From Diaspora to Multi-Local City Spaces
Savage et al (2003) chart the emergence of the study of Western cities and urban localities in the social sciences from the late nineteenth and into the early twentieth century. The locus of modernity and industrial capitalism, various topics have proven to be of interest: the spatial structure and character of cities; the experience of social life, the extent of place-based social ties and growing individualism; inequalities of race and class, various problems and the management of cities by the state. In its heyday before the Second World War, modern classics authored by the Chicago School explored ecological processes associated with the struggle for resources amongst bounded groups concentrated in different zones of the city. However, during the 1960s and into the 1970s the explanatory power of broader systems and forces associated with social stratification and the state became all-important. An interest in urban conditions and place declined and bounded ethnic groups often came to bear the burden of community and community studies, not least in anthropology which rediscovered its object ‘at home’ during the postcolonial period (Albrow et al, 1994).

Since the 1980s and 1990s, however, there has been a recovery of interest in how cities and the people that live in them at specific moments in time are constructed through processes of both political economy and socio-cultural agency (Eade 2000; Eade and Mele, 2002). Reflecting shifts to cities as post-industrial centres of post-modern consumption set against the increasing intensity and extensity of globalisation, Savage, Warde and Ward (2003) identify a twin focus in current work which is increasingly multi- and inter-disciplinary: i) the city as a node in wider sets of relatively unbounded yet uneven global flows, linkages and relations across the boundaries of the nation-state (Westwood and Williams, 1997; Sassen 2000; Eade 2000); and ii) multiple narratives, memories and signs of the city represented by differently positioned, intersecting stakeholders and constituencies in the discourse and practice of politics, policy, tourism and cultural production.

In terms of the former processes, cities must be seen in terms of the structures of the various scapes produced and imagined trans-locally by criss-crossing networks of people, capital,
goods, information and ideas (Appadurai, 1990; 1996). One way of conceiving globality, then, is in terms of the greater interconnection of multiple localities. The systemic rhythms of contemporary global capitalism (Harvey 1982) have not resulted in simple cultural homogenisation or ‘the death of the local’. Indeed, the local and the global, should not be viewed as dichotomous or binary opposites; their relationship is dialectical and mutually constitutive. As suggested by the term glocalisation (Robertson, 1995), globality is inevitably produced and tailored in terms of locality and regionality. Thus while some metropolises such as London stand out ‘as command points in in the world economy’ (Sassen, 2006: **), all cities are global cities (Schiller and Caglar, 2009). More than ever, then, that which is absent and distant is integral to the ongoing transformation of local space. Highlighting the second of the processes flagged above, this means that given the configuration of all space in terms of power relations, one production of locality inevitably competes with many others, reflecting struggles between its different versions, e.g. in terms of who belongs or the built environment.

In terms of diaspora studies, the local variety of experience associated with dispersed peoples settled in specific places at specific points in time suggests that ‘a grand overarching theory [is]. . . impossible’ (Cohen, 1997: xii). Nevertheless, the idea of multi-locality once again remains central to mapping diasporas’ common features (Cohen, 1997: 26; revised 2008: 17). Sheffer (1986) and Safran (1991) describe the ‘triadic relationship’ between: i) a globally dispersed ethnic group with an ongoing consciousness of its distinctiveness and the sense of co-responsibility it has for its membership; ii) the various host-land territories in which the group now dwells, often prospering despite majority-minority conflicts; and iii) the homeland which retains a hold on group commitments and memory not least in terms of some (perhaps only vicarious) idea of return (cf Cohen, 1997: 26; revised 2008: 17). Scholarship on diaspora is full of work highlighting the tensions and possibilities that come with these multiple and sometimes contradictory attachments to people and places ‘elsewhere’ (Clifford, 1994). In the notion of ‘double-consciousness’, for example, Gilroy speaks eloquently of ‘the special stress that grows with the effort in trying to face (at least) two ways at once’ (1993: 3).

As Vertovec remarks, then, this ‘awareness of multi-locality … stimulates the need to conceptually connect oneself with others, both ‘here’ and ‘there’” even while ‘not being there’ (2000: 147). Kalra et al also emphasise ‘multi-locational … interaction between homes and abroads’ as the single most important theme in the study of diaspora, but add that this ‘cannot be reduced to one place or another’ (2005: 17). Indeed, Gilroy’s argument elsewhere that ‘It
ain’t where you’re from, it’s where you’re at’ (1991), is a clear retort to definitions of those labelled as ‘immigrants’ or ‘ethnic minorities’ as within but not of the host-land nation. Here, post-modern and post-colonial theorisation of diaspora (cf Hall 1990; Bhabha 1994) disavows a preoccupation with ethno-religious communities and their connections to the homeland. The in-between, interstitial or third space of diaspora becomes a key site for the production of hybridising counter-narratives, which transgress and resist discourses of fixed origins. The cultural identities of diasporas cannot be confined by assumptions about ‘roots’ because subjects actively engage in improvising their own novel trajectories and ‘routes’ (Gilroy, 1993; Clifford, 1994).

In this regard, Brah’s theorisation of ‘diaspora space’ is useful here. She sees this as being configured by multiple locations of home and abroad and contested relations amongst and between people with diverse subject positions, not simply in terms of ethnicity, race or religion but also in terms of gender, class, sexuality and so on. Crucially, this balances diaspora as ‘a critique of discourses of fixed origins, while taking account of a homing desire which is not the same thing as a desire for a ‘homeland’’ (1996: 179-80). ‘Diaspora space’ is also ‘inhabited … equally by those who are constructed and represented as indigenous’ (1996: 181), an approach to the experience of dwelling at home abroad which provides an alternative to the usual ethnic lens of migration and diaspora studies. Thus in many ways Brah sets an agenda which distinguishes ‘diaspora as a theoretical concept from the historical ‘experiences’ of diasporas’ (1996: ***) and affirms ‘the lived experience of a locality’ (1996: 192).

