



## Continuity in Mind: Imagination and migration in India and the Gulf

**Thomas Chambers**

Oxford Brookes

2 p.m., Tuesday 26<sup>th</sup> February  
Syndicate Room, Old Main Building, St Antony's College

In the context of migration between Uttar Pradesh, other areas of India, and the Gulf, this paper explores the role of the imagination in shaping subjective experiences of male Muslim migrants from a woodworking industry in the North Indian city of Saharanpur. Through attending to the dreams, aspirations, and hopes of labour migrants, the paper argues that bridging the material and the imagined is critical to understanding not just patterns of migration, but also the subjective experiences of migrants themselves. Through a descriptive ethnographic account, involving journeys with woodworkers over one and a half years, the paper explores the ways in which migration, its effects, and connections are shaped by the imagination, yet are also simultaneously active in shaping the imagination—a process that is self-perpetuating. Emerging from this, the paper gives attention to continuity at the material, personal, and more emotive levels. This runs counter to research that situates migration as rupturing or change-driving within both the social and the subjective. These continuities play out in complex ways, providing comfort and familiarity, but also enabling the imaginations of migrants to be subverted, co-opted, influenced, and structured to meet the demands of labour markets both domestically and abroad.

Thomas Chambers is a lecturer in social anthropology at Oxford Brookes University. Thomas has a PhD in Social Anthropology from the University of Sussex, as well as a Masters in Cross-Cultural Research Methods and a First-Class Honours Degree in International Development. For the past decade his research has focused on the geographical region of North-West Uttar Pradesh (India) and covers a range of thematic focuses including migration, labour, artisanship, urban space, conviviality, welfare and digitisation. Thomas's work emphasises long-term immersive ethnography and descriptive detail. He has published in a variety of peer-reviewed journals including *Modern Asian Studies*, the *Journal of South Asian Development and Environment & Planning C*.

**All are welcome**

Convenors: Faisal Devji, Polly O'Hanlon, Kate Sullivan de Estrada, Nayanika Mathur,  
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*The South Asia Seminar is co-funded by the Ashmolean Museum, the Asian Studies Centre of St Antony's College, the Contemporary South Asian Studies Programme at the School of Interdisciplinary Area Studies, the Department for International Development and Faculty of History and the Faculty of Oriental Studies. Picture: Thomas Chambers*

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