

Migration, religion and post-imperial formations

THOMAS BLOM HANSEN

*Department of Anthropology, Main Quad, Building 50, 450 Serra Mall,
Stanford University, Stanford, CA 94305-2034
tbhansen@stanford.edu*

Abstract *Most scholarship on international migration focuses on the incorporation of ethnic and religious minorities into societies in Europe and North America. Much of this work overlooks that a very substantial part of contemporary flows of migration happen within well-trodden pathways of language, commercial ties and cultural imagination established by colonial empires and the networks of exchange and control they enabled. Adopting a notion of the post-imperial formation as a crucial economic and cultural factor in contemporary migration flows affords one to understand a much broader set of migratory movements beyond the Euro-American context. In this article, I explore two such examples – migration to Johannesburg and Durban in South Africa, and labour migration from the Indian subcontinent to the Gulf States – in the light of how movement of labour, commercial transactions and religious-cultural difference were managed within the British imperial and post-imperial formation.*

Keywords EMPIRE, MIGRATION, RELIGIOUS COMMUNITY, POST-IMPERIAL FORMATION, COLONIAL GOVERNANCE, INDIA, APARTHEID

Post-imperial formation and migratory pathways

We commonly regard migration of large numbers of people across the borders of nation-states as one of the most conspicuous effects of the process of globalization. However, large-scale migration of labour, within as well as across state borders, has indeed been central to global capitalism from the beginning (Hirst and Thompson 1996). During the centuries defined by European colonial domination, the overwhelming majority of international migration took place either as export of unfree labour – slaves and indentured labourers – or as massive flows of European settlers to the conquered and colonized territories in the Americas and Australia. With decolonization, international labour migration became defined as a problem for nation-states, many of them former colonial powers. Now, large numbers of migrants who differ from the majority population in appearance, ethnicity and religious practices seem to threaten domestic resources, social entitlements and tacit cultural and political values (Balibar 2004; Brubaker 1996). In the last few decades it has become a truism among

policy makers and political pundits across the world that migration, in and of itself, constitutes a political and social challenge to the cohesion and political stability of a society. This truism is premised upon two historical legacies of colonialism that are rarely discussed, if not deliberately erased.

The first legacy is racial and cultural. Bluntly stated, migration as such has never constituted a problem, but rather the physical appearance, religion and cultural habits of particular migrants have. The authorities in the Americas and other settler societies saw the migratory flows of Northern European settlers (white and generally Protestant) throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as a source of future prosperity if properly managed and monitored. However, the millions of immigrants from southern and eastern Europe (mainly Catholics and large numbers of Jews) arriving in the Americas, Australia and South Africa around the beginning of the twentieth century created anxieties about the properly 'white' character of these societies. Debates ensued about the social discipline, intelligence and aptitudes of people deemed white-but-not-quite. In the USA, this triggered a long and bitter debate about immigration policies and racial distinctions. Social scientists such as the founder of modern cultural anthropology, Franz Boas, played a key role as advocates of continuing non-discriminatory immigration policies (see Boas 1982: 3–81). Across Latin America, fears of the demographic domination of ex-slaves and *mestizos* gave rise to efforts towards whitening and 'improving' the local population by continued immigration from central and northern Europe (Jacobson 1999; Roediger 2005; Wade 1997). In South Africa, a beleaguered white minority continued such policies well into the 1970s (Dubow 1995; Peberdy 2010).

The second underlying historical colonial legacy is structural and spatial. Contemporary migration does not take place as spontaneous flows of impoverished migrants pushing towards the global islands of prosperity and security. The specificities of chain migration and migratory networks in both sending and receiving societies are now well explored (see Levitt and Jaworsky 2007 for an overview). However, the most obvious structuring factor in migratory flows continues to be that of colonial history and the dominance of the colonizer's language as the effective equivalent that connects diverse migrant groups. The largest and most substantial migratory flows in the last generation have taken place within what one may call 'post-imperial formations'. South Asians head for Britain or other Commonwealth nations, and more recently the USA. West Africans and North Africans head for France. Latin American and Caribbean people head for the USA, which for a century has been the *de facto* hegemon in the Americas. The Surinamese head for the Netherlands; Angolans for Portugal (and vice versa) and now Brazil. Turks and Croats head for Germany with which their countries have longstanding imperial and political connections. There are, of course, several exceptions to this general pattern. In the past few decades, London, like major American cities such as New York, Los Angeles, Atlanta and Chicago, has become a truly global destination for migrants from every corner of the world. However, the vast majority of migration in the world remains heavily 'path-dependent', premised on colonial pathways and historical connections. The reasons for this are obvious and straightforward – linguistic

competence, historical trade connections, employment and education; a measure of cultural intelligibility and familiarity with structures and institutions of government; as well as cultural and literary imaginings – all these powerful frames are always already available within post-imperial formations.

