

# HOW GEOGRAPHY MATTERS

## Neglected dimensions in contemporary migration research<sup>1</sup>

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### *Abstract*

In Asia, migration is a complex phenomenon, the same as worldwide. The approaches of diaspora as well as transnational migration and transnational social spaces describe contemporary migration processes and are at the centre of this paper. Our major critique about these approaches is their dominantly socio-cultural perspective on migration, the missing link to other existing social theory, and missing consideration of the importance of place and identity, and the multiple ways how people perceive and construct space. To address this critique we present innovative geographical research showing the potential of social geography to contribute to the understanding of increasing mobility worldwide.

### Introduction

Migration is a complex historical phenomenon. Over recent years, large migratory flows have emerged resulting partly from asymmetric economies and labour markets, political and social factors, growing pressure on natural resources and lack of income possibilities and population pressure, barriers to trade and investment and civil conflicts (e.g. WIESMANN, 1998, VON DER HEIDE AND HOFFMANN, 2001, IOM et al., 2005, YUDINA, 2005). However, economic and ecological motives to migrate often overlap with socio-cultural expectations of widening one's own experiences and the desire to escape from social obligation and control (e.g. DE HAAN/ROGALY, 2002).

Migration is studied in various disciplines and is "defined broadly as a permanent or semipermanent change of residence" (LEE, 1966:49). Generally

1 This article was peer reviewed in a double blind process. It was accepted April 30<sup>th</sup> 2007.

2 Both authors contributed equally to the article. The research of Pascale HERZIG was supported by the University of Zurich and the Swiss Graduate Programme in Gender Studies. Susan THIEME received financial support from the University of Zurich and the National Centre of Competence in Research North-South (NCCR North-South), with financial assistance from the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNF) and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC).

migration is subdivided into several dimensions such as space (e.g. internal or international migration), time (e.g. permanent or temporal) and cause and motivation (e.g. free, impelled or forced) for migration (BÄHR, 1995; PETERSEN, 1996).

Two widely applied contemporary theoretical approaches of migration research are the concepts of diaspora and transnational migration. The concept of diaspora, which has been used for a long time exclusively for the Jewish diaspora, was adapted to other diasporas more recently. The approach of transnational migration was introduced in the 1990s by social anthropologists in the US, however it is closely related to the older concept of diaspora.

In our opinion, although migration is in any case spatial, by applying those two approaches, the relation of space and people has been neglected in many disciplines. Since geography has a long tradition of investigating questions of place and space, we show that geographical thinking can contribute much to the discourse of migration. Both approaches include a certain Anglo-Saxon bias because – with some exceptions – they have found their ways only recently into German-speaking research and teaching.

The aim of this paper is to inform scholars of Asian Studies from all disciplines about social geographical research about contemporary migration with empirical examples from research in and about South and Central Asia. Therefore we ask the following questions: How do the concepts of diaspora and transnational migration approach the phenomena of migration? How do these approaches relate to “space”? What are the major critiques and conceptual lacks of these approaches from a social geographical perspective? And, what possibilities does contemporary social geography offer, to address these lacks?

To deal with these questions, the paper is structured in the following way: First, we introduce the two concepts of diaspora and transnational migration to the reader and review their application. Then we outline the major shortcomings of these approaches from a social geographical perspective. By doing so, simultaneously we highlight existing innovative work and how research gaps could be addressed.

We understand social geography according to JOHNSTON et al. (2000:753) as “the study of social relations and the spatial structures that underpin those relations”. The two words “social” and “geography” already imply that social geography has many theoretical connections and interrelationships between different fields of geography and other subjects of social science. For a better understanding of migration experiences and to enrich diaspora and transnational migration debates from a geographical perspective in this paper we differentiate

between the terms “place” and “space”. The term place is used in the sense that people are physically present at a certain location at a certain time. Concurring with Gillian ROSE (1999:248) we suggest that space is always a doing (“doing space”), and it does not pre-exist but is produced relationally in everyday practices. Therefore we define space as the product of iterations between social practices and place. Following Doreen MASSEY (1999:283) space “is the product of intricacies and the complexities, the interlockings and the non-interlockings, of relations from the unimaginably cosmic to the intimately tiny. And precisely because it is the product of relations, relations which are active practices, material and embedded, practices which have to be carried out, space is always in a process of becoming. It is always being made.” MASSEY (1999) points us towards the importance of relations among people, and individual characteristics and social categories such as gender, age, generation, caste, race and ethnicity. However, these social categories are not fixed but rather understood as socially constructed (cf. NAGAR, 1998; ANTHIAS, 1999; HERZIG, 1999; 2006). Each individual is member of multiple social collectivities, which are constructed and maintained by social boundaries – boundaries that divide insiders from outsiders (HERZIG, 2006). From a social geographical point of view, phenomena of diasporic and transnational migration can be constituted in and through different spaces and scales such as the individual (or the body), the family or home, the community, the nation state or on the global scale. Following VALENTINE’S work on “Social Geographies: Space and Society” (2001), in the third part of the paper we use geographical scale as an organising device to address our critiques and think about how different spaces, such as family, community and nation state are shaped through migration, and how these spaces can feed back into shaping migration experiences. We conclude with an outlook and suggestions for a future research agenda for geographers researching migration phenomena.

In order to clarify our theoretical argumentation, we use empirical examples of previous research by the authors. Pascale HERZIG has investigated recent transformation processes among South Asians in Kenya, by focusing on gender relations, relations between different age groups and migratory generations (HERZIG, 1999; 2004; 2006; HERZIG/RICHTER, 2004; FREDRICH et al., forthcoming). Susan THIEME’S examples are based on a recently started research project on multilocal livelihoods with empirical work in Central Asia and earlier work on labour migration between Nepal and India (THIEME, 2006; THIEME et al., 2006; THIEME/MÜLLER-BÖKER, 2004).

## The concept of diaspora

“We have this affinity for India, we have the same culture and the same traditions. But we have been away for the third generation, the draw is not to India anymore. [...] When I’m travelling I say I’m Kenyan. To describe us as a minority it is good to define my community as Asian African and not only Asian. Because this gives me an identity that I belong to Africa but I am of Asian origin” (Kenyan Asian man, 60, interview 1998).

