Transnational Lifestyles and the Transformation of Gender Relations: Professional Indian Women in Durban, KwaZulu-Natal

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INTRODUCTION

This study is based on the transnational experiences of 30 women from the wider Durban metropolis in Kwa-Zulu Natal, South Africa. It explores the movement of professional Indian women overseas for varying periods of time to pursue their careers and examines what could be changing patterns of social relations within the conventional structures of authority and in gender relations within the Indian household. "Professional" women in this paper refers to women who have a tertiary education in the form of a degree or diploma.

Transnational or migrant networks generally refer to spatially determined social relationships that connect across two or more geographical areas. Boyd (1989: 641) for instance says of migrant networks:

"Networks connect migrants across time and space. Once begun, migration flows often become self-sustaining reflecting the establishment of networks of information, assistance and obligations which develop between migrants in the host society and friends and relatives in the sending area. These networks link populations in origin and receiving countries and ensure that movements are not necessarily limited in time, unidirectional or permanent."

Similarly, Massey et al. (1993: 448) define migrant networks as

"…sets of interpersonal ties that connect migrants, former migrants, and non-migrants in origin and destination areas through ties of kinship, friendship, and shared community origin."

Based on case studies of thirty three women (30 return migrants and 3 mothers of the informants), this paper shares some thoughts on two aspects in particular-the role and nature of social networks in transnational processes and the transformation and renegotiation of gender relations within the Indian household influenced by transmigrant lifestyles.

Emigration: Who is Leaving and Why?

South Africa's skilled population of 1.6 million consists of 72% whites;18% African; 8% Coloured and 3% Indian (All Media and Products Survey, 1998 *cited* in Crush et al., 2000). The greatest mobility of highly skilled people both into and out of South Africa over the past decade has been amongst those in education and in the humanities occupations, followed by engineers and architects, top executive and managerial personnel. Emigration in South Africa has accelerated since its first democratic elections in 1994 which also marked the end of its international isolation. Attempts to quantify this phenomenon, more commonly known as the "brain drain", is problematic as are official statistics which themselves claim discrepancies in the collection of data, reporting a gross underestimation of figures as one report asserts**:**

"While 70000 South Africans are thought to have left the country between 1989-1992, the estimated number ballooned to over 166000 between 1998 and 2001. According to official statistics, over 16000 highly-skilled South Africans emigrated between 1994 and 2001, but the real numbers are probably three to four times higher." (The Economist, August 2005).

Reasons cited for emigration indicates a combination of "push" factors, the most widely cited reason being crime; perceptions of high living costs and levels of taxation; and the perceived decline in the standard of public services. Among the "pull" factors in recipient countries appear to be more stable and better paying career opportunities and professional mobility as well as more scope for allegedly uninhibited socialization.The most likely countries of destination are the English speaking first world nations such as the United States, Australia, United Kingdom, Canada, and New Zealand. In the last 3 decades the vast majority of skilled emigrants from South Africa have been in the most productive age-groups, 25 to 45 years.

The skills shortages that has resulted in this

loss has enticed the media to focus on emigration and its costs on a regular basis. One newspaper for instance pointed out that:

"Official figures show that more than 16 000 people emigrated in 2003–nearly 50% up on the previous year and the highest number since South Africa's first democratic election in 1994, when 10000 left the country…the exodus costs the country around R800-million in lost tax revenue each year. With an estimated 400000 South Africans living abroad, emigration has already cost the country about R285– billion…" (Independent Online, 23 April 2004).

Similarly, countless other reports have dominated the media focusing on varying aspects of the emigration of the skilled population, exemplified in the following newspaper articles.

"Britain and Canada have come under heavy fire from South Africa for their attempts to recruit doctors, nurses and teachers…Officials estimate that about 1500 South African doctors are working in Canada…the direct cost to South Africa from the emigration of doctors and dentists over two years was about R80 million…Education Minister Kader Asmal described the imminent arrival of principals and education consultants as a "raid on the teaching profession". The consultants were from a teacher recruitment company, Timeplan, which has lured about 7000 teachers to Britain in the past ten years…" (Cape Times, 15 February, 2001).