The logic of path dependence also extends to migratory flows to nodes of economic importance within these post-imperial formations. Cities like Hong Kong, Singapore and Dubai continue to attract labour migration from across the British post-imperial formation, just as they did as commercial hubs and free ports during the time of empire. In Africa, cities like Johannesburg, Lagos, Nairobi and Dakar, former hubs of colonial commerce and extraction, continue to attract large flows of migrants from across the continent. In other words, contemporary migration does not take place as human floods unleashed by globalization, but rather as intensified flows along already well-trodden, established, well-narrated and imagined pathways. At the end of these pathways, whether they are seen as final or not, migrants encounter institutions, networks and forms of social life that have some elements of both linguistic and social intelligibility. This path dependency, I suggest, constitutes an important deep structure of contemporary lives and imaginaries of migrants.

Concerns about religious differences were central to the regulation of migration in the colonial age. By the early twentieth century, two broad models of management of religious and cultural difference had emerged. The first was the model of non-intervention broadly preferred in the Americas, North and South. Here, people generally saw religiosity, regardless of its precise form and content, as a guarantee of a certain moral ground for civility, law-abiding behaviour and a respect for the sanctity of the religion of others (Banchoff 2007). In North America, the apparent tolerance built into this model derived from the assumption that migrants were smaller minorities unlikely to challenge the core values and cultural fabric of the majority in the host society (Hutchison 2004). The growing hostility to Latino migrants in parts of the USA today stems precisely from the fact that Catholicism and the Spanish language are changing the cultural makeup of significant parts of the country.

The second model, dominant in Europe and much of the post-colonial world, was based on governance through community. This essentially colonial model assumed that religious difference clustered with other cultural features in distinct historical ‘communities’. Since the writings of Henry Maine in the nineteenth century, people had regarded community as a form of self-governing social organization that formed the very core of what Maine famously termed ‘traditional societies’ (Mantena 2010). Today, authorities in areas as different as western Europe, South Asia and South Africa routinely assume that religious figures enjoy a high degree of authority within (migrant) communities because in this model religious identity is not a choice or a conviction but a ‘natural fact’, grounded in such organic traditions. In times of crisis and conflicts in the streets, it is customary in the UK and France to call upon religious leaders in immigrant communities to ensure internal order and moral discipline within their respective communities. Prior to 2001, it was also common for British asylum courts to grant asylum explicitly to individuals with religious education and expertise because they could be potential assets to the moral and cultural life within their

immigrant communities in the UK (Good 2009). The colonial idea that organic communities and ‘natural’ leaders should govern people of colour and of colonial origin remains influential across Europe and the postcolonial world. Indeed, the very term ‘community’ – the most ubiquitous, morally-valORIZED and loaded word in debates on migration – was imported from the colonial world into the UK in the 1960s (Baumann 1996). The curious non-translatABILITY of this word to many other European languages (except Spanish and Portuguese) suggests that the term itself has certain path-dependent powers.

The larger research programme on the religious lives of migrant minorities, as well as the articles in this special issue, deals with multiple permutations of this colonial model of regulation of cultural and religious practices among migrant minorities. It was the dominant model of the British Empire, and it remains the dominant model in the contemporary British post-imperial formation, whether in the UK or in Africa and Asia. Let me briefly describe the emergence of this model.

‘Natural leaders’, investiture and religious community as a social form

Religious community emerged first as a naturalized cornerstone in the management of colonial subjects in British India. Several decades of scholarship have now firmly established the crucial importance of colonial India to many aspects of British life and identity since the late eighteenth century. The sheer size and diversity of this colony, and its slow and incremental colonization over more than a century, made colonial India into a veritable laboratory for a wide range of colonial policies and enterprises. It is no exaggeration to suggest that in many fields – from taxation systems to labour management and managing cultural and religious conflicts – the experiences and models developed in India became cornerstones in the larger administrative landscape of the British Empire, and well beyond.

A great deal of confusion and many contradictory impulses marked the early decades of East India Company rule over growing territories in South India and Bengal. A pragmatic economic spirit emphasized profitability and collaboration with local elites. The emphasis here was on land settlements that could optimize land revenue and later support the hugely profitable opium trade. Many colonial officers and traders found themselves accused of ‘going native’, of becoming infected by the monetary and moral corruption that became associated with the hot climes of the East (Dirks 2008). Under the influence of scholars sympathetic to what was widely seen as a noble but decaying Hindu civilization, the East India Company initially embraced the idea of the temple as the central institution in all aspects of life and commenced a detailed regulation of temples and religious practices in South India (Appadurai 1981). The tide soon changed and, from the early nineteenth century, Christian social reformers began a frontal attack on the Hindus’ ‘heathen’ and ‘barbaric’ customs. Soon churches expanded and the authorities passed new legislation banning *sati*, stipulating a minimum age of consent for sexual unions, and tightening what they saw as a lax and negotiable native penal system in favour of stringent sentencing and public executions (Metcalf 1997; Singha 1998; Viswanathan 1998).

