

# Now and Then – Diasporic Identity Processes Among South Asian Young Adults in Scandinavia

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## Abstract

This paper explores some social-psychological aspects of South Asian young adults in Denmark, including identity processes through social relations across geographical borders and psychological diaspora consciousness, and is a follow-up of a project conducted in the mid-nineties, in Denmark (N = 14). Diasporic conceptualisations focusing on human-centredness and processes in migration, combined with a lifecourse perspective, provide the theoretical framework for this study. The method used is in-depth interviews, analysed through condensation and meaningful categorisation of the narratives. The young adults are perceived as active actors in relation to their life situation. The results show the young adults', as well as the parental generations', re-interpretation of the self, other and home. They also show that the young adults' diasporic identities involve the countries of origin as well as the Scandinavian welfare societies. However, the myth of return is not supported, although the countries of residence have adopted increasingly restrictive migration policies in the past years.

## Key words

to come

## Introduction

When we look at the present South Asian diaspora, the Scandinavian countries like Denmark and Sweden are rarely named among the host countries. Similarly, research on current migrations and intercultural psychological in these Nordic countries pay hardly any attention to this diaspora group. However, there are about 60,000 South Asians (from India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka) in these countries, who have arrived primarily as migrant labourers in the late sixties and early seventies, or a smaller number as refugees in the seventies and eighties such as Gujaratis from East Africa, Tamils from Sri Lanka and Sikhs from India (*Table 1*, right).

Diaspora involves several psychological and mental health issues. This paper is limited to diasporic identity processes, including identity transformations in the lifecourse, and is based on a recently completed research project in Denmark (Singla, 2008).

## Literature review

A review of the South Asian diaspora in the Nordic countries reveals a few studies. A relevant one is about Gujarati Hindu women living in Mariestad, Sweden (Hole, 2005). The study indicates that first-generation women still long to return to India, even when they are well acculturated in the Swedish context, and are thus seen as 'neither here nor there'. This group is seen as twice migrant, according to Bhachu's 1999 classification, as they arrived in Sweden from Uganda due to the process of Africanisation. On the other hand, the young generation doesn't have the intense urge to return to the ancestral country and has almost no economic commitments in the ancestral country (Bhachu, 1999 p308). Similarly, a recent study of young Indians by Nyberg (2006) conceptualises identity processes through various forms of **pluricultural identification** which involve construction through social relationships where contrasting comparisons take place.

In Norway, there is a relatively large Pakistani community and a few in-depth studies have been undertaken by social scientists. An illustration is Jacobsen (2001), who has explored young Muslim women from the perspective of Norwegian style and identifies three main tendencies in shaping identity in relation to their religion. These are the pulls of ethnicity, the terms of private life and new kinds of practice. The study by Ostberg (2003) is about identity management by Norwegian-Pakistani young people as a form of ‘integrated plural identity’ which underpins negotiations with parents and peers, while Bredal (2005) has focused on the marriage patterns of young South Asian people in negotiation with the parental generation in Norway.

In the Danish context, a young man’s definition of himself as **Muslim, Pakistani and Danish** illustrates construction of a complex diasporic identity (Khawaja, 2003). Another Danish study of Pakistanis (Mørck, 1998) bring to notice that the young people develop ‘double identities’; they feel mostly Danish but have strong attachment to their parents’ homeland. Similarly, the young women develop identity as ‘Danish-Muslim’, because they are afraid that ethnic Danes will not accept them as Danes because they ‘look’ different, implying experiences of exclusion related to skin colour (Siim, 2006). Frello (2006) notes that some minority young people are **cosmopolitan**, characterised by the ability to engage in other cultures and at the same time have a reflexive distance vis-a-vis their own cultural background.

Singla (2004a, 2004b) analysed the double challenges related to the period of youth and ethnicity faced by the young people in the mid-90s, depicting constructive as well as destructive ways of meeting the challenge. A study by Bamzai (2004) in India of Indians born overseas views diaspora in another context, and indicates the generational difference in diasporic identities.

Charsley and Shaw (2006) underline the neglect of the ‘domestic’ sphere in transnational practices, as the predominant emphasis has been on the economic activities of the diaspora families in such issues as remittances and transnational enterprise. Similarly, hardly any of the above-mentioned studies focus social psychologically on South Asians as a diaspora group in the Scandinavian countries with a long-term perspective. We can consider these studies as snapshots, without continuity in time.

The main research question that this article addresses is:

- What are the social relations, as well strategies across geographical borders, and what complex processes take place in the identity formation of young adults in the diaspora?

