WHEN I SAY I'M FROM INDIA, THEY ASK ME HOW TO GET A TAXI: IMAGERIES OF CONNECTEDNESS AND DISCONNECTEDNESS AMONG TRANSMIGRANTS IN MELBOURNE, AUSTRALIA

Markéta Slavková

Abstract: ***This article explores the imaginations of life strategies and negotiations of the notion of the self among young transmigrants, predominantly of Indian origin, who migrated to Melbourne, Australia, on an overseas student visa. The goal of this article is to present dense and complex ethnographic observations of a particular set of imageries, based on which these transmigrants perceived their lives within the context of global migration. I provide the reader insight into who these people are, the imageries that led them on their migration journeys, how these imageries developed in the host country, the repercussions their decisions to migrate had in terms of their imaginations of themselves, and finally, how these transmigrants imagine, experience and negotiate notions of social cohesiveness across the borders of two or more different nation-states.***

Keywords: ***Migration; transnationalism; transmigrants; identity; Australia; India***

Introduction

The distance between Chennai, India, where Rahul grew up, and Melbourne, Australia, where he has now lived for several years, is approximately 5,455 miles, 8,779 kilometers, or 4,740 nautical miles. These numbers come from a distance calculator that measures the straight line between two points. If one could drive on this straight line from Melbourne to Chennai, it would take 99 hours and 11 minutes at an average speed of 88.5 km/hr. For most people, it takes approximately

10 hours and 55 minutes to travel by airplane between their points of departure and arrival, not including the many hours of waiting at airports between check-ins, security and customs. Airports are transitory voids, filled with the syncopation of footsteps, and collages of fleeting conversations. They are non-places pervaded by the ear-splitting cacophony of engines, spaces defined by the artificial light of fluorescent lamps – airports are the lack of sunlight. The air inside hangs thick and stewed from hours spent waiting for everything and nothing.

Rahul would prefer to sit like everybody else and wait for his departure back to Australia, but the person behind the counter murmurs about the condition of his passport. He is told he is unable to fly due to the miserable appearance of his travel document. He knows this is not true; he has travelled half the world with the same passport he holds in his hand, and if it weren't for the greedy fingers of the airport employees hoping for a stack of bank notes adorned with the portrait of Mahatma Gandhi, he would already have checked in his luggage. Not willing to pay the bribe, he wanders from office to office, eventually coming to a sluggish official who glances at him disdainfully, then returns to fixing the collar buttons of his shirt. Rahul tries to ignore him; he knows this is just another example of ordinary corruption in India and a jealous official trying to exercise his minor authority. The many minutes pass like decades, but finally the man dismisses him, flashing an oily smile with paan-reddened teeth.[1] To erase the event from his mind Rahul pictures Nandita, his fiancée he had met only a few days ago, and the thought of her softens his heart.

I let "the story" of this article[2] commence with the airports – the transitory "non-places," as Marc Augé writes (see Augé 1999: 109–110). I begin on the move, and on a journey, following Clifford's appeal that we make a note of travel and the technologies which enable these journeys, and

1 Paan is the Hindi word for betel, which is traditionally chewed in India along with other ingredients. It could be seen as a parallel to tobacco chewing or the cultural use of other psychoactive substances.

2 The entire article is based on my master's thesis – The Benefits of Loss: Life Strategies and Negotiations of Identity Amongst Indian Transmigrants in Melbourne, Australia, (Slavkova 2011) and thus largely comprises of prevailingly unchanged sections of the original text. Some of these conclusions were also presented at the biennial CASA/SASA conference titled Of Cosmopolitanism and Cosmologies held in September 2011 in Telč, Czech Republic. The study is based on qualitative ethnographic research. I conducted the fieldwork while studying at the University of Melbourne, Australia, in the first half of 2009, but I had already become familiar with the research participants in the second half of 2008. The majority of the research sites were located in Melbourne, typically including my informants' households, locations of social events, university grounds and my apartment.

suggest the interconnectedness of various places around the globe (see Clifford 1992: 99–100) as I follow the stories of those who embarked to foreign lands in order to seek better lives. I attempt to trace the fragments of their fantasies and the seductive imagery of success for which they abandon the familiar for the unknown. With this vision they depart for Melbourne, a city most of them have never seen. In Melbourne, the imagery of success ripens; aspiring to the (business) elite is their dream. At first they are foreigners, and later they emerge at home. As they feel a belonging to more than one place, their minds roam, only to realize their homes now lie with their hearts. Who are these people and how did they get to this new place? Let me elaborate.

On a March Evening, Breaking News at the Lygon Street Apartment

Several days later, on March 6, 2009, Rahul, Sahil and I relax in the comfortable, worn sofas at the Lygon Street apartment in the northern suburbs of Melbourne, where Rahul lived before getting his own place. Autumn had just begun in the southern hemisphere and, as night falls, a gentle sea breeze brings a chill to the city. "I've never lived in such a cold place," sighs Sahil, who grew up in the tropical climate of Bombay[3] and couldn't fully comprehend the idea of four seasons until he moved abroad. What he knew as a vague concept from schoolbooks began to materialize as he established himself on a different continent – in a city with at least three seasons, two of which Sahil experienced as generally unpleasant. Now, less than a day had passed since the end of his family visit in humid, smog-veiled Bombay. He was the last of his friends to return from the annual visits to the homelands commonly undertaken during the Australian university summer break. Sahil had reached Melbourne only that morning, and he longed for the city he had left behind. Before he would readjust to his Melbournian life again, he found himself in transition: he felt solitary, didn't enjoy food, and worst

A small amount of the data was collected in India, mostly in Mumbai and partly in Goa, on my two-weeks long visit of my key-informant and gate-keeper Sahil and his family. Sahil enabled me to enter the social life of the group of his closest friends I came to study, and ultimately it was he who made this fieldwork possible. In order to bring the reader deeper insight of the topic, this article is intentionally written in an experimental genre of ethnographic creative non-fiction. However, the perceptive reader should be able to understand the analytical dimension that inherently stands out from the story line.

3 The geographical names are used with respect to my informants' everyday use of the language. Generally the colonial titles were preferred over the contemporary indigenized names. Mumbai was always referred to as Bombay, but Chennai was always titled Chennai and never Madras.

of all – he hated the cold. Despite this, the reunion with his closest Melbournian friends, his first and most important social arrangement planned for that day, made him noticeably cheer up.