The effect was seething resentment across the colonial territory. The rapid spread of the military revolt in 1857 to become a full-scale rebellion against colonial rule demonstrated the dangers of heavy-handed regulation of cultural and religious affairs. The British government now put India under direct administration and implemented a host of new policies (Anderson 2007; Bayly 1988; Metcalf 1991). One of these, namely decennial census operations, created a huge inventory of named and precisely 'enumerated' state-recognized communities defined by caste, religion and status (Cohn 1987). The second major innovation was a systematic bifurcation of government, with matters falling under criminal law administered without particular regard for cultural and religious identity. In all other matters, however, especially those pertaining to intimate affairs of family, inheritance, faith and cultural practices, the state accorded religious communities wide discretion and autonomy (Larson 2001). This, in turn, demanded that each community had visible and legitimate leaders and authorities to adjudicate disputes and reproduce the community as a social reality. The British operated with an idea of 'natural leaders', men who by virtue of their learning, religious prestige or property were assumed to command general respect. When such figures did not exist, or were impossible to find, the British simply performed acts of investiture and appointed men the headmen or official leaders of their community (Chandavarkar 1998: 143–234).

These policies had many and complex effects. One was the consolidation and deep codification of the caste system across South Asia (Dirks 2001). Another was deepening religious cleavages between the heterogeneous but slowly consolidating Hindu 'majority' and more clearly defined minorities such as Muslims, Sikhs and Christians (Hansen 1999; van der Veer 1994). A third effect was that learned Brahmins, the *alim* and other ritual specialists of letters could now claim a more fully fledged and legitimate position as leaders of their respective communities. They could command recognition by the government and could sometimes supplant the traditional aristocracy by virtue of their education and prowess in matters administrative and legal (Chatterjee 1994; Guenther 2009; Metcalf 2004).

Out of this long and complex process crystallized in South Asia a standard model of management of cultural and religious difference among colonial subjects. It rested on the assumption that in matters cultural and religious, colonized people have strong and enduring attachments to their own customs and habits. The colonial power could best maintain public order in the world of empire if it left religious and cultural affairs to the discretion of native institutions and native leaders who in turn could impose internal order on their own people. Owing their more formal and consolidated position to the government's recognition of them, these figures soon become useful and strategic nodes in everyday governance of neighbourhoods and native quarters (Chandavarkar 1998: 198–234). In its consolidated and routinized form, this relatively cost effective model of regulation not only became a centrepiece in the paternalist liberalism and its attendant claims of benevolent rule that came to characterize the very last phase of the British Empire. It also portrayed the very division of labour between native institutions regulating cultural matters and religious sentiments, and the 'secular' colonial state firmly regulating public order and economic welfare as a

natural and necessary order of things in the East (van der Veer 2001). The separation between communities governing their own cultural passions and a state providing supposedly neutral and even-handed rule of law did indeed form the basis for a relatively well-functioning idea of secularism in India after independence (Bhargava 2004; Hansen 2011).

This pragmatic model of governing cultural and religious difference slowly made its way across empire to Africa and other parts of Asia. In Africa, colonial administrators allowed missionaries a freer hand than in Asia and mission stations and schools came to play key roles in reforming and ‘modernizing’ native customs (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991, 1997). Both the British and French applied the principle of indirect rule through codifying customary law and empowering chiefs more strictly in Africa than anywhere else (Mamdani 1996). Yet, unlike in South Asia, they never allowed the newly empowered chiefs to govern, monopolize or restrict native spiritual life, which Christianity and Islam quickly pervaded during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Throughout the twentieth century, Africa remained the single most important field of Christian missionary activity. The continent also saw an unprecedented sprouting of independent African churches, most of which the colonial administrations accepted and encouraged as long as they remained disinterested in matters of political rule (Gifford 2012). As in South Asia, the colonial power firmly institutionalized the fundamental division between cultural-religious regulation of customs by native and local leaders, and political-legal regulation by a more distant state. This marked a break with older cosmological models of belief, which had pervaded all aspects of life. Everybody now understood and legally defined the new categories of ‘religion’ and ‘culture’ as discrete fields of institutional and ritual practice, comparable across continents, which governments and other institutions recognized (see Robinson 2000 for West Africa).