‘Diaspora’ is conceived not just as a category of analysis, but also as a category of practice (Dufoix, 2008), and transformations are considered along the temporal dimension – **now and then** – in the present project

**Table 1**

South Asians in Scandinavia: total number and the number who are citizens

| Group                 | India  |                            | Pakistan |                              | Sri Lanka |                            |
|-----------------------|--------|----------------------------|----------|------------------------------|-----------|----------------------------|
| Denmark (5.3 million) | 4085   | 2231<br>Danish citizen     | 19,301   | 8052<br>Danish citizens      | 10,291    | 6569<br>Danish citizens    |
| Sweden (9 million)    | 12,464 | 9652<br>Swedish citizens   | 3779     | 2416<br>Swedish citizens     | 6118      | 5109<br>Swedish citizens   |
| Norway (5 million)    | 4629   | 4629<br>Norwegian citizens | 26,286   | 15,450<br>Norwegian citizens | 11,918    | 7196<br>Norwegian citizens |

Source: Befolkning og valg 2005; Statistics Norway, 2004; Yearbook of Sweden, 2005

(Singla, 2008) and the original project (Singla, 2004a, 2004b). Identity processes are thus followed over time, because data exists from two different points of time.

## The present study

### Theoretical framework

The framework is mainly social psychological, about the relationship between the person and the society, in combination with anthropological perspectives. Epistemologically, a middle ground position is taken, consistent with the idea that reality constructs the person and that the person constructs reality. Both a crude realism (positivism) and a pure (linguistic) idealism are rejected in favour of a dialectical approach to knowledge, in line with Vertkuyten (2005 p28).

The present study is a follow-up of an earlier study (Singla, 2004b) conducted in a broad social context characterised by radical modernity, which forms a backdrop. Modernity involves challenges such as individualising and resolving the tension between the individual and the collective – the ‘we-ness’, seen as the conflict between ‘to be one’s own’ and ‘the urge to belong to a collectivity’.

Another backdrop is the lifecourse of young adults, which directs attention to events and transitions along the time dimension (Levy *et al*, 2005). The young adults **position** themselves, and can occupy more than one position simultaneously, within the family and networks, against these **social** and life course contexts (Gergen, 2001; Harré & Moghaddam, 2003).

It is accepted that intersections of important forms of social stratifications such as ethnicity, age, class, gender and national divisions bear significantly on diaspora histories (Sen, 2006; Phoenix, 2006). There are a great variety of categories to which we simultaneously belong: through birth, associations and alliances. Thus, drawing on sociocultural and postcolonial scholarship, this theoretical framework is critical of the universalistic assumption in the predominant acculturation strategies proposed by Berry

and Sam (1997). We need to abandon the idea that similar ‘underlying’ operations are involved in acculturation, irrespective of geographical and historical context. The different ethnic minority groups in the Scandinavian countries are socially and historically positioned with regard to each other and the majority group through vectors of ‘similarity, continuity and difference’. In agreement with Bhatia and Ram (2000), it is proposed that, fully to understand to the identity of these young adults, we need to think of selfhood as firmly intertwined with socio-cultural factors such as colonialism, diasporic processes, restrictive race-based laws and exclusion processes. Issues of power and race at different levels are consequently deeply interconnected with the development of these young adults’ social relations and identity.

At the same time, the subjective features of the diaspora – agency (the meanings held and practices conducted by social actors) – are the focus in the present delineation. As earlier mentioned, this study perceives diaspora both as a category of analysis and as a category of practice. This directs attention to the multiple meanings of diaspora (Vertovec, 2000), in which diaspora is perceived as a social form, a type of consciousness and a mode of cultural production/consumption.

A social form is about relations, networks and economic strategies across the borders, while consciousness is awareness of multi-locality, both **here** and **there**, connection with others who share the ‘roots’ and ‘routes’. Lastly, diaspora as a mode of cultural production is seen as a transnational cultural phenomenon. Appadurai (1989) points to the complex transnational flow of media images and messages as creators of the greatest disjuncture for the diasporic populations. Kalra, Kaur & Hutnyk (2005) argue that diaspora<sup>1</sup> shifts our attention away from viewing migration as a one-way process – people migrate from one place and settle in another, end of story. In a critique of Vertovec they argue that an understanding of the complex transnational identities needs new conceptual maps, and thus they conceptualise diaspora as both

<sup>1</sup>‘Diaspora’, defined by its Greek etymology as ‘a scattering’ from the roots, entered the globalising language to apply to all migrants (Guzder & Krishna, 2005). According to Dufoix (2008), diaspora is about dispersal and connections. Dispersion implies distance, so maintaining or creating connections becomes a major goal in dealing with that distance. His term ‘referent-origin’ and country of origin are terms chosen in this study. Homeland, ancestral country, sending country, source country are some of the other terms used in the literature for the ‘first’ end of the migration process.

**positive embracing** of transnational affiliation and a defensive posture by communities in the face of a hostile host saying **you do not belong**.

This theoretical framework is relevant for understanding the changing diasporic identities of the young adults and is inspired by a sociological metaphor (Hole, 2005) – being pulled by some positive factors in the country of origin/country of residence and being pushed away by negative factors in the country of origin/country of residence.

