

# ***‘Mind the Gap’:*** **The Structural Ecology of** **Small Networked Communities**

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## **Abstract**

The social network perspective starts with individual actors and observes among other things, the social and opportunistic ties and emerging patterns of arrangements within the group structure. In social networks, resources (including ties as social capital) are unequally distributed, and embeddedness defines the particular locations of actors in the network. By using social network analysis, the paper attempts to draw attention to the cohesive aspects of the structural ecology of two small groups of Indian migrants and their nodal ties in their transnational community. The paper works through the prism of structural-hole theory and seeks to show that the cohesive ties of ‘knowing’ (Urry 2007) amongst the nodal actors in such small and closed communities, while creating norms of goodwill and reciprocity, is also able to act prohibitively and hinder other sorts of ‘connectivity and relationships’ outside of the immediate transnational group of actors (Gargiulo & Benassi 2000:183). The argument is that networks underlie the relational nature of groups, and while affording access to network assets or social capital in the shape of employment opportunities, accommodation space and social gatherings, these networks also allow a significant amount of constraint to be built into the dynamic.

**Keywords:** structural holes, social capital, network constraints, knowing

## **Introduction: Network Analysis in the Social Sciences and in Anthropology**

I often borrow as quotation, the elegant words of Arjun Appadurai who

speaks of ‘anthropology as the archive of lived actualities’ (1990:11). For me this simple description of *what anthropology is*, captures emblematically the way I feel, where a visit for the belated(!) haircut for the school-going son, and a eagerly awaited trip to the favourite sushi restaurant, for the same son one adds, reveals an archive of ‘actualities’ that lend themselves to the anthropological gaze. For increasingly, perhaps understandably so in the case of the sushi bar (needing the specialist chef), and now, somewhat more surprisingly so for its increasing frequency, at tailors and salons and similarly supermarkets and small businesses situated in various Indian suburbs, we are met with staff that are from other spaces and distal reaches of the globe. Such transnational scatterings of individualized migrant labour are to be found in many other economic nook and crannies of the, in a sense, ‘respatialized’ country, with foreign faces offering otherwise routine services (see Naidu 2008).

In many of these small businesses, is the discernible face of cliques or clusters of migrant groups who appear to be related or connected in some manner to one another. These cliques of migrant workers in turn offer themselves up to the anthropological gaze as they reveal richly embedded social patterns of arrangement that work through particular relational webs. It is the presence of many such small cliques and networks that drew my gaze to the changing social landscape in suburbs like Reservoir Hills, which takes its name from its geography, the topography of the hilly suburban space, and the large reservoir that sits atop one of those hills.

Network analysis, although having greater currency in the physical sciences, is becoming increasingly popular in the social sciences and in sociological and anthropological studies. Many of these studies, especially in anthropology, have focused on large and often international networks and have looked at the diverse social phenomena of international terrorism, transnational corporation profitability and religious organisations. This paper is an attempt to bring the paradigmatic scrutiny of network analysis to small networked communities. Much of the work in network analysis is necessarily couched in network jargon and algebraic formulae that often elides the appreciation of the individuals and their experiences which I see as ‘thickly’ able to illustrate the qualitative nature of the relational webs within networks. This paper is an effort to bring into deeper working relationship, ethnography and network analysis. It is a move away from much of the stark

algebraic representation associated with network analysis, while retaining some of the relevant jargon and more importantly, the intellectual underpinnings of the paradigm. It was White back in 1992 who stated that narratives and stories are vital to structural pursuits, telling us that stories describe the ties in networks (White 1992: 65), and it is this cue that I follow.

### **The Mobile Indian: The *Indian* Diaspora, the South African *Indian* and the *Indian* Migrant**

I can recall lying on a glorious beach on one of the Greek isles a few years back and having an Indian face in a heavily accented Indian voice asking if I 'want to buy a DVD'. My thought (after declining the purchase) was 'wow, Indians are everywhere'. Although perhaps not quite literally 'everywhere', Indians have dispersed far beyond the Indian subcontinent. In South Africa alone, there are approximately one million Indians, mostly concentrated in the coastal province of KwaZulu Natal. South Africa has the largest population of people of Indian descent outside of India, who are born in South Africa, with sunny Durban playing host and home to the largest concentration of Indians in the country. This is rendered into global perspective by Bhat and Narayan (2010:16) telling us that population estimates by the High Level Committee on the Indian Diaspora<sup>1</sup> suggest 'that the Indian immigrants have crossed approximately the 20 million mark, dispersed around the globe in more than 70 countries'.

The history of the early Indians to South Africa is itself entangled in the wider socio-political 'movement' of colonial arrangements of power over people and lands, and the bodily 'labour' signified by the people. Thus, the earliest immigration and concentrated movement of Indians to South Africa would be traced back to the arrival of the approximately 140 000 indentured workers in 1860. The passenger or 'free' Indians arrived from the year 1880s. Granted, this rendering of early Indian migrant movement into South Africa, as 'indentured' (and aided) and 'free' (and unaided), shows a rather

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<sup>1</sup> This report outlines the profile of 23 countries with Indians, and shows that Indians number above 10,000 in 48 countries and are at the half a million mark in 11 countries.