"More than 7400 South African graduates and professionals, most not even stopping to complete their airport departure forms, hit the runways for the pound seats in the first half of this year as the country's brain drain continued unabated…The latest migration figures released by Statistics South Africa, collated at the county's three international airports in the last half of the year, show no reversal of a skills diaspora that began fast-tracking in mid-2001… While the brakes appear to be put on departing doctors and nurses, the slump in the engineering industry is already sending scores of professionals overseas–while almost 2000 graduates and budding au pairs head out for work opportunities denied them at home. "(Cape Times, 15 October, 2002)

"Despite an agreement to stop active recruitment for the national health service in the United Kingdom, South Africa was still haemorrhaging healthcare professionals as the agreement precluded the private sector whose recruitment agencies continued to troll large academic hospitals for staff…Although the national health service of the United Kingdom–which takes in the largest number of health care professionals from South Africa out of all receiving countries–could no longer actively recruit here, the United Sates, Canada, Australia and New Zealand were where an increasing number of South African health care workers were heading. The Emirates states rely solely on health care workers from other countries…" (Pretoria News, 12 December 2005)

The use of emotive language and wording such as "raid", "hit the runways" and "haemorrhaging" in the media underscores what appears to be an overwhelming challenge to a newly-formed democracy in a global economy. Presenting the actual state of affairs concerning the migration of professionals remains problematic due to the unreliability of official data. What does emerge is the lacking resources and expertise necessary to collate such data and the obvious unpreparedness of local infrastructure in dealing with such a phenomenon. Also called into question is the efficacy of the South African government's drive to successfully meet national quotas on education and employment, a decade afterindependence. The media's response to the loss of skills further problematizes unreliable data on international migration. Public opinion is based largely on social encounters with people and families traveling abroad as well as journalistic interpretation founded on scarce statistical evidence.

Rising Emigration among Indian Women

Emigration of skilled labour has always been associated with male-based skills. However, Statistics South Africa also indicates a steady increase in the number of professional women leaving South Africa, from about 25% of all skilled emigrants in the 1970's to just under 50% in the 1990's. The exact number of Indian women within this category is uncertain but is nevertheless a noticeable trend within the Indian population in Durban. Being a part of this community, I have noted from an "insider perspective" (as a professional Indian woman living in Durban) that the growing trend of "going overseas to work", has found commonplace in the Indian mindset, as opposed to the conventional expectation of the young adult to "get married and settle down." My observation of the Indian women in my midst who were traveling abroad for various reasons, piqued my interest and initiated this study.

The visible exodus of this sector of the population and its impact on the household and gender perceptions and relations, is in need of anthropological scrutiny and ethnographic detail. Recent literature about the history of Indians in South Africa is euphemistic at best at addressing those issues that affect Indian women most, that is their efforts at transcending the strictures of colonial and Indian paternalism. This is compounded further by a continual reliance and allusion to older works on the subject resulting in the generalization and concealment of the larger issues affecting them. Works by local Indian woman academics such as Jithoo (1978) and Meer (1969,1990) detail the Indian woman and her relationship to the household as well as her socio-economic position but generalize to the extent that the degree of their innovativeness and entrepreneurship is downplayed and remains hidden.

The idea of the Indian woman transnational is relatively recent but is becoming increasingly prevalent. It would seem that within the local community in Durban, the general conservatism regarding women and their roles as subservient housewife and dutiful daughter or sister has evolved to a certain extent through the education of women and economic pressures which has compelled the need for women to work. However, the dynamic of a transient lifestyle adds new dimensions to social institutions and practices which challenge conventional perceptions and expectations. This is a community that is in the throes of adaptation in order to meet the challenges of a global society but is nonetheless fraught with contradictions with regard to the way in which women are perceived, particularly in the more conservative household.

The Women

The target group for this project falls outside the conventional standard of a settled community that offers the anthropologist an opportunity to make an official entry and gradually ingratiate himself/herself into it to engage in participant observation. Such an approach for research among women who want to permanently emigrate or who want to work overseas is not possible. Research on such a target group must be predicated on the assumption that contact with such subjects is only possible over a wide area with whom interviews is only possible through a networking process.