In contrast to the chilly, evening streets, the inside of the apartment radiates warmth and familiarity. Dhruv and Vivek, who rent the apartment, are Rahul's and Sahil's close friends, and they care for each other as family. I think of Dhruv and Vivek as the "inseparables" – they are always together, and are more like brothers than mere friends. They are both from the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu, and knew each other from high school in Chennai. Together they implemented the idea to migrate to Australia for their university educations; they had always shared an apartment, they worked together at a call center until recently, and they spend much of their free time in each other's company as well. Their relatively spacious flat on the multicultural end of Lygon Street consists of two bedrooms and a living area with a kitchen. Apart from Dhruv and Vivek, who each have a bedroom, there are usually one or two other people who share the living and dining space dominated by the television and PlayStation. Many other friends visit daily. Upon entering, people remove their shoes and place them by the door.[4] Appointments are rare, and people come and go at random.

The Lygon Street flat is where the ones who consider themselves a family abroad gather; they cook, chat and play Tekken.[5] Squashed in the two sofas in front of the TV, they share food, speak of ideas and the struggles of everyday life, and imagine and dream together of a promising future. These friends constituted the core of Sahil's Melbournian community of affection – a community based on mutually shared emotional ties in terms of both kin and friendships motivated by the individual desire of belonging and participation.[6] Including Dhruv, Vivek, Rahul, and Sahil, my key-informant,[7] this Melbournian community of affection

4 A common, hygienic habit in India, also practived in European countries such as the Czech Republic.

5 Tekken – literally the "Iron Fist" – a series of Japanese fighting games published and developed by Namco.

6 Through this concept, I attempt to expand on Appadurai's notion of neighborhoods (Appadurai 1996: 178–185). The concept of communities of affection is more closely elaborated upon in my master's thesis (Slavkova 2011: 19, 20).

7 By limiting the scope of research interest to Sahil's social network of closest friends I intended to stress the importance of studying actually existing social formations, and thus focus on the processes that create these formations (Gupta and Fergusson also emphasize the importance of studying "local communities" – see Gupta and Fergusson 1997: 25, 26).

contained 14 close friends, the subjects of this article. Of the 14 friends, 8 were officially regarded as Indian nationals, bearers of the ink-colored passports adorned with the Sarnath Lion Capital of Ashoka in gold. Then there was Ram, who gave up his Indian citizenship to become an Australian. He experienced little change in his loyalties as he swapped his Indian and Australian passports; the new one was also ink-colored, but portrayed an emu and a kangaroo.[8]

The rest of Sahil's friends came from elsewhere. He met most of them through a group assignment in the class of Strategic Management, with the exception of the Mauritian Yash, who was Sahil's housemate when he first moved to the city. In the class there was Kerem from Turkey, who fell in love with surfing and the soft-spoken Thai girl Chor, who came to Australia to improve her marketing skills. Penelope moved to Australia for a Master's of Applied Commerce, to fulfill her dream of working for Rip Curl, and to escape the "petit bourgeois" climate of France. Finally there was Singaporean Lili of Chinese-Indonesian origin, who tried to free herself from the shadow of her father; she was notorious for her baking and distribution of cookies, muffins and cakes. Apart from friendship, there was more that connected these friends. They were all transmigrants[9] in their mid-twenties. The majority of them came from relatively well established, financially secure families of middle class and upper class backgrounds, where the parents encouraged and could afford to sponsor their children to obtain higher education abroad. They had come to Australia on an overseas student visa[10] in order to study at good universities in Melbourne, primarily in the field of business, economics, commerce and marketing. By March 2009, the majority of them had been living in Melbourne for about three years.

8 If an Indian national voluntarily acquires another citizenship, his Indian citizenship is automatically terminated (see Ministry of Home Affairs – Government of India, the Citizenship Act, 1955). India has partially weakened the more than fifty-year-old regulations in order to maintain close links with the large Indian diaspora. This has led to the introduction of Overseas Citizenship of India (OCI). OCI is not the exact equivalent of dual-citizenship, but it can be perceived as a form of permanent residency for people of Indian origin (PIO – Persons of Indian Origin) who are simultaneously holders of a foreign citizenship (see Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs (MOIA) and the Citizenship Act, 1955).

9 I accept Basch's, Glick-Shiller's and Szanton Blanc's proposal to perceive contemporary immigrants in terms of the concept of transmigrant (Basch, Glick Schiller, and Szanton Blanc 1999: 73–105) According to these authors: "Transmigrants are immigrants whose daily lives depend on multiple and constant interconnections across international borders and whose public identities are configured in relationship to more than one nation-state (Basch, Glick Schiller, and Szanton Blanc 1999: 73).

10 (Overseas) Student visa is an international student visa program administered by the Department of Immigration and Citizenship, Australia.

In the late afternoon when Sahil and I arrive at the Lygon Street apartment, only Rahul is there. Vivek is at the gym engaging in his regular body building routine, and Dhruv is stuck at work. Sahil and Rahul enter a passionate conversation regarding their recent airport experiences. They speak in English, the preferred language of communication. Rahul recalls the story of the airport harassment in India. "Unbelievable," he says. "I couldn't wait to be out of there. But Dubai airport was all right, except those women covered in a head veil – that's just not right." "I agree," nods Sahil. "Anyway what's wrong with the airport security these days? Anytime I go through the check I'm worried they will confuse me with a terrorist or at least give me extra troubles," says Rahul, irked. "Yeah man, even I feel like that every time," Sahil agrees, and raises his voice: "Just because we are brown, they think we must be terrorists. Come on, we are from India, we are no terrorists, we are not even from the same part of the world!" He laughs. "Ridiculous," says Rahul. "I was flying through Dubai when I went to Bombay as well," says Sahil. "Man, why am I always so unlucky to sit next to somebody annoying? I get to my seat and I see this other Indian next to me, you know one of those types who are taxi drivers here. I think, oh know, why do I have to sit next to him? Even worse, he's acting all friendly and tries to talk to me. I didn't feel like talking, why bother, so I just ignored him and looked outside the window. So he starts talking to this other guy instead and man, you wouldn't believe," Sahil chuckles, "He asks the guy: Are you a farmer?" With these last words both Sahil and Rahul burst into loud laughter that makes them nearly tear. I smile politely, but I feel perplexed as to why they found the anecdote so funny.