In the 1990s, the concept of diaspora emerged as a major theme in the human sciences (LIE, 2001). The concept offers an alternative way of thinking about transnational migration and ethnic relations in contrast to those that rely on ‘race’ and ‘ethnicity’ (ANTHIAS, 1998; WAHLBECK, 2002). Yet, diaspora was a term often used by historians to describe the Jewish people’s search for a home (Tatla, 1999). Diasporas, however, are strongly connected with colonialism, in fact colonialism itself “was a radically diasporic movement, involving the temporary or permanent dispersion and settlement of millions of Europeans over the entire world” (ASHCROFT et al., 1998:69). John LIE observed some general tendencies in the studies on diasporic communities. According to LIE (2001:356) “[t]he idea of diaspora [...] questions the teleological narrative and nationalist presumption of the dominant migration narrative. Rather than a singular journey from one country to another, the concept of diaspora makes space for multiple and complex trajectories”. Most significantly, many scholars working under the sign of diaspora continued to rely on the reified, essentialist, and nationalist conceptions of human flows and identities (LIE, 2001).

In seeking a common theory for the diverse phenomena of human migrations, analysts have suggested that ‘diaspora’ captures the most common experiences of displacement associated with migration: homelessness, painful memories, and a wish to return. Following TATLA (1999:3) “some writers are reluctant to extend the term ‘diaspora’ to migrant groups, insisting that a diaspora condition represents a unique and almost mythical experience of the Jewish exile”. Others are less reluctant. Recently any social group who has also maintained strong collective identities define themselves as a diaspora, though they have never been active agents of colonisation nor passive victims of persecution (COHEN, 1997; VERTOVEC, 1997).

There are several works which intend to illuminate the diaspora discourse. Steven VERTOVEC (1997) wrote an essay on the different meanings of ‘diaspora’ and stated that recent writing on the subject conveys at least three discernible meanings of the concept. These are (1) diaspora as a social form, (2) diaspora as



a type of social consciousness and (3) diaspora as a mode of cultural production. Östen WAHLBECK (2002) has added a fourth type ‘diaspora of politics’, which emphasises the political dimensions of contemporary diasporas.<sup>3</sup> Also Floya ANTHIAS (1998) analysed the discourse relating to the concept of diaspora. After outlining the three meanings of diaspora as presented by Vertovec (1997:277–299), the notion of diaspora as a field of intersectionality as suggested by Anthias (1998) is presented.

### *Diaspora as a social form*

Understanding diaspora as a social form is most common and relates to the conceptualisation of the diaspora of the Jews, it was later applied to Armenians and Africans too. Diaspora as a social form is characterised by a ‘triadic relationship’ (SHEFFER, 1986) between a globally dispersed yet collectively self-identified ethnic group, the host countries and the country of origin (VERTOVEC, 1999).

However, numerous analyses of diaspora (CLIFFORD, 1994; COHEN, 1997; VAN HEAR, 1998) refer to William SAFRAN’s work (1991) on the common features of a diaspora. SAFRAN’s conceptualisation of diaspora can be subsumed under diaspora as a social form as well. SAFRAN identifies six basic characteristics which help to assess whether an ethnic group is in fact a diaspora. He defines diaspora as:

“Expatriate minority communities whose members share several of the following characteristics: 1) they, or their ancestors, have been dispersed from a specific original ‘center’ to two or more ‘peripheral’, or foreign, regions; 2) they retain a collective memory, vision, or myth about their original homeland – its physical location, history, and achievements; 3) they believe they are not – and perhaps cannot be – fully accepted by their host society and therefore feel partly alienated and insulated from it; 4) they regard their ancestral homeland as their true, ideal home and as the place to which they or their descendants would (or should) eventually return – when conditions are appropriate; 5) they believe that they should, collectively, be committed to the maintenance or restoration of their original homeland and to its safety and prosperity; and 6) they continue to relate, personally or vicariously, to that homeland in one way or another, and their

3 The discussion is “mainly situated within the disciplines of Political Science and International Relations. Clearly, international relations are today increasingly complex because of the political activism of transnational communities and diasporas. The political relations between diaspora, homeland and country of settlement often constitute complex interdependent relations among three poles” (WAHLBECK, 2002:229).

ethnocommunal consciousness and solidarity are importantly defined by the existence of such a relationship” (SAFRAN, 1991:83–84).

Very few modern-day diasporas include all of the mentioned characteristics. Safran did not intend all of the criteria to apply to a group in order to consider it a diaspora (REIS, 2004), he noted later that the desire for return might be a utopian projection in response to a present dystopia (CLIFFORD, 1994). Another definition was presented by Robin COHEN: “The idea of diaspora thus varies greatly. However, all diasporic communities settled outside their natal (or imagined natal) territories, acknowledge that ‘the old country’ – a notion often buried deep in language, religion, custom or folklore – always has some claim on their loyalty and emotions” (COHEN, 1997:ix). That claim may be strong or weak, but a member’s adherence to a diasporic community is demonstrated by an acceptance of an inescapable link with their past migration history and a sense of co-ethnicity with others of similar background (COHEN, 1997). He proposed a typology which is presented in table 1. Some groups take dual or multiple forms; others might change their character over time.

The main problem arising out of this theoretical approach is that each diaspora is treated as a unity, however there are boundaries within the diaspora that vary over time and place (HERZIG, 2006). The Asian diaspora in Kenya, for example, reflects most aspects as defined by SAFRAN (1991). However, the Kenyan Asians lack a ‘myth of return’, at least within the long established families, but not within recent migrant families. Furthermore, the Asian diaspora in Kenya is differentiated by communities (such as Patel, Ismaili, Ithnasheri) which are based on religion and place of origin (and implicitly language, caste and class) (HERZIG, 1999; 2006).

*Table 1:* Types of diaspora according to COHEN (1997) adapted by HERZIG (2006)

<i>Type of diaspora</i>	<i>Main exponents</i>
Victim (refugee)	Jews, Africans, Armenians, others: Irish, Palestinians
Imperial (colonial)	Ancient Greek, British, Russian, others: Spanish, Portuguese, Dutch
Labour (service)	Indentured Indians, Chinese and Japanese, Sikhs, Turks, Italians
Trade (business/professional)	Venetians, Lebanese, Chinese, others: today’s Indians, Japanese
Cultural (hybrid/post-modern)	Caribbean peoples, others: today’s Chinese, Indians

The problem of treating the Kenyan Asian diaspora as a unity is apparent. In addition, South Asians have changed their occupation patterns over the decades,

and therefore can be described as different types of diaspora. With British imperialism they became a labour diaspora with thousands of workers under indenture. While most of the indentured workers returned home after finishing their contracts in East Africa, the so-called 'passenger migrants' (those who paid for their tickets by themselves) came in great numbers to East Africa to find their luck "in the America of the Hindu" (MANGAT, 1969:6) and transformed the labour diaspora into a trade diaspora (HERZIG, 2006). In the last decades, South Asians in Kenya improved the opportunities for education and occupation and transformed their lifestyles accordingly. Today's Kenyan Asian diaspora is linked with other South Asian diasporas around the globe, and can be ascribed as 'cultural diaspora' using COHEN's term. However, it is important to state that earlier forms of diaspora did not completely disappear while newer forms arose, hence, according to the definition of COHEN (1997), the Kenyan Asians are simultaneously a labour, trade and cultural diaspora (cf. table 1 and HERZIG, 2006).