Since mid-2005 33 interviews were done in the city of Durban. 30 were professional Indian women who had worked abroad (Table1) and were back in South Africa for varying reasons, namely: in-transit till their next scheduled work-related trip; in-transit while deciding their next destination; remaining in South Africa permanently; and on their way out "permanently." The remaining 3 interviews were with the mothers of 3 unmarried women who were working abroad at the time. The interviews lasted between 60 and 90 minutes and involved follow-up meetings or phone calls for verification of details. The women were interviewed in various sites, including their offices, at home but mostly during their lunch-break, or in-between other commitments. Some of the women were known to myself as family members, friends and colleagues and others were referrals from this and other personal networks. Numerous statistics emerged out of the data that was collated from the interviews with the women. At least five tabulations appear below that are intended to reflect on some of the issues that are relevant to this paper.

Table 1: Age groups of women interviewed

Ages groups	20-25	26-35	36-45	46-55	56+
Nos.	4	14	8		4

The marital status of the women showed an even ratio of single and married women, while six of the women were widowed (Table 2).

Table 2: Marital status of women

Marital status	No. of women
Married	12
Single	12
Widowed	6

The professional statuses of the women were diverse. The 2 students in the sample had used their academic qualifications to secure work overseas even though they had yet to complete their degrees (Table 3).

Most of the women had worked in the United Kingdom (particularly near London); a handful in Australia and fewer in New Zealand and Canada (Table 4).

Schuerkens (2005) points out that potential emigrants from South Africa are aware that economies such as Australia, Canada and the United Kingdom already have fairly substantial South African communities which serve to buffer

Table 3: Professional status of the women

Professional status	No. of women
Medical doctor	2
Attorney	2
Optometrist	2
SpeechandHearing Therapist	2
Lecturer	4
Nurse	4
Cosmetologist	6
Medical specialist	2
Business woman	2
Researcher	2
Student	2

Table 4: Number of women in destination countries

Destinations	No. of women
United Kingdom	22
Australia	4
New Zealand	2
Canada	2

or reduce the adjustment problems in moving to a new country. This factor, she maintains, combined with other key pull factors such as the socially secure and stable environments of these developed economies, affects the way in which individuals choose to move to a new society. While this might be the case with a bigger sample, findings in this set of 33 interviews did not entirely resonate with this view. Only a few of the women knew friends and/or family already residing in the country of their choice. 21 out of the 30 women had made their own work arrangements from South Africa through a recruitment agency or with their company/institution, 4 "went out on a limb" seeking employment on arrival, and 5 found employment with the help of family friends living abroad. One common factor that emerged was the enthusiasm and challenge to work and earn in a stronger currency economy and in an environment that is more socially conducive and safe.

Accommodation Arrangements

The dwellings in which the women lived were either old houses that had been renovated to accommodate between 4 and 8 people; 1 to 3 bedroom flats with private/communal bathroom facilities; a "granny flat" with a bathroom and communal kitchen; and a single bedroom with/without a bathroom to share, in the case of those who rented with a local family.

Making prior arrangements for accommodation overseas were as tedious as making prior arrangements for employment. 9 of the women had some form of indirect assistance (guidance and information) from friends and family with regards to accommodation. Once they had arrived and settled, they navigated their search for work and social lives accordingly. Only two women (whose mothers were interviewed) lived with several fellow South Africans, an arrangement that was made before leaving South Africa. One other woman interviewed also had a sister who had settled in the UK but who lived some distance away from her.

Most of the women were the first members of their immediate as well as extended families to leave South Africa to work overseas. They felt strongly about serving as role models to their siblings and peers as well as their future role in facilitating moves, temporary or permanent, for other members of their families.

Socializing with South Africans Abroad

When asked about South African communities overseas, the general view was that South Africans were too geographically dispersed to form more cohesive structures such as those that existed among the Pakistani, Chinese and Indian national communities that were much more established and easily identifiable in their locales (eg. Little India, Little Pakistan and Chinatown.). They generally agreed that the South African sense of community support was based on smaller networks and was more personal-often coming together at individual's homes or congregating at bars and restaurants on weekends to socialize and support national sporting events. Their support of each other extended only as far as friendships was concerned–there was no work-related or professional dependency. Social networks based mainly on friendship characterized the support systems of the women while they were abroad. Those who had family ties tended to keep their reliance to a minimum once their initial "settling–in" had taken place. While some of the respondents justified this position as being circumstantial, based purely on time constraints and traveling schedules, others rationalized their decreasing reliance on such family networks to increasing responsibilities, job movement (being placed or choosing to work in different areas) and independence.