## Methodology

The present investigation is a follow-up of the first study conducted in the mid-nineties (Singla, 2004a, 2004b), in which the sample was strategically selected as ‘well functioning’ and ‘poorly functioning’ young people with South Asian and Danish backgrounds. This categorisation is not used in the current study, primarily because of the oversimplification implied in the conceptualisations and the transformations over time which blurred the distinctions.

In-depth interviews with young adults (26–32 years, **Table 2**, overleaf) were conducted. I conducted the interviews myself, using a semi-structured guide. The questions in the interview were theory-based, and on themes covered in the first study combined with the dynamics of the **young adult** lifecourse stage and conceptualisations of diaspora.

The main pragmatic issue was re-establishing contact with the informants after a period of approximately 10 years. Resistance by a gatekeeper in charge of a residential institution for young people (Sanghera & Thapar-Brokert, 2007) could not be overcome, resulting in failure to re-establish contact with two young adults, while one had moved out of Denmark. Of a total of 14 informants, 11 were traced. Two of them were indisposed due to serious illness, so nine interviews were conducted and five of these informants, whose ancestral countries are in South Asia (India, Pakistan), are the focus of this paper.

My own South Asian background (North Indian, ability to speak Hindi, Urdu, Punjabi, Danish and English), professional position as a university researcher and lifecourse phase of middle age contributed to a balance between insider and outsider perspectives. The interviews

were conducted in my counselling centre in Copenhagen. The informants were also given a choice of languages for the interview. One chose English, another the mother tongue Urdu/Punjabi, and the other three a mixture of mostly Danish sprinkled with Urdu. The interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed in English.

The analysis strategy is to develop meaning-based categories grounded in in-depth readings of the narratives, combined, and followed by condensation and interpretation. These categories are tools of analysis developed in order to systematise the complex reality in which they are intricately intertwined. There are also attempts to compare and contrast the young adults’ narratives with their original narratives, through temporal (time-wise) analysis **now** and **then**, along with theoretical concepts of diaspora and through spatial (space-wise) analysis with the focus on **here** and **there** in their life world (Singla, 2008).

## Results

**Table 2**, overleaf, shows the following main features of the respondents.

Diasporic identity processes are analysed under the themes of social relations across the geographical borders and the psychological diaspora consciousness.

### Social relations and strategies across geographical borders

The social form of diaspora focuses on the relationship with the ancestral country and relations with the diasporic community in other parts of the world. The ‘myth of return’ as an archetype of diaspora is also indirectly included. The young people are placed in the following *post hoc* categories:

- comprehensive contact and strategies
- limited contact and strategies.

#### Comprehensive contact and strategies

This analysis indicates paradoxes in the psychosocial understandings of the young adults. As an example consider the Indian young woman Mita, who has comprehensive contact with the ancestral country, related probably to her marriage to an Indian spouse and their business relations

with a large city in India. They have established a firm in the field of pharmacy, because her husband has a Master's degree in Pharmacy and Biotechnology. She is the only respondent who has been to India eight times in the past decade, and she also has business and family relations in the UK. She is also a frequent user of the Internet for business and social purposes.

*'Our company is also in Hyderabad, England and in Denmark... sort of international.'*

She mentions economic strategies related to company employees in India, and emphasises that there are no economic obligations to the in-laws' family since they are economically well-placed and encourage the couple's endeavours.

*'Aman [husband] is only paying his staff in India and he would try to put some money to develop his company in India... The family support is none, as my in-laws don't want to take any. They say build your own.'*

However, she proclaims her connection and gratitude to Denmark as her country of birth and upbringing, providing 'settlement for life', along with positive feelings for her country of origin. In the original study (Singla, 2004b) she had neither expressed gratitude to the country of residence, which she wanted to leave because of experiences of racism, nor shown positive feeling for her country of origin, due to limited contact.

*'Denmark is my country because I was born here... But what I gained in Denmark is simply my settlement for life. Got my education here, came back and the first future and everything I need for progress in life, I got it here... I do belong to Denmark. But I love India as well. Love for India, which I didn't have before [the original study] because I haven't been to India for that long...'*

Mita is reflexive about her positive feelings and connection to both the countries, and seems to be content with the present solution of their business relations between India and Denmark.