Another important effect of this emergent institutional autonomy of a slice of life called ‘religious’ was, obviously, that religious practices were perceived as both portable and easily translatable into new contexts. The travelling faiths that Wong and Levitt discuss in this issue all derived from the new opportunities of trade and migration that marked the height of British Empire. The government of British India was keen to facilitate the growing flow of Indian Muslims departing from the Mumbai port for Haj (Low 2008). Soon, Mumbai’s centrality in global and Indian Ocean trade turned the city into a prime location for a large number of ‘religious entrepreneurs’ promoting various kinds of modernized Islam around the Indian Ocean (Green 2011). This laid the ground for many of the transnational flows in the Muslim world today, and modernized the longstanding tradition of the itinerant Muslim preacher as a figure of great authority and spiritual power. Similarly, with the large labour migration out of India in the nineteenth century (see below) Hindu organizations began to dispatch learned *sadhus* as missionaries (a novel concept in Hinduism) to Fiji, Mauritius, Trinidad and South Africa. Their objective was to ‘save Hindus from pollution’ by helping the indentured labourers create religious organizations, build temples and imbibe the teachings of the Hindu tradition – in short, to make Hindu practices and belief portable (Hansen 2012: 223–39; Kelly 1991: 121–40).

The market for labour evolved rapidly within the British Empire in the late nineteenth century. The banning of slavery and the need for large pools of labour in mines and plantations across empire necessitated new systems of mobile labour. One such system was the huge migrant labour system servicing the South African mines. By the mid-twentieth century, mines and plantations across southern Africa had recruited hundreds of thousands of workers on short-term contracts (Moodie 1994). Most of the labour was strictly controlled and the only concessions made in the mining compounds were those pertaining to spiritual needs. Workers were allowed, indeed encouraged, to attend church services in the mining compounds or outside. The mining companies regarded Christian dispositions and beliefs, even of a vernacularized kind, as vastly preferable to the often unintelligible, if not threatening, host of native customs (Harries 1994, 1998).

The other major labour migration scheme was the system of indenture that emerged as a substantial source of cheap labour shortly after Britain and other European powers abolished slavery. Over more than seven decades of the nineteenth century, several million poverty-stricken labourers came from India to the plantation economies of Mauritius, Fiji, Malaysia, South Africa and the Caribbean (Kelly 1991; Khan 2004; Lal 1983, 1998; Tinker 1974). The managers of these indentured labourers, who were mostly on renewable ten-year labour contracts, paid even more attention than their counterparts in the South African mining industry to the religious needs and requirements of the 'Asiatic' labour force transplanted to new soil. Missionary organizations of both Hindu and Muslim provenance were allowed free access to the 'coolie soul' (Green 2008; Naidoo 1992; Vedalankar 1950). Within a few decades of the indenture system, religious leaders and social reformers were organizing and representing the Indian populations on plantations across the empire and successfully campaigning for the rights of coolies to have autonomous cultural and religious community institutions.

To illustrate the long afterlife of these colonial models of regulating migration and to show how religious practices have remained at the heart of reproducing migrant communities, both as minorities and 'permanent aliens', let me turn to two examples. I take the first of these from a long-term ethnographic study of the Indian community in South Africa (Hansen 2012), of which part was under the aegis of the collaborative research project on the religious lives of migrant minorities that frames this special issue. The second example comes from ethnographic research I carried out in Mumbai in the 1990s and early 2000s (Hansen 2001; see Hansen 2000 for a discussion on migration to the Gulf from Mumbai).

Religion, migration and social order in South Africa

The discovery of gold and diamonds in and around Johannesburg and elsewhere in South Africa in the late nineteenth century triggered an unparalleled global gold rush and the birth of the city of Johannesburg. This rapidly growing metropolis attracted hundreds of thousands of migrants from Europe and elsewhere (Bonner 1996). The large numbers of African labour migrants coming from across the entire region on

short-term contracts were never allowed to reside in the city or become part of the wider society (Gotz and Simone 2003). British colonizers had already set up another colonial migration scheme in the eastern province of Natal where, using imported indentured labour from South Asia, they had created a successful plantation economy. Most of these labourers stayed in the country after the expiry of their indenture contract. Along with substantial numbers of mainly Muslim traders from India, who fanned out across the towns and countryside, Natal and the Transvaal soon had a substantial South Asian population (Ebr.-Vally 2001; on the Muslim population of Indian origin, see Sadouni's contribution in this issue).

After the end of the Anglo-Boer war in 1902, policies promoting commerce and industry dominated South African society. In Durban, a new industrial economy attracted the formerly indentured labourers from India and isiZulu-speaking migrants. Both groups jostled for space and livelihood in dense new neighbourhoods around the city (Maasdorp and Pillay 1977). White anxieties over native and Indian 'encroachment' translated into countless conflicts over land and residential space (Padyachee and Morrell 1991; Palmer 1957: 54). The Durban authorities responded to the growing wealth of Indian traders and the radicalization of Indian and African working-class organizations by pioneering early schemes of systematic urban residential separation that were to become the blueprint for apartheid's infamous restructuring of urban space. We need to understand the triumph of the apartheid project in 1948 against the background of a white population that for decades had felt increasingly beleaguered and overwhelmed (Hansen 2012: 27–35; Maharaj 2003).

