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Cosmopolitans and ‘cliques’: Everyday socialisation amongst Tamil student and young professional migrants to the UK

Demelza Jones

School of Education, University of Birmingham, UK

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Abstract

Among student and young professional migrants to the UK the opportunity for a global or cosmopolitan experience emerges as a motivating factor for migration. This article takes the example of student and young professional migrants to the UK from the South Indian state of Tamil Nadu, and explores how this cosmopolitan ambition plays out in the formation of UK social networks. Two ‘types’ of research participant are identified; ‘self-conscious cosmopolitans’ whose social networks are cross-ethnic, and others whose networks are largely co-ethnic and who are often derided by their self-consciously cosmopolitan counterparts as ‘clannish’ or ‘cliquey’. The article asks how ethnicity emerges as salient (or not) in these migrants’ talk and practice around UK social network formations. It then considers whether a co-ethnic social network necessarily limits the cosmopolitan experience, or whether this interpretation reflects a narrow understanding of cosmopolitanism which excludes the multiple inter-cultural encounters these migrants experience in their everyday lives.

Keywords

Tamils, student migration, international students, skilled migration, professional migration, cosmopolitanism, migrant social networks

Introduction

‘If you stay in India it’s ok, but if you go global you’ll meet a lot of people and your knowledge will improve. It will help in the future, like professionally and career wise, but also life-wise’ (Kaalán – engineer).

There is an undeniable desire amongst educated Indian young people to study and work abroad. As Suvén, a young engineer who participated in this research, explains, ‘If you ask anyone who’s at university in India and is reasonably good in studies, there is no question – everybody wants to go abroad’. Factors influencing the decision to study or work overseas include a lack of access to higher education or opportunities for career progression at home, historical links between the home and destination country, and perceptions of superior educational or professional standards abroad

(Mazzarol and Soutar, 2002: 82), with each of these impetuses reflected in the narratives of the 25 student and young professional migrants from Tamil Nadu interviewed towards this research.

The quotation from Kaalan which began this article is an example *par excellence* of a common thread emerging from participants' narratives – the ambition to 'go global' as a key motivating factor in the life-changing (and in the case of students, very expensive) decision to study or work in the UK. A 'cosmopolitan' outlook and experience is posited as an essential outcome of the UK work or study venture, an ambition reinforced by the self-presentation of UK universities as globalised spaces where a multi-national and multi-ethnic student body mingle happily on glossy prospectus pages, and by corporations whose international orientations are fore-grounded in marketing campaigns.¹ In common with the middle-class Indians in Batnitzky et al.'s study, who viewed a period working in London as a 'resume builder' (2008: 62), international exposure is understood as a marketable attribute which enhances future prospects: 'I want to work here at least a couple of years ... Let me gain a couple of years' experience because then it looks very good on your CV – you can go back and do whatever you want' (Sharuk – media professional). A period spent working or studying overseas additionally signifies personal development. Monesh, an engineer, explains that international experience has allowed him to 'see life in a different perspective' and to 'grow as a person', while Bala, an engineer, speculates that time overseas may make him a more attractive marriage partner: 'If the girl is educated – a modern career girl ... If you have lived abroad you will be more exposed to those values and not be expecting her to stay in the house, so they will appreciate that'. As such, international experience is configured as capital: 'It is the social benefits of gaining new knowledge, skills and education in another place that matter most' (Findlay et al., 2011: 4), with 'one of the uses of this symbolic capital [being] to represent international study [or professional experience] as a distinguishing identity marker' (11).

The notion of cosmopolitanism emerges strongly from the accounts of student and young professionals who view their migration to the UK in these capital-building terms. But while cosmopolitanism, 'in its most fundamental sense, implies openness to difference' (Datta, 2009: 353), debates around *who* is 'open', and to *what* and to *whom* have concerned scholars, with robust criticisms of the traditional association between the cosmopolitan and the elite world traveller emerging through accounts of 'working class' and 'ordinary' cosmopolitanism (Lamont and Aksartova, 2002; Werbner, 1999). As with Datta's (2009) Polish respondents in London, the participants in this study blur the 'elite' and 'ordinary' cosmopolitan division. With a few exceptions,² participants are middle-class, occupy positions of economic and social advantage in their country of origin, and experience privileged mobility as authorised entrants to the UK through formal immigration channels. But as Datta notes, cosmopolitanism is 'spatial' and 'situated' (356). For postgraduate students or recent graduates in particular, the localities of everyday life may correlate more closely with those of 'ordinary' or 'working class' cosmopolitans, with many living in ethnically diverse, low income neighbourhoods where short-term rental accommodation is cheap and plentiful. However, participants' talk around their expectations of the UK work or study venture suggests engagement with a more traditional, 'Hannerzian' understanding of cosmopolitanism: 'An orientation, a willingness to engage with the Other ... an intellectual and aesthetic stance toward divergent cultural experiences, a search for contrast rather than conformity' (Hannerz, 1996: 103). This positions 'the cosmopolitan' in contrast to 'the

ethnic' or 'the transnational' (1990: 240): 'Cosmopolites reject the confines of bounded communities and their own cultural backgrounds' and instead 'embrace a global outlook' (Binnie et al., 2006: 7).