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naive typology, given the later patterns of migratory flows into the country. However, it was not until very much later in the early 1990s that Indians started arriving as ‘new immigrants’ in South Africa<sup>2</sup>. This is what Bhat and Narayan (2010:16) refer to as ‘old diaspora’ or broadly speaking, the ‘3rd to 5th generation descendants of the early emigrants during the mid-nineteenth century’. This earlier movement of people is to be distinguished from later waves of migratory flows of professionally trained and skilled emigrants to the developed countries of the West during the second half of the 20th century which comprise the so called ‘*new Diaspora*’.

Last, is the ‘labour diaspora’ which is a reference to the migrant labour force, from the so called unskilled and semi-skilled, to the highly skilled and professional, said to constitute the third component of the immigrants from India. Many of these individuals are said to have left behind their families in India and continue to remit savings towards the maintenance of the family (Bhat & Narayan 2010:17). Having left behind family and friends, in many instances these labour migrants enter networks of constructed relationships with other migrants within the host societies. This is the point of insertion of this particular paper which begins with the position that the topology of most social networks is more often than not characterized by clustered connections or short paths between nodes (the individual actors).

Network analysis by itself does not of course tell us much about the actual qualitative nature and ‘human value’ of the relationships within the structure, and as such it is in the richly veined narratives of the migrant participants that we can hope to ‘see’ how relational effects such as community size and strength of ties is able to shape network structure by influencing the course of social, and other links between the labour migrants in the group.

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<sup>2</sup> Park and Rugunanan (2010) attribute this to the fact that the then government of South Africa wanted to repatriate the Indians already in the country and halt further immigration of those wishing to enter the country. They point out the rather obvious, that, while the former (attempt at repatriation) did not have much success, the latter policy (halting the tide of further immigration) proved more fruitful.

## **Background and Methodological Entrances**

This paper draws on ethnographic work done in late 2008 and early 2009, and then 2010, over a fifteen month period, and succeeds earlier papers (Naidu 2008; Naidu 2010). As transnational networks are not fixed and unchanging, with new members entering and older members leaving at different points in time, follow up interviews were scheduled in the latter part of 2010 (June-November) and 2011 (September-October) with purposively selected Indian migrants from two of the original groups. This was to obtain a sense of how the networked community may have changed its profile of members, as well as to make contact again with some of the early respondents and revisit (literally and methodologically speaking) with them.<sup>3</sup>

The research design is both descriptive and explanatory, and narrative description is seen as vital to the research process. The rich narratives from the participants are located within network analysis which allows us to understand some aspects of the migrants' transnationalised lives. There were thirty participants in the original study and the sampling on these occasions was broader and drew from five different networks or groups, and included participants that were both Indian and Pakistani. The total number of participants revisited in 2011, number nineteen. Here the sampling was purposively narrowed to just two of the networks that comprised Indian migrants. As the number of individuals in the groups was appreciably small, the sample within the category of Indian migrant was not consciously selective or delimited in any way. Rather, efforts were made to include all within the group as participants.

As in the initial interviews two years ago, the participants were all male as this form of individualized migrant mobility, was found to be highly 'masculinized'. It appeared from conversations with the participants that women from the background and towns that the male participants were from,

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<sup>3</sup> In 2009, and in 2011, a research assistant was used, who went in, on both occasions for two days and asked some questions formally. The reasoning for this was simply to triangulate some of the bits of information for which seemingly conflicting information had been noted. By then the respondents had gained a sense of familiarity with me, and having bridged somewhat, the gap between researcher and respondent, I was concerned that there were sometimes teasingly giving differing 'answers' to my questions.

and who might fall into the category of unskilled or semi-skilled, did not migrate alone in search of work. This observation is vindicated by Park and Rugunanan's (2010) study, which was carried out in the Fordsburg/Mayfair areas of Johannesburg for the South Asian migrant communities they interviewed, where they also point out that their respondents were all male. They explain that the 'lack' of female respondents is due to 'a gender disparity in Asian migrant populations', and 'traditional gender norms'. They stress that the vast majority of the South Asian migrants are male and claim that this is typical of most new migrant groups where young, single men tend to arrive first and then, if successful, return to the sending country to 'collect or find wives and children' (Park & Rugunanan 2010:7). My own sense is that this is perhaps a bit of a 'flattening' of the reality which is somewhat more complex. Certainly in the case of migrant Indian communities of skilled labour (see Meijering & van Hoven 2003), the individual migrates with the nuclear family (which includes the spousal female), and in some instances, subsequently 'sends for' members of the extended kin. The migration pattern that I found amongst my respondents was that Indian *females*, who might be termed as belonging to the categories of so called unskilled and semi-skilled labour, *did not* migrate to South Africa for mainly normative 'cultural' reasons, and that the male migrants, even if married, chose to migrate alone and did not send for their wives<sup>4</sup>.

When I first met my participants, their work day extended over 12 hours, from 8 am to 8 pm, and this had not changed two years later, when the latter sets of interviews were done. The important early meetings facilitated a level of familiarity, vital for dialogue. Later interactions were scheduled interviews, themselves structured flexibly as conversations, given (most) participants' long work hours, and a scarcity of 'free time'. There was also the added language 'challenge' to be negotiated with some of the respondents as English was not their native language. This had also changed very little. Although their English appeared very much more fluent, the

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<sup>4</sup> When probed, the married men said that they preferred their wives 'safe with family' back home. It was not so clear however to what extent the reasons were also embedded in the sense of 'freedom' that the male migrants seemed to be experiencing away from family and in some instances, away from their wives.

respondents were still more comfortable in their own language of *Gujarati*. This I ascribed to the fact that all of their interactions amongst themselves was in their native tongue. Their English was reserved to the stock questions posed to the clients regarding the specifics of their haircut. Thus, given the language difficulties, and cultural ‘coyness’ perhaps, ‘conversations’ moved slowly until a certain degree of rapport had been established<sup>5</sup>, facilitated by my own rudimentary familiarity with the popular North Indian vernacular of *Hindi* (itself culled from Bollywood movies).