Later when the laughter quiets, Rahul says: "I have some news to tell you." His voice grows serious. He smiles, and calmly states, "I'm getting married. It is a typical arranged marriage." He exhibits the incarnadine "holy thread" wrapped around his right wrist. Sahil and I both congratulate him, but the unexpected announcement triggers a rash of questions. "How did it happen?" Sahil wants to know. As Rahul explains, Sahil teases him: "Show me a photo of her. She's nice." "Yes, I liked her at first sight," Rahul replies. However, the more Rahul speaks, the more anxious Sahil grows. "But why?" he thinks. Instead, he asks compassionately: "How do you manage?" Deep inside, he feels shaken. The news clears the jovial atmosphere, for this is a serious matter – Rahul is now an adult, and engaged, and it becomes clear he is returning to India. That evening no one cooked; we dined on vegetarian pizza ordered over the phone. Some of us smoked cigarettes instead of having dessert (Vivek drank a protein shake), and Tekken was played.

The news of Rahul's marriage clouds Sahil's mind and escalates into a conflict on the following day. Sahil and I agreed to cook a communal dinner at the Lygon Street apartment. I am busy with *bengain bhurta*, a delicious spicy dish prepared from burned eggplant, while Sahil works on his favorite dish – chicken curry. Because Sahil keeps wandering off to speak to Dhruv, Vivek helps me chop ingredients and roll *chapattis*. Vivek and I share a passion for cooking and often we end up in a kitchen together; a proper Indian style dinner consists of more than just one dish, and there are always several mouths to feed. In the meantime, Sahil confesses to Dhruv he finds Rahul's arranged marriage shocking. Dhruv snaps: "Stop criticizing our traditions. Arranged marriages are normal. It's normal to get married that way, there's nothing wrong with that. For how long did your parents know each other before they got married?"[11] Sahil says nothing, and looks noticeably upset. He can't find an answer; his parents' marriage was also arranged, but he can't imagine himself in the same position as Rahul. Dhruv's reaction leaves him surprised. Most of the others can't imagine themselves in Rahul place either. I am also puzzled and try to understand why Rahul, whom I know as a cosmopolitan Melbournian, would voluntarily accept this centuries-old set of customs.

On the Rise of Sahil's Imagery of Success and the Astrologers Prediction

Sahil's mother Rupali often invited an astrologer to visit the family – the same astrologer, dressed in a bright white *kurta pajama* adorned with golden buttons, whom I met several years later during my visit to Sahil and his family in 2009. It was there in Sahil's home on Juhu Beach, sitting cross-legged on a red, ornamental mat and dining on Marathi cuisine, where I learned Sahil had travelled to Australia "due to the astrologer's prediction." When I inquire about the event, Sahil recollects: "Mhm, I think he came after my dad told me to go to Australia and I had already begun the process. So at the same time I was even applying for NBA[12] in India. This guy came. I was already applying for Australia but he didn't know all

11 A smaller part of the direct speech is based on a reconstruction from field notes combined with data analysis and may not exactly correspond with the actual sentences spoken at the site – however, the meaning and context of the statements is intact. The majority of direct speech comes from the transcription of interviews, with minimal edits to aid comprehension.

12 NBA School of Business in Delhi, considered one of the most prestigious educational departments in the country.

> this. He told me that I'm gonna study abroad. Not in India. So my mom asked him: would he do NBA in India or abroad? He said, abroad. Like his, what do you call that, eh the chart, it said that I'm gonna study abroad, I'm gonna stay abroad and I'm not gonna live in India."

Unlike his friends, Sahil never considered a life outside India until his ambitious sister Aashi decided to migrate to the US, and his father Ravi strongly recommended the same for him. Ravi had travelled abroad many times himself on business trips. Some of the family's distant relatives lived abroad, and the children of one of his close colleagues were examples of successful migrants in Australia. After he consolidated these thoughts and suggestions, Ravi concluded that the US and Australia both offered a brighter future for his children than India. Ravi's decision-making strategy supports Hugo's argument that social networks (which facilitate the migration of family and friends, provide information about migration, and help new migrants establish themselves upon arrival) generate more migration (Hugo 2006: 109). Before Aashi left to the US for the first time, she received a contact of her mother's cousin's sister with whom she stayed for few days after her arrival. Sahil also received contacts of family acquaintances, but he preferred doing things his own way. When I enquired whether he sought support, he said: "No, I didn't bother. I was like fuck it, who cares?" Still, whether one seeks assistance or not, these social networks are one of the many factors that enable the perception of migration as a life strategy. It is in this sense that Brettell and Hollifield speak of the "culture of migration," a set of ideas in which migration becomes an expectation and a normal part of the life course – particularly for young men, and increasingly for young women (Brettell and Hollifield 2000 :16). Also, Appadurai points out this specific mindset while defining ethnoscapes insofar as more persons and groups deal with fantasies of the desire to move or realities of having to move (Appadurai 1996: 33–34).

One day, Sahil's father gave Sahil and Aashi a lift to downtown Bombay in the taxi he takes to work. When they parted, Ravi went to his office and the siblings headed to the IDP office near Churchgate Railway Station in South Mumbai – one of the world's largest student placement and English language testing services provider. Agencies like IDP India are part of the fast growing, global migration industry that rapidly rose along with the universalization of education and constitute a crucial factor in the growth of contemporary migration and its perception in terms of a possible life strategy (see Hugo 2006: 109).

These companies not only provide information, visas, and enrolment to universities: when it comes to the realm of imagination, these entrepreneurs offer a choice of imageries to success. Here Sahil was given a choice where to start imagining his life – would he go to Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the UK or the US? These countries were the most popular on the list because English is their official language of communication. These countries were also considered the most prestigious destinations based on the rating of universities.