Drawing on the mainstream social science concepts of the day, apartheid relied on the distinction between (white) modernity and (native) tradition. Black South Africans were defined as 'foreign natives' within the country, guests of the white South African Republic, visiting from their designated homelands (Bantustans) that had been set up along lines of 'tribe', custom and language. Here, the apartheid state argued, Africans were able to live in harmony with their ancestral community traditions and have their 'natural' leaders, the chiefs and native elites whom colonial rule had defined and consolidated, govern them. By law, if not always in practice, black South Africans were temporary sojourners to the city, aliens whose usefulness lasted only for as long as they could build the city, care for gardens and pools, or nurture white children. The infamous *dompas* system that controlled movements of Africans in the white parts of the country was in many ways a logical extension of the bio-political technologies employed elsewhere in the colonial world and in parts of Europe and North America (Njoh 2008). Indeed, the older colonial model of governance through discrete communities of culture, race and religion sustained the wider apartheid system. Apartheid pushed this model further by systematically separating residential space and public institutions, turning race into space by designating every residential and commercial space in the country as belonging to a racially defined community (see Loren Landau's contribution to this volume for a more detailed examination of spatial management in apartheid and post-apartheid Johannesburg). Although the colonial model of regulation assigned crucial

importance to religious institutions and identities, racial distinctions were pre-eminent. Across South Africa, churches and mosques were catering to distinct racial communities and would offer separate services to different racial groups. In the late 1970s, when a community of Zanzibari Muslims in Durban faced reclassification as 'Indians' on religious grounds and had to move to an Indian township, wealthy Gujarati Muslims in the city built them a separate mosque and madrasa (Seedat 1973).

Like its earlier colonial incarnations, the apartheid state regarded Indians as intrinsically alien to African soil, as stepchildren of colonial rule whose customs and religious orientation meant that they ought to be repatriated to their 'proper place' in the world. However, after almost a century in South Africa, scarcely any Indians were interested in returning to India, despite various government incentives and pressures in the 1950s. The newly independent government of India, while leading the global condemnation of apartheid, was also reluctant to allow the South African state to repatriate its 'Indian problem' (Pachai 1971). Instead, in 1961, the state ventured to propose a Faustian bargain to the now substantial populations designated as Indians, and the mixed race 'Coloureds' (Western 1981). It accorded the communities the status of quasi-citizens allowed to live in designated areas in the city and to enjoy a semi-protected position in the labour market while being deprived of any substantial political or social rights. The state separated the Indians and Coloureds from Africans, and provided them with a somewhat higher standard of infrastructural amenities, schools and social assistance than those afforded to black South Africans.

The colonial model of management re-emerged in the Indian township spaces created from the 1950s onwards, but now as a general racial category. The disparate groups of people originating in the Indian subcontinent, speaking many vernaculars and adhering to a range of religious practices and caste ideologies, were now treated as a single racial entity, as 'the Indian community'. The government treated religion with seriousness and designated multiple plots for the construction of mosques, temples and churches. Keen to generate a more religiously minded and conservative leadership among Indians, instead of the high profile activists aligned with the now banned African National Congress, the government encouraged the formation of religious organizations and associations such as the South Africa Hindu Mahasabha and the *ulema* councils of Natal and the Transvaal (Tayob 1999). One of the many legacies of these policies is that the state still sees people of Indian origin in South Africa as a kind of permanent minority. Even after six generations in the country, it still regards them as aliens, as people from elsewhere whose loyalty to the new South African nation is routinely put into question (Hansen 2012: 97–116).

Another deep legacy of apartheid is a widespread suspicion of people of colour who migrate, whether within or across national borders. The state regards those who move from the impoverished countryside and former Bantustans to the cities with deep contempt and suspicion, as a sub-proletariat at the margins of both the city and civilized life. The millions of migrants who have arrived in South Africa since the end of apartheid are the victims of even stronger prejudice and hostility: foreigners are called the source of HIV, the primary cause of crime and a threat to jobs and culture. Throughout the country, the police regularly arrest and detain foreigners on the

grounds only of their physical appearance, their inability to speak the right language or for simply fitting an undocumented-migrant 'profile' (Landau 2012). Beyond the beat cop, the city of Johannesburg and other municipalities have deployed massive resources to rid the city of a presumably hostile alien presence. While the riots in 2008 in Johannesburg and elsewhere in the country mainly targeted migrants from other African countries, Pakistanis and Bangladeshis were also targets of anger and violence (Kupe et al. 2009).