This article examines how this particular understanding of cosmopolitanism frames participants' perceptions of themselves and others as cosmopolitan or not through talk and practice around socialisation, and explores how ethnicity emerges as salient (or not) in social network formation in the UK setting. The article begins by introducing the research and its participants. It goes on to consider everyday socialisation amongst these migrant participants, grouping them into two 'types'; 'self-conscious cosmopolitans' whose networks are wholly or predominantly cross-ethnic, and those who are embedded in more ethnically homogenous networks, whom self-conscious cosmopolitans commonly deride as ethnic-parochial; as 'clannish' or 'cliquey'. Participants' talk and practice around these networks are then explored, in particular how the reality of social networks in the UK setting is negotiated in relation to the professed cosmopolitan ambition. The final section of the article asks whether participation in co-ethnic social networks represents a 'failure' to realise the cosmopolitan ambition, or simply reflects a narrow understanding of cosmopolitanism which does not take into account the host of 'ordinary' cosmopolitan encounters these migrants experience in their everyday UK lives.

The research and the participants

The research took place as part of a broader study concerned with the everyday identifications of Tamil migrants in the UK. Although taking an ascribed ethnic group as its starting point, the project was framed by an understanding, concurrent with the aims of this special issue, that ethnic attachments are not inevitable. Through a methodological focus on everyday research sites of the household, social networks, and faith-based practice, the project presents a nuanced picture of the attachments and identifications (ethnic or otherwise) experienced by migrants in their everyday post-migration lives (Jones, 2013). Cosmopolitanism was not a focus of the research, but rather, emerged inductively as a theme in the narratives of Indian Tamils who had migrated to the UK as students or professionals.³ As in the main study, these participants express and practice both ethnic and non-ethnic identifications, which were negotiated in relation to professed desires for a cosmopolitan overseas study or work experience in a variety of ways.

Twenty-five student and professional migrants were interviewed between March and September 2011, and observational work was carried out at social events attended by participants. Student migration is a major immigration flow to the UK (Mulley and Sachrajda, 2011: 2). India ranks only behind China in the list of top non-EU student sending countries with, in 2009/2010, 38,500 Indian students attending UK universities (UKCISA, 2011). Skilled employment migration to the UK is a smaller but significant stream. Of the almost 114,000 work entry visas issued to non-European Economic Area (EEA) nationals in 2010, just under half were issued in the Tier 1 (Highly Skilled) and Tier 2 (Skilled) categories (Blinder, 2011: 3), with India, again, an important sending country at the vanguard of skilled labour migration within the globalised information technology sector (Khadia, 2006: 175). Of the twenty-five participants, fourteen were in employment at the time of research, with six of these fourteen entering the UK as Tiers 1 or 2 visa holders. The remainder of employed participants had completed postgraduate study at UK

universities, and remained under the terms of the two-year post-study work visa (PSWV) then available to international postgraduates.⁴ Seven worked in engineering or computing, while the remaining five were employed in the health care, media and marketing sectors. The remaining two worked in the service sector while seeking employment relevant to their studies. A further eleven participants were current postgraduate students at UK universities, with most studying engineering or computing related courses.

Research took place in the Midlands and South West of England, in locations which are home to universities and/or 'hi-tech' industries with a demand for skilled employees. Participants are in their 20s or early 30s, and nineteen are male and six female, reflecting a trend for student and professional migrants to be 'young and male' (Blinder, 2011: 4–5). Gender and professional or student migration is an under-researched area (Iredale, 2005: 157), and though the sample is insufficient to make meaningful inferences, it is perhaps reflective of the gender imbalance in Indian higher education and subsequent access to skilled occupations (Azam and Blom, 2008: 6). Other factors may include the male-domination of sectors associated with non-EU student and professional migration – engineering, computing and the sciences (Iredale, 2005: 156),⁵ and social expectations that young Indian women prioritise marriage over overseas work or study. For the majority of these migrants, their stay in the UK is temporary. Most envisage returning to India after gaining their qualification or a few years work experience, and expect that this will assist them in 'climbing a few rungs of the career ladder' (Bala). Others are willing to move wherever opportunities present themselves:

'Let's say there is something interesting going on in Germany – I will go there. Somebody offered me a job in Australia – I would go there ... Right now this job is paying well. Tomorrow, if there is something else, I will go for it' (Suven).