#### *Diaspora as a type of social consciousness*

The second meaning of diaspora according to VERTOVEC (1997) has been developed relatively recently and puts greater emphasis on describing a variety of experiences, a state of mind and a sense of identity. Diaspora consciousness is a particular kind of awareness said to be generated among contemporary transnational communities (cf. GILROY, 1993; 1997; CLIFFORD, 1994; BRAH, 1996; HALL, 2000). The dual or paradoxical nature of diaspora consciousness "is constituted negatively by experiences of discrimination and exclusion, and positively by identification with a historical heritage (such as 'Indian civilization' in the case of the South Asian diaspora world-wide) or contemporary world cultural or political forces (such as 'Islam')" (VERTOVEC, 2000:147).

According to ANTHIAS (1998) this conceptualisation represents diaspora in a post-modern understanding, which denotes "a condition rather than being descriptive of a group" (ANTHIAS, 1998:565). To treat diaspora as a condition is to pose the problem in terms of the specificities pertaining to the process of territorial and culture shifts (ANTHIAS, 1998). This approach, largely situated within the vague area of Cultural Studies, includes writings on syncretism, 'hybridity' and 'new ethnicities' among groups of migrant origin (WAHLBECK, 2002). It is argued that the world is now fractured and fluid and all humans live in the same cultural predicament. Everyone is dislocated, no one is rooted, so there is no need for a theory about unifying capitalism (MANGER, 2001). Di-

asporic populations and cosmopolitans are now seen as liberating agents, as heroes of the post-nationalist era. And in this lies the potential (feared or celebrated) for destabilising the nation-state (MANGER, 2001). "Such approaches suggest that the bonds of ethnic ties and the fixity of boundaries have been replaced by shifting and fluid identities" (ANTHIAS, 1998:566).

### *Diaspora as a mode of cultural production*

The third meaning of diaspora according to VERTOVEC (1997) is usually conveyed in discussions of globalisation. In this sense, globalisation is examined in its guise as the world-wide flow of cultural objects, images and meanings resulting in various processes of creolisation, back-and-forth transferences, mutual influences, new contestations, negotiations and constant transformations. In this way diaspora is described as involving the production and reproduction of transnational social and cultural phenomena (cf. APPADURAI, 1991; GLICK SCHILLER et al., 1992).

A key avenue for the flow of cultural phenomena and the transformation of diasporic identity is, not surprisingly, global media and communication (VERTOVEC, 2000). It is obvious that this discussion frequently merges with the previously mentioned discussion within Cultural Studies about issues like cultural hybridity and creolisation among diaspora cultures (WAHLBECK, 2002).

### *Diaspora as a field of intersectionality*

An additional way of dealing with diaspora is conceptualising it as a "field of intersectionality" (cf. BRAH, 1996; ANTHIAS, 1998; HERZIG, 2006). According to MANGER (2001) this way of thinking grasps local complexity and contradictory processes. ANTHIAS (1998) argues that, unless attention is paid to difference and the material is presented to show that these differences are transcended by commonalities of one sort or another and in certain contexts, the idea of a community even as 'imagined community' cannot be sustained. According to her, there "appears to be a general failure to address class and gendered facets within the diaspora problematic" (ANTHIAS, 1998:570).

Increasingly, critics are seeking to understand the ways in which diaspora itself is gendered and the role sexuality plays in the diaspora identity (MIRZOEFF, 2000). With regard to gender, the role of men and women in the process of accommodation and syncretism may be different. Women are key transmitters and reproducers of ethnic and national ideologies and central in the

transmissions of cultural rules (ANTHIAS and YUVAL-DAVIS, 1989).<sup>4</sup> Therefore Anthias proposes that the issue of gendering the diaspora can be understood at two different levels.

At the first level of analysis, it requires a consideration of the ways in which men and women of the diaspora are inserted into the social relations of the country of settlement, within their own self-defined 'diaspora communities' and within the transnational networks of the diaspora across national borders. [...] The other level of analysis, regarding gendering the diaspora notion, relates to an exploration of how gendered relations are constitutive of the positionalities of the groups themselves, paying attention to class and other differences within the group and to different locations and trajectories. (ANTHIAS, 1998:572)

ANTHIAS (1998) asks for a diaspora notion that pays full attention to the centrality of gender, on the one hand, and to intersectionality, on the other. In doing so "it may be possible to see ethnicity, gender and class as crosscutting and mutually *reinforcing* systems of domination and subordinations, particularly in terms of processes and relations of hierarchisation, unequal resource allocation and inferiorisation" (ANTHIAS, 1998:574, original emphasis).

The concept of diaspora enables us to analyse and understand social relations that encompass politics, economy and culture at the global level. It pays attention to the dynamic nature of ethnic bonds, and to the possibilities of selective and contextual cultural translations and negotiations (cf. HERZIG, 2006).

## The approach of transnational migration and transnational social spaces

"My grandfather has been working as watchman [in Delhi], my father and so do I. [...] People from our region are not educated, so what else should we do in Delhi, other than work as watchman." (A migrant from Far West Nepal living and working in Delhi, 2002).

Globalisation is not just about increased flow of goods, services and money, but also about mankind and labour. New information technologies and a

4 YUVAL-DAVIS (1997) points to the centrality of the home in this process and thus of women's responsibility as home-makers: it is in the home that cultural rules and practices are transmitted to the next generation, through the switchboard of the home that the networks of ancestry and kinship are maintained.



new division of labour are some of the interwoven yet fundamental “global shifts” at work in today’s globalising world (BACKHAUS 2003). Therefore North American social anthropologists introduced the concept of transnationalism to grasp the dynamics of cross-border population movement (GLICK SCHILLER et al., 1992). The people involved, live between two worlds, their new place of residence and work (predominantly in the North) and their place of origin (predominantly in the South). Moreover these transnational communities became characterised as “de-territorialized” (GLICK SCHILLER et al., 1999). PRIES (2001), a German sociologist, developed the concept further towards transnational migration and transnational social spaces. He highlights that migration affects all people involved, i.e. migrants as well as people who remain behind. It structures the everyday practices, social positions, employment trajectories of women as well as men of different generations (PRIES, 2001).

#### *Achievements of the transnational migration approach*

In the 19th and 20th century, migration approaches mainly relied on the emergence of strong nation states and nationalism, viewing a society as a “national container society” (e.g. LEE, 1966). From this perspective, a certain (physical) place corresponds to a (social) space. Consequently migration was mainly seen as a uni- or bidirectional movement brought about by emigration, immigration or return migration caused by isolated factors, such as political or economic ones (MASSEY et al., 1993).