"It's first the US, then the UK and then Australia," Sahil said and continued: "Don't know why US is first; I think because all the top universities are there and they say it's the land of opportunities and all that." The rest of the countries were, according to Sahil, the "screw-up options." Sahil didn't like the idea of going to the USA, which limited the selection to UK and Australia. Because Sahil's father had heard the UK was more racist and because his colleague's children enjoyed their lives in Australia, the destination choice seemed clear. Sahil cared little about where he was going, so he followed his father's suggestion. "I didn't know what I was doing. So I was like, who cares the UK or Australia, everything was the same," sighed Sahil. In contrast to Sahil's initial carelessness, for his father Ravi, the choice was indeed the matter of prestige. Success did not only entail a prestigious education, but also an image of a celebrated immigrant. Katy Gardner suggests, with an example of a different type of much less privileged migration, that those who immigrate to Western countries are often glorified (despite their potential poverty, which wouldn't be visible for the ones living in India) based on the examples of the successful returnees (Gardner 1993: 10). As Gardner argues: "The *bideshis*[13] are the new elite, and everybody wants to join them" (Gardner 1993: 10). In this respect, Ravi also hoped that, like his colleague's children, his own offspring would become reputable *desis*[14] whom many could only dream of following.

Not only did Sahil feel ambiguous about this life trajectory; he was also skeptical about the astrologer. He considered himself an atheist and believed in

13 Bidesh is a Bengali word corresponding with Hindi videsh, meaning the "foreign land," as opposed to desh, meaning homeland, with a clear reference to India (Hindustan). In this sense, desh is also often a substitute of words India or Hindustan with additional affectionate-patriotic connotations.

14 In order not to essentialize identities of these persons within the framework of nation-state in this article I mostly refer to the ones of Indian origin as *desis,* drawing the inspiration from Katy Gardner (Gardner 1993: 1–15). I perceive as *desi* a person inhabiting or coming from *Desh,* which is one of the Hindi terms for state, homeland, often referring to India as a country. Unlike Gardner (1993) I use the term to refer to both my transmigrant informants of Indian origin as well as their families who remained in *Desh*.

neither magic nor astrology. Still, he wondered because some of the predictions made by the astrologer "turned out to be true." Despite his uncertainties, he began to think of his life abroad as "maybe possible" – the prediction opened up his horizon and let him dream of a different life. The thought of being a successful immigrant thrilled him. At that point he had never been abroad and his imageries of success were the hazy and naive dreams of a child. They were the undefined groupings of his desires, stories of success heard from others as well as the plethora of images from books, magazines, newspapers, websites and TV. Because a poor economy had bothered him in the past, he dreamt of making a fortune. He would be able to travel – "or something like that..." Sahil's parents never fully relied on the astrologer's prediction – they had carefully weighed the decision from a more practical perspective before the astrologer was invited – but still, the prediction was a positive sign within the process of deciding their son's "fate." After all, it was based on the constellation of stars at the moment of Sahil's birth; generally considered a serious matter in India. And in case "the stars were wrong" and things didn't turn out as favorably as expected, there was always the possibility of repatriation, which made the decision process somehow easier: if one can return, there can't be "much harm" in giving migration a chance.

There was another reason why Ravi suggested that his children move abroad, one that made Sahil's journey quite extraordinary when compared to his friends'. Sahil's family originated from "the Untouchables," also known Outcasts, *Harijans*, *Dalits,* etc. "The Untouchables" are traditionally the most discriminated and poorest strata of Indian society and his parents feared caste-based discrimination of the children. The parents and even Sahil had their own experiences of caste prejudice. Thinking about his origin, a social status formed by hundreds of years of injustice, made Sahil angry, sad and shy, and he rarely spoke of it. In February 2009, Sahil and I admired the beautiful *Holy Spirit Church* in Margau, Goa, while the local school-uniformed children laughed, chatted and chased each other in the yard. I spoke unfavorably about the expansion of Christianity and Colonial rule, but Sahil disagreed. He liked the Raj and snapped back at me: "If the British hadn't come to India, I would be cleaning toilets, and they would still be burning women alive." Sahil was well aware that his father wanted to spare him the trouble he had experienced himself, and he also knew that the safest way of doing this was to leave for a place where castes don't matter.

Desh-Videsh:[15] Moving to "Multicultural Melbourne"

Australia was a place where castes didn't matter, at least not among Sahil's friends. Castes were rarely mentioned until I (shifting temporarily to the role of an outsider and anthropologist) made my naive inquiries. Several of Sahil's friends claimed to have no caste, and in this way expressed their lack of belief and rejection of the concept. Others had never wondered about their caste origin and simply didn't know; their caste origins remained locked away with the secrets of their ancestors. Moreover, they had realized that the idea of the caste system did not correspond with the imagery of the cultured, educated transmigrants and future business elites that they wanted to become. To speak of castes meant to discuss an outdated form of oppression. In Melbourne, a place called Australia's most multicultural city, and at a liberal, open-minded university environment that celebrates diversity, and within the busy business lifestyles, there was little reason for meditating over ancient history such as caste origin.

Earlier I suggested that these young people didn't come to Australia strictly for an education, but also the search for a better lifestyle and imaginations of success and prestige. An education at one of the world's top ranking universities surely facilitated the notion of success and prestige, but more importantly, the enrolment in an Australian university included the overseas student visa that allowed temporary residency for the length of the education program, and afterwards there was a promise of obtaining permanent residency (PR) via the General Skilled Migration.[16] In this way, Australia increased its attraction. One evening after dinner at Lili's I enquire about the PR matter. Her balcony entrance opens to a breath-taking view of downtown Melbourne, and we sit and watch the flickering lights. She replies diplomatically: 'We knew it would be easy for us to get it. So if we got here, we already studied, there is no harm in getting the PR."[17]

15 Videsh is a Hindi word meaning the "foreign land" as opposed to desh meaning "homeland" with a clear reference to India (Hindustan) and is also the name of the Indian grocery store in Melbourne, where Sahil used to buy his food supplies.

16 The General Skilled Migration Program is a visa category for professionals and other skilled migrants who are not sponsored by an employer and who have skills in particular occupations required in Australia.