**Table 2**

Demographic features of the respondents

| Name   | Age/Gender | Ancestral and birth countries               | Civil status        | Education                 | Occupation                              |
|--------|------------|---|---------------------|---------------------------|---|
| Salman | 29/Male    | Pakistan, Dk                                | Married             | Law student               | Law-related, part-time job              |
| Abdul  | 30/Male    | Pakistan, came to Dk aged 14 yrs            | Married             | High school               | Self-employed, in music systems company |
| Mita   | 28/Female  | India, Dk                                   | Married             | Master's in Biotechnology | Researcher and firm owner               |
| Nadia  | 26/Female  | Pakistan/Afghanistan, came to Dk aged 12yrs | Married             | Teacher's training        | Teacher in a school                     |
| Atim   | 28/Male    | Pakistan, came to DK aged 3yrs              | Single (girlfriend) | Pedagogue                 | Jobless                                 |

*'So we both are mixing it together and it is going very well, our company. If I can succeed this way, I am not going to feel that I miss anything... have both things I want.'*

At the same time Mita positions herself as open with respect to the future, as she points to the negative side of Danish society – restricted, not open to foreign cultures and other ways of life. Mita mentions her diffuse dream of return to India as a possibility in the distant future.

*'Tomorrow my dream is to work in India. To give myself such a status in the company that I can go and live there forever... Danish culture is very restricted... not very open to foreign cultures.'*

Spatial analysis of Mita's narrative reveals that her social contacts between **here** and the multiple **there** are at several levels, as she has frequent and varied contact with the ancestral country as well as with the UK, where some of her diaspora family members reside. A temporal analysis indicated transformations, as she didn't show much interest in her ancestral country in the original study and she had considered settling in England, partly to escape racism in Denmark (Singla, 2004b). However, her educational stay in the UK has contributed to her awareness of the educational and job opportunities provided by the Danish welfare system. Consequently she is more aware of the positive as well as the negative aspects of her country of residence now as compared with then.

On the other hand, it is remarkable that she hardly mentions her parents regarding her across the geographical borders, unlike the other young adults included in the next section.

#### Limited contact and strategies

In contrast with Mita's comprehensive contact with the ancestral country and the UK, other young adults, Abdul and Salman, have rather limited social relations with their ancestral country of Pakistan. However, they explicitly mention their parents' close relationship with the country of origin. In the original study, Abdul was very much connected to Pakistan, where he had studied in a boarding school and was psychologically attached to his father's older brother (Singla, 2004b p147). He had visited

Pakistan only twice in the past decade: for his older sister's marriage, where he fell in love with his cousin, and the second time to fetch his fiancée. He emphasised conflicts between his father and uncle as the reasons for their estrangement. He mentions no economic strategies in relation to the ancestral country, though he emphasises parental connections with their country of origin.

*'My parents have kept contact with the country of origin... They have not forgotten where they came from.'*

However, as an owner of a music systems company, he travels comprehensively and has an international business network.

*'I have business contacts in countries like Italy, America, and Korea and Germany. I travel twice a year to these countries.'*

Abdul's limited contact with the ancestral country can be interpreted through metaphor: **pushed** away by contentious family relations in the ancestral country, and **pulled** in by business activities in other European countries. There is a significant reduction in the relationship with the country of origin between **now** and **then**.

Similarly, Salman has rather limited connections with the ancestral country due to conflictual relations in the extended family and his wife's Afghani background. However, he was planning to travel to Pakistan to attend his younger brother's wedding, indicating the pull factor of the transnational marriage. His narrative referring to reduced contact after the paternal grandfather's demise can be understood through the lifecourse perspective, as the connecting links diminish with the passage of time (Levy *et al*, 2005), while marriage outside the family, in contradiction with the dominant discourse of Muslim extended family endogamy, is another reason. Likewise, the family conflicts pertaining to property can be seen as a 'pushing away' factor from the country of origin.

*'Rest of our family lives in Pakistan. My parents have contact. We are an extended family with lots of conflicts, partly because my parents chose to get their children's spouses outside the family and partly because of some property'*

*matters... these are the reasons for the distance from the family. We visit them, though. We had a closer relationship with the family when my grandparents were alive. After their death it is not the same.'*

On the other hand, Atim's parents have a very close relation to Pakistan and his mother spends three or four months every year in the ancestral village. He himself has visited Pakistan just twice in the last decade, though he sometimes visits Pakistani friends in Norway and Sweden.

Unlike these Pakistani informants, Nadia has not visited Afghanistan and Pakistan at all since she arrived in Denmark approximately 15 years ago. Political uncertainty and violence in the country of origin **push** her away from the country of origin, which she wishes to visit after completion of her studies in the near future.

*'When I finish my education here, then I could think of visiting Afghanistan for six months and work. When I am finished my education (SIC), I will not be so busy.'*

Some of Nadia's maternal family live in Australia and Pakistan, while her paternal family has moved to Germany and the USA. There is telephone contact with family members in what Dufoix (2008) terms multi-focal diaspora, while she has contact with the extended family members in these countries through the Internet and mobile phone. In contrast with the others, Nadia has an economic strategy in relation to the family living in Afghanistan, as she sends money to her maternal family every month. She can be placed as a compassionate family member, having multiple diasporic relations in many contexts.