Co- and cross-ethnic friendships

'You come here to learn about different cultures and you can't just sit in your own group. Most of my friends are White and English – my best mate is White' (Samuel – postgraduate).

For participants like Samuel, a multi-ethnic social network is an important aspect of the cosmopolitan experience, and he is part of a minority within the sample whose social networks in the UK are drawn predominantly from non-Tamil ethnic backgrounds. These participants are self-consciously cosmopolitan in their outlook and behaviours, with cross-ethnic social networks functioning as a crucial point of differentiation from other migrants, whom are characterised as non-cosmopolitan and 'failing to make the most' of the international experience: 'They just stay inside this little Tamil circle – what was the point of coming here?' (Krithic – postgraduate). This correlation between cross-ethnic social networks and a worthwhile overseas experience is close to the 'official' view of universities, and of scholarship concerned with international students' welfare. Within these understandings, cross-ethnic network building correlates with academic and social success, and 'helps all individuals toward a higher level of maturity ... [and] help[s] both home and international students to become better citizens of the world' (Pritchard and Skinner, 2002: 346). To employ Putnam's influential distinction, within these terms

the 'successful' student migrant is expected to build 'bridging' rather than 'bonding' networks so far as ethnic difference or similarity is concerned (Putnam, 2000, 2007).

Cross-ethnic social networks are accessed through 'non-ethnic pathways of incorporation' (Glick Schiller et al., 2006: 112). As in Glick Schiller et al.'s study of migrant participation in an evangelical Christian congregation in the USA (2006), for Christian participants in this study, like Samuel and Maya, a 'pathway' stems from religion, through attendance of predominantly White British or ethnically mixed congregations. Other 'pathways' are workplaces or courses, sports or hobby groups, and voluntary work in the community. In some cases the formation of cross-ethnic friendships is a deliberate strategy, and ethnically bound settings are actively avoided. Shreya, a postgraduate, recounts how 'at fresher's week a guy from the Hindu society asked me to join and I said 'sorry' and just walked away – I don't want to mix with Indian people'.⁶ For others, networks have developed more circumstantially. Suven attempted to meet co-ethnics on arrival in the UK by posting a notice in his university's student's union, but on receiving no responses, 'got on' with making friends of other nationalities: 'Most of my friends are from Italy, Spain, France, and English'. He has since met a number of Tamil people in the city: 'I ended up meeting people in a supermarket, because they'll be pushing the trolley and speaking Tamil! So you just have a chat with them', but has not pursued further contact as 'they are more family people with the wife and kids, not students or young graduates like me', illustrating that other identifiers such as age, work, and current life experience are prioritised over ethnicity in constructing a UK friendship network. While Suven concedes that, given the chance, he may have built more co-ethnic friendships, he has come to greatly value the benefits his cosmopolitan network affords:

'Because of the set of friends that I have my life is just a little different. Because they've [Tamils with co-ethnic networks] got the opportunity to hang around with Tamil people – let them enjoy. For me, it's luck or unlucky, I don't know, but I don't have that. So, in that sense, one day I will miss eating *idly* [South Indian snack] every day, or speaking Tamil every day, but at the same time that's given me the opportunity to explore so many other cultures though my group of friends ... That gave a, let's say, international exposure'.

Cosmopolitan orientations are also attributed to backgrounds by participants. Suven attended an Indian boarding school where, 'all my friends were from different states and different countries', so 'experiencing something different was always part of my life from childhood', while Samuel feels that his 'Westernised' upbringing and period spent at an international school in the Middle East left him 'able to mix with anybody'.

A reification of 'Tamilness' is also evident in these participants' narratives. An essential 'Tamil' character is constructed, from whom participants differentiate themselves in terms of their own (perceived) atypically Tamil interests or personality traits. Suven describes himself as 'not your typical Tamil guy' and says of his interest in classic Hollywood cinema: 'It would be very difficult to convince a Tamil guy to come and watch ... They want the *masala* type movie with song and dance – for them a movie without that will be boring!' Shreya explains that she 'love[s] to visit galleries ... if I had Indian friends and asked them to come and see the gallery, they'd say no ... And I love to do national parks, but I don't know any Indians who'd like to do that'; while Samuel 'like[s] to go for Argentine tango class and stuff like that – I

know I'm really weird for a Tamil!' Shreya additionally describes Tamils as 'very loud, rude and inconsiderate – I much prefer the European character'.