Several of the women commented that their fellow South Africans were "too busy working";

were "generally independent"; and one woman said "mostly aloof".

Three women however, who interacted regularly with other South Africans (on a weekly basis) did join in each other's religious celebrations (prayers and festivals) regardless of their ethnic and religious affiliations. Generally, the women had formed friendships with people of diverse ethnic and religious backgounds. Most women in the sample socialized with mainly Indians on a personal level but with a variety of other ethnic groups in the working environment. While most of their friendships were with other South African Indians, other Indians included a wide range of religious backgrounds including Jains, Sikhs, Muslims, as well as Christians and Hindus.

Only a single informant in the sample said that her life "revolved around her South African friends" who had moved before her to the UK. She had expanded her network with people of other backgrounds through her South African friends. She adapted easily to her new environment and felt very comfortable in her new home because of this pre-existing support network. Her brother who left South Africa a year after her had moved into the same house as herself and 5 co-inhabitants, all of whom were of Indian descent. She was one of the 3 women in the sample with siblings residing in the same country.

Case Study 1: Bhavna

Bhavna (30) is a speech and hearing therapist who works simultaneously at 2 hospitals near Oxford, London. She boards with 7 other professional transmigrants in a large house not too far away. 5 of her housemates are South African. She, along with 3 of her housemates are vegetarians. Bhavna socializes mainly with these South African friends and a few other South African colleagues. Bhavna has a brother who works as a townplanner in Essex who she encouraged to leave South Africa. She has no other family ties in the United Kingdom and is presently pursuing a doctorate in speech and hearing therapy. Bhavna is the eldest of 3 children and her family are devout Hindus who belong to the Ramakrishna Movement of South Africa. She has continued her loyalty with this religious body and visits the Ramakrishna mission in London where she often attends lectures. She also maintains rituals (eg. fasting)

and observes religious festivals practised in South Africa. She shares religious books and CD's with her brother and parents on a regular basis. Her youngest brother presently working in South Africa will soon join his siblings. Bhavna sends home a generous sum of money every 3-6 months for household improvements and together with her brother is due to take her parents on a holiday. Marriage is not her priority because she has always put her studies first. She would like to marry a fellow Hindu, preferably an Indian and a vegetarian. She is averse to pork and beef for religious reasons, which she says excludes a European spouse for choice. She is very settled in the UK and believes that it is a better society than South Africa with regards to safety, work opportunities and income. She upholds that people in the UK are far more independent and far less materialistic.

This case study shows three significant trends that have evolved in the South African Indian community's perception of women. Firstly, that Bhavna's parents willingly supported her decision to work in the UK despite the fact that she did not have anyone to facilitate her settlement there. She was unmarried and was venturing out to an unknown destination without a chaperone or family member to assist her. This case contradicts general perceptions of how unmarried daughters should be protected by their families until marriage. Secondly, being unmarried and living with "strangers", including males, is symbolic of the major shiftstowards independence of females, especially after acquiring qualifications in tertiary education. And thirdly, Bhavna's choice to pursue a career and studies over marriage shows the growing preference for higher education that such women have over marriage. However, her situation was by no means unfettered. While her mother stated that she accepted and understood this choice, Bhavna's father's position was more conventional and he continued to advise her over the telephone and by email about the values that she had to abide by as an unmarried woman. His anxiety about her unmarried status presented itself as a perennial source of concern to him, although he often tried to present a sense of ease with her. He believed that she should stop studying and begin focusing on marriage before she "grew too old". Her parents pointed out that while their immediate nuclear family supported the idea of their children living abroad, reser-

vations from some extended family members about her living so far away from home, had surfaced. Since her move to England, Bhavna has visited her parents twice. They keep in regular contact with each other telephonically and via email. In the light of this case study, Vertovec (2000: 4) provides an apt discussion on such situations:

"Newer, cheaper and more efficient modes of communication and transportation allow migrants to maintain transnationally, their home based relationships and interests. Today, globally "stretched" patterns of activity affect a variety of migrants' social relations (including friendship, kinship and status hierarchies), modes of economic exchange, processes of political mobilization, practices of cultural reproduction (including religious practices, institutions like marriage, images and symbols affecting group identity) forms of information transfer and the nature of professional association."