*'We have my mother's family in Afghanistan. Our contact is that we send money to them every month. I send money to my grandmother and mother's sister. I have chosen to send money to them.'*

Summing up, these narratives indicate rather limited contact, with no mention of any economic strategies, while the temporal analysis indicates a noticeable reduction in contact **now** compared with the contact

**then**, especially for Abdul and Atim. In contrast, from the young adults' narratives it can be interpreted that for some parents social relations with the country of origin have become more intensive **now** than **then** due to the labour market status of the parents – retired or semi-retired now, in contrast with full-time working status **then**.

Nadia's social contacts are different – not a single visit to the ancestral country because of the shifts in world politics, yet through new technology there is maintenance and establishing of close contact with diaspora family members in different parts of the world. How diasporic contacts and strategies, such as limited visits to the country of origin, affect psychological consciousness and cultural patterns in relation to identity formation in this age of global communications is the question covered in the next section.

### **Psychological diaspora consciousness and cultural consumption**

Analysis of the narratives reveals that, for all the young adults, the ancestral country and the other contexts are aspects of their complex identity, though there is difference in the salience attached to diasporic consciousness and cultural consumption. The young adults are placed in the post hoc categories of Dominating and Moderate, based on the meaning attached in their narratives to diasporic consciousness, indicated by their current network, self-identity and experiences of inclusion/exclusion in the majority society. Moreover, we can follow the transformations in the diasporic identity processes through a decade as we address the young adults' narratives **now** and **then**.

#### **Dominating meaning**

For the young adult Salman, diasporic consciousness is a dominating aspect of his identity, as his present primary social network is his ethnic group members. When asked about this network, he emphasised the almost everyday contact and lesser contact with others.

*'I have a core group, whom I see frequently and talk with... They are primarily Pakistanis. The second group is on hello terms...'*

He also mentioned that he had sustained the network he had developed through religious participation in the first

study (Singla, 2004b). At the same time, he draws attention to the Danish aspects of his identity. He positions himself as a combination of Danish and Pakistani aspects, contrary to the dominating discourse in the Danish society about the ‘incompatible’ Danish and Pakistani worlds.

*‘I already think of myself as Danish. I think a lot Danish, though there are also Pakistani things in me... My feelings are Danish. When I think, then it is in Danish, there are Danish words circulating around in my head. Only this is symbolising how Danish I am. I have taken the good things from the Pakistani culture and the good things from the Danish culture.’*

Juxtaposing Salman’s position **then**, in the first study (‘I am a Pakistani, irrespective of my years in Denmark or passport’) and his emphasis on his experiences of racism in the society (Singla, 2004 p171) with his present position as ‘a combination’ illustrates the changing nature of diasporic identity. From predominantly ethnic self-positioning, he positions himself as a combination of what he perceives as Danish and ethnic. His spouse is an Afghani young woman, with whom he communicates in Danish.

On the other hand, the young woman Mita has an ethnically mixed network, and she clearly positions herself as Indian along with her sense of belonging to Denmark. In the original study, she stated ‘I am Indian-Danish, though more Indian than Danish’ (Singla, 2004 p172).

She further elaborates her positive interest in Indian cultural productions like films, music and so on; however, her South Indian husband’s interest in American films is also mentioned. Her watching Indian films, though mixed with American films and English music, can be interpreted as a part of her diasporic socialising.

*‘I love Bollywood movies, I watch as much as I did before. I have been watching them since I was a kid. Some American movies that is what my husband likes... Music – English, Hind & bhangra.’*

At the same time, Mita’s unpleasant memories of racism in her college days are part of the narrative in the original study, although she indicates that she has not experienced racism later in her life ‘as I know the Danish mentality’.

*‘In college I had a very hard time. With those boys in my class, I was crying... I really hated them a group of 6–7 people who were pure Danes and one of them who was Polish.’*

Both Salman and Mita’s narratives depict a dominating position of diasporic consciousness, through different dimensions – network and cultural consumption respectively – in spite of changes in their diasporic identity. The transformative processes related to life events are also explored, such as marriage with spouses who represent different cultural and linguistic aspects.

#### **Moderate meaning**

Atim’s network consists of Pakistanis along with a few Turkish and Danish friends, though he doesn’t perceive himself as just Pakistani or a combination. He mentioned his interest in both international Rap music and Pakistani singers like Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan.

He has become aware of his ethnic belonging through experiences of racism in his education as the club pedagogue. He emphasises the negative stereotypical understanding of his teachers, which he tried to challenge. This awareness of the teachers’ power position and the sense of injustice implied by their stereotype ‘ethnic minorities are not well brought up’ also influence the diasporic consciousness.