For the remaining majority of participants, UK friendship networks comprise only or predominantly other Tamils. Ramchandran notes that 'factors such as language barriers, lack of familiarity with conventions and practices, and a fear of being ignored encourage international students to form smaller groups based on language and cultural background' (2011: 206), with each of these factors replicated in the findings of this research. Language is a key consideration for participants in building UK friendship networks. Although all speak English to a high level of proficiency, most are more comfortable conversing in their mother tongue. Sharuk, despite 'talking far more in English than in Tamil these days' finds it 'a bit difficult to express everything in English compared to Tamil', while for Kaalan, 'if you talk in Tamil all the things will come to you naturally 'cos you're born to that. Anything you want to say you can just say it'. As in Bravo-Moreno's research with Spaniards in London, a common first language not only eases interaction but holds emotional resonance: 'the first language remains the language of emotions; speaking in a second language may distance the respondent from vulnerable and innermost parts of herself' (2006: 229). Rabesh, an engineer, observes for example: 'I tend to feel more close when I am able to converse in my mother tongue'. A common language also enables a shared frame of reference to vernacular popular culture. Pratheep, a postgraduate, describes how he and Tamil friends 'talk about the movies, and some movies you like to imitate the words and jokes and all that – we do that in Tamil movies', while Sathya, a postgraduate who in his spare time administrates an online social networking group for young Tamil migrants in the UK, said that posts about Tamil films and star gossip are 'the topics that get everyone involved!'

For others, feelings of alienation and 'difference' in the UK setting encourage embeddedness in ethnic networks. Sharuk describes socialising with Tamils as 'a way of cheating homesickness', while Kulam, a medical professional, says: 'I would imagine an English person coming across another from England in say ... Mongolia .. they would look at each other and just smile basically .. It's just a natural feeling thing'. Feelings of 'comfort' and 'naturalness' in the familiarity of co-ethnicity are expressed by participants living with Tamil housemates. For the Greek students in Petridou's study, preparing familiar food from home together in their London halls of residence 'creates family bonds' (2001: 94) and 'reconstructs the sensory totality of the world of home' (89), and a 'family atmosphere' is similarly achieved amongst Monesh and his Tamil housemates through cooking South Indian meals:

'We like to cook in a group. Like someone is cleaning the vessels, someone cuts the vegetables, and that one chap makes the food for everyone ... We sit around at the same table and have a nice dinnertime all together, and we'll be chatting for thirty minutes or so ... We can eat our food in our way and just relax'.

Shared cooking and mealtimes are also a key social activity in Pratheep's home: 'We just take turns for cooking, and everything is Tamil traditional food'. The household is additionally described as 'so proper actually! No one smokes or drinks much, so all Tamil culture you can find at our house', with this construction of a Tamil moral space considered especially important as there is a 'sister' (female Tamil student) within the household towards whom Pratheep displays a protective attitude: 'It wouldn't be

right if there were people coming over drinking with a sister in the house – that would cause a problem’. As well as the everyday routine of cooking and eating an evening meal, food takes a central role during religious festivals or other special occasions. Puneeth, a postgraduate, recounts a recent birthday celebration which was ‘like a marriage or something – great big trays of onion and chicken! Four to five houses had to cook – we made all kinds of Tamil food’. He also describes how, although he didn’t mark *Pongal* [the Tamil harvest festival] ‘properly’ last year as he had been placed in university accommodation with Punjabis, this year he and his new Tamil housemates plan on ‘cooking the *Pongal* food’ and hosting a celebration. Around half of participants are also members of Tamil associations, which Dinish (postgraduate) describes as a ‘joint Tamil family’, providing practical support, and a space in which festivals can be celebrated, and a ‘homely atmosphere’ achieved through eating South Indian food, and dancing together to the latest soundtracks from Tamil cinema.

For these migrants, friendships with British people had proved elusive. This is sometimes attributed to a simple lack of opportunity, with Monesh for instance noting that there were very few British students in his university department. However, migrants’ perceptions of ‘differences’ between themselves and the host were also referenced. Most participants dislike drinking in bars or clubs, ‘which is where the British people meet’, and, in common with the French professional migrants in London in Ryan and Mulholland’s (2012) study, national stereotyping emerges in participants’ understandings of cross-ethnic relationships. A reified version of the British character as ‘cool’ and ‘reserved’ is situated in opposition to the ‘warm’ and ‘friendly’ Tamil who is ‘always very willing to chat’ (Bala). Hari, an IT worker, finds it hard to imagine his relationships with British colleagues blossoming into close friendships as, ‘there’s a coolness there’, while Ashan, a marketing professional, has experienced differing expectations of hospitality and openness: ‘They say an Englishman’s home is his castle – well that castle is guarded very closely!’ These barriers are contrasted with the ease of meeting fellow Tamils and quickly building close co-ethnic friendships:

‘If you are just chilling on a bench at university or in the city centre, another Tamil guy sees you and it is just ‘hi’ ... It starts on like that only. And his friends will become our friends, and the group grows on and on’ (Pratheep).