The transnational migration approach replaces the fixed container concept with the concept of social space. These are socially constructed spaces, which develop only through the migration process.

Related to the construction of social spaces, the approach puts social practices and cultural achievement of migrants, and partly also their contribution to economic processes at the centre. It describes daily strategies of people to deal increasingly restrictive regulations of immigration, access to labour markets or establishment of economic niches (BÜRKNER, 2005).

The concept of transnational migration has experienced a wide reception of political scientists, social anthropologists, geographers and sociologists (FAIST, 1999, PORTES et al., 1999, VERTOVEC, 1999, CONWAY, 2000; AL-ALI et al., 2001; PRIES, 2001; MÜLLER-MAHN, 2002). Its application can be mainly found for South-North migration (BASCH et al., 1994; GLICK SCHILLER et al. 1995; PRIES, 2001; VOIGT-GRAF, 2004; 2005), however the application of the transnational migration approach to illuminate migration among developing countries

remains relatively rare (NAGAR, 1995, VOIGT-GRAF, 1998, HERZIG, 2006, THIEME 2006). It is surprising that, compared to the excessive production of literature in this field, only few scholars of geography criticised the approach substantially or even tried to develop the approach further (e.g. CONWAY, 2000; BECKER, 2002; BÜRKNER, 2000; 2005).

### Shortcomings of both approaches

The approaches of diaspora as well as transnational migration or transnational social spaces describe contemporary migration processes. Our major three points of critique towards these two approaches are outlined in the following and can be summarised as follows: First, both approaches mainly address a socio-cultural perspective of migration (i.e. relying on ethnic and family relations), rather than focusing on economic causes and motivations. Second, in both approaches migrants are treated as a unity without any differentiation of social categories or consideration of power relations. This idealisation of ethnic and familial bonds we explain with the fact that both approaches do only rarely interlink with social theory, which we think would enrich the debate about migration in manifold ways. A third concern is an underemphasising of the importance of space and identity, and the multiple ways how people perceive and construct space and which geographical scale (from body to the global) is of concern for them or not. We argue that, as one consequence of neglecting the importance of space, both approaches are obsessed by the nation state and international migration, and exclude the complexity of migration patterns where internal and international migration are often interlinked.

#### *Focus on socio-cultural categories*

BÜRKNER (2000) discusses in his paper the shortcomings of the transnational migration approach, and he emphasises that rather (socio-)cultural than economic categories did influence scholars by researching transnational migration phenomena. Though relevant migration processes actually continue to be economically motivated. In our opinion the same often holds for research using the concept of diaspora. Similar to research from a transnational migration perspective, individual strategies of making a living and developing social embeddings are mainly declared socio-cultural rather than economic. Therefore transnational

migration as well as diaspora formation is often seen as a socio-cultural process of production and reproduction of ethnicity and familiar belonging.

On the one hand social practices of migrants can be self-decided, where migrants find autonomous niches between different societies and cultures. However, on the other hand migration is in most cases forced by economic needs for adaptation to globalisation (BÜRKNER 2005). Hence, transnational migration and diaspora studies too little consider characteristics, amount and impact of economic activities on migrants themselves as well as on people living in their places of origin and the new places of residence and work (BÜRKNER 2005). Additionally, economic activities of non-migrating individuals and groups have rarely been taken into consideration, despite the fact that they influence decisively economic success or failure of migrants (JONES 1992, in BÜRKNER 2005:116–117).

#### *A missing linkage with other social theories*

Recently any social group who has also maintained strong collective identities define themselves as a diaspora or a transnational community. The current over-use and under-theorisation of the notions of diaspora or transnational migration among academics, transnational intellectuals and community leaders alike, threatens the term's descriptive usefulness (COHEN, 1997; VERTOVEC, 1997).

Both approaches, i.e. diaspora and transnational migration have been critiqued lacking a social theoretical foundation (BÜRKNER, 2005; HERZIG, 2006; THIEME, 2006). They do not analyse relations of migrants to their places of origin or relations to their new places of residence and work. Also they do not reflect inequality of power (e.g. between/within communities or households; gender/age structures) and do not allow for analysis of the relationships between subject and society. Both approaches are blind towards inequalities and unequal power relations in the migration process, as well as social and cultural difference of societies and resulting corresponding but also conflicting networks of migrants. In most studies, migrants are perceived as one group and unity, imposing an ideal picture of ethnic and familial bonds, and celebrating the importance of social networks.

The main problem arising out of this theoretical approach is that the migrant groups are treated as a unity, it fails “to investigate inter-ethnic processes, and [there is] a lack of concern with the intersectionalities of class and gender” (ANTHIAS, 1998:562). The assumption is that there is a natural and unproblematic ‘organic’ community of people without division or difference, dedicated to the same political projects.

“The idea of diaspora tends to homogenise the population referred to at the transnational level. However, such populations are not homogenous for the movements of population may have taken place at different historical periods and for different reasons, and different countries of destination provided different social conditions, opportunities and exclusions” (ANTHIAS, 1998:564).

Following ANTHIAS (1998) three major objections can be raised to how diaspora is conceptualised in mainstream theory. “[T]he lack of attention to issues of gender, class and generation, and to other inter-group and intra-group divisions, is one important shortcoming. Secondly, a critique of ethnic bonds is absent within the diaspora discourse, and there does not exist any account of the ways in which diaspora may indeed have a tendency to reinforce absolutist notions of ‘origin’ and ‘true belonging’. Finally, the lack of attention given to transethnic solidarities, such as those against racism, of class, of gender, of social movements, is deeply worrying from the perspective of the development of multiculturalism, and more inclusive notions of belonging” (ANTHIAS, 1998:577).

For this reason, the concept of diaspora as a field of intersectionality is illuminating. It enables us to analyse and understand social relations that encompass politics, economy and culture at the global level. As we have shown above, it is also our critique that the notion of diaspora or transnational communities has hidden dangers to lump everybody and everything together. Therefore, intra-ethnic divisions and social boundaries have to be taken into consideration (HERZIG, 2006).

In recent studies with a diaspora or transnational migration perspective concepts or categories such as capital, social field, social space and power relations are frequently used in an under-theorised way. In our opinion an ongoing theoretical debate in human geography is very enriching. Scholars suggest to apply BOURDIEU’s Theory of Practice or parts of it (BOURDIEU, 1977, BOURDIEU/WACQUANT, 1992) as one possibility to clarify the theoretical concepts used in geographical research (DÖRFLER et al., 2003; DE HAAN/ZOOMERS, 2005; GRAEFE/HASSLER, 2006; HERZIG, 2006; THIEME, 2006; THIEME et al., 2006). BOURDIEU’s Theory of Practice provides us a clearer understanding of the relationship between individuals, society and attended power relations. It offers a clearer understanding and embeddedness of the so often used concept of capital, and specifically social capital. BOURDIEU’s concept of habitus has also been applied in explaining transnational migration (KELLY/LUSIS, 2006).