Recalling Clifford (1994), both Procter (2003) and Schwalgin (2004) perhaps go even further, arguing that an emphasis on de-territorialisation, mobility and homelessness, has tended to marginalise a consideration of the continuing significance of re-territorialisation, sedentariness and dwelling in processes that are just as ‘diasporic’. The re-making of a safe and enduring sense of place, community and home in contexts often marked out by majority hostility is rooted in the social relations forged in struggles to survive, reproduce and prosper in specific local territories. There is often great place-based pride in and loyalty shown to whole neighbourhoods and their associated homes, streets, businesses and institutions. Indeed, while to outsiders they seem closed ethnic colonies and enclaves, being here and not there they are in fact sites of new ethnicities, organic hybridisation and becoming local. The idea of ‘milieu’ (Albrow et al 199*) also suggests that individuals produce their own ‘maps’ of
translocally produced spaces (cf Back, 2005). Identity, belonging and embodied / emotional attachment are all generated through this sort of intimate knowledge of place, locality and landscape (Westwood and Williams 1997; Schwalgin 2004). Indeed, given that notions of home can become very complex not least as diasporic memory and desire fractures, Schwalgin (2004) argues that ‘experienced’ place-making, i.e. personalised experiences of concrete, face-to-face social relations, is superior to ‘imagined’ place-making (2004: 74). Similarly, Procter is sceptical of the ability to transcend the local although undoubtedly this depends on the extent to which translocal interactions play a role in everyday life (cf Levitt, 2007).

**British-Asian, BrAsian & Beyond**

The study of communities in specific urban neighbourhoods, towns and cities, has been a key feature of social-scientific accounts of South Asians in Britain in the post-war period. While accounts of inner-city Birmingham (Rex and Moore 1967; Rex and Tomlinson 1979) trace their roots to the Chicago school of Urban Sociology, ethnographies of similar zones in Bradford and Manchester (Dahya 1974; Werbner 1990) were very much informed by the Manchester school of Urban Anthropology. (See Gale and McLoughlin this volume). However, in these works attention to the dynamics of locality, place and space were often subordinate to analytical paradigms driven by race, housing and class on the one hand or ethnicity on the other.

Until the 1980s and 1990s, moreover, when diaspora and transnational studies became established, 'immigrants' and 'ethnic minorities' were still conceived as being encompassed by the nation-state although some anthropologists were involved in multi-sited ethnography at both ends of the migration chain. Although not concerned with South Asian cultural production, set against the end of the innocence of 'black' subjectivity (Hall 1995; Modood 1994) and a newly visible expressive Asian youth culture, Hall, Gilroy and others did begin to influence a new generation of work in this field. Sharma et al's (1996) *Disorienting Rhythms* was a ground-breaking examination of musical forms across national boundaries, as well as a politically-engaged polemic against the unthinking politics of approaches said to reinscribe ideas about the determining (and one-way) influence of homeland cultures on ethnicised minorities.
In the final chapter of that volume, Kaur and Kalra (1996: 223) coined two neologisms - TranslAsia and Br-Asian - which creatively highlighted the way in which twin processes of cultural deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation were mapping out in the transnational networks, flows and imaginaries connecting South Asia and its contemporary diasporas. Concerned mainly with the relationship between identity and the production and consumption of material culture, their work was typical of the volume in writing deliberately against the body of mainly anthropological work concerned with diaspora as a social form (cf Vertovec, 2000). In a formulation resonant of Gilroy's Black Atlantic, simplistic notions of home are disrupted:

we propose the imagined spatial arena of TranslAsia...South Asia is one of the many reference points...but not necessarily its originary location...the term 'TranslAsia' is intended to prioritize the notion of space, which 'highlights histories of domination and the production of difference and hierarchy, as well as imaginative social practices (Axel, 1994: 17)' in its various locales

Kaur and Kalra identify places such as Toronto, Mumbai, Southall, Jallandhar, California and Handsworth as nodes within this space of cultural translation, drawing attention both to the changing configuration of relations between them and new emergent 'cores' of power and influence. Citing bhangra as their main example, Britain is seen as such a centre from the 1980s onwards with with the glocal vernaculars of cultural production that have emerged here increasingly exported in triadic flows 'back home' and beyond. The 'Br-Asian' vernacular then is 'a particular localization of global cultural flows in some way or another related to South Asia' (1996: **). It is said to mirror ethnographic realities on the ground, suggesting hybridising 'sliding subjectivities’ (1996: 219) and allowing for new alliances, exchanges and fragmentations in a way that essentialist - typically religious - discourses do not (1996: 229). Kaur and Kalra also argue that, unlike the normative 'British Asian' which 'essentialises both terms, as well as hierarchizing the former against the latter', Br-Asian is 'forwarded as an analytical tool from which it is possible to consider identity formations in the particular locality of Britain' (1996: 221).

Despite some hint at the significance of locales and the relations between them, and the evident shift from an ethnic lens to dynamic spatialities of cultural production, the overwhelming emphasis and sense of locality here remains focused mainly on the nation-state...
rather than translocal flows and multilocal consciousness or dwelling. Despite Alexander's (2000) work, too, on young Asian Muslim males of Bangladeshi heritage in inner city London, to a large extent such notions remained undeveloped in the writing on South Asian diasporas in Britain until the appearance, a decade later, of *A Postcolonial People* (Ali et al, 2006).