Since the end of apartheid, South Africa's cities have become sites of unprecedented ethnic and religious heterogeneity. Unaccustomed to such levels of social mixing, cordoned off in discrete townships for decades, and without public institutions to bridge divisions and suspicions, it is perhaps unsurprising that most South Africans display remarkably low levels of trust in neighbouring ethnic and national groups. The primary loyalties of recent migrants remain oriented to their communities of origin, or to family and community members located elsewhere in the world. Dense community networks and overlapping institutions have emerged where South Africans have lived on a longer-term basis, typically peri-urban or racially ethnic townships such as Soweto and Alexandra, or the Indian townships in Durban. This density, however, derives from solidarities based on language, neighbourhood and ethnicity that are hostile to newcomers.

Religious institutions seem to be some of the few social formations capable of transcending the deeply entrenched structures of solidarity, membership, association and conflict along racial lines in South African cities. Even here, however, the long shadows of the past reappear. Where religious institutions were strongly intertwined with the governance and identity of specific communities – the *ulema* councils among Indian Muslims, for instance, or the Shembe church among isiZulu speakers – these are hardly open to new members of different ethnicities (see Sadouni's contribution in this volume). Only the newer and highly successful religious movements such as evangelic and charismatic churches, which carry a strong message of discarding one's cultural and religious past, are systematically attempting to build multiracial congregations. As was the case in colonial South Africa, revolutions of social mores still often take place through revelation (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991).

Nodes of the informal empire

Let us move the perspective away from an entrenched settler colony to another important node of empire, namely the free trading port under British imperial tutelage that was so vital to Britain's economic and maritime dominance.

Trading communities from Gujarat established settlements and warehouses in what are today Abu Dhabi and Bahrain centuries before British explorers and naval officers arrived there in the early nineteenth century. Surat in modern Gujarat had been a major centre for trade across the Arabian Sea (Haynes 1991) and, for centuries, trading communities such as the Shia Daudi Bohras maintained centres both in their native Yemen and on the Gujarati coast, only to make Mumbai their main base in the nineteenth century (Blank 2001). Other mobile communities, such as the Hadramis

from Yemen, established major presences across the Indian Ocean in Mumbai, Kerala, Sri Lanka, Java, and further afield (Ho 2006). From the peninsula of Kutch in Gujarat, shipbuilders and lascars sailed the Arabian Sea for centuries and set up nodes of trade and collaboration along the coasts of modern Iran and the Persian Gulf (Simpson 2006).

As part of the British effort to establish pre-eminence in the Indian Ocean (which by the mid-nineteenth century British possessions mostly surrounded), most of the smaller sultanates in the Gulf were forced to accept the status of a British protectorate. They retained that status until 1970–71, when the last naval presence and British run police forces in what subsequently became the United Arab Emirates were dismantled (Smith 2004).

During most of the nineteenth century, the sultanates became commercial entrepôts, or trading posts, and kept nominal sovereignty under the umbrella of empire. Like the many princely states in the Indian subcontinent proper, they were run under a version of indirect rule whereby a so-called ‘Gulf Resident’, who answered directly to the colonial Government of India, supervised government and commerce, and indeed the welfare of other imperial subjects residing in these territories. Throughout the nineteenth century, the colonial government gave this position to prominent Indian merchants in the territories, mostly Gujaratis, whom they called ‘Native Agents’. With the growing strategic importance of the Gulf and the discovery of oil in the twentieth century, this position was upgraded to ‘Political Agent’, now manned by a British person, but still answering directly to New Delhi rather than London (Gardner 2010: 24–49). For most of the twentieth century, this was the situation wherever Indian trading communities, especially from Gujarat, had established firm and profitable presences within the reach of empire – in the Gulf, Oman, Yemen and elsewhere along the rims of the Indian Ocean, including Durban, Dar es Salaam and Mombasa.

For a century and a half, in these places as at home, the colonial authorities settled and regulated Indian labourers and traders as discrete and distinct communities entrusted with the administration of their own community organizations, forms of worship, burial societies, social clubs and much more. Today, people of South Asian origin constitute the largest ethnic group in the UAE, which, according to the UAE authorities, is well above 60 per cent of the population.¹ As Andrew Gardner has shown in a recent book on Indian migration to Bahrain, to a significant extent so-called ‘civil society’ in Bahrain today consists of organizations rooted in various Indian migrant communities (Gardner 2010: 96–118). This is hardly surprising given that Mumbai and other parts of the west coast of the Indian subcontinent had throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries been supplying entertainment, print, finance, commodities and what Nile Greene (2011) calls ‘religious firms’, namely missionary societies proselytizing and globalizing Islam across the ocean from Mumbai. When the need for labour of all kinds grew dramatically in the Gulf from the 1970s onwards, the colonial networks and pathways were already well established and Mumbai was the first place to which Arab employers went in search of labour and other services. Unsurprisingly, religion played a major part in these efforts. The UAE