By using the Theory of Practice, migrants do not receive a theoretical preferential treatment. Their situation is analysed with the same concepts as the

situation of all other members of society. It sheds light on explanations of how and why migrants and their non-migrating family members can benefit from migration, and what sometimes also prevents them from doing so and at the same time shows the interlinkages between places of origin and places of residence and work (THIEME, 2006).

Following BOURDIEU, social practice can be seen as a result of interrelation between habitus and social field. Habitus is a system of lasting positions and an internalized behaviour, a product of history. A social field is constituted by positions of actors and the relationship between them (e.g. indigenous people and new settlers, wife and husband in a household, employee and employer in the job market). The relations between the positions constitute a social topography in which some actors are more powerful than others. No actor's position within a social field is absolute. The position of an actor in a social field is based on the possession and amount of various capitals. Inequality of capitals and access to capitals is at the basis of each social field operation. The value given to capital(s) is related to the cultural and social characteristics of the habitus. It automatically favours or disfavors individuals according to their background. Therefore, the notion of a social field is not only described by strategies but also by conflict and resulting struggle for a position in a field (BOURDIEU/WACQUANT, 1992). With the Theory of Practice we can also look at changing power relations among migrating and non-migrating household members or the individual and its community. However, the approaches dealing with difference and power relations (as we suggested BOURDIEU's Theory of Practice or the approach of intersectionality) do not refer to place and identity explicitly.

### *Placing identities*

Our third point of critique is the missing inter-linkage between migration experiences and the meaning of place and identity, and how place influences migration patterns and how migrants do appropriate and shape place. Several geographers contributed to a better understanding of migration processes and its interlinkage with place and identity (e.g. SILVEY/LAWSON 1999; EHRKAMP 2005)

Relying on CONWAY (2000, 2005), geography should aim at contributing to an integrated conceptualisation of the physical and the social space. The resulting geographies of migration are "home" and "away", that are not only distinctive in their spatial context but also in their social one, whereas work, household formation or day-to-day activities differ in their nature and conse-



quences. The way migrants live are influenced by social identities and structures from 'home' (i.e. the places of origin) as much as by the structures of the new places of residence, which transforms the meaning of 'home'. In summary, being at a different 'place' also creates new 'spaces' CONWAY (2005).

The two, three or more places that make up the multi-local network create new spaces which are influenced by the flow of people, information and remittances, but also by the social structures of the past. Similarly, all people who are affected by migration need to re-negotiate their social positions. Those newly negotiated power relations might either create new opportunities or restrictions. However, people locate previous and current experiences and therefore placing their identities, which has been taken into account in previous studies on migration only in a very vague way.

In addition, EHRKAMP (2005) convincingly shows that not only migrants but literally everybody transforms places of residence by "placing their identities". Physical places are changing when migrants establish community centres or religious sites. "Places, however" as EHRKAMP (2005:349) writes, "are neither simply containers that serve as platforms for the construction of subject positions and identities; nor are places static. Being produced and reproduced in social processes and relations at different scales, place lies at the intersection of different spaces and moments in time." Appropriating places creates new social spaces and thus places of belonging (HERZIG, 2006) or a sense of place (MASSEY, 1993; 1999).

Geraldine PRATT and Susan HANSON (1994) found that contests over identity occurred in and through the spatial relations of places. Their focus on place worked against rigid and static conceptualisations of difference along lines like class, gender, and sexual alliance (JACOBS/FINCHER, 1998). The work of PRATT and HANSON (1994:25) suggests that there is a "stickiness to identity grounded in the fact that many women's [and men's] lives are lived locally." This definition of identity is opposed to the radically fragmented notions of identity. According to Jane JACOBS and Ruth FINCHER (1998) people's relationship with places help construct their identities like their relationship with class, gender and ethnic groupings. But the embeddedness to local lives shall not hide the complexity of spatial scales that flow through place. 'Local' identities are always also constituted through non-local processes, or place-based identities are tied to the micro-politics of the home (HERZIG, 2006).

## Spatial scales and migration

Taking into consideration the three major points of critique, we show in the following the complexity of spatial scale, we exemplify, how migrants and non-migrants negotiate and experience space, and thus make geography. Therefore we chose the four examples: family and the home, community, and nation state to show their different meanings in the migration context, and how these meanings shape the way these spaces are produced and used, and how migration experiences in turn shape these spaces.

### *Family, home and migration*

According to Valentine (2001) the family is not only a physical location but also a matrix of social relations. The family is a place which has multiple meanings and which is experienced very differently by different social groups. Traditionally, the home has been constructed as a private sphere, and it is women who have been charged with the responsibility of making and maintaining the home in many societies. "The home is an important site where spatial and temporal boundaries in relation to both domestic space and public space are negotiated and contested between household members" (VALENTINE, 2001:63). Simultaneously, the home is an important site of consumption as well as for work.

In the context of South and Central Asia, family structures are mainly patrilineal and patri-virilocal. After a usually arranged marriage, a woman leaves the natal home and moves into the house of her parents-in-law, which provides many women already a first migration experience. However, their main point of reference for most of their lives is the husband's home. This patrilinearity and patri-virilocality involves that women's skills and labour benefit the patrilineal household and do not contribute to their parents' livelihoods (THIEME et al., submitted). In Nepal, but also in Kyrgyzstan, it was often a main reason why families do invest in girls' cultural capital such as education less than for boys. However, as the example of the Kenyan Asians shows, migration may also lead to cultural transformations, such as the changing patterns of marriage arrangement show. In Kenya, the proportion of arranged marriages has diminished with each migratory generation. While 56 percent of first-generation migrants had an arranged marriage, among fourth-generation Kenyan Asians it is only 21 percent. At the same time, the proportion of love marriage increased from 18 percent among first-generation Kenyan Asians to 55 percent among fourth-generation Asians (HERZIG, 2006:227).

*Table 2: Marriage types among South Asians in Kenya by generation in percent*

	<i>Arranged marriage</i>	<i>Partly arranged marriage</i>	<i>Love marriage</i>
1. generation	55.9	26.5	17.6
2. generation	46.2	17.9	35.9
3. generation	30.3	26.1	43.7
4. generation	20.7	24.1	55.2

Source: HERZIG, 2006; n=260. In “partly arranged marriages” the woman or the man can agree or disagree with a marriage proposed by parents or relatives.

