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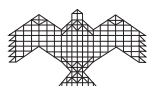
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Provincial Globalisation

Transnational Flows and Regional Development in India

Carol Upadhyya and Mario Rutten

January 2012



National Institute of
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PROVINCIAL GLOBALISATION

TRANSNATIONAL FLOWS AND REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN INDIA

Carol Upadhyia and Mario Rutten

ABSTRACT

The relationship between migration and development is currently a key area in research and policy-making. The contributions of international migrants to their home countries in the form of remittances, investments, and philanthropic donations are widely regarded as an important source of development resources. This paper reviews the migration and development debate and the current state of knowledge about flows of migrant resources to India, pointing to gaps and shortcomings in the literature. It argues that the complexities and intricacies of both mobility and resource transfers need to be better mapped and disentangled by placing them within three (interconnected) contexts: (1) the transnational social fields that connect diasporic communities with their home regions; (2) the institutional structures, networks, and nodes through which both people and resources move; and (3) the specific histories and social/political-economic formations of the regions from which migrants leave, and to which resources are transmitted. The paper concludes that tracing transnational connections and flows at the regional level will provide a more nuanced understanding of their social and economic implications for the home regions and for India as a whole.

Keywords: Migration, Development, Transnationalism, Mobility, Remittances, India

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INTRODUCTION

Contemporary development discourses often represent migrants from developing countries as ‘agents of development’ (Faist 2008) because of the substantial resources that they transmit back home through remittances, investments, and philanthropic donations. Accordingly, the relationship between migration and development has emerged as a key area of research, with numerous policy initiatives at the international and national levels directed at enhancing the connections between diasporic communities and their countries of origin. Since the 1970s, the Government of India too has made concerted efforts to promote the engagement of Overseas Indians with India’s development.

This paper argues that to fully understand the purported connections between ‘migration’ and ‘development’, it is necessary to carefully unravel the complexities of various forms of transnational mobility and ‘reverse flows’.¹ The diverse transactions that are usually categorised as ‘remittances’ or ‘diaspora philanthropy’ are in reality multifaceted social processes that are embedded in, and inflected by, the specific histories, social structures and political-economic formations of the ‘migrant sending’ regions. We argue further that the effects of migrant resource flows can be best analysed by tracing them through the social structures, networks, and agents that configure and animate transnational social fields, which span both diasporic communities and their home regions.

The first section of the paper briefly reviews the migration and development debate, highlighting several shortcomings of this literature. Section 2

summarises the current state of knowledge on ‘reverse flows’ to India, which include remittances, diaspora philanthropy, and investments, as well as intangible resources such as of knowledge, cultural orientations or political ideologies. In section 3 we draw attention to the multi-faceted, multi-directional and multi-focal nature of these flows and to the interconnections among them. The fourth section argues that by reinserting migrant resources into their broader social context we can better understand their impacts on the home regions. Finally, in section 5 we outline a methodological framework for mapping and analysing patterns of mobility and reverse flows in India through a focus on the region, which we regard as a key scale at which dense and consequential transnational networks crystallise, and on the institutional structures, agents and other modalities that facilitate, direct and channel movements of people and resources.

MIGRATION AND DEVELOPMENT DEBATE

A substantial body of development research and policy-making today focuses on the potential benefits of international migration for developing countries, in particular on the resources (especially remittances) that are sent back by migrants to their families or communities. This new ‘development mantra’ (Kapur 2004) views migration as an opportunity rather than a negative outcome of poverty and underdevelopment, as migrants from the South working in the North augment their skills and resources and become conduits through which human and financial capital is reinvested in their countries of origin. The emergence of migrants as ‘heroes of development’ (Khadria 2008) is a

¹ In the Provincial Globalisation research programme we use the term ‘reverse flows’ to refer to the entire gamut of remittances, investments, and other resources – tangible and intangible – that are sent by migrants or diasporic communities to their families, hometowns or communities in India. However, the term has been used in a different way in macroeconomics, to refer remittances that are used not for consumption or investment but for debt amortisation, reserve accumulation, or capital flight. The diversion of remittances to such uses are termed ‘reverse flows’ because they limit the potential positive effect of remittances on growth (Das and Serieux 2010). Thanks to Jafar K. (NIAS) for pointing this out. However, we continue to use ‘reverse flows’ in the sense indicated above in this paper.

In addition, we recognise the theoretical difficulties of metaphors such as ‘flow’ which permeate much of globalisation theory (Bude and Dürschmidt 2010), but retain this term for the present paper because it is a useful shorthand for the range of transactions, exchanges, and movements that we discuss here.

logical corollary of neoliberal economic orthodoxy in the international development arena, which has entailed a rollback of development aid from both nation-states and international institutions.

The current discussion on migration and development was initiated by the 2003 World Bank report on *Global Development Finance (2003)*, which claimed that the inflow of financial resources from developed to developing countries in the form of migrant remittances and philanthropy – at USD 90 billion a year globally – was nearly twice the total flow of official development assistance. Subsequently, international development agencies have repeatedly highlighted the significance of migrant remittances as a source of capital and investment for developing countries (for example, the UNDP *Human Development Report 2009*). Recent figures put the volume of international remittance transfers to developing countries at USD 300 billion in 2010 – an increase of about 270 per cent in the past decade (Guha 2011a: 2). Diaspora philanthropy is also recognised as a significant form of migrant transfers (Geithner et al 2004; Merz et al 2007).²

The current interest in migration and development has produced a large amount of literature detailing the types, volumes, channels, destinations, and impact of remittances and other kinds of resource transfers. Most of these studies aim to determine whether and how resources sent by migrants to their home countries contribute (or not) to ‘development’. This literature suffers from several theoretical and methodological problems, which are briefly noted below.

First, the question that is usually posed about the ‘impact’ of migration on development is probably

impossible to answer because of the difficulty of measuring net losses and gains of migration (Maimbo and Ratha 2005). Developing models to assess the macroeconomic impacts of remittances also presents many challenges (Guha 2011a, 2011b). The problem of inadequate official data is confounded by the large proportion of remittances that flow through untracked informal channels (Pieke et al 2007). Further, most studies remain straitjacketed by conventional notions of both migration and development and simplistic models of their interconnections (De Haas 2010).³

Second, much of migration research views mobility as a one-way process that mechanically connects ‘sending’ and ‘receiving’ countries (Raghuram 2009). Similarly, many studies of remittances concentrate on unidirectional flows of resources, overlooking their entanglement within a wider web of multi-directional and multi-dimensional exchanges and mobilities. A related problem is that studies of remittances are often carried out in isolation from migration studies, even within the same region, as if these two kinds of flows (of people and remittances) are not part of the same process. Consequently, this literature tends to focus on what migrants send back without taking into account how the migration process itself influences such transfers (and vice versa).

