**Space, place and power – week 4**

**Response paper – Cecilie**

In 1983, Roger Ballard wrote an article comparing the areas of Mirpur in Pakistan and Jullundur in India – two places from which significant numbers of migrants have left to work in Britain. Despite the two areas – situated on opposite sides of the Pakistan-India border – appearing similar on the surface, migration has had very different effects on the two places. On the Indian side at the time of the article's publication, agriculture was thriving, local industries were doing well, and local workmanship was being developed, whereas on the Pakistani side Mirpur was completely dependent on remittances from migrants, agricultural land was either lying fallow or was badly managed, and the streets were lined with empty shops that failed to attract renters. While government officials in Islamabad were eager to tell Ballard how lazy and illiterate the Mirpuris were, he argues that the underdeveloped condition of Mirpur rather a result of structural conditions outside of Mirpuris' control. For example, although Mirpur is the location for the multi-purpose Mangla Dam – finished in 1967 and the world's seventh largest dam – the Mirpuris bitterly note that the electricity from the dam reached Karachi years before it reached Mirpur (Ballard, 1983). Although Mirpuris contribute significantly to Pakistan's remittance-dependent economy – as evidenced by the fact that every little village has a bank positively bursting with cash – their area remains a backwater overlooked by the government, with low levels of education and high levels of unemployment.

India has had a long-standing policy of *swadesh* – self-sufficiency – and for years closed its border to import of foreign goods in order to protect local workmanship and industry. Pakistan, on the other hand, with the encouragement of the U.S. and the World Bank, from the beginning implemented a policy of free trade and free movement of goods and labour. The result of this has been that it is a an economy run ‘largely for the benefit of the urban elite’(Ballard, 1983:131), where development of agriculture and local industries has been abandoned in favour of focusing on importing goods and supporting this import-based economy with migrant remittances. Thus people all over Pakistan are encouraged to migrate for work – to Europe, America, or the Middle East, depending on who will take them at any given time – in order to bring remittances home. During the 1970s and early 1980s, many worked in industries in Britain, Germany, Denmark and Norway. It can be argued, therefore, that they found themselves in a double-alienation bind. On the one hand, they were in a classic situation of estrangement from the product they laboured hard to produce for capitalists in Europe, whereas on the other hand, when they brought their earnings home to Pakistan, they were, as Sopranzetti argues, estranged from 'desires of mobility' (2013:178), as they contributed significantly to the Pakistani economy but experienced little of the benefits of this.

Franz Fanon (1963) has shown how women's urban mobility and practice during the Algerian liberation struggle changed the symbolism of the headscarf and set in motion changes to women's roles. Similarly, it seems that the act of migration, which results in coming back home with an air of worldliness, carrying money and consumer goods purchased abroad, changes people, both in their own eyes and in the eyes of their community of origin. As many lost their jobs during the recession in the 1980s, and as racism was on the rise in Europe, some decided to take their savings and move back to Mirpur. However, although they had often done heavy manual labour abroad, their new status as a returning migrant precluded doing physical labour once back in Mirpur. Farming – the most obvious choice considering the agricultural land available in Mirpur – had a low status, as it involved using techniques such as plowing by walking behind a pair of bullocks. There were no local industries to invest in, and few migrants brought back any marketable skills. The only avenue apparently open to returning migrants was therefore to build a shop or a hotel which could be rented out while the owner relaxed and collected the income. Such income failed to materialise, however, because Mirpur was already full of shops and hotels but lacked customers with anything but hard-earned remittances to spend. In Pakistan as a whole, remittances were mostly spent on consumer goods, meaning that almost nothing was channeled into improvement of infrastructure that could make industries viable in places like Mirpur. Meanwhile, the returning migrant's savings slowly dwindled and he was facing the need to go abroad to earn some more (Ballard, 1983).

Thus, Pakistani migrants find themselves in a difficult situation, where they feel pushed out of Europe by racism and lack of work, or out of the Middle East by horrific working conditions and a lack of rights. But they are also not able to return to their place of origin, as they are incapable of making a living there because of structural problems that their own remittances and migration have contributed to creating. In Mirpur, there were occasional instances of social unrest in the 1980s, as people protested against their unfair treatment by the government and the urban elites. More recently, however, Pakistani migrants in Denmark who attempt to go back now tend to move to the big cities rather than to the place their families came from (Rytter, 2011). There, second generation migrants marry into urban middle class families – a significant step up the social ladder – and use the skills and education they have acquired abroad to set up private businesses. In this way, they refuse the inferior position that the government and the elites have assigned to them, bypass the stagnant backwater of their parents' home town, and apply new strategies in order to turn their history of migration into renewed gain, both economically and in terms of status.

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