17 General awareness of easy access to permanent residency also partly answers Hugo's call for clarification of the transition between temporary and permanent residency visas (see Hugo 2006: 113, 114). I conclude that in the cases of most of my informants, the temporary residency was indeed perceived as a bridge to permanent residency as they chose their educational programs by carefully looking at

After all, one couldn't fully consider oneself a successful transmigrant if after the completion of expensive education one was forced to leave. Thus, if an immigration official asked these student migrants why they came to Australia, the response would probably be the safe one: "for education." Instead, I suggest that the majority of these people perceived their translocation to Australia as an advantageous life strategy which brought them closer to fulfilling their (or their parents') imageries of success. In other words, most of these transmigrants didn't only come to Australia to study; they came there to live – if they could manage to establish satisfactory lifestyles. For many, like Sahil, this seemed quite probable.

Business is business; this education-driven migration was not only a good "life investment" for the young transmigrants; Australia profited as well. From a more recent historical-political perspective, these individual translocations were enabled by the significant transformation of conditions in Australia's immigration policy since the early 1990s that diverted attention from permanent settlement, developed a complex array of visa categories with a range of lengths of stay and commitment, and increased the focus on skill in the selection of migrants (see Hugo 2006: 107, 108). The overseas student visa has become one of the main temporary visa categories allowing employment through which an increasing number of temporary immigrants travel to Australia (see Hugo 2006: 111). The number of students studying abroad in tertiary education doubled within the last decade of twentieth century, and increased by a third between 2000 and 2003 (Hugo 2006: 111). In June 2006, 208,038 people resided in Australia on student visas – Sahil and his friends among the "lucky ones" who fit these ongoing trends (Hugo 2006: 111). The overall support of foreign student migration should be understood as a strategic move that levels the country's demographics and brings significant amounts of foreign exchange to the country. Thus, the focus of these immigration policies seems not only a matter of knowledge or skill, but also a matter of finance. Attaining a student visa requires proof of adequate finances, and there are high tuition fees for international students. As a result, the greatest possibility to immigrate is reserved for financially well-established elites. This creates an advantageous "business" for Australia, whose international education produced export earnings as high as 10.8 billion AUD in 2006 (Hugo 2006: 111). It is also precisely in this sense

the prestige of the university and whether their professional specialization would be eligible for the General Skilled Migration program.

that these young transmigrants aspired to become the global-business elite for whom the host country kept its door open.

Similarly, what these friends learned at school was that it was not necessary to impress with breath-taking analytical skills and high distinction. It was more important to adapt to the appearance of a flexible, sophisticated business-elite in vogue. Thus, for Sahil and others, school was not only an institution that provided education; it was a site of establishing friendships and the site of his initial integration into a cosmopolitan Melbournian lifestyle. The image of the cosmopolitan, future business elite was certainly not to be taken for granted or learned overnight; the initial, blurry imagery of success that had started them on their journeys came into focus when it was learned and appropriated in the multicultural environment of Melbourne's universities. When Sahil first arrived in Melbourne, the city felt foreign; there was no clamor of honking horns, squealing brakes, shouting, chanting. The air was not heavy with dust, fumes and heat. The city was strikingly clean, and although he had already learned of this in India it still took him by surprise. "That's what everyone said, all these countries are so clean and all that," explained Sahil and continued: "The air was very fresh as well, like not so much of pollution as it is in Bombay. Yeah, so it was good." Although he enjoyed the glamour of Melbourne, at that time he often found himself lost; the city struck him as *terra incognita*, foreign and strange.

Soon after his arrival, and based on his interactions with others, Sahil realized he needed adjustment, and that the most suitable place for doing this was the university. Thus, along with business and finance skills, Sahil learned, recreated and internalized the many images of what a successful, transmigrant elite seemed for him to be. Sahil liked to take one of his former Australian lecturers as his own example. He admired how confidently and captivatingly the lecturer spoke in his lectures, how smartly he dressed, how successful his career was, and how, despite his busy lifestyle, he could still manage to escape work to spend vacation at Saint Martin in the Caribbean, with its sand, palm trees, and translucent, azure waters. By the time Sahil graduated in Business and Economics at the University of Melbourne, where he now worked as a tutor of BPA (Business Process Analysis), he had improved his social skills and learned how to converse smoothly with strangers.

The city changed for him as well – now he was a person with a Melbournian history as the cityscape became imbued with his own memories, and he knew the streets, buildings, parks, and nearby shops. He was familiar with the local infrastructure and how "things worked." He had his friends who became his

family abroad and with whom he spent most of his free time: dining on egg curry, rice, puff pastry *rotis* and playing Tekken with Dhruv and Vivek in their flat, seeing Friday the 13th with Kerem and Penelope (devoted horror film fans), chatting with Chor while munching on extra hot chicken at Nando's, eating Asian fusion dinner with Lili and Raj, or sculling Jäggerbombs under the pink fluorescent lights with Dhruv, his Australian girlfriend Katie and Vivek at multicultural vibe of The Balcony club. He dreamed of obtaining a graduate position as a business analyst for PwC (PricewaterhouseCoopers) in the company's onyx-like high-rise on Melbourne's Southbank and, of course, he fantasized about visiting that beach at Saint Martin someday.

On a sunny day, more than two years after Sahil first arrived in Australia, I meet him at the university campus ground. I hold my regular dose of caffeine in a paper cup; Sahil, who dislikes the taste of coffee, slowly sips hot chocolate. With his long hair fluttering in the wind, sporting dark jeans and red Converse, none of the locals would consider him a new immigrant at first sight. "When we first met he was different," sighed Penelope, recalling Sahil's metamorphosis with her distinct French accent. "And then you know, step by step. Like it took a while but then I was like ah, it's quite nice now...we share more things..." Also Raj shared this impression: "He was very different from what he is. Now he integrates with people from different cultures...first two semesters Sahil was the guy who came from Bombay, now even his accent has changed." Not only do his friends consider him different – Sahil's ideas of himself have also changed. He now imagines himself as a Melbournian.

Transmigrants' Travelling Homes and Other Imageries of Connectedness

Like Sahil, in Australia, Rahul is a Melbournian. He now embodies the transnational paradigm, a person who flexibly moves across multiple nation-state territories and leaves his mind open to new ventures. Two months after his departure from Chennai, he smoothly slips into his familiar routine. He gets up before seven in the morning, brushes his teeth with Colgate Triple Action, irons his clothes and takes a shower. He skips breakfast, watches the news, and by 7:30 he leaves the house. He travels 17 minutes on a Metlink train from the western suburbs, where he lives after moving from the Lygon street apartment to the inner city. He spends most of the day working for NAB (National Australia Bank). He generally eats at the various bistros near the office during his brief lunch break. Rahul's week

resembles the routine of many young professionals of the city: Monday to Friday he is busy working, and on the weekends he goes partying in clubs.