Third, the migration and development literature often constructs migrants primarily as economic actors, focusing narrowly on ‘economic’ transactions to the neglect of other dimensions such as intangible flows – of knowledge, new ideas, information, and know-how – or what Levitt (1998) has termed ‘social remittances’. For example, microeconomic studies on the ‘motivation to remit’ often treat migrant households as if they are

² Development experts have not always held such a positive view of migration, however. The contemporary enthusiastic view succeeds an earlier period of pessimism that highlighted the ‘brain drain’ or the loss of human capital to the developed world caused by migration, which in turn followed an earlier stage of optimism. For detailed accounts of these discursive shifts in the migration literature from the 1950s to the present, see Castles (2008), Faist (2008) and De Haas (2007, 2010). Clearly, perspectives on the developmental potential of migration are not unrelated to global political shifts and changing development ideologies at the international level.

³ We leave aside here the issue of the unproblematic use of the concept of ‘development’ in this literature, which tends to refer only to income growth (De Haas 2005, 2007), ignoring several decades of critical and post-development literature (Davies 2007).

autonomous agents engaged in decision-making based on expected economic benefits, delinked from their social context (Guha 2011b: 7-9). Similarly, much more attention has been paid to the economic impacts of remittances than to their potential socio-cultural, ideological and political reverberations. The singular focus on migration and remittance transfers as economic processes with economic outcomes fails to take into account the cultural meanings, political motivations, or social implications of resource transfers.

Fourth, there is the problem of scale. Despite a growing recognition that transnational networks connect migrants with their home regions or towns at various scales, the development literature has focused primarily on the relationship between nationally defined diasporas and their home countries, and on the macroeconomic effects of remittances – what has been called the problem of ‘methodological nationalism’ (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002). On the other hand, we have a number of micro-level qualitative studies (mainly by anthropologists) that examine how remittance flows connect particular villages or communities with absent members (e.g., Gardner 1995; Levitt 2001). While this literature provides a useful corrective to the national-level bias, many of these studies ignore the larger political-economic context that shapes patterns of migration and remittances. Few scholars have attempted to capture the multiple scales at which transnational mobilities and flows take place, particularly the intermediate level of the region, or the inter-connections between different levels and types of flows.

In short, to fully understand the intricacies of the connections between ‘migration’ and ‘development’, we need to track and unravel

transnational flows and their implications in all their complexity. Before discussing how this might be done, in the following section we provide a brief account of what we currently know about ‘reverse flows’ of migrant resources to India.

THE INDIAN SCENARIO: MIGRANT RESOURCES AND DEVELOPMENT

Since the 1970s, the Indian government has put in place a range of policies and programmes to encourage NRIs (Non-Resident Indians)⁴ to invest in India. In 2002, when the High Level Committee on the Indian Diaspora released its report (Government of India 2002), India’s engagement with Overseas Indians broadened. Overseas Indians (OI) came to be viewed as an important source not only of foreign exchange and investment capital but also of knowledge, expertise and skills. While many Indian diasporic communities across the world have maintained connections with their home regions for a long time, sending remittances to their families at home or donations to local temples or schools, the recent establishment of institutional, legal and financial frameworks to facilitate their involvement with India has both stimulated and reshaped these connections. In addition to national-level policy-making, individual state governments (such as Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh, and Punjab) and even district bodies have forged direct relationships with their own regional or state diasporas by setting up NRI cells to channel donations and investments, organising local ‘Pravasi’ events, and the like.

In this section we summarise the available information on three main types of material migrant transfers to India – household remittances and NRI deposits (individual-level); collective

⁴ In this paper we use the terms ‘NRI’ (Non-Resident Indian) generically, interchangeably with the currently official term ‘Overseas Indians’ (OI), in consonance with the popular usage of ‘NRI’. Overseas Indian in government parlance includes all types and generations of people of Indian origin around the world. Since the 1970s the Government of India has devised a series of special categories and linked policies which have progressively incorporated Overseas Indians into India’s economy and polity. The NRI category was formulated in the 1980s, followed by the Persons of Indian Origin (PIO) scheme in 2002 (which granted visa-free entry and rights to property ownership to ‘people of Indian origin’ with foreign citizenship), and most recently, the Overseas Citizenship of India (OCI) category in 2005 (Roy 2006). The NRI designation carries certain financial and tax benefits; to qualify a person must live outside India for more than 183 days a year. NRIs may be Indian or non-Indian citizens, while the PIO and OCI cards are like long-term visas, available only to non-citizens (Indian origin people who have taken up foreign citizenship).

remittances ('diaspora philanthropy'); and direct investments; and a fourth category of intangible resources or 'social remittances'. In this discussion we also refer to the migration and development debate in the Indian context, which has focused mainly on two issues – 'brain drain' (Khadria 1999) and the macroeconomic impact of remittances (Nayyar 1994). However, the effects of migration and reverse flows in India are much more varied and complex than the literature would suggest. While household remittances remain the most important component of total remittance receipts in India, other forms of transfer such as local withdrawals from the NRI deposits and philanthropic donations are growing in significance. However, as detailed below, available data sources do not clearly track these various kinds of flows nor their ultimate destinations or uses.

Remittances and Local Withdrawals from NRI Accounts

In 2001 India was already regarded as the largest recipient of overseas remittances in the developing world (World Bank 2003), and the country continues to hold first place. Remittances rose dramatically from the 1990s due to several policy changes and incentive schemes (Kapur 2010: 112-13). Although available estimates are unreliable (Guha 2011a), recent World Bank figures put total remittance receipts in India at USD 55 billion in 2010.⁵

There are two main channels of household-level remittances – direct transfers to families at home through transfer official banking channels or other money transfer organisations (MTOs), and local withdrawals from NRI accounts.⁶ Macro-level data on migration and remittances are available from

sources such as the National Sample Survey (NSS) and the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), but these data sets are quite limited (and possibly inaccurate) and so do not allow clear conclusions to be drawn about the development and migration nexus in India (Kapur 2010: 114-15). According to RBI data, the largest proportion of remittance receipts in 2008-09 consisted of family-level remittance transfers at USD 14,288 million, followed by local redemptions from NRI accounts (USD 11,217 million), and 'personal gifts and donations' at USD 1,525 million. Total 'private transfers' in that year amounted to USD 46,903 million.⁷

In addition, we have several state-level studies such as the periodic Kerala Migration Surveys focusing on Gulf migration (Zachariah et al 2002). Kerala provides the most dramatic example of a regional economy that has become dependent on remittances, and it is also the most studied state in India in relation to the impact of out-migration – yet existing analyses do not provide a clear picture of the interlinkages between migration and development even in this case. In 2008 around one-fourth of households in the state had one or more emigrant or return migrant members, and remittances accounted for about one-third of the state net domestic product and 1.74 times the total revenue receipts of the state (Zachariah and Rajan 2010: 4-8). Several scholars suggest that remittances underpinned the 'Kerala model' of development, contributing more to poverty alleviation than any other factor (Zachariah et al 2001a, 2001b), but others argue that remittances, far from contributing to economic growth, have created a consumer-driven economy marked by stark imbalances, decline in agricultural production, stagnant industrial development, and continuing

⁵ World Bank Migration and Remittances Factbook 2011. <http://econ.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/EXTDEC/EXTDECPROSPECTS/0,,contentMDK:21352016~pagePK:64165401~piPK:64165026~theSitePK:476883,00.html>, accessed 8 October 2011.