*‘My teachers were really barami [bastards]... discriminatory and racists. They were very prejudiced... and placed us in categories like this. We can be well brought up. I was the only foreigner there.’*

His positioning of himself as a ‘foreigner’ reflects his feeling of exclusion from society. However, he argues that one can avoid these exclusions if one is self-employed, as there is more risk of racism in being employed. He also points out media as a powerful source of stigmatising of the minority and consequently the influence on the political arena.

*‘If a person is self-employed, then you don’t feel it. If you work under them... seek a job where Danes are in charge, then you feel that you are a migrant in this country... Media seem to be controlling matters here. Whatever media say,*

*the ministers also say the same the next day.'*

Similarly, Abdul feels discriminated against in society on the whole, especially in the media, though as a successful firm owner he doesn't experience discrimination in his business dealings. This is one of the reasons for his moving to Malmoe (a Swedish city near Copenhagen), which he expects to be more congenial than Denmark.

*'There are no problems in my profession... society treated [the ethnic minority] all right earlier... but it has changed. Personally it has not affected me, but changes are taking place. The way information, media are creating impressions is very bad. This is why my interest in living here has finished.'*

His diasporic consciousness is considered moderate, as he views Indian films and Pakistani dramas once in a while. He downloads the latest films via the Internet and watches them regularly, combining his narratives about **there** with his everyday life **here**. He has an international business-related network and is a member of the Mazda car club in Sweden – another reason for shifting to Malmoe. He further explains his position regarding the predominant discourse about minorities misusing the system, which creates the paradox that a person like him, contributing substantially economically through income tax, can risk being considered a criminal and a misuse.

*'There is debate about people cheating the system. I have never done anything incorrect in the business. I don't owe any money to the state. Every month I pay the tax... I do so much but still when I am out, people will think I am a criminal, misusing the system.'*

Abdul exemplifies active agency, contrary to the prevalent discourse about unemployed, passive minority man. He is active enough to confront racial discrimination by shifting from Denmark to Sweden.

In contrast with Atim and Abdul, Nadia's narrative reveals rather unexpected radical changes in her life trajectory, which have led to the moderate diasporic consciousness in the present study. This is in sharp contrast with the dominating meaning in the first study as 'an

Afghani girl, more Afghani than Danish' (Singla, 2004 p243). Now Nadia has a comprehensive Danish network, because she is about to complete her schoolteacher studies and teaches in an upper middle class Danish private school.

*'Then I had a [girl] friend from the school, who is also Danish. She is more of a friend than a colleague. Then I have five or six who are much older than myself, about 57-58. These three are young, otherwise they are all older, over 50 years, all Danish.'*

Her narrative indicates that there is the possibility of positive transformations depending on the person's active agency and some supportive contacts. At the same time, while she is the only young adult who is a paying member of a diasporic organisation, she is critical of the Afghani group organisation in Denmark.

*'There is an Afghani association but there are people who deal wrongly with matters from my point of view... I feel that there isn't solidarity among the Afghanis in Denmark.'*

Moreover, she is a member of a number of mainstream charities such as the Red Cross and Refugee Help – an aspect of ethnic minority groups which is neglected in the prevalent discourses of limited or no civic contribution to the mainstream society (Siim, 2006).

In a way, Nadia seems to have transformed her rather narrow ethnic position into a broad, more international, cosmopolitan position with a varied supportive network. She has not experienced racism personally in later years, in contrast with her earlier experiences of race discrimination at her work place (Singla, 2004b). Though she regards herself as 'really fortunate', she mentioned her siblings' experiences of discrimination. She emphasises that they have faced difficulties and had to put in 'double' the effort to reach their educational or job-related goals, compared with native Danes.

*'But my sisters, they had to do double what Danes have to do in order to get a job or just complete their education.'*

Summing up Nadia's position as one of moderate diasporic consciousness, the temporal analysis indicates a

transformation, from a narrow ethnic identity to a broad 'cosmopolitan' identity (Frello, 2006).

## Discussion

Earlier in the paper the themes of social relations and strategies across geographical borders and diaspora psychological consciousness were separated for the purpose of analyses. Now they are combined in order to answer the main research question addressed by the project, regarding the processes of diasporic identity over time, on the basis of analysis of data from two different points of time.

The analysis directs attention to some continuing social relations and economic strategies of the young adults in the country of origin. Intersectionality of informants' own ethnic identity with the family history, educational, economic level and the ethnic/regional identity of the partner influence the extent and quality of these contacts, as illustrated by their narratives.

In the present narratives, there are two distinct positions on visits to the country of origin, from almost yearly visit to no visit at all in the past decade (represented by Mita and Nadia). For Mita this is in contrast with almost no visits **then**, while for Nadia there is no change on this matter. Salman, Abdul and Atim have been to the ancestral country two or three times, primarily for family weddings or visits, and have no economic strategy in regard to the country of origin.