Cosmopolitan dreams and ethnic reality?

‘My friends are Tamil. I mean, it’s nice, and we have a lot of fun, but I’m hardly having that cosmopolitan lifestyle’ (Neena – postgraduate).

How is the empirical reality of, predominantly, ethnic social networks negotiated in relation to the cosmopolitan ambition? Those embedded in ethnic networks are described by self-consciously cosmopolitan participants as ‘clannish’, ‘narrow-minded’ and ‘cliquey’, with Samuel even linking ‘failure to mix’ in the student migration context to broader anxieties, expressed by sections of the majority population and UK media, around the supposed failure of multiculturalism (Lenard, 2011: 22): ‘[They] act more Indian in this country than back home! In places like Bradford I got the shock of my life that people call it Bradistan! If you come here you’ve got to integrate’.

However, despite this pathologisation, the reality appears more complex. In one exceptional case, the maintenance of a wholly co-ethnic social networks was a deliberate strategy. This postgraduate student had unfortunately had a negative experience in the UK, including suffering racist abuse. This has encouraged his 'retreat' into a tight-knit group of Tamil friends in order to help him 'endure' the remaining months before his planned return to India. In all other cases though, participants with largely co-ethnic social networks do display a cosmopolitan orientation – 'I like to interact with everyone ... I like to meet all different peoples, not only from India, but from everywhere' (Kaalán) – and report a pre-arrival expectation that friendships would be built with fellow students' or colleagues from British or other national backgrounds. Pratheep for instance, explained, 'I came here because I wanted to know this culture', and pre-arrival was 'excited of how am I going to meet the peoples?' Despite their characterisation by some of the self-conscious cosmopolitans, 'failure' to realise this ambition, or to realise it to the extent they had hoped, does not necessarily denote ethnic-parochialism or a non-cosmopolitan outlook amongst those participants whose social networks are more ethnically bounded.

In addition to the factors of language, cultural unfamiliarity and lack of opportunity for cross-ethnic socialisation described earlier, for many participants with wholly or predominantly Tamil social networks, this was not by design, but stemmed from instrumental choices around living arrangements on arrival, and practical support networks which extended back to pre-migration locales. The role of ethnic networks and the social capital accessible through these networks in supporting migration and settlement is well-documented (Erel, 2010; Evergeti and Zontini, 2006; Haug, 2008; Ryan et al., 2008), and these migrants were no exception. Prior to their migration, participants had spoken to contacts in the UK, or visited online social networking groups to ascertain 'how Tamil people can live here? Is it ok? Can we get jobs?' (Puneeth), and most had landed in the UK armed with phone numbers and addresses of young Tamils already living there. Kaalán for example, was met on arrival by a friend of a friend from his undergraduate programme in Tamil Nadu: 'He had called him and said my friend is coming – please take care of him for the first week'. Often, temporary stays in shared accommodation with co-ethnics whilst settling in, morphed into longer-term arrangements:

'I just arrived at the airport and gave the taxi driver the postcode. Everyone from Tamil Nadu was gathered to see this new one coming in! They took me inside their home. I could just mingle up quickly, so that was not a problem for me, and they liked it too, so they just told me, 'yeah we can share going onwards – not a problem'. They were friend's brother's friend's contacts from home' (Pratheep).

Subsequently participants are themselves able to offer support to incoming co-ethnics: 'Last year a friend from home came for his Masters, and I was helping him out with accommodation and all' (Monesh), with this social capital also deployed in the UK job market. Monesh was able to furnish the same friend with useful engineering industry contacts, Dinish secured a part-time job for a friend of a friend from home who was experiencing financial difficulties, and Puneeth anticipates receiving this kind of assistance on his own graduation: 'They may give me some guidance on how to find a job or apply for post-study work permit – so if I have any problem in that way they will help'. The newcomer's reliance on their 'senior' co-ethnic informant was even parodied in a skit performed by Tamil post-graduate students and young professionals at a Tamil association's New Year celebration, in which a newly arrived

migrant, comically bundled in coat and woolly hat, is told tall tales about life in the UK by 'old hands'. As Dinish, who acted in the performance, explained: 'he is new and we could tell anything, bluff anything – he will believe it!'