As part of the ‘old diaspora in South Africa, I was an outsider on many levels. I was after all a local Indian female, 5<sup>th</sup> generation in the country, who had no known kin or other links with India, who wished to understand the ‘materiality’ (Featherstone & Waters 2007:383) of the participants’ lives as transnational migrants. To this end a large window was invited on their transnationalised lives and practices. A clutch of concerns around remittances, xenophobia, the legality of their stay, cultural taboos etc., were allowed to surface in both the early and latter interviews, even though the delimited orbit of the study did not include these issues. This ‘window’ greatly assisted in ‘looking inside’ the complex reality characterizing migrants’ lives. The ethnographic snapshots that follow capture a few of the 19 participants, and are not meant to imply that there exists a generic profile for this category of migrants, but rather to hold a lens to aspects of network cohesion and network constraint as they come to be revealed in the participants’ narratives.

## **Networks, Community Size and Network Structure**

There were two networks that featured in this study. These were small

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<sup>5</sup> My very early meetings were casual and unscheduled visits seeking to establish an acquaintance, and offered a chance to make use of the salon (for the rather unwilling son and his much needed mop of hair) and restaurant facilities (not surprisingly, more welcomed by the same son). The salon catered initially to only males. It thereafter employed a local female who ‘took care’ of the female clientele. I did not offer myself as a client as it was the male haircutters that I wished to interact with. Thus the (rather unwilling son) was the early (bribed) sacrificial lamb needing the repeat ‘shearing’.

networks with small membership that ranged from 12 individuals in one networked group, to 7 in the other networked community. The assumption was that the close acquaintances of an individual in a small community would most likely be close acquaintances or friends with each other because there would be few other potential social opportunities, thus engendering greater or high network closure and exhibiting a significant measure of social capital. The network and the networked community, is characterized by a set of nodal actors and by connections, or said differently, *interactions*, between these nodes. Each of these groups had also transnational linkages, members outside the country but these are construed as ‘weak ties’. Although we are aware of them as they feature in the narratives of the participants, this study focused on the ‘cliques’ represented by the immediate and strongly ‘tied’ individuals that were in close and daily contact with each other, and form the research community of this study.

The structure of the network and size of the community makes sense if we were to frame the transnational movement within a particular typology and ‘scale’ of migratory flow. Much work (see Aulakh & Schechter 2000; Hudson and Slaughter 2007; Vervotec 2009) has been done revealing how transnationalism articulates within the wider frame of globalisation and the paper does not mean to revisit those discussions. What is of more immediate interest rather is the smaller scale articulation of transnationalism. Creating conceptual typologies that aid in methodological and empirical studies, Guarnizo and Smith (1998) speak of ‘transnationalism from below’ or the routinized activities and practices of transnational individuals. Similarly, echoing what are termed as the sociology of South Asia, and found particularly in studies of south Asian religions, are Gardner and Grillo’s (2002:183) semiotic concepts of ‘great’ and ‘little’ transnationalism, that is to say signifying the ‘macro’ transnationalism of state and economy, and the ‘micro’ transnationalism at the level of household and family, and as in this particular study, at level of the *individual*.

Indeed, more and more, transnational processes are examined at the micropolitical level of family and household, and at the level of the individual (see Levitt 2001; Poros 2001; Chamberlain & Leydesdorff 2004; Yeong *et al.* 2005; Silvey 2006; Gernsheim 2007; Thieme 2008). As Portes *et al.* (2001) and Voigt-Graf (2004) point, there are particular typologies of transnational flows that can be spoken of within the contexts of ‘little’ and

‘great’. However, the various authors themselves caution, ‘*little*’ and ‘*great*’ are not to be reified as oppositional streams of transnational flows, but are rather to be understood as the articulation of the *global* with *local* manifestations. This statement cuts to the core of the point that, the ‘*transnational*’ and, ‘*transnational flows*’ are not always immense in scale (see also Hannerz 1996). It is understandable then that this small scale migration had led to small networks and hubs of migrant communities.

Given all of this, the scrutiny of the paper is focused narrowly on, *individualized mobility* and particular categories of work of the transnational migrants. The paper is an attempt to reflect upon the constructed pathways of connectivity and social capital within the Indian migrants’ transnationalised lives, and holds the lens to two small networked communities, onto a small community of ‘haircutters<sup>6</sup>’ and waiters and a small community of tailors. Of course not all migrants engage in sustained transnational practices, in other words not all migrants are *trans*-nationals. The groups in the study however, are transnational by virtue of their engagement in transnational activities of remittance, frequent contact and emotional investment in ‘home’ as well as different degrees of movement in straddling and criss-crossing home and host society.