It is interesting that Mita's and Nadia's economic relations with the country of origin are based on different grounds – business motives for Mita and family-related altruism for Nadia. We can consider the structural changes in the countries of origin – economic liberalisation in India and continued violence in Afghanistan respectively, combined with their domestic situation – as the broad reasons for these relationships. The young women's active agency and self-defining position are made explicit through these strategies, which provide counter discourses to the dominating discourses about passive ethnic minority women. This is in contrast with their situation **then**, characterised by **relative** indifference and passivity regarding their country of origin (Singla, 2004b).

Within the metaphorical framework of **pull** and **push** for diasporic relations, we could consider factors such as transnational marriage accompanied by cordial relations

with the partner's family, presence of extended family with warm ties, and business relations as factors which pull the diaspora group towards the country of origin. On the other hand, complex social factors like an uncertain political situation, extended family conflicts about marriage and property, and death or moving away of extended family members factors **push** the diasporic population away from the ancestral country. Restrictive laws in the country of residence on transnational marriage have varied consequences; most choose partners there, while others continue transnational marriages in different forms. Mita's narrative lucidly illustrates that globalisation – breaking down of artificial barriers to the flow of goods, services, capital, knowledge and (to a lesser extent) people across the border (Stiglitz, 2002 p9) – through transnational business, educational opportunities and knowledge exchange, directly influences diasporic identity processes. **Now** Mita includes India, England and Denmark as part of her self-understanding, while then – in the original study – she was rather negative about Denmark, which she wanted to avoid due to racism, and was almost indifferent about India, due to very limited contact. Similarly, Nadia's narrative brings out the significance of shifts in demographics and world politics in amplifying some of the dynamics of diaspora identity processes, for example through continued violence in Afghanistan and a counter discourse to the dominant discourse of marginalisation of ethnic minorities in Denmark. Although the elements involved in these processes are multiple and resolved only tenuously, we can bring reach an answer to the question about Nadia's identity processes by pointing out that **now** she has a broad cosmopolitan identity, whereas **then** she had a narrow identity with exaggerated focus on the ethnic dimension.

These dynamics mirror the changing interpretation of 'self', 'others' and 'home' for the young generation in particular, and to some extent also for the parental generation as we move across time and space. Along with Dufoix (2008), we see diaspora as an analytical concept and a social practice concerned with connectedness to a 'referent origin', to fellow migrants located in the same or a different country. How the 'home' and these interconnections are perceived seems to change with the life course. Some of the young adults do not position themselves as having frequent social contact with the ancestral country, though they emphasise the parental generation's contact. On the other hand, for some of the

young people, there are multiplicities of geographical contexts, multiple focal diaspora (Dufoix, 2008) – not just the country and the country of residence, but also other countries where diaspora members live. They are connected to different here and there. Similarly, there are transformations in what they thought about their connectedness with the ancestral country between the first study and in the present study, indicating changes through life phases, affected by radical modernity. There is use of global technology to maintain connections with the diaspora across the borders; examples are Mita and Nadia. On the other hand, Abdul has concentrated on his business relations through technology, while for Salman and Atim, the focus is primarily on **here**, with rather limited contact with **there**.

Combining the answers to the research questions about the social relations and strategies across the geographical borders, and the identity processes, underpins the paradox of the dominating diasporic consciousness despite limited social relations to the country of origin. This can be understood by perceiving diasporic relations as **positive embracing** of transnational affiliation and a defensive posture by communities in the face of a hostile host (Kalra et al, 2005). The young adults' experiences of the educational and job opportunities in the country of residence, combined with racial discrimination in various forms, from direct stigmatising in the educational institutions, 'do double' to get a job, to awareness of negative media images of ethnic minorities, lead, partly, to the feeling of partly **not belonging**, as well as to curiosity about, sustained interest in and a feeling of **belonging** to the **ancestral country** and the multiple **there** as well.

Yet there are transformations in different directions as far as feelings of belonging are concerned. Salman positioned himself as just **Pakistani**, but now sees himself as a combination of the best of Pakistani and Danish cultures; he also invokes **Danish thinking**. For Salman religious belonging is also sustained by participation in mosque activities, where new religious practices play a part. New media have also impinged actively on religious experiences, as increasingly religious communities all over the world make use of modern mass media, both print and electronic, addressing multiple publics and offering alternative forms of belonging (Meyer & Moors, 2006).

For Mita, the change is in the direction of being 'Indian' in contrast with a combination in the original study, whereas for Nadia there is a radical transformation, from a narrow diasporic identity to a broad cosmopolitan identity. In spite of these changes, these young adults consider both the country of origin and the country of residence as dimensions of their identities.