Rahul, Sahil and I sit at Starbucks outside the DFO (Direct Factory Outlet) South Wharf. Rahul is sipping a tall Starbucks latte and smoking a cigarette. An impersonal female voice announces that another train is about to depart from Melbourne's Southern Cross Station. Passengers' voices melt into the singular buzz of a post-industrial human hive. Rahul is in his mid-twenties, a casual business type. He has just finished his daily errands for NAB. His clothes are a palette of grays and blacks that fade into his sandalwood complexion and short, charcoal hair: the derby shoes, trousers with nearly invisible stripes and his woolen RDX double-breasted jacket. Similar to other Melbournians, Rahul wears only a shirt underneath his jacket, no cardigans, pullovers or turtlenecks. Such fashion is symptomatic in a city where the weather is moody and literally changes out of the blue. In his business outfit, Rahul effortlessly blends in with the many multicultural inhabitants of the city, and like Sahil he considers Melbourne home. Rahul also feels a strong sense of belonging with Chennai, where he's planning on returning in half a year to get married. I can't help wondering how Rahul makes sense of himself in among these various homes. How does one imagine having multiple homes when the physical body can inhabit only one at a time?

The imagery of more than one home was shared among all of the young transmigrants. "Looks like I have two homes now. One in India and one in Australia," concluded Sahil's former classmate Ram. Lili best explains the imagery when she states: "Home is where your heart is. Oh, you know, home is Singapore. I mean, not because I was born there but more because my family's there. And I'm very close to my family so, you know, that's where my attachment is, so home is where my heart is, which is Singapore. But then, you know, I came to Melbourne, I started studying here and I made a life for myself and made good friends and you know, I formed attachments here and I realized that, yeah, you reach a state where, you know, Melbourne is home as well. Because it's where you have your life, you have your friends here, like people who might not be a biological family but...The really good friends you make here, they are your family unit." The importance of Lili's depiction lies in the idea that home is not necessarily tied to physical locality but instead is imagined more in terms of an attachment. For these transmigrants, the imaginations of belonging arise around their loved ones – their communities of affection, whether the ones in the country of origin or the ones in the country of dwelling. Since

these transmigrants imagine their sense of belonging in terms of emotional attachments, they can make their homes travel.

However, I suggest this is easier for the mobile transmigrant elite who can comfortably sustain physical contacts with countries of origin and flexibly adapt to various conditions. Even though Lili's "heart" was in Singapore, she imagined her home to be of a "nomadic nature." "It's kind of confusing but people live in so many places," sighed Lili and continued: "How do you really say which is home? It's kind of hard. Because everywhere you go, you kind of make a home there and then you kind of move on but I guess like, yeah, home can travel around depending on what attachments you have to that place... You can move halfway across the world for love. You can leave because you got a really great job across the world and you know there is so much cross-cultural assimilation. I think like eventually everyone is going to be a citizen of the world." Lili described her buoyant vision in a high-pitched, Singaporean accent she cultivated with pride. As Lili philosophized in her cozy Melbournian high-rise apartment about the ideas of what home was, she spoke of how she couldn't quite choose between the many attachments she had to various places around the globe, which from her perspective seemed notably smaller these days. It became apparent that this must be a privilege not many of us can reach to. Lili obviously came from a wealthy family, as shown by her Salvatore Ferragamo ballerinas, Channel Paris accessories, lilac Marc Jacobs handbag with a tingling Hello Kitty charm, and the dusky Mazda she drove, adorned with a snow-white toy polar bear hanging from the rear-view mirror.

The others were hardly as wealthy, and apart from Vivek did not own cars. To make the rent more bearable, they generally shared their apartments with twice the number of persons than would be the expected. On the other hand, they were fresh graduates of top universities in Australia, mostly in the fields of business and economics: they could afford to come here; they became cultured, educated transmigrants, and in their minds their homes indeed travelled as well. It is in this sense, I suggest, that this imagery of homes is a privilege, which seems symptomatic of a specific type of migration category – the overseas student visa, which already includes those who can afford to remain, on a certain level, flexible and mobile. "Home is not a place," announced Raj, who had the privilege of visiting most of world's continents and has lived in three large metropolitan cities in three different countries. "I find it very easy to integrate into the place but where you have a good set of people around it, that's where home is. And that might not necessarily have to be a constant thing as well. I've never formed that much of an emotional attachment with any place..."

On Stereotypes of "Punjabi Taxi Drivers" and Imageries of Disconnectedness

Previously I suggested that from the position of aspiring global, mobile elites, Raj, Sahil, Rahul as well as their other friends imagine they are connected and share alliances with dual communities of affection: Melbournian ones consisting of both *desi* friends and internationals of similar background and experience, and the ones in their countries of origin (family and friends). In other words, social cohesiveness centers on lifestyle and education, rather than national boundaries – "imagined community" in Anderson's words (Anderson 1983) or "community of sentiment" in Appadurai's (Appadurai 1990). Raj, who grew up in Doha, Qatar, explained: "I'd say I'm Indian because I have an Indian passport, that's pretty much it. That's why if somebody asks me where you are from, I say India." Nevertheless, his transmigrant experience allowed him to fit in various metropolitan places around the world, adjust accents, change languages and topics of conversation. "When I speak to somebody I can usually tell what they'd expect to see of me. So if I'm talking with an Arab, I'll change my accent slightly to Arabic as well. I'll throw in few Arab words. If I'm with an Indian, I'll say stuff in Hindi, I'll speak in Hindi. If I'm with an Australian, I'll talk about alcohol (bursts in laughter). No, but I mean, basically, wherever – whichever part of the world the person is from, I very quickly try to mimic the way that person talks to me and I talk to them that way. Of course I'm keeping my ideas and keeping the way that I am as well, I don't completely change into a different person," stated Raj confidently and smiled.