⁶ The government has introduced various savings deposit schemes in commercial banks specifically for NRIs with attractive conditions and interest rates, which allow them to deposit money in India in rupees or in repatriable dollar accounts. Such accounts are officially held by the NRI but family members may be given limited withdrawal rights.

⁷ Guha's (2011a) analysis of RBI data reveals that local withdrawals from NRI accounts have become more important compared to conventional family-level transfers. During 1990-2009 remittance transfers formed about 38 per cent of the total international remittance receipts on average, compared to 42 per cent for local withdrawals. While this shift probably reflects changes in policies governing NRI deposit schemes in the early 2000s, it may also point to changes in both the nature of remittances as well as their utilisation pattern (Guha 2011a: 9-10).

high unemployment (Kannan 2005). Moreover, remittances may have actually undermined the 'Kerala model' by providing a disincentive to the provision of social services by the state.⁸

Local and macro-level studies of remittances tend to produce contradictory findings. The high level of remittances to states such as Kerala and Punjab, which have significant levels of international out-migration, appears to contribute to economic growth, increased consumption, or enhanced social welfare at the macro-level (Banerjee et al 2002; Oberai and Singh 1980). Yet micro-level studies suggest that remittances may have negative effects, for instance by sharpening socio-economic inequalities in the sending communities (Ballard 2003; Taylor et al 2007) or creating dependence on remittances and undermining local economic autonomy (Gardner 2008). Village studies confirm that migrants often display their new-found wealth by purchasing land and constructing opulent houses in their home villages – providing evidence for the common view that migrant resources are largely 'wasted' on unproductive forms of consumption expenditure rather than being invested in 'productive' activities (De Haas 2007: 16-17). This kind of migrant investment is said to inflate local land prices and exacerbate polarisation of land ownership, as migrants purchase land from impoverished local residents (Gardner 1995). However, village studies in Punjab suggest that in the 1960s and 1970s, remittances stimulated farmers to invest in land and new technology, while the pattern of out-migration by young men reduced sub-division of plots – all factors contributing to the success of the Green Revolution. Other scholars argue the contrary, that remittances flowing into purchase of agricultural land in Punjab have created distortions in the land market and the local political economy, becoming a form of rent used to finance further migration (Kapur 2010: 114-15). These conflicting conclusions suggest that

many more local, regional, and state-level studies are required in order to unpack the complexities of remittances and their effects.

Diaspora Philanthropy

'Diaspora philanthropy' is an increasingly significant modality of migrant resources flowing into India (Viswanath and Dadrawala 2004). This broad category encompasses a wide range of activities, from donations to temples or other religious establishments, to support for NGOs or charities. According to one estimate, donations to religious organisations and charitable institutions from NRIs amounted to USD 5,472 million between 1995 and 2002 (Kapur et al 2004: 183). However, there are no reliable figures on the extent or ultimate destinations and uses of philanthropic donations by NRIs, in part because a large proportion of such funds enter India through informal channels (Guha 2011a: 15). Donations come through a range of routes – via remittances to family members who then donate to local temples or development projects, direct gifts by visiting migrants, or through registered trusts or foundations. Kapur et al (2004: 195) found that the two most important channels for Indian diaspora funds were informal family or personal networks and faith-based (religious) organisations, followed by international, NRI and national NGOs. In addition, there are numerous private initiatives promoted by NRI associations or wealthy individuals who build schools or temples in their home villages – a form of philanthropy that completely escapes official statistics. Similarly, household remittances may be used for philanthropic purposes by the recipients – a channel that is also not captured in existing data sources.

Religious organisations are especially important destinations for donations from NRIs, with mixed and controversial results. NRI contributions to the construction of temples or to right-wing religious/

⁸ With migrant households being more likely to send their children to private schools and to avail of private medical facilities, the state faces less pressure to spend on social sector or developmental activities (Kapur 2010: 118-19).

cultural organisations reportedly have been instrumental in sharpening inter-community conflicts in India (Rajagopal 1997). However, transnational connections forged by political or religious movements do not necessarily result in increased radicalisation but may have more complex outcomes, including a tendency to ‘moderation’ or support for religious reform movements of various kinds (Ahmad 2005; Osella and Osella 2008b; Simpson 2003).

It is only through micro-level studies that we may get a better sense of the entire range of migrant resources that flow into different regions and locales in India, and especially the local perceptions and effects of these flows. For example, several studies indicate that migrant philanthropy in the home village may create divisions and conflicts between migrant and non-migrant households rather than enhancing overall welfare. The local people who are the supposed beneficiaries of migrant-funded development projects may perceive these activities cynically – as migrants’ investments in their own social status or as an attempt to make their stay more comfortable when they come for their annual visits (Taylor et al 2007). In the case of Patel NRIs, for example, philanthropy has become a strategy of status enhancement and a point of contestation between migrants and the local communities (Dekkers and Rutten 2011: 13-16).

Direct Investments

In addition to private savings schemes, various incentives to attract business investments from NRIs have been floated by the central and state governments. Especially since 2005, the Government of India has liberalised rules governing foreign investment and provided various concessions and incentives to promote the entry of NRI capital, for instance by setting up Special Economic Zones (SEZs) exclusively for NRIs.

However, RBI statistics do not reveal what proportion of foreign direct investment (FDI) in India comes from NRIs or OIs, either as individual investors or through companies, nor do we have aggregate statistics on purchase of land, real estate, and other such investments by NRIs. Kapur (2010: 105) notes that NRI FDI flowing into India between 1991 and 2004 was just 7 per cent of the total, at USD 2.8 billion.⁹ Data from a survey of Indian origin households in the US suggest that the majority of investments were ‘passive’, going into real estate (33.1 per cent) or bank accounts (28 per cent) rather than business or other investments (Kapur 2010: 93-4). This finding is significant because it confirms what is known only from anecdotal information – that land (including agricultural land) and real estate are major destinations of NRI money coming into India.