## Network Structure: Introducing the Migrant Members

*Mohamed*\*<sup>7</sup> was a thirty year old Muslim Indian owner of the *Surti*, a one-roomed ‘tailor shop’ tucked away in a little passageway and bordered by other small businesses, a local grocer, a local fishery, as well as a salon and small restaurant run and staffed by migrant Indian workers. When I first met Mohamed, he was visiting his ‘haircutter’ friends in *Al Noor* Salon, immediately next door. As he bounded in and out of the salon, it was easy to see that he was at ease in English and he had picked up numerous (quaint and not so quaint) South African colloquialisms, which he was keen to try out on

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<sup>6</sup> The seemingly quaint way of referring to the male stylists as ‘*haircutters*’ echoes the manner in which they see themselves, and is a fall back to the male barber shop and haircutters.

<sup>7</sup> As some of the participants were comfortable with me using their names and others not, I have opted to use pseudonyms for all of them.

me. With Mohamed, it was thus a fortuitous and a fluid transition into conversation about himself. In my early interviews in 2009 he had revealed that he had left Gujarat seven years earlier in search of better economic pastures and had opened his 'tailoring shop' six years earlier in Reservoir Hills, claiming that he 'knew people here'. This journey was on the heels of and aided by his brother, who had arrived a few months before Mohamed and set up a tailoring business in Johannesburg. Mohamed had employed two other migrants (from Gujarat) as workers a few weeks before the early set of interviews. He shared that he had 'oh so many friends', both Muslims and Hindus, mainly from Gujarat and that it made it 'very easy' to be in this country. In many of my visits to the *Al Noor* Salon I noticed that Mohamed was seamlessly in and out of the salon that bordered his 'tailor shop', and interacted with all the migrant workers here, even the newly arrived, almost as if they were all long time friends. It was clear from the narrative that Mohamed who had had no tailoring experience or interest! prior to arriving in South Africa and setting up shop on the advice of his tailor brother, was comfortable with 'falling into' this line of business. In the interviews conducted in 2011, approximately two years after first meeting him, he had rented and moved to larger premises and was running a larger business, further down the same main road.

Mohamed is part of what I refer to, for want of a better name, as the 'Tailor Network'. He had employed two other immigrants from his native town in India. These migrants also had no experience in the tailoring business but made quick work of the employment (and social) opportunity offered by their cohesive ties with Mohamed and learned their tailoring skill 'on the job' so to say. While one of the newly employed workers (Memud) had made contact with Mohamed while in Rajkot in Gujarat, the other worker (Jihan) had according to his story, simply 'turned up at the new 'tailor shop' and 'asked for a job'. He claimed that he 'got the address' from some friends who knew that Memud was coming here, and who knew Mohamed. Back home, he had worked as a 'delivery boy' he said. He told me however, that he was enjoying the 'sewing', and Mohamed confirmed that he (Jihan) had learned quickly and become quite adept. The very many satisfied local patrons who came in while I was talking to the workers testified to how skilled and in demand all the migrants had become.

According to what many of the migrant workers from the tailor shop

shared, their networked community comprised a small and tightly knitted group of seven individuals, five of whom worked daily in the tailor shop, and another two (also fairly recent arrivals) who 'took care of the house' and appeared to be on standby when work orders exceeded the labour capacity of the workers in the shop. Networks are of course not in any way permanently stable but are rather fluidly assembled and altered by newly arriving members. Over the last two years, two of the workers had left to return to India and another two (the two recent employees) had entered the community. All had arrived at their employment, literally through their nodal networking and associative ties with each other. Mohamed had liberally peppered his conversations with me with sympathetic and caring comments that, 'these guys' were his 'brothers' and like him, 'needed a start in life'. He said that even though he did not always have work for the other two more recently arrived individuals who mainly stayed at home and took care of the domestic chores, he nevertheless felt compelled to help them with accommodation. He also told me that they all socialised together and attended worship at the local mosque together. Farr notes (2004:10; see also Allcott *et al.* 2007:80) that amongst transnationals, sympathy is a capacity 'that could be cultivated to understand and identify commonalities with others' and emerges as a deep feature of such networks.

**Anant\*** was thirty four, and a single Muslim from the city of Surat in Gujarat who had been working for about three years at the *Al Noor* Salon. These premises were initially rented by a Pakistani Muslim migrant who owned the salon. I learnt in the interviews in 2011 that the salon had been taken over by **Roshan\***, another migrant from Gujarat who had been working there for a few years. When I first met Anant, he was thirty two and had been at the salon for just under a year. Anant was part of what I refer to as the 'Salon Network'. Drawing our attention again to push and pull dynamics of economics, he told me that he had wanted to come to South Africa to 'make some money for his family'. Having done the same kind of 'job' in Gujarat, he shared that he was quite comfortable working in the salon. He had heard about the *Al Noor* from a friend while in India, who in turn had been told about the salon by another 'friend' who had already moved to South Africa for work. Anant was then able to obtain more details and 'turned up' at the Reservoir Hills salon and 'asked for a job'. This by now was emerging as a

sustained narrative refrain amongst the members in both networked communities, that of ‘turning up’ and almost, ‘falling into’ their line of work. While it may appear that Anant, with a salon background, had been fortunate to find the kind of work he sought, Anant revealed in the initial round of interviews two years ago that he had in fact hoped for ‘something else’ that was new, and better salaried. However, he shared at that time that it was ‘impossible to find any other work’ and that he did not wish ‘to sell DVDs on the streets like some others’. Failing to find anything suitable, or ‘anything at all’ he too joined the rapidly expanding *Al Noor* Salon staff. Two years later, Anant was still working in the salon. He told me that while he had grown to ‘really like’ his ‘job’; sometimes he still wished it was easy to ‘go find some other kind of work’. He continued that he did not have the kind of ‘money like some Bangladeshis’<sup>8</sup> who he claimed, came into the country and quickly started up small shops.