Parental contact is a crucial basis of support for all the women-regardless of their marital status. Regular communication, either by email or by telephone has emerged as an integral factor to the life of the transmigrant woman and family. All the women upheld that frequent contact is mentally therapeutic and that it is fundamental and reassuring to know about the well being of family when they are in different parts of the world.

Mothers and Daughters

The family backgrounds of the women showed varying instances of the mother-daughter bond, ranging from the traditional stereotype of guarded emotional attachment and reserve on the one hand to open-minded, communicative rapport on the other. In conservative Indian families kinship relationships are generally authoritarian and patriarchal. Distinct patterns of household relations emerge as the nuclear unit matures and advances in age. Very distinct gender and age relations begin consolidating, although both males and females tend to rely more on their mothers for their needs and advice than on their fathers. For these reasons, especially among the women in the household, they tend to develop closer bonds and more intimate relationships with their mothers and sisters than with their fathers and brothers. However, relationships

between mothers and daughters are durable only to the extent that they are based on mutual understanding of common cultural expectations. Any deviance from these expectations can lead to severe tension in relationships between parents and children, despite their affinity and closeness. For instance, during the interviews the mother-daughter relationship in particular instances exemplified such strain.

In one of the cases the daughter's relationship with her then fiancé was spoken about only because she eventually married him. I was fortunate to become privy to the details of that relationship as it was particularly revealing of challenges faced within a conservative business family in terms of traditional values and modern aspirations and challenges.

Case Study 2: Paula

Paula is 27 years old and worked in London as a case handler in a law firm for 3 years before returning to South Africa. Her parents were anxious about the idea of her working away from home even when she served her articles 80km away from Durban. Her decision to work overseas created panic as did her boyfriend's decision to join her in London. It strained her relationship with her parents for a while but she was determined to follow her dream to work overseas. Her conservative parents eventually accepted her decision even though they contradicted the traditional values espoused at home. But Paula still found herself at loggerheads with her parents, particularly her mother.

Paula married her boyfriend on returning to South Africa. While she was able to financially assist her parents with their business, she found it very restricting being back at home. She subsequently secured a position as an attorney with a British legal firm based in Cape Town through her friends in England. This would hold her in good stead should she decide to go back to England. Paula had established her own network of professional colleagues whom she could possibly rely on at a later stage. She was unsure as to whether she would settle in Cape Town permanently but felt that such a move would serve their immediate needs as a newly married couple. They enjoyed their experience overseas and therefore kept open the possibility of emigrating at a later stage. Paula argued that Indian parents face the dilemma of allowing

their children independence on the one hand but continue to adhere to the idealism of the past. She believes that parents should understand the changes that they themselves adopted in rearing them and should therefore be more flexible in their approach to contemporary values.

Meera, on the other hand, a young mother who had 2 children working abroad, contradicts the idea of the traditional Indian mother. Her open-mindedness differed markedly from Paula's mother.

Case Study 3: Meera

Meera is an insurance consultant whose son works as a town-planner in London and whose daughter also works in London as a teacher. Meera was married at the age of 17 years in an arranged marriage and lived in a joint family household for many years. She did not want the same for her children, particularly her daughter and so has encouraged them to find independence by working and traveling. Her daughter and son live with 5 other 78 South Africans in a three-storey house in London. Meera says that she will accept whomever her children choose as spouses because her love for her children is unconditional. She speaks openly to them about the pros and cons of sexual relations before marriage and even took her son's girlfriend to the family-planning clinic for advice on contraception when they visited South Africa. Meera has had many disagree-ments with her husband on the way in which she supports her daughter's approach to life and independence. He would prefer that their daughter remain in South Africa because he feared that she may "tarnish the family name" if left on her own. Meera believed that parents should trust their children if they want them to grow as individuals.