Most of the young adults are both diasporic and Danish, in different proportions, contexts and movements, which corresponds to the meta-theoretical middle position of the present project. The analyses indicates that the concept of **others** and **home** seem to change with the passage of time, related to the processes of globalisation and the shifts in world politics, for some of the young adults. These changes lead to transformations in the relation in Scandinavian societies between **here** and **there** against the backdrop of radical modernity, of which homelessness as an existential state has been considered an aspect (Dencik, 2005). Most young adults included in the present study seem to be **here** but also **there**, perhaps more **here** than **there**. They are Indian/Pakistani, Danes, Hindu/Muslim at the same time, though with differing emphases in different phases of life. Their visions **then**, probably transformed, are still parts of their **now** and the **future** in some way or the other. Analysis of the **mythical longing for return** indicates that the young adults hardly mention returning to the parental country of origin, like the young adults in Hole (2005). These findings are in congruence with the conclusion by Bamzai (2004) that Indians born overseas do not wish to be anywhere other than where they are, but do internalise India and express it in a different way from their parents.

We can infer with some caution that most of the South Asian young adults in Denmark feel both **here** and **there** in their multiple belongings and contexts, where the secure welfare system and the opportunities for **settlement for life**, as delineated by Mita, and some experiences of race discrimination co-exist, similar to the complex processes for South Asians of East African origin in Sweden, who referred to themselves though several expressions such as Indian-Swedish, half Swedish, half Indian, Swedish-Ugandan-Indian, just a mixture, international (Nyberg, 2006 p286). These processes are congruent with the Norwegian-Pakistani young people's management of identity (Osterberg, 2006).

In agreement with Dufoix (2008, p79), whether one feels one is from **here**, from **there** or both – or neither – what is always involved, even if implicitly, is dealing with distance. Irrespective of limited direct social relations, probably helped by the complex transactional flow of media images and messages through global technologies like the Internet and Indian films (Bhachu, 1999; Balasubramaniam, 2005), diasporic identities are significant for South Asians young adults. At the same time, we have to consider that these global media processes are also about the feelings of longing, recreating representation and a sense of belonging (Guzder & Krishna, 2005).

These complex relations between the country of residence and the real/imagined country of origin have significant implications, delineated elsewhere (Inglá, 2006; Singla, 2007), for psychosocial intervention for the young adults. These findings indicate some tendencies, and add to our insight into the young South Asian diaspora in Scandinavian countries.

## Conclusion

Our temporal journey, as a follow-up of the young adults studied a decade back, indicates complex and paradoxical results in social relations as well as strategies across the geographical borders and diasporic identity processes. Instead of just a **snapshot**, this **movie** through a decade underpins just some continuities and a number of surprising transformations in these young adults. There is a continuum of different degrees of social relationships, as well as strategies across the geographical borders, rather different from the scene in the mid-nineties. Against the backdrop of late modernity and the Nordic welfare societies, it can be concluded that the young adults are experiencing changes in regard to their parents' generation and their understandings of their own lives, as most are in the family-building phase of their lifecourses. Although some may consider the study as meagre with respect to the limited number of informants, yet the in-depth analyses and the close-ups add insight into the understanding of the complex phenomena of diaspora and identity processes.

Analysis of the temporal perspective indicates both continuity and changes as their **then** is still a part of their **now** and the **future**, despite changes in the world around them and in their own family and lifecourse situation. A spatial analysis shows that the young adults are

maintaining and creating relations and attachments across the borders, in varying extents from a yearly visit to almost no visits to the country of origin. In spite of these variations in concrete social relations, diasporic consciousness is part of their identity and they are able to feel at **home** in multiple contexts. The sociocultural aspects of their life situation are intertwined with the transformations in their identities.

Using global technologies and microelectronic transnationalism – Internet, films and music – contributes to creating **home**, not only in the country of residence but also in the country of origin and in some countries where parts of the multipolar diaspora relations and business contacts exist.

This feeling of **home** is not only a positive affiliation, a pull towards the country of origin, but also relates to the processes of being pushed away, racism and exclusion in different forms, from job problems to media stigmatisation in the country of residence. In spite of some experiences which lead to feelings that **you do not belong**, especially due to the restrictive policies for foreigners in the past few years in the Scandinavian countries, paradoxically most young adults feel at **home** mostly **here**, where **they experience** opportunities for 'settling for life', and also there, with which they have connections. They have hardly addressed **the myth of return** characterising the diaspora processes in their self-definition and life trajectories now and in the future. Finally, answering the research question, we can conclude that, as the diaspora implies distance and connections, the young adults are able to maintain or create connections between the 'referent-origin' and the country of residence at various levels, and thus they are both **here** and **there** in different ways **now**, in contrast with the psychosocial situation **then**. It is hardly possible to predict the future situation at present, though there are plans to continue with the longitudinal study in the coming decade, in 2011 and 2016.

I hope that this study has contributed to our understanding of the complex diasporic processes by focusing on one genre of everyday life practice (social relations across the borders), anchored in one region (South Asia), through a long time perspective, in order to explore the variety of practices and temporal transformations that emerge even in such a field.

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