The attitudes concerning marriage have changed in the last decades. Marriage still represents the dominant form of organising and legalising relations between adult men and women. Identities have not only changed regarding marriage age but also regarding the type of marriage. Young Kenyan Asians are more likely to agree with the statement ‘arranged marriages are old fashioned’ than elderly people. “In summary, among Kenyan Asians the ideal marriage is increasingly a love marriage, not only in the expectations but also in real practice. The duration of the stay in Kenya, i.e. the generation, is one important reason for the disappearance of arranged marriages” (HERZIG, 2006:227).

Patriarchal structures may also be one reason for gender selectivity in migration patterns. It is manifested in intra-household resource and decision-making structures, and a socially determined and gender-segregated labour market (CHANT/RADCLIFFE, 1992). Women bear the main responsibility for housekeeping and child-rearing, taking care of the elderly and undertaking agricultural work attached to the house. The man is seen as the main cash-income earner and, as a consequence, migrates for work, although these patterns are changing. However, women’s mobility still remains restricted (SILVEY, 2006), maybe except for an arranged marriage or higher education. Kenyan Asians regard higher education (i.e. cultural capital) as a privilege more than ever before, considering education as a pathway to upward social mobility. Educational qualifications acquired overseas, many Asian parents assumed, would enable their children to get better jobs than those which they had themselves (BRAH, 1996). Therefore the Kenyan Asians’ children – girls and boys – are preferably sent to Europe or North America for tertiary education, less affluent families send their children to India or Pakistan (HERZIG, 2006).

Family is a place where spatial and temporal boundaries are negotiated and migration often challenges existing power relations. For example in Nepal, female family members who remained behind, proofed very controversial expe-

riences. In some cases women challenge patriarchal structures and gain decision-making power within the household and even on village level. In other cases women who remain Nepal do not gain more independence or bargaining power within the household. The family, especially women, take on a bigger workload in the villages to enable their menfolk to migrate. Women take on the responsibility for the house and child-care and can even lose their decision-making power if they stay with their parents-in-law. If the men do not come home for harvest, women also have to take on the added agricultural work, or have to organize male support and they depend on the remittances of their husbands showing a close interlinkage between social and economic capital (KASPAR 2005, WYSS 2004, THIEME, 2006, THIEME et al., submitted).

The term marginality does not represent marked or differentiated positions. The way how migrants appropriate places of living and working and create spaces shows that migrants can simultaneously be at the centre and at the margin occupying very contradictory positions (also VALENTINE, 2001:6).

The Kenyan Asian household organisation is based on external help, i.e. domestic workers. Among the respondents of the survey 2000, 93 percent employed at least one domestic worker (cf. HERZIG, 2006). Cleaning the house and gardening are the main jobs for the domestic workers. In addition, many Asians engage a cook and frequently, child care is transmitted to an *ayah*. These women are treated almost as members of the family. Especially when the mother works fulltime, the child regards the *ayah* as a second mother, as the two following example show:

“Like my sister, when she started working again she had to leave her two months old baby with the [African] maid. She is still working and her son is now one and a half and he will only eat when the maid is around or if she feeds him. If my sister feeds he doesn’t want to eat! They get so attached. My sister is happy with the maid, the maid is almost a mother. And from the maid the child learns how to speak Kiswahili. The child knows Kiswahili more fluently and also her local language, than the mother tongue” (Kenyan Asian woman, 31, interview 1998).

Many families employ domestic workers to relieve the women from the burdens of housework, which enables them to follow paid work. This fact shows that the gendered division of labour is still unequal and that the woman is enabled to be engaged in paid work. The men therefore only have to change their ideals so far, as the situation does not change for them when the wives are engaged in paid work.

The second reason is rooted in the distribution of work within the extended family. Often only the most senior woman stays at home and co-ordinates the housework of the domestic workers and possibly of one or two daughters (-in-law). The other daughters and daughters-in-law work fulltime and are relieved from the housework. These women may adopt a male gender role at least regarding the division of housework (cf. HERZIG, 2006).

The stereotype of the Asian housewife and the male breadwinner does not correspond with the real practices any more: today the majority of the Asian women in Kenya contribute their part to the family income. One reason for the working women is the desired standard of living. Nairobi is a very expensive city and the school fees for the private schools are high. The working wife is to some extent a necessity. It is obvious that with the general enhancement of the level of education the proportion of working women has increased as well. Therefore, it can be assumed that with a rising educational level, identities concerning gender relations are changing as well (HERZIG, 2006).

In Moscow, in comparison, Kyrgyz male migrants work as sweepers in the city centre of Moscow (Arbat). They are illegally employed by the city council. The council provides them shelter in very old, run down houses in the centre of Moscow and pays them a much lower salary than officially and legally employed staff would supposed to be earning. Migrants establish their own households, with multiple forms of co-habitation and overlapping social units. They live in very congested environments and share rooms not only with family members but also with co-villagers and friends. Their dream and perception that they are only temporarily living in Moscow, takes the motivation to look for a better place to live from them. Working as street sweepers, Kyrgyz migrants are very present in the daily street life and thus very close to urban citizens or tourists who go shopping or sightseeing in central Moscow. They are inside of prospering urban Moscow, but get marginalised and are outside at the same time. Kyrgyz migrants work illegal on Russian ground and are thus constant victims of police or security guards checking documents and taking bribes. They work in deplorable conditions, without contract or social security, adding to the exploitation and vulnerability of these workers. Many migrants experience racism and fear to leave their shelters at night. Men therefore saw their orange working uniform as a 'protection'. Wearing these uniforms they felt protected and accepted, but without, they feared to be asked by the police for their documents or become victims of racist attacks. Though contributing to the urban labour market, the majority of individual migrants felt stigmatised as 'rural and low-skilled immigrants' by the society in their urban working places.



While migrants feel often marginalised in their workplace, they are still able to earn money and send remittances back home. If migrants are successful and are able to finance costly feasts and bring gifts of clothes, radios, recorders, etc., but also to invest in housing, livestock, or children's educations, it increases the migrants' own honour and reputation as successful migrants in his or her home community, and enhances the social position of the whole family.

### *Community and migration*

From a geographical perspective, community can be defined as "A social network of interacting individuals, usually concentrated into a defined territory" (JOHNSTON et al., 2000:101). However, the scale at which socio-spatial relations evoke ranges from neighbourhood to the nation and even to the globe (VALENTINE, 2001:112). The notion of community is often a positive one, in a sense of positive social relationships, shared identity and mutually understanding. However, community is also a site reflecting boundaries of acceptable behaviour and possibilities to act, reflected in limits on use of space and time.