The last two testimonies of Paula and Meera illustrate 2 very different relationships between mothers and unmarried daughters. I found the dynamic among my married respondents to be differently focused. For instance, Shreya and Alka's relationships with their mothers revolved significantly more around support concerning childcare than around issues of emotional support and independence. Although without this encompassing maternal support, it would be very difficult to fulfill the roles of the modern, working Indian woman.

Case Study 4: Shreya

Shreya (31) is a medical doctor who worked as a locum at a hospital in the UK for 18 months. She left South Africa with her spouse (also a doctor) for two reasons: seeking newer social experiences and for financial reasons. When she returned to South Africa she had a child but tragically lost her husband a year later. She has not returned to the UK since then but planned on doing so "in the near future". Shreya's overseas' experiences were socially as well as professionally positive. Shreya is completely reliant on her mother for childcare and emotional support and has decided that when she returns to the UK she will have to take her mother with her–" because there is no family support network in the UK and I would not leave my child with a child-minder-although it is a far better society than South Africa where the social pressures imposed on women are overwhelming". She believed that as a young widow all her actions within the community and wider family network are unduly scrutinized. She said that she had been criticized for "not behaving like a widow" and was constantly being judged in the local Indian community by both men and women alike. She had a sister who was settled in the UK which she said gave her some incentive to return there.

While Shreya's personal circumstances were exceptional within the sample, her experiences as a young, widowed, single-mother bear testimony to prevailing attitudes within the Indian community.

Alka, is more of a transnational than any of the three cases cited above. While she may not be working overseas at present, she lives a dual lifestyle and moves between two transnational "spaces" both of which are "home".

Case Study 5: Alka

Alka (34) is a property investor and is married with 2 young children. Her husband is a dentist and going overseas to work has always been his dream. This is his second marriage and he has 2 daughters from his first, both of whom will be joining him overseas when they graduate in 2006. Alka still owns properties in South Africa and visits South Africa every 6-8 months with her children. In this time she relies on her mother to accommodate her and the children as

well as baby-sit for her while she manages her investments. In the UK she is a housewife but has the help of a South African domestic helper who migrated with the family. She is presently studying towards a law degree. In South Africa she has set up a specialized furniture factory to help her brother and mother financially. Alka's extended family's needs depend upon her initiatives–which she felt are best achieved through her keeping doors open in two countries.

Alka's life is one about networks in South Africa and the UK. While her South African network is based on familial ties and emotional dependence, her UK network is based on business ties and friendship networks. Her straddling between these two countries is supported by Portes' (1997: 812) view of "transnationalism and dual lives":

The importance of newly acquired command of communication technologies by individuals within such networks (enable) participants (who) are often bilingual,(to) move easily between different cultures, frequently maintain homes in two countries, and pursue economic, political and cultural interests that require their presence in both.

Alka pointed out that she would send her children to South Africa during their holidays to be with their grandmother, as soon as they were old enough to travel on their own. She admitted that it was not possible to live this lifestyle without her mother and was therefore considering relocating her to the U.K. Her mother was resistant to the idea because of her belief that maternal support should be accorded to all her children equally.

Fathers and Daughters

In general, the women expressed gratitude for the support and encouragement of both their parents, but instances of the one parent showing more enthusiasm (or lack of it) were also evident. Priya, for instance, who was in South Africa after 8 months of working as a beautician on board a cruise-liner, said that parental pressures and cultural expectations were enormous. Not only were young women expected to get married at the "correct" age but they were also expected to find a spouse from the "correct" family with a long list of the "correct" credentials. She was tired of being made to feel that there was

something wrong with her for not having met a potential partner as yet.

Case Study 6: Priya

Priya (29) openly admitted that she was leaving to work in a health clinic in Wales to avoid the pressures of being unmarried, particularly from her father. She had previously worked on board a cruiseliner before deciding to leave for Wales, against the wishes of her parents. During the interview with her she had already confirmed most of her arrangements and was going to tell her parents "at the last moment" so that they had no choice but to accept her decision. She said her father was embarrassed that she was 29 years old and was still unmarried. He believed that nobody would marry her now because she was too old. Priya supports her parent by sending one third of her income home every month.

