed to the process of transnational movement.

The remarkable story of Charles Prinsep, who served as Advocate General in the East India Company in Kolkata, is quite intriguing. The author notes, "Prinsep, along with other members of the Calcutta elite including Dwarkanath Tagore, was a founding member of the Australian Association of Bengal, an organization which sponsored trade between India and Australian colonies. Among the 69 passengers on a vessel sponsored by this association in 1838 to sail from Calcutta to Adelaide were '12 coolies' and 12 native servants.

It needs to be pointed out that Dwarkanath Tagore was a leading industrialist and entrepreneurs of Bengal Renaissance and his forward-looking and progressive entrepreneurial skills can be compared to today's Indian IT entrepreneurs.

The book, while dealing with Hindu and Sikh religious practices, further informs us that the religious practices of Hindus and Sikhs in Australia has been in direct proportion to material well being of the communities. The earlier Indian migrants who were personal servants and coolies could not afford brahminical religious rituals. There were very few immigrants who were Brahmins and from the priestly class to carry out the ritualistic tradition. As the

number of Indian immigrants increased and their prosperity grew, priestly class also started making their way to the subcontinent.

While the Hindus and Sikhs in Australia is a necessary and compelling addition to the rich diasporic study, it must be pointed out that like all other edited editions, it suffers from the lack of free-flow narrative. One meanders from one subject to another, without finding a linking pattern. But this should not be a deterrent from reading this wonderful book, which is a rich repository of laborious and intelligent research.

It could be a good idea for the authors to bring out a popular and abridged book on the subject, highlighting the major milestones of Hindu and Sikh Diaspora in Australia and imparting it an easy, historical and sociological read, as there are few books in the genre. The book is highly recommended for those who want to expand their knowledge in diasporic studies.

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## Call for Applications

### MOOC Course on "Mass Migration and Human Rights – Legal and ethical dilemmas"

Course Director- Inga Bostad

Host Organization- Norwegian Centre for Human Rights

The course, in four parts, employs a variety of dissemination methods, including documentaries, video lectures, interviews and texts. And the course opens for interactivity, including experienced web hosting that will offer further scholarly guidelines. Professor Stener Ekern of the NCHR is in charge of this guidance.

The first module presents the essential questions:

- What are the core principles of international refugee law?
- What is the relationship between human rights and ethics?
- What are the core dilemmas of European asylum law and policies?

The second module deals with Human rights and root causes of mass migration. In this module, one examines these causes with particular emphasis on North Africa and the Middle East, in particular Syria and Lebanon. The third module deals with the questions of Access to asylum - in

theory and practice. The fourth takes into consideration the long term consequences and challenges of integration.

The four modules are released consecutively on a weekly basis,

1. the first on Monday, September 18th, at 08:00 GMT.
2. The second, exactly one week later, on September 25th,
3. followed by the third on October 2nd, and, finally,
4. on October 9th at 08:00 GMT, the final and fourth.

All four modules are closed down exactly one week later, on Monday, October 16th. This implies that one can view all four modules at once only in the final week, between October 9th and 16th.

For Enrollment- <https://uio.bibsys.no/courses/162/pages/welcome-to-the-course>

For more details: <http://www.jus.uio.no/smr/english/research/current-affairs/mooc-english.html>

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Excerpts from course website. Collected by GRFDT Team

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We invite Students, Researchers and Faculty Members to submit a small write up of their achievements and awards to the editor. It will provide the scholars a platform to connect with peer groups working on themes related to Diaspora and Transnationalism. Information related to seminar/con- ferences/events can be sent to the Editor at: [editor@grfdt.com](mailto:editor@grfdt.com)