In the diasporic South Asian context, the term 'community' refers to an organised social group, which is defined by religion and language or place of origin. In addition, a community is also based on caste or sect, race and class. According to the interviewees (interviews 1998) the community is traditionally the primary frame of reference besides the family for the Kenyan Asians. In general, the Hindu communities are based on caste (*jati*), and Muslim communities are based on sect. A sense of community exists within these groups and not within the Asian minority as a whole (HERZIG, 2006).

The term community often evokes the erroneous idea of a homogenous and harmonious group that shares a set of values and has common interests (NAGAR/LEITNER, 1998). A community is also characterised by dissension, disharmony, and power hierarchies that celebrate some people and groups and marginalize others (NAGAR/LEITNER, 1998). Inclusion and exclusion not only occurs between the different communities but also within (e.g. in the case of intermarriage when a person might be ostracised). Nonetheless, at least for some people, the membership to a community is an important source for the construction and maintenance of their identities (HERZIG, 2006).

The dominance of the socio-cultural in the two discussed migration approaches leads to the identification of ethnic niches in the labour market. Studies of immigrants and their entrepreneurship show that their kinship networks are a key resource for the creation of small businesses (LIGHT/KARAGEORGIS, 1994;

PORTES, 1998). Mobility opportunities through niches are completely network-driven as members find jobs for others and teach them the necessary skills. Both approaches do not adequately address, that many migrants often do not have many other options of income possibilities. Globalisation contributes to an increase of informal and illegal sector activities. This especially holds for major destinations of migrants such as urban centres. Larger urban centres such as global cities are characteristic for an increasing social polarisation and ethnification of labour markets. Access to the formal labour market becomes restricted and an informalisation of economic activities and increase of low skilled service sector prevent migrant's social mobility (BÜRKNER, 2005).

If we explain now the appropriation of space by migrants through BOURDIEU's Theory of Practice, the concepts of ethnic niche or ethnic economy explaining why migrants work in a specific labour market sector and how migrants manage their economic life, becomes obsolete. For example, the 'ethnic' character of occupying a specific job niche is then a result of the relation of specific kinds of capitals and the interplay of social fields and habitus. The overlap between culture and economy becomes not automatically classified either as anachronism ('tradition') or crisis management ('regeneration') anymore. Culture does not per se create differences, but it is possible to look at the different components of the 'ethnicity' of each society or economy. To avoid an essentialist conception of ethnicity and family we assume that differences exist but only analysis does show which importance various differences have (PORTES/JENSEN, 1992; TIMM, 2000; DIENER, 2002; HERZIG/RICHTER, 2004; HERZIG, 2006; THIEME, 2006).

When migrants enter the labour market in the new place of work, they regularly face that their cultural capital such as education, general knowledge and abilities, which are important in the rural context of their place of origin, are not valued in the new labour market. For example, agricultural knowledge of Nepali migrants is not important for survival in the city of Delhi. Migrants rather have to know how to maintain security in an urban living quarter as watchman, women have to know how to run a middle class household as domestic worker, and tailors have to know how to tailor fashionable clothes. All of them lack the knowledge (cultural capital) where to get information about job opportunities from and the necessary documents to be able to work in their new destination. As a result, migrants were found to occupy a distinct niche in the low skilled, informal labour market (THIEME, 2006).

In comparison, South Asians in Kenya managed to leave their distinct ethnic niche as petty *dukawallahs* (shopkeepers). But popular accounts of Asian

settlement are still preoccupied with an image of Asians as traders and middlemen. They ignore that social boundaries, such as gender or class, subdivide communities as well. In order to perform successfully in a foreign context, the Asian minority from the very beginning acquired knowledge and developed networks, i.e. cultural and social capital, in order to be able to keep up with the host- and colonial society. The creation of communal organisations can only be fully grasped when taking this into consideration. These organisations help develop and maintain the social networks which form the basis of economic, social, and cultural reproduction. The first schools, for example, were founded by community organisations, which also shows the high importance Kenyan Asians attach to education. For them, a profound education is a prerequisite for social mobility (HERZIG, 2006).

But also examples of very limited social mobility exist. In Delhi as well as in other cities of India many male migrants from Far West Nepal work regardless of caste as watchmen handing their jobs even over from generation to generation (THIEME 2006, also PFAFF 1995; PFAFF-CZARNECKA 2001). To ease the lack of other capitals and find access to a job social capital is essential for migrants. In India jobs are arranged by or taken over from friends or co-villagers. However this social capital can also exclude certain people if they do not fulfil other preconditions laid down by their co-villagers in order for them to get a job. For example, among men jobs have to be 'bought' from a predecessor for up to three times more than a monthly salary. Financial capital and social capital are therefore the major entry point for getting a job. Relying on close kin or friends with mainly the same background is therefore helpful in providing emotional support in finding a job, and in the best case, arranging a job similar to theirs to gain economic capital. However, this limited social capital is not valued in other subfields of the labour market in search for a higher-skilled and better-paid job. Strong reciprocal obligations make them successful in times of crisis, but they render individual entrepreneurship difficult. At the same time the 'job sale' makes them dependent on informal credit for seed capital. It puts the migrant in an even more vulnerable position, especially when a migrant loses his job right after buying it from a predecessor. People borrow from one source to repay another. Migrants find themselves tied into an expanding network of credit dependency and their whole family and even kin in Nepal are trapped in this cycle. Because of its linkage to long-term debt, migration to India helps people to cope with their life rather to improve it substantially and entailing that they remain migrants for their whole lives (THIEME, 2006).

*Nation, nation states and migration*

Migration processes are usually differentiated between internal and international migration. Thereby the transnational approach stresses the importance of crossing international borders (VERTOVEC, 1999, CONWAY, 2000). The focus on 'nation' implies that 'society' or 'nation' can be perceived as one unit. It implies that a society shares common circumstances of living and other commonalities and that state borders are definite boundaries, separating very different worlds. These approaches ignore that social life only accepts administrative borders in a political and administrative sense (BECKER, 2002; WIMMER/GLICK SCHILLER 2002; VAN SCHENDEL, 2002). Regions like South and Central Asia provide interesting examples of how borders are changing and how migrants perceive international borders differently.

In the 19th century, for example Nepalese migrants were economically attracted by tea plantations, construction work, coal mining, and land reclamation in Assam, Bengal, Darjeeling, Garhwal and Kumaon (HOFFMANN, 1995; 2001; KRENGEL, 1997). By the end of the 19th century half the population of Darjeeling in India was of Nepalese origin (CAPLAN, 1970; SHRESTHA N., 1990; SHRESTHA S., 1998). Many of the early Nepalese migrants to this region settled permanently and came to be known as Indian Nepalese (UPRETI, 2002). Until today they have close social links across the border to India, providing us an indication that these Indian Nepalese might be in a not only physical but also cultural sense closer to Nepal than to other parts of India, but still always becoming international migrants while crossing the border (THIEME, 2006). At the same time Indians migrated to most parts of the British Empire, working on plantations as well (HERZIG, 2006).