Phizacklea (2000:108) maintains that while migration provides an economic escape route, it provides a social escape route as well. She refers to two studies by Morokvasic (1983) and Gray (1996) on Irish and Yugoslav women migrants when she posits that:

"…migration was not always an enforced response to economic hardship but also a calculated move on the part of individual gendered actors who could see that migration also served as an escape route from a society where patri-archy was an institutionalized and repressive force."

Husbands and Wives

From among the 30 interviewees, there were 12 married women, 9 of whom did not have any children and 3 who had children of varying ages. Two of the women with children were settled abroad but made annual visits to South Africa to visit their families. Aruna has emigrated to New Zealand which does not make her a transnational but her case history is pertinent to the sample because it puts into perspective the limitations of a family with children as opposed to a married couple without children.

Case Study 7: Aruna

Aruna (41), a speech and hearing therapist, emigrated to New Zealand with her 3 children

and husband after experiencing a violent incident which left her paranoid about the security of she family. She had been held-up at gunpoint with her children in her family doctor's consulting rooms and subsequently decided to emigrate. Initially, she would have liked to go abroad with her family for 2 to 3 years (more for the work experience)and then return to South Africa but changed her mind and decided to remain in New Zealand. Aruna has a brother who lives in France who she planned to visit but the rest of her family lives in South Africa. Their first year of being away from family in SouthAfrica was very difficult but they eventually adapted to their new surroundings. She points out that her children are very happy there and keep in touch with their cousins by email and cellphone. Her husband had to help with household chores and childcare-responsibilities that he had never undertaken in South Africa. She feels there is less distinction in roles between husbands and wives because of the need to share household and financial responsibilities as well as less dependency on help from extended family members. In the first four years of her stay in New Zealand, members of her family visited her five times. When her daughter fell ill in 2005, her mother rushed to their assistance as they did not have any family support.

Aruna's difficulties arise when the children fall ill and neither her husband nor herself are available to take care of them due to work obligations. Apart from this they live a relatively stress-free, independent life without domestic helpers and the pressures of class obsessed South Africans.

Julie's (56) situation is vastly different from Aruna's as her reason for going overseas was financially motivated. Julie is a paediatric nurse and her plan was to go on several working stints to the UK without her family, to "earn pounds" so that she could pay off her personal debts. Her efforts at being a transnational were thwarted by several unforeseen factors.

Case Study 8: Julie

Julie left South Africa confident that her household would be adequately managed by her husband, 3 adult children(one aged 28 years and twins aged 25 years) and a very efficient domestic helper. Ideally, she would have liked to have worked for 6-9 month periods at a time to remit money back home. She lived with an Irish family in London and worked at a private hospital for 6 months before she felt the pressures of being away from home.While her husband was initially supportive of her move, he grew resentful of her absence and felt that she needed to be at home tomanage their household. He was also not prepared to leave South Africa nor his extended family. In the time that she was abroad, Julie managed to send home a substantial amount of money as she earned twice as much as she earned in South Africa. Since then, her husband had passed away and although she would have preferred to return to London, her obligations to her family constrained her from doing so. She has encouraged her children to travel and settle abroad as she believes they have greater opportunities outside South Africa.

The flight of South African nurses to the UK and Saudi Arabia is well documented and has dominated emigration figures in the past five years. In these countries they can earn up to five times their salaries in South Africa. Van Rooyen (2000: 120) writes:

"South African nurses are in great demand overseas, and may leave the country as a result of poor pay and stressful working conditions. As a result, the outflow of nurses, particularly to the UK and Saudi Arabia, reached such high proportions that former president Nelson Mandela tried to persuade the British government to halt the recruitment of South African nurses to the UK–his efforts did not appear to be hugely successful, as more than 600 South African nurses applied for registration in the UK in 1998."

The following newspaper articles highlight the exodus of nurses leaving from South Africa for better prospects abroad, exacerbating the crisis facing local government hospitals already incapacitated by the AIDS pandemic.