**Kirtan\*** was a Hindu from Gujarat, twenty two years old and single when we first met. Unlike many of the other informants, he was articulate in English, jovially talkative to the point of being garrulous. He had attended first year psychology courses at his local University in Surat, in the state of Gujarat. His narrative revealed that his passage to South Africa over four years ago was aided by the fact that he had *both* relatives and friends in other African countries like Kenya and Zambia. He had gone to Zambia first and worked there in a grocer business belonging to his uncle. However, he had decided after a few short months, to move to South Africa. Again, he had an uncle here who had helped with his arrangements getting into Durban and with whom he had lived with for the first year before ‘finding his feet’. He had heard about the position for ‘haircutter’ at *Al Noor* Salon through the uncle who had in turn, ‘heard’ from other friends. When prodded gently for a name, Kirtan says that he thinks it was his co-worker **Roshan\*** who mentioned the ‘job’ to his uncle.

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<sup>8</sup> Park and Rugunanan’s (2010:7) research in the Free State revealed that the vast majority of Indian (and Pakistani) immigrants are engaged in small retail businesses, and that in almost every major town, secondary town, and in every ‘dorp’ there was at least one or two Bangladeshi or Pakistani shops.

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Kirtan's story, like that of the other migrants, appears to be in concert to what is pointed out in the bulk of the literature on international migration, which reveals that immigrants rely vastly on interpersonal ties (see Poros 2001; Levitt 2001) to migrate and find employment. In Kirtan's case these interpersonal ties opportunistically corralled him into the work as haircutter. In the interviews in 2011, Kirtan reveals that he had recently married on one of his regular return trips to Gujarat. While he would like to earn more and get into 'other kinds' of work, he says everybody he knows well 'does this kind of job' and that he also has grown to 'really like the job'. When prodded he said that his wife was 'happy to remain with his family in India, and where she 'had work in an office'. When asked, he quipped to not have any plans to have her join him.

**Komal\***, now two years older at twenty eight and that much more rotund, was a single Hindu from Surat. Although his family's background in India, had been in the laundry business, his story reveals that *who* he *knew* in South Africa determined what kind of employment he eventually settled into. He had come to South Africa to visit his cousin, the then 25 year cousin **Roshan\***, who by then was working in the *Al Noor* Salon. Roshan himself was a skilled electrician who could not get into the line of business that he had originally trained for back home. Roshan confides that he would 'really like electrician work'. Komal had stayed because he 'liked the country'. Although Komal had had a background and preference in running a small business he found that it was relatively impossible to find 'good' employment. His acquaintance and relationship with his cousin Roshan, and the cousin's web of relationships around the (migrant) salon owner and other transmigrant workers, had made it inherently straightforward, a *fait accompli* almost, to find employment *within* the salon.

**Rafee\*** was now twenty seven. I had initially met him when he was a coy and soft spoken, twenty five year old. He had left Gujarat three years ago on the advice and prompting of his parents. Although married and the father of by now a five year old little girl, he had wanted better salaried work to help take care of his family in India. When I first met him he was employed at the restaurant next to *Al Noor* Salon. The close proximity and subsequent relationship meant that he was part of the 'Salon Network'. In his early

narrative he revealed a short summary of a long chain of acquaintances and friends whose sympathy and advice he says he sought and ‘trusted’. This trust led him to his work as a full time waiter and occasional cook’s assistant. The migrant staff at the salon and restaurant, were, both Hindu and Muslim. However, they all came from closely dispersed towns (in some cases the same town) in Gujarat. They formed one networked community, sharing work space and accommodation. Rafee not only revealed that he shared the accommodation with some of the salon staff, but added that he was also able to help out in the salon if any of the (salon) friends took ill. When I returned in 2011, I saw that the restaurant had been closed down a few months ago and had given way to a locally run liquor store. As a member of the small community, Rafee had managed to find work in the salon. He tells me that one of his migrant friends from the restaurant had returned to India, while another had found work in another restaurant that was run by ‘people from India’.

*Ajay\** came to South Africa two years ago. He has no family in this country, and shares that he gets all the support that he needs from his salon friends. He seemed to be mostly under my radar in the early round of interviews two years ago, his days off coincided with my research days and when we did meet (due to me swopping around my schedule specifically to meet him) he seemed shy and did not open up much. This time round he was more comfortable narrating that he had ‘worked as a hairdresser in India’ and says his friends advised him to come to this country as there are many opportunities for ‘hairdressers’. He tells me that he enjoys ‘taking care’ of his migrant friends and feels this as natural as they are the only family he has here. Also, he shares, ‘they are from the same town in India’ so they are able ‘to share a lot’. He owes ‘this job to his friends’ not ‘just the ones from the salon but even other friends’ who had come to South Africa before him (and worked in the salon for a while) as they ‘encouraged’ him to move here. He also seemed to point to **Roshan\*** as a central figure in the group that helped to consolidate his move here.