Migration within nowadays independent states of Central Asia has only 15 years ago been entirely internal migration within the former Soviet Union. Kyrgyz migrants who are now illegally working in Russia or Kazakhstan were only 15 years ago citizens of one state. Male migrants often had even served in the army in Russia in former times. Additionally the focus on transnational border movements within the transnational migration approach does not pay sufficient attention to the range of mobility types available to individuals and families. It ignores internal migration, which is often also an important way of getting income, and second often interlinked with international migration. A recent quantitative survey in a 10,000 inhabitants community in South Kyrgyzstan (Interviews 2006) revealed that 45 % of the total number of migrants migrated internally mainly to the capital Bishkek, 41 % migrated to Russia and 12 % to

Kazakhstan. Furthermore many migrants move stepwise, either first internally to the capital and later to another country. Or people migrate internationally and in case they have earned enough money they invest later on in other places within their country, which can be urban but also rural. Jointly with internal and international migration also other geographical units of analysis such as 'the urban' and 'the rural' become strongly interlinked. Both, rural and urban places are socially constructed in multiple ways. This means that moving from one country to the other is only one dimension of creating new social spaces. Because of the cultural similarities between Nepal and India but also between Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Russia, it can even be argued that the change from the rural to the urban context has the same or even more influence than changing country. People would have to deal with as much difference in an urban setting, shifting from physically marginalised villages to a place with access to physical and social infrastructure.

The community-based networks serve as one of the central elements for the success of South Asian communities not only in Kenya but world-wide. As soon as the communities were established in Kenya, the strong relation with South Asia was not as essential anymore. However, according to MANGAT (1969), already after World War II, the ties with South Asia started to decline. The economic success and improvements in education contributed to the social progress of the Asian diaspora in Kenya. The processes of settling down, of adaptation to British institutions, the extensive urbanisation of a social group emigrating from Indian villages, the rise of a new generation exposed to the influences of the Western education and to better economic standards, all these factors influenced far-reaching changes within the Asian diaspora (MANGAT, 1969). Second- or third-generation Asians regarded Kenya or East Africa as the place where the networks should be maintained. South Asia was increasingly regarded as a place of the ancestors, though many of the young Asians did not even know. There are families in Kenya who have never visited the Indian subcontinent (interviews 1998). Although an attachment to the previous home remained, the physical contacts with South Asia decreased while the number of the communities in Kenya increased. Therefore, the migration of whole family units as well as the establishment of strong communal networks in the diaspora leads to permanent migration and later on, it weakens the ties with the homeland. In summary, the maintenance of transnational ties has been a long standing Kenyan Asian household strategy; during the first decades of presence in Kenya, though, the networks were focused on South Asia. This changed after independence in the East African countries as well as after Amin's expulsion of the Asians from Uganda



in 1972. An increasing number of Asians were forced, or chose, to migrate a second time, especially to Great Britain and to North America (i.e. Canada and the United States). These migrants are named ‘twice-migrants’ (cf. BHACHU, 1985). More recently people started to migrate to Australia as well. After the expulsion from Uganda, the most highly skilled people tried to go to North America; the working family members headed for Britain (BHACHU, 1985; VAN HEAR, 1998). This could be termed as a strategy of transnational insurance. The tradition of family cohesion and assistance, which has been an important factor in the success-formula of the Asians in commerce and industry in East Africa, now was needed on a transnational basis. The community networks that once helped relatives to start their new life in East Africa were needed by the Kenyan Asians to start their new lives in the UK or North America. But again, the arrival of East African Asians as family units, very often consisting of three generations has led to their rapid settlement in the UK, alongside the reproduction of strong communication links established during their stay in East Africa. This also meant that the social networks, which were established and maintained in East Africa, shifted to the new places of settlement. Especially in Great Britain, East African Asians were far more successful than the direct migrants from the Indian Subcontinent (BHACHU, 1985). The East African Asians did not only have the (embodied) cultural capital with them but were also able to shift the (embedded) social capital from East Africa to the UK. Therefore, those Kenyan Asians who stayed behind shifted their orientations to the Western countries (HERZIG, 2006).

## Conclusion

Recent migration studies have approached the phenomena by mainly two concepts: the diaspora and transnational migration. Based on a discussion of both approaches we critiqued their dominantly socio-cultural perspective on migration, the missing link to other existing social theory, and missing consideration of the importance of place and identity.

Migration is always context specific. Taking a social geographic perspective we better understand various contexts of migration by differentiating between the concepts of “place” and “space” and illuminating them with other theories and debates of social science. While place forms the physical presence at a certain location and at a certain time, space is understood as an iterative

product between social practices and place. Each place is invested with certain meanings, and these meanings shape the multiple ways how people perceive and construct their own social spaces, how they experience themselves and how they categorise others. In a migration context we always have to consider a multiple network of at least two, but often even three or more places, such as the place of origin and the (new) place of residence and work. Those places are not only distinctive in their spatial context but also in their social one and that is where geographical research shows how migration influences the construction of space in various settings. However, if we look at how people place their identities it indicates that being a migrant or not is only one difference among others such as gender, age, ethnicity, etc. However, migration brings along important experiences creating opportunities for challenging power relations and subsequently forming new spaces.

Examples have shown that the local (such as family and community) is a place of significant social practices, where ideas are formed, actions are produced and relationships are negotiated (MARSTON et al., 2005:427). Thereby the local scale is not less important than the often so highlighted national scale. Having looked at the different places, we have shown that a place does not represent a fixed scale nor a rigidly bounded spatial sphere, or a fixed hierarchy or ordering of scale. The examples rather describe the way power at one geographical scale can be expanded to another, how they are embedded in each other and which scale really matters for individual persons at what time (VALENTINE, 2001:9). Geographers like MARSTON et al. (2005:427) critique the dominant hierarchical conception of scale, implying that “social practice takes a lower rung on the hierarchy, while ‘broader forces’, such as the juggernaut of globalization, are assigned a greater degree of social and territorial significance”. This implies that the local is not less important than the global or the national. Apart from the hierarchical conception of scale we have also shown that diaspora and transnational migrants share the same experiences in their daily life and show that both concepts from a geographical perspective are embedded in each other.

In summary, we state that migration and its resulting geographies are always context specific. Geographical research shows how migration influences the construction of space in various settings like on family, community, national and global scale, but also questions the embedded hierarchy of this scale. A geographical perspective can show how migrants construct and appropriate place by interlinking place and space with other theories and debates of social science.

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