and Saudi Arabia were reluctant to grant work visas to non-Muslims and for the first decades of the economic boom in the Gulf, labour migration provided millions of Muslim men from South Asia with a significant source of income and means of social mobility. (There is an account of this with respect to the southern state of Kerala in Osella and Osella 2000.) As the Gulf economies evolved, however, they required better-educated and more highly skilled labour, so the Gulf States opened their doors to professionals from South Asia, East Asia and Euro-America.

If one asks an average Indian today about the significance of the Gulf States, many will say that cities like Dubai and Doha are models of what they would like their own nations to become. They will also say, correctly, that South Asian labour built these cities and will suggest that in the Gulf for the last three decades all South Asians have felt 'like brothers'. Many will also personally be acquainted with someone in their family or community who is currently working in one of the Gulf States. These are opinions I have encountered in recent decades, both during research in the 1990s among young Muslims from Mumbai working in the Middle East (Hansen 2000) and during countless conversations with South Asian labour migrants in the Gulf during intermittent stopovers in Dubai and Qatar.

The Gulf and the Middle East house millions of labourers and professionals from South Asia. They are no longer just a proletariat, although manual labour remains the largest category by far, but the group also includes engineers, doctors, pharmacists, teachers and executives. They see Dubai, especially, as a South Asian city – many have family there and it is a popular saying among the ubiquitous Pakistani taxi drivers and service workers in Dubai that there are more flights from Islamabad and Karachi to Dubai each day than between these two major cities in Pakistan.

Let me conclude this section with a small vignette drawn from my earlier ethnographic work in the mid-1990s with young men from Mumbai who worked most of the year in the Gulf and returned to their families for one or two months each year. For these young men the enduring logics of the post imperial formation subsumed even the powerful language of Islamic unity. They saw working in the Gulf as an option they could ill afford to ignore and many young men were under considerable pressure from their families to begin years of migrant work there. The economic marginality and increasing isolation of Muslims in India from government service and the formal sector, which has become much more acute since the 1990s (Sachar 2006), meant that there were very few employment options available in Mumbai, as well as elsewhere in India. The propensity of the Gulf authorities to give preference to Muslims from South Asia meant that most people I encountered had older cousins or other relatives who had previously worked in Saudi Arabia or the UAE. Mumbai was at the time the main hub for flights to Dubai and the UAE and the city had a well-developed networks of travel agents, trade testing centres, hostels, visa services and much else servicing hundreds of thousands of young men aspiring to get one of the much coveted *kahfils* (work sponsorships) in the Gulf.

The young men I knew mainly undertook semi-skilled work, such as construction, car repairs, electronics and minor clerical functions. That was at least the story they told their families. In reality, many did very menial jobs, such as cleaning, and lived

in cramped rooms without ventilation, on construction sites, on rooftops, or in labour camps. The stories they related to their elders and their families were invariably those of living a clean and modern life in the Gulf and enjoying the respect of being a fellow Muslim in these true lands of Islam. However, the reality was different and one of frequent racist abuse, erratic payment by their employers and demeaning treatment by local Arabs. Yakub, who was seething with anger at the time, told me of how a caretaker outside one of the largest mosques in Bahrain had asked him to provide identification documents to prove that he was a Muslim. Eventually, when turned away, he and his friends learnt that only rich Indian Muslims were welcome in the older mosques that the Bahraini elite controlled.

Instead, he and his friends frequented smaller, more modest, mosques that South Asian Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Indian Muslims ran and maintained exclusively. 'Here we feel at home', he told me and admitted that he only socialized with people from back home. 'The Pakistanis are our brothers, no doubt,' he told me, 'but at the end of the day I like the Indians the most.' He had Christians and Hindus among his friends, but they were all Indians. Yakub and his friends also felt that they could not really tell their families that most of the good jobs in the Gulf went to Hindus and white people, rarely to Muslims. They were better educated and, according to Yakub and his friends, they all appeared to have the connections they needed to obtain the coveted *kahfils*. That was what mattered. As one of Yakub's friends explained:

In [the] Gulf, Islam is just what people are talking. ... It is all about money and nothing else. They may look down on us for their own reasons but they do all kinds of things that are *haram*. ... I cannot even tell you. Whatever they say about us, Muslims from India, I think we are the ones with the most sincere intentions (*niyah*).