To sum up, migrant remittances, NRI investments, and diaspora philanthropy constitute a substantial (and highly uneven) inflow of financial resources to India – yet the quality of data on these cross-border flows, in terms of volume, scale, content, channels, destinations and impact, is inadequate. Without in-depth field studies and regional level surveys it would be very difficult to gauge the significance of these flows. Moreover, fluctuations in NRI deposits and other private capital flows are usually viewed as outcomes of financial factors such as changing interest rates or incentives provided by the government (Gordon and Gupta 2004; Singh 2009), but often non-economic (especially political) factors are more significant influences on decisions by NRIs to remit, invest or donate to India (Lessinger 1992; Walton-Roberts 2004b). Only ethnographic and qualitative research can provide insights into these questions.

Social Remittances

Most attention has been paid in the literature to material resource transfers, but intangible flows

⁹ However, direct investment by Indians abroad may be much higher than is officially acknowledged, given that much of it probably comes through untracked channels. Kapur (2010: 105-6) notes a striking contrast between different states in the quantum of NRI FDI – the three states of Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra and Karnataka received the highest amount of NRI direct investment (1991-2003) while Gujarat ranks much lower – a surprising finding given the size, wealth and entrepreneurial bent of the Gujarati diaspora.

emanating from the Indian diaspora, such as transfers of knowledge, ideas and know-how, professional and scientific collaborations, and dissemination of political or religious ideologies, arguably exert more influence on India's development trajectory (Kapur 2010).¹⁰ Recently the Government of India has turned its attention to tapping NRIs for their social and cultural capital in addition to their economic resources (Kapur 2003). Conversely, many NRIs are deeply engaged in political advocacy and social movements in India. NRIs have organised themselves into significant pressure groups, both in pursuit of their own interests and to contribute to (their vision of) India's development (Bose 2008; Gandhi 2002). For example, profession-based NRI associations such as the American Association of Physicians of Indian Origin¹¹ are actively channelling resources and expertise to India.

This selective review of the literature from the South Asian region shows that diasporic and migrant individuals and groups are actively involved in India at various scales and in different ways – economically, politically, ideologically, and through maintaining strong social ties. Yet we do not have a clear picture of the varying patterns of migration or reverse flows across the various regions of India. What kinds of networks link different towns and regions with migrants abroad, and what resources flow through these linkages? What kinds of institutional structures or agents facilitate these flows? What are the key destinations and uses of these resources? What role do local actors play in attracting, directing, and utilising migrant remittances or philanthropy? How has the state, at different levels, responded to migrant activities and investments within India? What policy measures should be adopted to regulate, encourage, or redirect NRI remittances,

investments and philanthropy? To answer these and other questions we need a more nuanced method for mapping and analysing reverse transnational flows, the channels of transmission, the purposes for which they are used, and finally their consequences for 'development' in the recipient regions.

NUANCING TRANSNATIONAL FLOWS

In this section we suggest that the study of the resources that are sent home by migrants requires nuancing (Osella and Osella 2008a). Remittances, philanthropic donations, and other kinds of reverse flows are multi-faceted, multi-directional, and multi-nodal, and so cannot be easily reduced to one-way, singular transactions or movements, as they are commonly represented in the migration and development literature.

First, as noted above, much of the migration and development literature ignores crucial social, cultural, political, or ideological dimensions of resource flows, analysing them in isolation from the larger context within which both mobility and resource transfers take place (Levitt 2008). Yet transnational reverse flows are multi-dimensional in character – they are not simply economic transactions but are deeply embedded in social networks and transmitted through a range of social mechanisms, such as kinship and caste networks, to diverse recipient sites. Conversely, studies of transnational political or religious movements or other kinds of 'social remittances' often treat them as entirely separate from economic flows, although mobilising funds may be a key activity. Transnational resource flows are not only interpellated by local, national and transnational socio-economic structures and processes, they may have profound (and often unintended) political and

¹⁰ An older body of work, stemming from Anderson's (1992) 'long-distance nationalism' thesis, documents the involvement of diasporic communities as social and political actors in their countries of origin (Featherstone 2007). This literature – which provides a prime example of 'reverse flows' that are both material and immaterial – has been largely ignored in current discussions of 'social remittances'. The Sikh diaspora connection with the Khalistan movement and Sri Lankan Tamil refugees funding the LTTE are well known cases in point (Axel 2008; van der Veer 1995).

¹¹ <http://aapiusa.org/>.

cultural consequences. For example, funding for development activities is often accompanied by new models and practices of development or ideas of the 'good society', which may reshape existing development paradigms or programmes in the recipient country.

Second, what are treated as different 'types' of transfers (family remittances, capital investment, philanthropic donations) are often closely entangled. For example, business investments and philanthropic donations may come from the same source and be directed to linked destinations – yet in macro-level data sets they are treated as separate phenomena. In Coastal Andhra, diaspora philanthropy appears to be but one strand in a multiplicity of flows that emanate from affluent Non-Resident Telugus (NRTs). NRTs are prominent business investors in the region, especially in urban real estate development, the Telugu film industry, and in setting up private hospitals and educational institutions (Bhaskar and Bhat 2003). Many of these transnational business entrepreneurs also support developmental or welfare activities, especially in the health and education sectors. For instance, the NRI Educational Society (NRIES) merges philanthropy with business interests by providing free education to poor and meritorious students while also running private fee-paying institutes for upper middle class students.¹² The mushrooming of super-speciality private hospitals in the region has been linked to NRT investments, even as NRT doctors are also active in promoting charitable and private-public ventures in the health sector (Heerink 2011).

Unravelling the intertwined paths and ultimate destinations of resources travelling through transnational networks is made all the more

difficult because the channels and utilisation of migrant transfers may diverge. In Central Gujarat, money deposited in NRI bank accounts (which would be counted in official statistics as investments or remittances) is often withdrawn by local relatives to donate to religious or charitable organisations (Dekkers and Rutten 2011). Similarly, while donations to religious organisations may be identified as purely 'religious' in nature, many such institutions (such as the Swaminarayan organisation) use these resources to sponsor social development activities. Rather than trying to slot such transactions into separate categories such as remittances, philanthropy or investment, or as serving 'religious' or 'developmental' purposes, it would be more useful to retain these complexities in tracking transnational flows.

Third, neither 'migration' nor 'remittances' are simple unidirectional processes – exchange of resources between migrants and their families or communities at home are usually multi-directional, while mobility too is increasingly circular or multi-polar. People, money, things and ideas move in various directions and along multiple paths as interconnected flows through more or less structured networks or institutional arrangements. What have been singled out as discrete processes of 'migration' and 'remittances' are not just two sides of a coin, but two strands in a larger complex of networks and exchanges.¹³ For example, the migration process is usually supported by the migrant's family, and remittances may be regarded as repayment of such debts (Dekkers and Rutten 2011: 3; Singh 2006: 378). Yet the large investments that are made by potential migrants and their families in the migration process itself – in education, attaining certifications, visa fees, travel costs, and support for migrant children while they get established abroad – are often ignored in the

¹² This information is drawn from the unpublished research proposal submitted by Sanam Roohi to NIAS and the University of Amsterdam, 'Provincial Diaspora, Philanthropy and Social Domination: A Study of Coastal Andhra Pradesh, India' (2011).