Within broader imageries of belonging and success, flexibility and adaptability seemed to constitute a crucial aspect; this was one of the things these transmigrants learned at universities, when they first came to this new place of dwelling. They wanted to be perceived by others as equals – liberal, sophisticated Melbournians and aspiring global elites. This was why they expressed disapproval and disappointment when associated with the less educated Indian origin groups (who generally came through different types of immigration categories). In other words, they disliked being thought of in "national geographic" categorization (Malkki 1992), which was how they were stereotyped in daily interactions. Those whom these transmigrants desired to disconnect from were generally labeled as uneducated, "villagers," who publicly exposed a penchant for "tradition." The ones who physically or ideologically supported the image of "the ethnic" were criticized or made fun off in order to express

disconnectedness from the ones that could threaten the image of successful transmigrant.

"I don't like the fact that a lot of Indians who come here are stereotyped. There are people who come from the villages. I hate the fact if someone from Australia looks at me and puts me into the same category as them!" said Raj and explained: "I'm talking about the ones who never step out of India and never learn how things work outside India and they have no acceptance of it at all. They just pretty much live in their own nutshell and, you know, they don't wanna integrate with people who are outside. You know and that's pretty much it. In particular people from the villages who have no idea and, you know, they don't work towards being accepted at all. They just be the way that they are. All they think about is okay, are we earning enough money, we could send money home, they gotta buy a house back home and maybe the fact that they've come to Australia is probably to get a better dowry."

This imagination of connectedness with educated business elites and disconnectedness with uneducated "villagers" reveals why Sahil and Rahul laughed so hard about the story from the plane in which they expressed disdain towards "Punjabi taxi drivers and farmers." "Punjabi taxi drivers" happened to be the group generally stereotypically associated with village background and inclination to "tradition." From the perspective of the flexible, mobile and adaptable transmigrants, the "Punjabi taxi-drivers" lacked a willingness to integrate. On March 13, 2009, Sahil attended a Hazard Perception Test in order to get his Australian driver's license. When I met him later that day outside Safeway grocery store on Lygon Street, he sarcastically noted that when he walked inside the building the room carried a "typical Punjabi smell" due to the taxi drivers. Then he joked that, if he couldn't get decent employment, maybe he could become a taxi driver.

Even though the "villagers" were criticized and laughed at, neither Raj nor the others dismissed them entirely – these transmigrants were like them in the past. "You can do similar things like people in the country. You can understand how they think, you don't have to change yourself but you have to be able to socialize," reconciled Raj and explained: "The local type of thinking can prevent conflict; it's about realizing the differences. See, I mean, a lot of things happen based on the perception that people have about other people. Like I mean if they wear *kurta pajama* and have a big beard and wear, you know, something on their head. In south India, they put coconut oil (in their hair) and it's acceptable but here you don't wanna go out for your first interview smelling of coconut. You

actively change the other person's perception about yourself," concluded Raj. The main reason behind the imagination of disconnectedness wasn't really the matter of the link to the "ethnic" heritage; it was the matter of mimesis. These aspiring young global elites were proud of their backgrounds,[18] and adored their closest kin and friends who remained in the countries of origin, and they enjoyed returning to them. However, it was a matter of the right time, place and "the audience" – one needed to expose just the right amount of "ethnic" behavior while living abroad.

The reason why they tried so hard to disconnect from "the villagers and taxi drivers" was that they often found themselves grouped together with these less-privileged countrymen by the other Melbournians (they became subjects of "indigenization" (see Appadurai 1997: 32). The young transmigrants experienced this as a form of a social stigma. They blamed the less-educated *desi* for giving a bad name to the entire community and occasionally firing up unnecessary social conflicts, e.g., regarding female harassment in the clubs. More than once, Sahil, Vivek, Dhruv and others experienced uncomfortable looks and were refused entrance to nightclubs, which they believed was clearly due to their Indian origin, but racial discrimination was never openly suggested in a way that could be an act punishable by the law. Thus, while discrimination was never blatantly practiced, many believed this made it harder, for example, to find employment with a foreign name, or to date an Australian girl. It was this social stigma, this subtle discrimination generally expressed by disconnectedness and distance, which disturbed their self imagination of the global elite. For Sahil there was another aspect to it. He perceived the villages as the hubs of "tradition" and perseverance of "conservative attitudes" and he had his reasons: his parents came from a small village in Maharashtra, the name of which Sahil carried, and because of the past "tradition" he hated and wanted to rid himself of the name. This "tradition" of the past was to blame for his ancestral oppression as well as his own. This was why connections with the "villages" and public expressions of inclination to "tradition" were better to disconnect from: moustaches, oiled hair, lack of deodorant, turbans, *burqas*, *salwar kameezes*, taxi drivers, and for some, arranged marriages – and for others

18 The imagery of Indian national identity was experienced with pride if one managed to present oneself as a "modern, cosmopolitan Indian" who had negotiated a background in terms of a western lifestyle. However, this problematic understanding of "Indianness" in terms of tradition occasionally clashed with their experiences of *desi* patriotism, which doesn't mean that their patriotic feelings would necessarily diminish.

like Rahul, not. All of these individuals continued to renegotiate their own slightly differing positions and decide for themselves which of these imageries of the self were better to be connected to or to avoid.

Conclusion

In this article I attempted to bring closer insight into the everyday lives and imageries of the self of a group of young transmigrants, prevailingly of Indian origin, who migrated to Melbourne in Australia. Using the example of Sahil's individual journey, I revealed that what takes these young people on a journey to unknown lands is often the glamorous imagery of success associated with a possibility of the life abroad. The particular imagery of success seems to stem from a broader ideological mindset, which others referred to as "culture of migration" (Brettell and Hollifield 2000) or ethnoscapes in terms of desires to move (Appadurai 1997) and in which the examples of successful migrants inspire others to translocate as well (see Gardner 1993 and Hugo 2006). Individual translocations are often a matter of collective decision in which family plays a crucial role, and the imagery of success is imagined differently by the various parties. In Sahil's case, these dreams took the blurry and largely naive form of dreaming of the wealth of the "Western countries," success and celebrity-like status of an elite migrant.