Not unlike the labour system created in apartheid South Africa, these migrants were permanent outsiders who fulfilled multiple economic and practical functions but had no prospect of permanent residence or political rights. The authorities could withdraw their *kahfils* at any point and deport them on a whim. This is not just because of some innate prejudice among Arabs or undemocratic structure of government, though those factors also play a significant part in the enduring uncertainties labour migrants face. What these men experienced was essentially the twenty-first century version of a system of labour management that the imperial world had fundamentally shaped. None of the post-colonial governments involved in this are interested in changing it because the benefits of the system far outweigh the humiliations and indignities to which citizens of India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka are subjected in the Gulf States. The system reproduces a precarious and essentially disposable labour force to which the Gulf States have no substantial social or political commitment; and it ensures a steady and growing stream of revenue and remittances back to the struggling economies of countries like Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. As Mohammad, a mechanic from Mumbai and a veteran of this labour system for several decades told me a few years ago:

It is true that many of our people are not treated well in [the] Gulf, but then look at how we are treated here, in our own country! Our government is not like your country that sent aeroplanes to get your people out when the war came in 2003. ... We were not even told that there was any danger. Most people stayed and many got jobs in Iraq driving trucks and working for the Americans, even if they were Muslims. It is the money we want, no?

Migration and post-imperial formations

Mobilizing considerable hyperbole, Stoler and McGranahan (2007: 8) describe imperial formations as follows:

Imperial formations are politics of dislocation, processes of dispossession, appropriation and displacement. They are dependent on material and discursive deferrals that manage their own exceptions: delayed sovereignty, temporary interventions, conditioned tutelage, military takeover in the name of humanitarian intervention ... they create new subjects that must be relocated to be productive and exploitable, dispossessed to be modern ... coerced to be free.

Beneath the rhetorical flourish the authors offer a useful conceptualization of a historical 'formation' as a social and cultural compact that defines the ruling mentality of an epoch – the ruling assumptions, styles, genres, institutional arrangements and, in the case of imperial formations, the routinization of double-speak and bad faith in any dealing with colonized subjects. As with the 'post' in the term post-colonial, the notion of 'post-imperial formations' denotes that the imperial indeed is a thing of the past in a formal sense. This very stripping away of the legitimacy of the formal aspects of the colonial-imperial order now allows us to appreciate fully the extent and depth of the naturalized common sense it created and on which it rests. Much of that common sense lives on. To use Stoler and McGranahan's (2007) terminology, the age of 'deferral' is over and a new formal order is established: colonial territories are now sovereign states and colonial subjects have become rights-bearing citizens, at least in a formal sense. Yet, the mentality of the imperial formation, its horizons, tacit hierarchies and popular common sense have much longer shadows and more durable effects than any of the discursive and pragmatic arrangements that created them in the first place. The post-imperial formation is the world where sovereignty and citizenship are formally redistributed and where ideas of nationhood, self-determination, ethnic purity and belonging have become truly globalized. Yet, the reappearance of the mentality, spatial imaginings, regulatory regimes and cultural common sense of older imperial orders and the very real economic discrepancies and dynamics of the global economy constantly pierce and undermine this formal order. From the imperial formation, we inherited the fundamental idea that the geographical movement of white people as settlers, executives or tourists signifies progress and modernity. The movement of people of colour, by contrast, whether to cities or across borders, invariably signifies a social and political

problem in need of careful monitoring and control. Many thousands of mainly eastern Europeans have migrated to South Africa since 1994, but even ardent African nationalists never raise this as a problem because everybody assumes that they contribute to the economy. Instead, as we see from the contributions of Landau and of Sadouni, South Africans direct their ire against Zimbabweans and Somalis whose contributions to the economy are equally significant.

Hundreds of thousands of Europeans and Americans have settled in the Gulf in recent decades, mainly as migrant professionals in a range of fields. Many take this as a sign of the region's emergence as an important centre in the global economy. However, the region's economy depends vitally on the vastly larger numbers of South Asian migrants – engineers, pharmacists, nurses, teachers, builders, drivers and other skilled workers. Yet, the local authorities routinely single them out as a problem. They govern and perceive them as undifferentiated communities deserving of discrimination, as a threat to the cultural identity and political stability of the region.

The scale and breadth of international migration today is different from the imperial age. Yet, a not very distant imperial age and mentality decisively shape the pathways, regulatory regimes and racial-cultural hierarchies that govern and shape these movements. Those more specific post-imperial dynamics, rather than some imputed newness of general global flows, ought to be the starting point of any analysis of migration and the religious lives of migrant communities. The various contributors to this special issue of *Global Networks* are calling attention to how, and why, religious practices and organizations play a particularly central role in how governments across the British imperial and post-imperial formation perceive and govern migrant communities in comparable ways.

Note

1. http://www.uaeinteract.com/docs/Expatriates_numbers_rise_rapidly_as_UAE_population_touces_6m/37883.htm.

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