¹³ The brain drain/ brain gain literature does attempt to measure the net effects at the macro-level by balancing investments in human capital in the migrant sending countries against potential inflows of new knowledge or return migration of highly skilled personnel (Beine et al 2001). Economists also increasingly recognise the two-way flow of resources, such as the significant foreign exchange resources that go out of the country along with Indian students going abroad in the form of educational fees, which should be balanced against potential inflows of remittances from these migrants once they get jobs.

celebratory discourses about migration and development. Moreover, for some migrants this investment in the end does not pay off (Rajan, Varghese and Jayakumar 2011), which may have implications for the reproduction of a migration pattern.

Investment in higher education, in India or abroad, is a particularly crucial strategy that underwrites high-skilled circular mobility, and which illustrates the high level of investments that are made in migration. Education migration (of students) in turn has become a key channel of mobility from India, with mixed consequences for first generation migrants, who may get cheated by visa and education agents or end up studying in sub-standard institutions abroad (Baas 2010). The growing transnational 'educational regime' may have negative implications for social development in the home regions, by widening local inequalities or reshaping the educational priorities and career choices of local youth (Harriss and Osella 2010: 141).

Fourth, transnational connections and exchanges may get reproduced (and also altered) across several generations. A case in point are the Patels of Central Gujarat, who first migrated to East Africa in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and from the early 1970s to the UK and other countries. Many of these migrants have maintained ties with their home villages and continue to send back various kinds of remittances and resources, but the nature of these ties and resource flows have changed over time. While most remittances from East Africa migrants were used for household consumption, to make improvements to the ancestral house, and as investments in agriculture through the boring of tube wells and purchase of land, the more recent flows from Patels living in the UK and USA are invested primarily in bank accounts and real estate (non-agricultural land and housing property) or are used for philanthropy, especially in the educational and health sectors (Chandra 1997; Dekkers and Rutten 2011; Rutten

and Patel 2002). Strategies of mobility unfold over time, which means that taking a longitudinal approach may make us more sensitive to the multi-directionality and multi-valence of these flows.

The circulation of migrants themselves, who return to their homes periodically or permanently, is an important aspect of multidirectionality that may significantly impinge on social and cultural configurations in their home villages or towns (Ramji 2006; Walton-Roberts 2004a). A growing number of highly educated NRIs are returning to India to work, start businesses, or to retire, bringing with them accumulated knowledge, capital and other resources. Return migration is also a major route through which social remittances – skills, 'know-how', and novel ideas and expectations – are transmitted. Returned NRIs, or 'RNRIs', who often 'return' to India's 'high tech' cities such as Hyderabad and Bangalore, bring with them new aspirations and ideologies that are conditioned by their experiences abroad, in turn inflecting the cultural orientation of the middle classes (Chacko 2007; Upadhyaya 2012; Varrel 2011). Moreover, the earlier one-way flow of highly skilled labour from developing to high-income countries is being replaced by more complex circular and multi-polar movements of skills, capital and technology between differently specialised regional economies. For example, wealthy Indian-origin IT entrepreneurs in Silicon Valley have invested significantly in the IT sector in India as venture capitalists or entrepreneurs (Saxenian 2006; Upadhyaya 2004), while Indian IT professionals circulate through various sites in the global informational economy (Xiang 2007). Another example of multi-directionality are NRIs who send their children back home to stay with grandparents, or to elite 'international' boarding schools in India that promise to ground children in 'Indian culture'. In other cases, grandparents move in the other direction, travelling to the UK or US to take care of grandchildren to enable both parents to continue working (Lamb 2002).

Finally, the forms, destinations and uses of transnational flows are shaped by the kinds of migrant and transnational organisations or networks through which they move. As Levitt and Lamba-Nieves (2011) point out, what comes back is influenced by migrants' prior experiences and the ideas and practices that they take with them. Moreover, migration studies usually make a sharp distinction between international and internal mobilities and remittances, whereas in many regions they are closely inter-related processes. By treating different kinds of mobilities (of people and resources) to and from (and within) a region as disconnected and discrete processes, we curtail the possibility of producing a more in-depth and fine-grained analysis.

MAPPING AND THEORISING TRANSNATIONAL FLOWS

In this section we work towards a more satisfactory theoretical framework through which to map and analyse transnational reverse flows and their effects in the recipient regions and communities. Only by reinserting migrant resource flows back into the transnational social fields through which they travel (and of which they are constitutive), and within their wider social contexts, can we begin to understand their significance. First we review key concepts that have developed around the idea of transnationalism and discuss their theoretical potential. Next, we refer to some of the relevant anthropological literature on South Asia, which provides additional insights into processes of migration, the formation of transnational connections, and their consequences for migrants and their home regions.

The idea of transnationalism came into prominence in the early 1990s¹⁴ and caught the attention of many social science scholars, leading to the development of the interdisciplinary field of

transnational studies (which draws especially from anthropology and sociology). Since the early 1990s the concept has been refined and deployed in various ways, through terms such as transnational communities, transnational social spaces, transnational social fields, and transnational networks. Fouron and Glick Schiller define transnational social field as 'an unbounded terrain of interlocking egocentric networks that extends across the borders of two or more nation-states and that incorporates the participants in the day to day activities of social reproduction in these various locations' (2001: 544). Faist (2000) advocates the idea of transnational social spaces, which highlights multiple bidirectional movements and relationships across borders. He uses the terms transnational 'social spaces', 'fields', and 'social formations' interchangeably to refer to 'combinations of social and symbolic ties and their contents, positions in networks and organisations, and networks of organisations that cut across the borders of at least two national states' (Faist 2010: 1673). Transnational practices of exchange have also been conceptualised as 'transnational habitus', which incorporates the social position of the migrant and the context in which his/ her transmigration occurs (Guarnizo 1997).