*Sunil\** arrived in the country five years ago to ‘visit’ friends in Johannesburg. A few months later they found him a job in a salon in Johannesburg. He moved to Reservoir Hills, Durban when he heard this year

that Roshan had ‘taken over’ the salon. He also referred to a long time acquaintance with Kirtan whom he met through mutual friends. He tells me that he did not want ‘that kind of job’ but did not ‘mind it’ either. He has since (like the other workers) spent ‘six days a week cutting people’s hair’ (all the workers took turns having a rest day off), and had come to ‘enjoy the job’. Sunil did not have any family here but several close friends who were from India and ‘a few South African friends’ (although after some prodding he revealed that he does not actually spend social time with these local friends). His friends from India, through ‘their connections’ helped him settle in South Africa and he told me he owes ‘getting his job to his friends’. He feels his co-workers have become his family here as when they are together, they speak their home language and they are able ‘to do’ their religious practices together, as they would normally have engaged in back home. Sunil also shares the communal chores, and confides that he enjoys doing the cooking. His ‘brothers’ make the *roti* or Indian flat bread and other types of foods, but he claims that he is the designated cook who cooks a ‘good hot curry’ (Kirtan confirms this).

‘Like physical capital’, which can be used for different purposes, social capital according to Adler and Kwon (2002:21) is appropriable in the sense that an actor’s network of, say, friendship ties can be used for other purposes, such as information gathering or advice, or vice versa. In this case it was played out in Sunil assuming a paternal role outside of the shared work context. Sunil tells me that he enjoyed spending time with his ‘brothers’, and feels he has the responsibility of ensuring that they are well taken care of, and says quite disarmingly, that he ‘loves them all’. Even when they go out he feels that he has to ‘look out for them’ as some ‘like too much partying and drinking’ (Kirtan again confirms that Sunil was the ‘father figure’). He claims that living with his ‘brothers’ helps him cope with missing home as ‘from time to time’ they sang cultural songs, danced and watched Indian movies together.

*Jameel*, who was coy about his age, was from Bangladesh (and did not have a separate Bangladeshi self identity as such and was happy to refer to himself as Indian). The other migrants working with him put his age down to thirty one. At the time of the early interviews he had been in the country for just a month. He had come to South Africa looking ‘for work and more money’, via

a rather chequered route having attempted working for short periods in Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe. In those early interviews he had chosen not to share very much about those movements except to intimate that 'it was tough times'. He had come to South Africa through some 'good friends', (from Bangladesh) that he had met and befriended in Zambia, and who knew 'others who had come and worked in the salon' some time back. He 'knew sewing' back home and when he arrived at *Al Noor* Salon a few years ago, the workers here 'helped get him work' at the neighbouring tailor shop of Mohamed. He said he had no other family in South Africa, only 'many Indian friends from India', made here in South Africa and with whom he went to the movies, and to the mosque every Friday. Two years later, he shared that he had left and gone back home for several months, 'to see his family' and then came back to South Africa. As the tailor shop had moved down the road and had more workers than it needed, he was co-opted into the salon. It appeared that he had slipped effortlessly back into the community. He, like Komal, referred to **Roshan\*** as a kind of 'focal' actor (Adler & Kwon 2002:19), who effectively tied together many of the members of this particular network by their common associative ties with him.

## **The Two Faces of Social Capital**

Social capital, as a sociological concept, has become somewhat of a trendy term in the social sciences. Portes (2000:2) points out that the original theoretical development of the concept of 'social capital' by the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu and the American sociologist James Coleman, centered on *individuals* or *small groups* as the units of analysis, and on the benefits accruing to individuals *because of their ties* with others. These theorists defined social capital in terms of *resource* to which an individual has access to, and is able to use for their benefit. Simply put, social capital is a reference to the resource embedded in the connections (of goodwill that can be called upon) *within* (and sometimes *between*) social networks. For a community, frequent cooperation or interactions by its members leads to tighter social linkages and increased trust in one another, described as a 'virtuous circle' of participation and trust (Janjuha-Jivraj 2003:32).

Closely knitted social networks are thus able to act as 'pools of

popular agency' (Meagher 2005:220) and are embedded in popular relations of solidarity and reciprocity. Rafee's story (similar to many of the others) show that his movements were clearly facilitated at most points by the people he knew and trusted, and by the fact that he could insert himself into the network and the pre-existing ties and pool of social capital in the network. The concept of social capital is 'complexly conceptualized as a network of associations, activities, or relations that bind people together as a community via certain psychological capacities, norms, and trust' (Farr 2004: 8-9).

The migrants' narratives reveal the complex and dense relational texture of their community. This emerges in terms of how they responded to, and in anticipation of each other's closely knitted emotional, work and social needs. Sunil was able to comfortably admonish a paternalistic eye, and his own emotional need of 'family' was reciprocally taken care of. Likewise the newly entering migrants in the 'Tailor Network' were embraced within a similar paternal offer from Mohamed, with work and accommodation. Even when work was less forthcoming, they still had a place to stay and friends to socialise amongst, and attend mosque with.

The relational characteristic of social capital is echoed by Adler and Kwon (2002:18) who point out that the social structure within which the actor is positioned is the resource available to actors *as a function of their location* in the structure of their social relations. Adler and Kwon (2002: 22) additionally point out that social capital is 'located' not in the actors, but *in their relations* with other actors. Mohamed was at pains to inform me that that the migrants he employed were 'related to him'. This was in a sense knitting a social relation into a deeper kinship relation. I am hesitant to refer to this as 'fictive kin', for in the understanding of people like Mohamed, these are not 'made up' relatives, but an expanded and stretched sense of who one is related to that extended beyond both consanguinal and affinal relations, and was fed by circumstances of past ancestral location and present situational location, a case of a connection engendered by sharing the same 'roots' and 'routes' (Gilroy 1993). All of which cohered to, in turn fix the migrants into a tightly networked community.