The common mismatch between young migrants' expectations of cosmopolitan social networks and the actual UK experience of largely ethnically-bounded social networks is observed by Pritchard and Skinner: 'although they usually come to the United Kingdom with high hopes of making new friends and of broadening their range of experience, their lack of personal adjustment is disappointing in human terms' (2002: 323). For some participants, co-ethnic friendship networks appear unproblematic, with Ashan feeling that although his closest friends are other Tamils, his interaction with British and international colleagues is enough to ensure 'a good balance and a good experience'. But for others, the sense of disappointment reported by Pritchard and Skinner is felt keenly, particularly amongst postgraduates, who are acutely aware of the financial sacrifices their families have made to enable migration, and the consequent need to 'make the most' of their UK venture. Alongside Neena, quoted at the start of this section, Monesh is 'sorry to say' that all of his close friends in the UK are also from Tamil Nadu, while Pratheep reports that he 'doesn't feel like [he] is in the UK' due to his exclusively co-ethnic friendship group. But are these participants justified in their feelings of disappointment or frustration, or is this simply a reflection of a narrow understanding which precludes the possibility of characterising other kinds of intercultural encounter as cosmopolitan? Do co-ethnic social networks preclude a cosmopolitan experience, and are self-conscious cosmopolitans really less invested in ethnic identifications than their 'cliquey' peers?

While friendships with the British host may prove elusive, most participants whose social networks were predominantly Tamil, did, nonetheless, experience socialisation with other international student or young professional migrants from a variety of ethnic or national backgrounds. While Puneeth laments that he has not befriended any 'real British people', he *has* met 'lots of Chinese, Africans, all sorts'. Similarly, during his studies Sharuk got to know course mates from 'Africa, Asia, and some even from South America', and attended events such as Vietnamese New Year celebrations arranged by the diverse members of his university's international student society. Sussman finds that Hong Kong migrants in Canada form 'close friendship networks born out of the anxiety of being young immigrants together' (2010: 85), with, in the case of the Tamil migrants in this study, this bonding quality of a shared migrant experience functioning across, as well as within, ethnic boundaries. Rabesh, for instance, explains that he has developed close friendships with migrant co-workers from a range of countries: 'They are going through the same thing as you – being away from home and family in a new country', echoing Morosanu's findings that young Romanians in London form cross-ethnic social networks with other young migrants based on the shared experience of 'coming here alone' (2011: 99), and Ryan's and Mulholland's (2012) observation that French migrants in the capital befriend other migrants who are 'in the same boat' and are thus 'willing to invest' in networks with potentially transitory memberships. But this form of socialisation is also contingent on shared identification in terms of class and migrant hierarchies. Participants see themselves as 'good migrants', with some weaving close to the discourse of symbolic violence common in UK media and political discourse in differentiating themselves from 'bad migrants'. Postgraduate Marcia for instance, describes herself as 'from a proper professional family –

not like asylum seekers', while others are angered by the removal of the post-study work visa, blaming migrants who 'abuse the welfare system' for 'giving us a bad name', and distinguishing themselves as 'here to contribute and work hard' (Samuel).

Another form of cross-ethnic socialisation occurs with other Indian students from different regional backgrounds. Monesh had been on the committee of his student union's society for Indian students, and had enjoyed the opportunity to mingle with migrants from other Indian regions and to share his own Tamil heritage: 'Many are from the north part of India and different peoples, so it's a mixed bag over there. So, we take Tamil songs ... [and] people got to know things about Tamil culture from other parts of India as well' – an instance of Werbner's notion of 'the Indian subcontinent and its global diaspora(s) ... [as] a vernacular cosmopolis, divided by religion, nation and language, and yet nevertheless united by mutually comprehensible popular aesthetics' (2011: 108). Several participants are members of the same society, which had been formed as migrants felt alienated from an existing 'Indian' association at the university which was dominated by British Asians: 'It's a totally different experience they are having, as this [UK] is their country more than India' (Jaya - postgraduate). For other participants however, the 'vernacular cosmopolitanism' offered by broadly-defined 'Indian' networks has been less gratifying. The 'Hindi dominance' referenced by Werbner (110) has been felt keenly by some, who commented that Tamil identity is 'squeezed out'. Sajeeth for instance, reports that within his university's Indian society, 'they [north Indians] would only talk in English for a little while, and then go into their language and exclude us', and 'at the functions they were always expecting us to dance to Bollywood. They would never let us play Tamil songs', with on-going tensions leading to the formation of a 'breakaway' social group for Tamil students.