"KwaZulu-Natal's overworked health department is understaffed by more than 10000 people, largely because of vacancies caused by the huge number of qualified nurses who left to work overseas…Understaffing in the health department, includes 6000 nursing staff and 4000 in administrative and other specialized areas." (The Mercury,7 November 2002)

"South African nurses have been showing up at work in pyjamas in recent weeks to press

demands for uniform allowances–the latest sign of malaise in the health care system wracked by an exodus of medical staff…The pyjama protest comes amid unease in the health care profession as it grapples with a "brain drain" that the unions says bleeds the system of some 300 nurses per month". (Mail and Guardian, 2 May 2005).

Both Aruna and Julie's situations illustrate the limitations of married professional women with children as well as the necessary adjustments that their husbands had to make. Aruna's husband had to adapt to doing housework and helping with the children–duties that he had not involved himself with in South Africa and Julie's husband had to adapt to her long absence which put a strain on their marriage and which ended her working abroad. Couples with children were subject to a different set of variables compared to the married couple with no children. For instance, Raksha, travelled to and fro every year to the UK to avoid losing her work permit and to write exams for additional qualifications that would allow her to work overseas. A supportive, encouraging husband made this possible as did the fact that she had no children to restrict her movements.

Case Study 9: Raksha

Raksha (31) is an optometrist and is married to a medical doctor. At the time of the interview she had already done 8 working stints of 8 weeks duration each in England-where she established a good working relationship with a private company. She has continued to work in the UK to avoid losing her work permit. Her husband is very supportive of her work overseas and thus far they have been able to pay off debts in half the time it would have taken them, had she worked in South Africa only. Her parents were worried about her absences impacting on her marriage but they realized that she had the full support of her husband. However, his family have not been supportive of the idea at all and the couple has had to distance themselves to a certain extent with particular relatives. Raksha would like to emigrate and start a family overseas once her husband has completed his specialist medical exams.

CONCLUSION

The case studies and discussion above provides ample evidence that trans-nationalism is a major force of contemporary change, affecting the statistics of professional workforces at national levels and social relationships at household and individual levels. It demonstrates the radical changes that have taken place in the domestic relations of conservative Indian households. At least three issues emerge from it. First, parents among people of Indian origin have adjusted to the educational needs of their children, both male and female, and continue to support them up to the highest possible level after secondary schooling. Second, they accept that attainment of such educational achievements warrants employment and is in fact necessary in an increasingly demanding consumerist environment. Third, the search for employment among young unmarried women is still a contentious issue and a major cause of friction within the household. The last factor is essentially a barrier that constitutes a problematic inter-phase between global forces of change and idealist thinking. Although Indians have succumbed to a great extent to liberal values, especially in educating their children and allowing them to work, they have yet to feel comfortable about extending freedom to them to trans-migrate, especially to their unmarried daughters. While there is the recognition that the forces of change make their freedom of choice somewhat inevitable, conventional values are still an inhibiting factor. In each of the case studies discussed above, an element of conservatism was experienced to a certain degree, although most women did not react to the extent of altering their plans. Individualism, career aspirations, a search for new social networks and working environments, and the sheer need for more cash have become the new determinants in individual choices. While conventional preferences are still a factor among parent-children relationships, they are submerged by the latter's urge to actively participate in an expanding transnational workforce.

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KEYWORDS Transnational Migration. Social Networks. Gender Relations

ABSTRACT This paper explores the possible trends of changing gender relations and identities of 30 professional Indian women in the Durban region, Kwa-Zulu Natal, engaged in transnational migrations. For the purposes of this paper, the transnational lifestyle refers to the temporary migration of the women to first world countries for several reasons including: international work experience; the long term intention of settling abroad permanently; pursuing newer enriching social experiences; and pursuing more highly paid career/work opportunities for personal gain and/or to contribute towards familial obligations through remittances. Through the use of case studies, this paper illustrates how the women have all worked for varying periods of time abroad before returning to South Africa. Some have had several working stints and have moved back and forth over a period of years and in the process created transnational "spaces" in between which they move. In this process, transnational networks have emerged and facilitated a lifestyle that challenges perceived notions of Indian womanhood and subsequently male/female relations within the local Indian community.

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