In contrast to earlier migration studies, the transnational approach emphasises the dynamics of mobility and the creation and reproduction of cross-border relations and ties (Vertovec 2003). However, several scholars point out that migrants have always moved back and forth and maintained relations with their homelands, suggesting that there is nothing particularly new in the idea of transnationalism (Kivisto 2001). In response, others argue that these connections have only recently acquired the 'critical mass and complexity necessary to speak of an emergent social field' (Portes et al 1999: 217) – which perhaps explains the neglect of transnational ties in earlier

¹⁴ A key article that kicked off scholarly work in this field is by Glick Schiller, Basch and Blanc-Szanton, who defined transnationalism as the processes by which immigrants build 'social fields' that link together their country of origin and their country of settlement (Glick Schiller et al 1992: 1-2). Another seminal piece, less often referred to in this literature, is Gupta (1992).

migration studies. Overall, this literature suggests that systemic or structural shifts are indeed occurring in places with significant patterns of out-migration, or at least that transnationalism may deepen or broaden ongoing processes of transformation in the home region (Vertovec 2004, 2009). Of course, it is not easy to distinguish the effects of migration from wider processes of change; yet in-depth studies can provide compelling evidence of how both mobility and inflows of migrant resources are inflecting local societies and economies.

The idea of transnationalism has provided a productive conceptual framework, or 'lens' (Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004), through which reverse flows may be unravelled and understood. In particular, the transnational perspective situates the various practices discussed in the migration and development literature – remittances, diaspora philanthropy, as well as diasporic politics – within their concrete historical, social, and political contexts. Transnational studies locate resource flows within the networks or social spaces through which they move. Money, gifts, commodities, ideas, and people are seen to flow in various directions within transnational social fields, not just in one direction or in isolation from one another. Further, the transnational lens emphasises that material exchanges are never purely 'economic' acts but are loaded with cultural meanings and driven by social or political strategies. This approach also has the advantage of encompassing both sides of these flows (migrants and those at home) within the same framework, mapping the networks and channels through which people and resources move in order to trace their ultimate destinations, uses, and effects.

The anthropological literature has contributed additional insights into how transnational social fields are formed and maintained, even when the

concept has not been explicitly used. For example, a number of studies point to the centrality of marriage practices in migration strategies and for the production and reproduction of transnational networks, or show how migration and transnational connections may alter patterns of kinship, marriage, and gender in the migrant sending communities (Beck-Gernsheim 2007; Charsley and Shaw 2006; Palriwala and Uberoi 2005). Similarly, migration and reverse flows may reinforce or alter structures of caste, kinship or political power. Velayutham and Wise's (2005) study of a 'translocal' village in Tamil Nadu shows how Vellalar migrants replicate their caste and kinship networks in Singapore, based on a closed moral economy which promotes giving and taking across distances (also see Wise and Velayutham 2008). Another important social dimension of remittances is the formation of transnational networks of caring and support (Gardner 2006).¹⁵ This literature demonstrates that material transactions linked to migration are deeply embedded in pre-existing and emergent social networks that have their own cultural logics which might be quite different from that of rational calculation. This does not mean that migrants, or their families, do not strategise in pursuit of their interests (such as a higher income), but that the goals or interests of actors, and the strategies they develop to attain those goals, flow from social contexts that are much wider, and deeper, than migrant or transnational networks alone.

From an anthropological perspective, both migration and migrant resource transfers may be seen as strategies of accumulation, in Bourdieu's sense – of social, symbolic, and economic capital – strategies that are developed and pursued both by individuals and collectivities. Strategies of accumulation are often oriented to upward social mobility, by seeking respect or prestige in the home community, or by collecting valued consumption

¹⁵ Cf. the growing literature on transnational families and transnational care regimes (Baldassar, Baldock and Wilding 2006; Bryceson and Vuorela 2002).

goods or acquiring certain forms of cultural capital. Geographical mobility ('migration') often is but one among several interlinked strategies of social mobility, which may also include donations to temples, transnational marriages, pursuit of foreign educational certifications, and so on. Investment in education is an especially crucial strategy of accumulation, often aimed at facilitating emigration or marriage with an NRI (Harriss and Osella 2010). Of course, these mobility strategies may have unintended consequences for local societies, as when remittances create inequalities between migrant and non-migrant households or introduce new consumption-oriented lifestyles that other seek to emulate. As noted above, migrants often attempt to differentiate themselves from local households by buying land or building large houses in their villages, a strategy of social mobility that may sharpen existing inequalities and produce social conflict (Osella and Osella 2000). A culture of migration may foster new aspirations among village youth, contribute to the reinforcement or reconstitution of cultural, religious or community identities, or introduce new imaginings of progress and modernity (Gardner and Osella 2003; Osella and Osella 2006, 2007) – processes that have unpredictable outcomes.

A major conceptual point that emerges from the anthropological literature is that transnational networks and connections, like all social relationships, are created and sustained through flows of gifts, commodities, and other kinds of material and immaterial exchanges (Simpson 2003; Werbner 1990, 2000). By abstracting certain transactions (such as 'remittances') out of their social context, and denigrating the 'conspicuous consumption' of migrants who bring home expensive commodities like flat screen TVs and microwave ovens, development-oriented studies often refuse to recognise the thick cultural substratum of various forms of mobilities and reciprocity or the centrality of consumption in strategies of social mobility. By considering material exchanges apart from the

social and cultural logics that drive them, we cannot fully understand practices of mobility or remittances, why particular kinds of resources flow into specific regions, or the effects of such flows. From a theoretical perspective informed by transnational and anthropological studies, remittances are never just household-level individual transactions, but are embedded in wider social fields that may be defined by social relations of kinship, family, or caste, by cultural identities based on religion or language, or by imaginings of national or sub-national political homelands. Contextualising specific resource flows in this way allows for a deeper understanding of their significance and local consequences.

Drawing on these insights, in the following section we further elaborate a proposed theoretical framework for tracking and analysing the consequences of resource transfers from migrants to their home regions, through a focus on the region. As discussed above, the complex nature of transnational social spaces demands a more nuanced approach that captures not only their multi-dimensional and multi-centred nature, but also the various scales at which transnational connections and networks are formed.

TRANSNATIONALISM AT A REGIONAL SCALE

Particularly missing in the literature reviewed above is a mapping of transnational connections and flows at the intermediate level of the *region* – a socio-economic and cultural formation below the level of the nation-state (and also below the level of the official state in India, in most cases) but larger than the village, town, taluka and usually also the district. The regional scale has its own dynamics that cannot be captured by micro-level studies and is glossed over in state- and national-level analyses. In this section we develop our argument that for India, the regional scale is the most appropriate one for mapping patterns of

mobility and reverse flows as they move through transnational networks and institutions.¹⁶

Although the idea of transnationalism has stimulated an outpouring of research and rethinking on international migration and its consequences, the term itself is being rethought, especially with regard to the question of scale. For one, the idea of transnationalism seems to reproduce the problem of methodological nationalism, which privileges ‘dyadic relationships between “sending” and “receiving” countries [and] obscures other connections in a complex spatial terrain’ (Harriss and Osella 2010: 146). Caglar (2004) notes that transnational social fields are shaped by institutional actors, power dynamics and policies at, below, and above the level of the nation-state – hence the study of transnational ties and flows must be multi-scalar in approach (cf. Faist 2000). According to Levitt and Khagram, transnationalism is not a territorially grounded concept but an ‘...optic or gaze that begins with a world without borders, empirically examines the boundaries and borders that emerge at particular historical moments, and explores their relationship to unbounded arenas and processes’ (Levitt and Khagram 2007: 5).