The translocations are generally provided by migration agencies such as IDP India that spread the information, support the idea of privilege and success in relation to education and provide the practicalities of the translocation. Enrolment into the local educational institutions constitutes a crucial necessity of a successful migrant to Australia. Not only will the person obtain a prestigious education; work and residency permissions are also guaranteed. However, this possibility lies beyond the reach of the majority of the world's population. The high cost of tuition for international students, necessary financial resources of translocation, as well as other expenses all limit accessibility mostly to the well-established, financially-secure social strata. Among other things, this shows that what has been described by some as a "South-North movement" (see e.g. Sowell 1996, Hugo 2006) does not necessarily mean the migration of poor people from (using Cold War terminology) "undeveloped" to "developed" countries, but often entails the movement of already well-established, highly educated/skilled elites. This is clearly shown in the Australian immigration policy regulations that prioritize financially advantageous, skilled migration

over the allowances of other visa categories (see Hugo 2006). On the other hand, it is always necessary to look at the individual histories for, as in Sahil's case, the previously oppressed poor can also rise.

From this perspective, the universities are not exclusively attended for the quality of their education but more importantly for the fulfillment of imagery of success and promise of residency permissions. The imagery of success grows clearer as the previously imagined destinations are reached and thus become real on an experiential level. The universities' liberal, multicultural mindset inspires the imagery of success to arise in a form of aspiring mobile, flexible transmigrant (business) elite in vogue. This image, of course, had to be learned as these young transmigrants, were initially more accustomed to the idea of the social norms and acceptable behavior in their places of origin. It was through the teasing remarks of close friends that the future elite image was negotiated and shaped. In this more matured state, the imagery of success incorporates the images of the self as of a transmigrant with many attachments to different places around the world and multiple homes. The imageries of multiplicity of homes reflect the plurality of experienced emotional attachments. As the imagery of belonging and home within the framework of the broader imagery of success becomes less experienced in terms of a place and perceived stronger as an emotional attachment to others, the imageries of belonging arise as those of "travelling homes" that one can build in different places around the globe. This is, however, closely linked to the overseas student visa these privileged migrants arrived on and as a result of their financially stable position, which enables them to remain flexible and mobile.

The more connectedness and affiliation one expresses with the self-image of a cosmopolitan, educated, transmigrant with multiple homes, the greater the disconnectedness and disconcertment grows among matters of what is comprehended as "the tradition" and verbally stereotyped as "villagers" and "Punjabi taxi drivers." The reason why the young transmigrants, especially those of *desi* origin, want to detach from these other less educated and less privileged migrants is that they are often put into the same national origin-based category by the other Melbournians, generally the ones who don't share the migrant experience. Because of this stereotypization, these transmigrants are subject to milder forms of discrimination that undermine their imageries of reputable, aspiring (business) elites. In this sense, they accuse the less privileged of "giving a bad a name to the entire community." The problematic perception of some of their less-privileged fellow countrymen is comprehended as a lack

of open-mindedness and willingness to integrate. Sahil also imagined these less privileged individuals to embody the perseverance of the Hindu tradition, which he blamed for the caste discrimination of his relatives.

These feelings were mostly verbalized in the form of jokes, which explains why the anecdote about a "taxi driver" aboard a plane asking the passenger whether he was a farmer was considered so funny. For the same reasons, Rahul's arranged marriage was considered a disquieting matter as it questioned the imaginations of the self these friends had established in Melbourne and conformed to "traditional attitudes." In Australia it seemed easy to disassociate from certain "traditional attitudes," but when they were back in India and negotiated their imageries of self with their families, who often didn't have as liberal mindsets as their offspring learned abroad, many matters became unclear. As the primary feelings of belonging and imagery of the self of these transmigrants develops around communities of affection, which are both in Melbourne and in the countries of origin, it also incorporates contradicting ideas. In the matters like Rahul's arranged marriage, they felt as though they had to take sides, but they didn't know which ones were theirs.

The argument concerning Rahul's marriage stemmed from different stances. Whereas Sahil emphasized his Melbournian imageries of the self, Dhruv thought of respect and a sense of belonging with his own biological community of affection. Dhruv's position appeared curious to Sahil since Dhruv was "putting on thick layers of Australian make-up these days," and he was happy with his *gori* (white) Australian girlfriend. Unlike Dhruv and Sahil, Rahul stayed calm. Even though he also didn't favor traditionally arranged marriages, Rahul wanted to give this one a chance: for the sake of his parents, the respect he felt for them, and for the honor and reputation of his family name. The idea of getting married in his mid-twenties was, in a way, a product of haggling or, more precisely, considering his parents desire. If it were up to his parents, he would have already been married for two years, while if decided independently, he would have waited another two. He decided to compromise, and his answer to the marriage was: "Yes." What he also learned in Australia was a certain amount of open-mindedness to new ventures and flexibility. He knew that this was his position, his compromise, and his ultimate decision to honor his parents, please them and let them choose his wife whom they would enjoy growing old with. For his biological community of affection Rahul decided to return to India, where he settled down with his wife and family and took over the family business.

The majority of Rahul's other friends including Sahil decided to remain in Australia, where they continued to renegotiate their imageries of the successful self and their ideas of multiple belonging and to challenge the stereotypization of their identities within the imageries of others. However, until the symbolic violence that stereotypes often include is shed, these transmigrants are left to wrestle with the ambiguous and contradictory imageries of the self. Until then, perhaps only laughter can help allay the confusion of the transmigrant. In the second half of 2008, at Dhruv's party in the Lygon Street apartment, I witnessed a conversation that played so strongly with stereotypes that, apart from feeling bewilderment or at a loss for words, there was nothing left to do but to laugh:

An Indian guy tries to make a conversation with two pretty Colombian girls saying: "In Colombia, you have some great coke there."

An Iranian guy jumps into the conversation: "Don't be so stereotypical man. When I tell someone I am from Iran, they ask me if I know how to make a bomb."

"Man, that's nothing," announces another Indian guy, who continues: "When I tell people that I'm from India, they ask me how to get a taxi."

Markéta Slavková studied both the bachelor's and master's programs at the Faculty of Humanities at Charles University in Prague, where she is currently continuing her doctoral studies. Her long-term specialization lies in the area of social anthropology, in which she focuses mainly on the topics of anthropology of food, transnationalism, migration, globalization, nationalism, conflict and identity. In her doctoral studies Markéta Slavková has decided to profile herself primarily as an anthropologist of food in the region of the Former Yugoslavia.

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