A common misconception amongst self-conscious cosmopolitans is path dependency between ethnic social networks and 'only doing Tamil things' (Krithic). It is true that the Tamil friendship groups I encountered do spend time engaged in 'ethnic' activities such as watching Tamil films, trips to London's East Ham and Tooting neighbourhoods to visit the Tamil-run shops and temples, and participating in events arranged by Tamil associations. However, it is clear that ethnic social networks do not preclude cosmopolitan consumption. Most of those embedded in ethnic networks also take part in leisure activities in 'non-Tamil' spaces – albeit often with other Tamil people. Tamil friendship groups watched Hollywood films, went on day trips to the countryside or the monuments of London, and, if finances allowed, took forays to European destinations. Pratheep's travel plans include 'France, Vatican, Rome, and at the end I will go for Russia and Germany too. I'm here for quite a while, so I just want to cover the most of things and all the places available over here'. Co-ethnic networks also enable cross-ethnic interactions, with a Tamil student association's cricket team playing regular matches against 'local boys' and Pakistani students. Food is another important everyday site of intercultural encounter (Duruz, 2011), and while familiar foods play a key role in some participants' making of a Tamil space within the home, when out and about most become 'gastronomic cosmopolitans' and enjoy an array of tastes: 'We're into all the restaurants around here ... Italian, Chinese ... We go to 'Frankie and Benny's' [UK restaurant chain with a retro American diner theme] every Sunday, or for the proper English break-fast' (Monesh). Although cosmopolitan food consumption has been robustly critiqued as a superficial encounter with the ethnic 'other' (Hage, 1997; Molz, 2011), it is worth noting here for its

deviance from self-conscious cosmopolitan Samuel's imitation of his 'cliquey' peers as saying, when faced with international cuisine, 'Oh yuk! I only like Indian food!'

Furthermore, with the exception of Shreya, who claims 'I never do anything Indian', even self-consciously cosmopolitan participants do engage in 'Tamil' activities and spaces. Morosanu's work with young Romanian migrants in London, finds that ethnicity can function as an 'ingredient' of cosmopolitan sociability, providing a pretext for cross ethnic socialisation in the form of cultural exchange (2011: 103–104). Similarly here, Samuel visits a local Tamil-run restaurant serving South Indian dishes with 'a few of my friends – people from other countries and people who are English – and they like the food. That's always a nice feeling when you have people sharing your food and the different culture', while Maya recounts a 'fun evening' spent with her British and African housemates, when they 'dressed up' in her *salwar kameez* and jewellery. Again though, these participants differentiate their behaviour from that of the ethnically-orientated 'other' by virtue of it taking place in the company of non-co-ethnics with whom Tamil culture is 'being shared', and 'not being the only thing I do' (Krithic). But despite these differentiations, these self-conscious cosmopolitans' deployment of ethnicity as a resource in network building is not, in fact, dissimilar to Monesh's (who does not describe himself in these terms) enjoyment in taking Tamil songs along to the Indian student society's meetings, and disrupts understandings of cosmopolitanism as diametrically opposed to performances of ethnic identity.

Self-conscious cosmopolitans' claims to be less 'ethnic' than their peers who are engaged in largely co-ethnic social networks are also disrupted by the formers' ready evocation of 'Tamilness' as a marked category; as 'special, different, other' (Brubaker et al., 2006: 211). By speaking about a 'Tamil character', or typical Tamil leisure preferences or interests, from which they, in turn, differentiate their own character or interests as 'a-typically Tamil', these participants attribute to ethnicity the same 'structural fixity and therefore ontological reality' as those accounts critiqued in this special issue's introduction (Fox and Jones, this issue). An essential Tamil ethnicity is evoked in strongly exclusionary terms, seemingly at odds with the 'openness' inherent to the Hannerzian cosmopolitan vision. These migrants are not yelling their ethnicity from the rooftop (Fox and Jones, this issue). In fact, they are doing the exact opposite, by foregrounding a self-consciously de-ethnicised version of the self in their narratives. But in spite of this, ethnicity, far from becoming an experiential irrelevance, continues to constitute the lens through which they view themselves (albeit in terms of distinguishment) and others. Of course, those participants whose social networks largely comprise co-ethnics engage in marked categorisations of ethnicity too; in their evocation of national stereotyping and the oppositional 'British' or 'Tamil' characters as explanation for their frustrated attempts to build friendships with members of the host population. But for these participants, Tamil ethnicity largely functions as an unmarked category, 'the normal, default, taken-for-granted' (Brubaker et al., 2006: 211), through the continuation of comfortably familiar social networks established for quite instrumental purposes on arrival in the UK.

Furthermore, each participant, whether self-consciously cosmopolitan or not, lives, works, or studies in a multicultural urban environment. Therefore, as well as the experiences described above, everyday life involves a host of inter-cultural encounters offered simply through traversing public spaces (Anderson, 2004; Radice, 2011), using public transport (Wilson, 2011), and 'rubbing along' with neighbours (Hudson

et al., 2011) in the diverse city. These encounters are high- lighted in participants' narratives in both negative and positive terms. Dinish complains of the 'rowdiness' of 'Black teenagers' on the bus and Hari comments on 'the number of Pakistanis around here', while Rabesh admires the 'diversity and tolerance', and Monesh the 'multicultural-ness' of their respective adopted cities. But while these encounters are clearly cosmopolitan within the frame of reference of 'ordinary' or 'working-class' cosmopolitanisms forwarded by Werbner (1999), Lamont and Aksartova (2002), and others, they are not presented as such by participants. Living through these encounters does not seem to contribute to realisation of the ambition for international exposure or to temper disappointment at a perceived failure to fully realise the cosmopolitan ambition, or, in the case of self- conscious cosmopolitans, mediate pathologisation of others for their perceived failure to do so.