From this perspective, the world consists of multiple sets of dynamically overlapping and interacting transnational social fields that create and shape seemingly bordered and bounded structures, actors, and processes (Levitt and Khagram 2007: 5).

As Harriss and Osella (2010: 158) argue with regard to the education field, what has been called a ‘transnational social space’ includes many different actors operating at diverse scales, including ‘supra-national organisations, national and sub-national governments, private companies as well as families, parents and students’. Castles

similarly points out that macro-level factors have different effects at the local and regional levels due to mediating historical experiences and socio-cultural patterns (2008: 12).

As noted above, most studies of the developmental potential of migration in India remain at the level of the nation-state, glossing over significant regional variations in patterns of migration, the nature of migrant networks, and the volume, kinds, and destinations of remittances and other reverse flows. Given the great regional diversity in India, transnational social fields may be most fruitfully studied by viewing them as embedded in, and inflected by, the specific histories, social structures and political-economic formations of the ‘sending regions’. This approach, we suggest, will produce a more grounded mapping of the inter-connections between the places, people, and scales that constitute the transnational social fields through which remittances, diaspora philanthropy, and NRI investments move. In addition, a series of regional studies will allow for comparison of particular processes or dimensions *across* regions, which may reveal significant correspondences between the type of migration and diasporic networks and the kinds of resources that come in. For example, temporary low-skilled migrants (such as Kerala workers in the Gulf) primarily send household remittances for family consumption, while the more settled and affluent diasporas in the UK and North America from regions such as central Gujarat or the Doaba in Punjab seem to be more involved in philanthropic activities in their home villages and to send much lower levels of family remittances. Such regional variations require more investigation.

The second key component of the proposed methodology is to map, at the regional level, the institutional structures, social networks, agents, and key nodal points through which resources move or which direct, facilitate, and motivate these flows.

¹⁶ In this paper there is no space to adequately define the category of region, which is not merely a spatial or scalar concept but has emerged as central to recent theorisations of modernity and development (Sivaramakrishnan and Agrawal 2003). Conceptual issues about region and scale and their methodological role in the ProGlo research programme will be clarified in a separate paper.

Processes of transnationalisation may transform social institutions (for example, of citizenship, education, or kinship), and these institutional changes in turn influence processes of transnationalisation (Faist et al 2010: 8-10; cf. Portes 2003). With the strengthening of transnational ties, older institutions may acquire new meanings or functions, and new institutions may emerge at various levels – local/ regional (such as schools or welfare organisations funded by migrants), national (changes in citizenship rules), and transnational (migrant associations). A growing literature is documenting the diverse associations, voluntary organisations and networks that have emerged to channel migrant resources, such as ‘hometown associations’ (Caglar 2006). Levitt and Lamba-Nieves (2011) similarly argue for a focus on *collective* (as opposed to individual) social remittances, i.e., how social remittances are deployed collectively in organisational settings (such as NGOs engaged in ‘development’ work or migrant support for political parties), and how they affect what organisations do and how they do it (2011: 3). Thus, an important research strategy for studying the local/ regional effects of cross-border flows would be to identify the political, economic, and socio-cultural institutions in migrants’ countries of origin that have been challenged and transformed by transnationalism (Levitt and de la Dehesa 2003).

To illustrate the usefulness of a regional/ transnational ‘optic’ with a focus on mediating structures, connections and agents, we take the example of diaspora philanthropy and its variations across several regions of India. An uncounted number of diasporic and transnational organisations as well as individual NRIs are actively engaged in philanthropic activities in India (Sidel 2004), and in most cases these engagements are directed to the specific home towns or regions of the migrant groups. Moreover, local NGOs and charitable foundations often solicit NRI donations

to support their activities. Formally constituted NRI associations as well as informal transnational networks operate in this space. Such organisations or networks may be very broad-based or narrow in their membership; many are constructed on the basis of regional, linguistic, religious, or caste identities, rather than a generic Indian identity (Rutten 2008; Thandi 2006). Many diasporic organisations mobilise donations from their members to support development projects in areas such as education, health and rural development (Singh 2008; Tatla and Dusenbery 2010). Philanthropic activities of NRIs may emanate from existing organisations or create new ones, for example the US-based Asha for Education which has united NRIs of diverse backgrounds around the cause of improving primary education in India.¹⁷ Such activities may link new institutional structures to existing local organisations in India, or promote the establishment of new kinds of NGOs or social movements in the target areas. The social composition of such associations presumably influences the kinds of philanthropic or other activities that they sponsor in India. Yet we have few case studies of the activities of NRI-sponsored NGOs or development initiatives. Below we provide a brief comparative sketch of three regional diasporas and their philanthropic activities – Punjabis from the Doaba region, Patels from central Gujarat, and Telugu migrants from Coastal Andhra.

Punjab has a long history of transnationalisation and the close involvement of diasporic groups with their home regions. While Punjabi migrants have been sending resources to their villages and families for a long time (Tatla and Dusenbery 2010), philanthropic remittances have grown in importance in the last two decades and have also altered in content (Walton-Roberts 2005, cited in Rajan and Varghese 2010: 104). Earlier generations of migrants often sent donations to establish large memorial gates in their home villages and towns

¹⁷ <http://www.ashanet.org/>.

in memory of their ancestors, while the current trend is to send funds for development or gurudwaras (Singh 2008, cited in Rajan and Varghese 2010: 104). An estimated 16 billion rupees has been donated by NRIs during the last five years to the Doaba region. The Government of Punjab, recognising the potential of Overseas Punjabis as a major source of development resources, has taken several measures to attract and channel such funds, for instance by establishing a state-level Department of NRI Affairs in 2002 (Rajan and Varghese 2010: 105; Sahai et al 2011). While the state government has altered administrative structures in an attempt to formalise existing transnational economic spaces, these official measures have probably not succeeded in capturing even a fraction of the informal flows that typify diasporic relations with the home region (especially flows to migrants' villages and religious establishments; Rajan and Varghese 2010).