However, Gargiulo and Benassi (2000) claim that it is the optic of structural-hole theory that peels back the wrapping on the concept of social capital. The theory is claimed as describing how social capital is a function of brokerage opportunities in a network. In their rather aptly titled paper

*'Trapped in your Own Net? Network Cohesion, Structural Holes, and the Adaptation of Social Capital'*, these authors explore the tension between oppositional views on how (actually) networks work to create social capital. Network closure (Coleman 1988) of course stresses the role of cohesive ties in creating a normative environment that facilitates cooperation. Gargiulo and Benassi's (2000) argument, is that the 'other side' of social capital is borne out by structural-hole theory (Burt 1992), which conversely sees cohesive ties as a source of rigidity that hinders opportunities, and in a sense works against certain relational benefits created by social capital.

The lens of structural-hole theory allows us a glimpse of both faces of social capital. Individuals like Mohamed from the 'Tailor Network' are 'central nodes' in the networked community. The notion of 'centrality', itself emerges as a key concept in network theory and refers to the position of an individual actor in the network, and denotes the extent to which the focal actor occupies a strategic position in the network by virtue of being involved in many significant ties (see Gnyawali & Madhavan 2001:433). This 'centrality' is key in understanding the benefits that can accrue through association with such a central nodal actor. However, it is this very centrality that closes the 'gap' and door to the possibility of other kinds of employment opportunities for individuals like Jameel and many others. Likewise Roshan, by virtue of his central position in the 'Salon Network' was able to help many migrants with getting work at the salon, but not able to help with other sorts of employment possibilities, even for himself. We are reminded that he was a trained electrician who earnestly wished to get back 'into that kind of work'.

According to Burt (1997:441) the 'structural hole' is an opportunity to broker the flow of information between people and control the form of projects that bring together people from opposite sides of the (structural) hole. However, in both networks there was no 'hole' that could allow for a brokerage of diverse opportunities, *outside* of the salon or tailoring business respectively. Labour 'markets', even at the level of small scale and with so called unskilled labour, are themselves embedded in networks of social relations which, as in the case of Mohamed (tailor-shop) and Anant and Jameel (salon work), often do the business of 'matching' or bringing together work and person. The network mechanisms also highlights the role of individuals in the network in producing distinct types of 'migration flows'

and ‘occupational outcomes’ (Poros 2001:244). Social network theory unveils how *nodes* or the actors in the networks and *ties* or relationships between the actors function within networks. Critical concepts of ‘degree’ and ‘cohesion’ allow a further unpacking of *how* the migrant participants are connected, and to *whom*, with the concept of ‘knowing’ and ‘cohesion’ being vital in our understanding that other transnational relatives and friends connect the migrants cohesively and directly through routine rituals both secular (e.g. going to the movies) and religious (attending worship at the mosque). Structure refers to the particular pattern(s) between actors, where the strength of ties (‘degree’) has meaning and consequence. While structural holes in a network are traditionally seen as entrepreneurial opportunities to add value and opportunities to those able to facilitate some kind of brokerage outside of the closed system, structural-hole theory is used in this instance to show how being inside a densely knitted, and highly connected network means that the cohesive ties prevent one being able to get information and opportunities for employment outside of that network.

My sense, based on the interviews, was that it also worked to prevent any kind of brokering of new or meaningful social relationships or friendships with the local Indian (diasporic) communities. Leonard (2007:52) spells out that unlike cosmopolitans who move comfortably between so called ‘cultural worlds’, transnationals are people who build encapsulated ‘cultural worlds’ around themselves, most typically worlds circumscribed by interpersonal ties. Of all the participants interviewed back in 2008/2009/2010 and even in 2011, only one(!) Kirtan, claimed to have had South African Indian friends. However, he had never visited the friend(s) at home or met the rest of the local Indian family. More recently, in 2011, Kirtan boasted that he had many local Indian friends (and African friends). However, when speaking to his co-workers it emerged that given his level of ease with the English language Kirtan was very comfortable conversing with the local Indian clientele that visited the salon and the local Indian and African clients that patronised the liquor store next door. However, all his free time, limited though it was, was spent with them, the migrant co-workers claimed. They all chorused that they enjoyed spending time with each other. Thus it seems that their insulated (social) worlds were kept in place by cohesive nodes and ties. This is heightened within small groups where the expectation is for greater *network closure*. The intuition is straightforward

says Allcott (Allcott *et al.* 2007:1), in small communities, the pool of potential friends is limited, which increases the extent to which the network neighbourhoods of two friends are likely to overlap. These small closed communities are good examples of individuals embedded in networks of cooperative relationships that direct the flow of resources and social interaction among them (Gnyawali & Madhavan 2001:431). Thus not much had appeared to change two years later when I returned for follow up interviews. The Indian migrants still had not brokered any meaningful social interactions with the local Indians beyond the context of the salon. Part of the reason for this was that the migrants felt fully supported within the cohesive networks that they lived and worked through<sup>9</sup>. Mohammed and three of the other workers from the 'Tailor Network' seemed to have some meaningful interaction with the local Indian Muslims at the mosque they worshipped at. Here again though, this did not extend beyond the worship context.