Unknowing cosmopolitans?

In this article, I have described the forms of everyday socialisation experienced by twenty-five Tamil student and young professional migrants in the UK. Through their talk and practice around social networks, these migrants engage with elite- focused, Hannerzian understandings of cosmopolitanism, positioning themselves and others as 'international' or 'ethnic'. A minority within the sample, who I have called 'self-conscious cosmopolitans', define their 'worthwhile' UK study or work experience through their cross-ethnic social networks, and differentiate themselves from those whose social networks are more ethnically bound, whom they characterise as 'clannish' or 'cliques'. This dialogue of failed cosmopolitanism is additionally reproduced by many of those who participate in predominantly co-ethnic social networks, despite these frequently operating alongside a range of other attachments; to other Indians within Werbner's 'vernacular cosmopolis' (2011), and to other migrants from a range of ethnic backgrounds (albeit only the 'right sort' of migrant).

While the self-conscious cosmopolitans often attribute the co-ethnic networks of their peers to 'choice' or a reluctance to 'leave their comfort zone' (Shreya), in reality all participants express cosmopolitan orientations and a desire to build cross-ethnic social networks. Some though, have seen this ambition frustrated through perceived ethnicised differences in character and leisure preferences, and the understandable pull of practical support, comforting familiarity, and shared cultural reference points offered through co-ethnic networks. It is also evident that participation in ethnically bound networks does not preclude cosmopolitan consumption, with Tamil friendship groups frequently engaging in exactly the kinds of activities characterised as abhorrent to their supposed ethnic-parochial tastes by their self-consciously cosmopolitan counterparts. Indeed, this evocation of 'Tamil tastes', and other forms of marked characterisation of ethnicity, call into question the very claim to cosmopolitanism by these self-consciously cosmopolitan participants, or at least their claims to be somehow *more* cosmopolitan and *less* ethnic than their co-ethnic networked peers. An ethnic-lens persists in these migrants' self-understandings and understandings of others through ethnicity-focused distinguishment and reification. Additionally, through virtue of living in diverse urban environments, participants with ethnic social networks are just as likely as those with cross-ethnic networks to experience a range of mundane and unthinking cross-ethnic encounters in their everyday lives.

As Heibert observes, cosmopolitanism is contextual, and ‘people are not easily classified . . . interact[ing] in mono-cultural contexts in certain aspects of their lives (e.g. friendship networks) and cosmopolitan ones in other aspects (e.g. at work)’ (2002: 213), an understanding concurrent with Glick Shiller et al.’s recent work challenging oppositional positioning of ‘openness’ and ‘rootedness’, and acknowledging the possibility of a ‘cosmopolitan dimension’ occurring simultaneously with ‘the maintenance of ethnic/national ties’ (2011: 400). But with close inter-ethnic friendships perceived as the *raison d’etre* of the cosmopolitan experience by these migrants, a host of other experiences, alternatively and equally definable as cosmopolitanism, are disregarded, both in characterisations of the ethnic-parochial ‘other’ by self-conscious cosmopolitans, and in these ‘others’ own self-understanding. Narrow and elitist understandings of what it is to be cosmopolitan prevail. These young migrants *are* ‘going global’, just not necessarily in the ways they imagined pre-arrival, or continue to imagine in UK lives tinged with disappointment and frustrated ‘cosmopolitan’ ambition.

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Notes

1. Such as a UK television advertising campaign for a financial services provider, which features customs from around the world with the tagline, ‘the world’s local bank’.
2. One participant was from an impoverished ‘scheduled tribe’ community, and though in receipt of an Indian government scholarship, relied on a part-time job in a care home for the elderly to meet UK living costs. Another described how his family had mortgaged their assets to allow him to study in the UK.
3. The sample of research participants also included Tamils from other state backgrounds – from Sri Lanka, Malaysia and Singapore – who had migrated under a range of impetuses (Jones, 2013).
4. The PSWV scheme ended in April 2012, and non-EU postgraduates who wish to remain in the UK now must secure a job before graduation and apply for transfer to an employment visa (UKBA, 2011).
5. An exception is the medical sector, with women accounting for over half of the doctors migrating to the UK (Kofman and Raghuram, 2006: 293).
6. ‘Indian’ and ‘Tamil’ were used interchangeably in Shreya’s interview narrative.

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