A similar pattern is observed in Gujarat, with its large and powerful diaspora (especially Patels) who have a tradition of supporting developmental schemes in their home villages, particularly for education and health. Patel NRIs from Central Gujarat usually provide donations directly when they visit their native villages, or through their relatives. As in Punjab, the Gujarat state government has been very active in promoting NRI investments through concessional schemes and events to strengthen Gujarati identity and pride amongst NRIs, such as the annual 'Vibrant Gujarat' summit. Yet it appears that the majority of donations in this region are not channelled through state institutions or formal organisations such as NGOs or registered charities, but come primarily through informal village, caste or religious organisations. This may be due to the distrust of government bureaucracy among Patel migrants

(Rutten and Patel 2007), as well as to the ideological role of Hindu communalism and religious sentiments that influence many overseas Patels to donate to temples and religious organisations (Dekkers and Rutten 2011: 16-18)

In contrast to Central Gujarat and Punjab, the pattern of diaspora philanthropy in Coastal Andhra appears to be quite distinctive. NRTs – in particular those living in the US – have been raising money and organising development-related activities in the region, especially for rural areas. The Andhra Pradesh state government has not only set up a state-level NRI department to attract investments, but even several districts have established NRI Cells to promote local NRT engagement. The first such NRI Cell was established in the Guntur District Zilla Parishad; its main activity was to raise funds from Overseas Telugus through a matching grant scheme. Preliminary investigations suggest that resources channelled through the Guntur NRI Cell are primarily directed to the donors' home villages or towns, where many still have family members living. The donors express a desire to 'develop' their villages in order to bring them up to 'American standards' by building roads, flyovers, schools and health facilities.¹⁸ Much of the philanthropic activity in the region is spearheaded by strong diasporic associations based in the US, such as the TANA Foundation of the Telugu Association of North America, which carries out charitable work to the tune of USD 1 million a year, and the American Telugu Association (ATA) with its 'Adopt a Village – Support your Motherland' scheme.¹⁹ A number of foundations and trusts headed by NRIs or with NRI support are working in Coastal Andhra, such as the Ramineni Foundation, Society for Rural Scholars, and the Shankara Eye Hospital.²⁰ Highly educated NRTs tend to support initiatives linked to their

¹⁸ *Source:* Ongoing fieldwork on NRT philanthropy in Guntur District by Sanam Roohi.

¹⁹ <http://www.tana.org/?docid=29>, http://www.ataworld.org/index.cfm?select=projects&project_type=charitable%20projects, accessed 8 December 2011.

²⁰ *Sources:* a) Heerink 2011

b) Unpublished research report on diaspora philanthropy in Guntur District by TLS Bhaskar

c) <http://www.drraminenifoundation.com>, <http://180.179.43.28/AspxForms/donatenow.aspx>, www.sankaraeye.com/?q=content/sankaraeyehospitalsguntur, websites accessed 8 December 2011.

professions, such as medical education, yet family trusts remain an important (but largely unexplored) channel of NRT philanthropy in Coastal Andhra.²¹ However, religious donations appear to be less significant in Andhra compared to the Doaba region of Punjab or Central Gujarat.

These examples illustrate the variability of what is generally put into a single category of 'diaspora philanthropy', in terms of the ways in which funds are collected and donated, the kinds of activities supported, the sorts of organisations involved, and the sources, channels, purposes, and destinations of funds. Even within a single region we find a complex congeries of transnational connections and reverse flows that might be loosely grouped together as 'philanthropy'. In order to explain these patterns and variations, we need to track reverse flows at the regional level and then compare spatial and scalar differences in their nature and destinations. Moreover, these flows are embedded in transnational social fields that have been inflected by the specific histories and social formations of the 'sending regions'. For example, the different migration patterns of the dominant landowning communities of Coastal Andhra and Central Gujarat, which are linked to the specific agrarian structures and social histories of these regions, may explain their diverse modes of transnational giving and engagement with the home villages.²² The methodological framework outlined in this section will allow us to better delineate and contextualise processes of transnational mobility and flows and also provide a conceptual basis for cross-regional comparative studies.

CONCLUSION

Flows of migrant resources – tangible and intangible – to developing countries are believed to influence processes of economic and social development. Such resources flow to the home villages and towns of migrants through

transnational social fields, with diverse implications for local economies, social structures, politics, and cultural orientations that are often glossed over in the literature on migration and development. The nature and effects of reverse flows are highly variable and complex, and depend on a range of factors, including the specific histories and social formations of the migrant sending regions; the institutional structures that shape and direct such flows; and the types and pattern of mobility from the region. In this paper we have argued that to go beyond current discussions on remittances and diaspora philanthropy, an ethnographically 'thicker' and theoretically sophisticated account of transnational connections and flows is needed, in particular by paying more attention to the social, political and cultural contexts of resource transfers and to the social and institutional structures that configure regional transnational social fields. Only by carefully contextualising transnational connections and flows within the historical and sociological specificities of the different regions can we begin to grasp the significance of transnationalism and reverse flows for contemporary social transformations in India.

We have also suggested that the regional scale is best suited for tracking, unpacking and contextualising reverse flows to India, while keeping in view the multi-scalar nature of transnational social spaces. Accordingly, we have sketched out a methodological approach to this research problem that is centred on mapping and analysing regional transnational social fields and the organisational structures and networks that facilitate and direct reverse flows. This approach, it is anticipated, will allow us to better delineate and understand the contexts and consequences of mobilities and transnational flows and to compare these processes across regions, which in turn will generate a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of the 'migration-development nexus' in India.

²¹ *Source:* As in note 18.

²² This comparative argument will be developed in more detail in another paper.

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ABOUT THE PROVINCIAL GLOBALISATION PROGRAMME

The Provincial Globalisation research programme ('ProGlo') explores transnational connections between Overseas Indians and their home regions, especially the effects of 'reverse flows' of resources, including remittances, philanthropy, investments, and knowledge.

The programme consists of five independent but interlinked research projects (three PhD and two postdoctoral) located in three states of India – Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, and Gujarat. The research documents a broad range of resource transfers by migrants, including economic resources (such as household remittances, investments in land), social remittances (including flows of ideas, support for NGOs), and cultural flows (such as religious donations), and their influence at the regional level.

The PhD projects are intensive studies of three selected regions – Anand District in Gujarat, Guntur District in Andhra Pradesh, and Dakshina Kannada District in Karnataka – focusing on the effects of resource transfers by migrants in the key provincial towns and their rural hinterlands. The two post-doctoral projects provide macro- and meso-level mappings of transnational linkages and flows at the regional, state, and national levels. By tracing these transnational networks and the modalities and destinations of resource transfers comparatively across three regions, the research programme provides insights into the economic, social, political, and cultural consequences of Overseas Indians' engagements with India.

'ProGlo' is a five-year collaborative research programme of the Amsterdam Institute for Social Science Research (AISSR), University of Amsterdam, the Netherlands, and the National Institute of Advanced Studies (NIAS), Bangalore, India, funded by the WOTRO Science for Global Development programme of the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO), the Netherlands, initiated in 2010.

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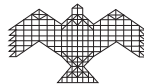
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