### **Conclusion: Minding the Gap, Knowing and Networking**

According to Gargiulo and Benassi (2000:184) and clearly borne out by the narratives, the members of a knitted network can trust each other to honour various obligations. The various stories that cut across the domains of work and home have shown how the migrants in both the small networks rely and count on each other. However, the point Gargiulo and Benassi make is that the amount of social capital available to an actor is not merely a function of the closure of the network surrounding him, but also the amount of structural holes in the network that allows brokerage. For networks also function to develop social constraint and to direct information and other flows, as well as maintaining social capital. Structural-hole theory holds that actors are in a better position to gain from their interactions with others if they are

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<sup>9</sup> Although not the immediate focus of the paper, a randomly selected cross sample of the local Indian patrons was also interviewed probing their perceptions towards the salon workers. Most of these respondents echoed that, while they admired the talents of the migrants as hairdressers and tailors, they did not interact with the migrants socially. Many respondents said that the migrant Indians 'were friendly' but felt that the migrants 'preferred to mix amongst themselves'.

connected to those others, *who are not themselves connected*. The lack of connections among those others, are the *structural holes*. The actor's opportunities are constrained if there are no holes. When the connections (opportunities) are surrounded by structural holes, and the *actor is not* surrounded by structural holes there is what is referred to as 'structural autonomy', for the actor. The network dualities of brokerage and closure are seen as the imperative mechanisms by which social networks constitute social capital.

Clearly the structure of network itself does not tell us much about the quality of the ties or relationships amongst the members, which is where rich ethnographic work that documents the narratives of the migrants is vital. Looking through the windows they have allowed, one sees that the transmigrant workers who have criss-crossed vast distances and spatial coordinates, have to a large extent permeably entered existing networks through their chains of acquaintances and capitalized on *knowing*. The narratives reveal that their (small) world appears as a cohesively networked 'multiplexed' world (Portes 2001:10), straddling home and work domains, and where workers are sometimes linked also by family or acquaintance ties (such as in the case of cousins Komal and Roshan) within which there is frequency of (exclusive group) contact and reciprocity (Vertovec 2003:647). This world, constructed through *knowing* and *networking*, while allowing migrants a social space to construct relationships amongst other transnationals and access opportunities known to their group(s), simultaneously denies them, and insulates their access to the wider knowledge and economic communities and opportunities. It also renders contact and relationship with the local Indian communities, at best, difficult. While the migrants did not exactly 'ignore' the local Indian patrons in the salon, they spoke 'through' them, to each other in their local tongue of Gujarati. The migrants also did not appear to have any meaningful relationship with the local Indian Gujarati-speaking community, who share linguistic kinship with them. It emerged in interviews that the migrants did not feel comfortable enough to socialise or interact much with the local Indian community. Many shrugged it off by claiming 'not to have the time' in their long work shifts.

Poros' study (2001) discussed labour market flows in the context of professional Gujarati Indian migration to New York and London, showing

how specific configurations of network ties result in different migration flows, and revealed how new networks formed and how individual immigrants ‘flowed’ into particular kinds of employment as a result of the dynamics of the linkages and networks. By focusing on non professional labourers, the haircutters and tailors, the attempt in this paper was to focus on how individuals in this labour category enter and become embedded in networks through the process of *knowing* the people who allow the porous movement into the networks. Closely knitted social networks are seen as pools of popular agency, embedded in popular relations of solidarity and reciprocity (Meagher 2005:218-220). Networks are constantly being socially altered and reassembled by the (sometimes newly arriving) members. Yet, networks still manage to maintain their cohesiveness of ties and closure, engendering opportunity and trust. However, what this paper attempts to show is that in the context of the small communities of Indian migrants, interpersonal nodal ties also limit opportunities because the networked kin and the insular community can rarely provide new information and resources about work and social opportunities (see Poros 2001) This is clearly to be seen in many of the migrants’ stories such as in the case of Komal and Kirtan who shared that they more or less ‘fell’ into their current work at the salon through their linkages across networked connectivity. An individual’s position in the structure of these exchanges can in sense be an asset in its own right. A person like Roshan from the ‘Salon Network’, or Mohamed from the ‘Tailor Network’ comes to mind as individuals who knew many people. Structural holes however, are the gaps between non redundant contacts (Burt 1992:25-30), ‘redundant’ in the sense of *knowing people who also know each other*. The embeddedness argument is that actors’ actions are embedded in enduring relationships that impact particular outcomes (Gnyawali & Madhavan 2001:432). We have clearly seen this in the context and lived experience of the participants. While they are assets, Roshan and Mohamed are also ‘redundant ties’ in their networks as many others who knew them, *also knew each other*. A structural hole shows that the people on either side of the ‘hole’ circulate in different flows of information, in this instance employment and social opportunities. The idea is that social capital stems from the brokerage opportunities created by dispersed ties, or by the lack of network closure. The structural-hole argument defines social capital in terms of the information advantages of being the broker in relations

between people otherwise disconnected in social structure. The disconnected people are said to stand on opposite sides of a hole in social structure. However, within both the small network communities of the 'Salon Network' and 'Tailor Network', all the members are closely knitted in work and social contexts, and there are no structural gaps between them, into which new opportunities of socialising and employment possibilities may be introduced. There is thus no 'gap' to mind.

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