‘Currents and eddies’: Indian-Middle East migration processes

K. Ravi Raman

Development Studies, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, Thornhaugh Street, Russell Square, London WC1H 0XG, UK, rr21@soas.ac.uk

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Migration begets migration in a constant flow of currents and eddies with people moving in to fill the niches vacated by emigrants thus blurring boundaries and spaces. This paper explores the nested complexities of the migration processes between India and the Middle East, and within India, from the regional perspective of Kerala. It assesses the claim that migration flows do not yield to a particular framing, highlighting the necessity of rethinking existing theoretical notions in terms of dependency and development and locating the migrants in multiple domains across spaces, regions and social locales as well as the practical implications thereof.

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This paper is built on the metaphorical hypothesis that migration follows a pattern of ‘currents and eddies’: the currents typify the flow of transnational migration from a geopolitical region, and the eddies represent the tighter cycles of internal/intranational migration. It explores the manner in which migration from one region not only sets the trend for subsequent emigration but also sets in motion a flow of people from the peripheries of neighbouring subnational states, who move in to occupy the niches vacated by the transnational migrants, thereby purchasing for themselves a new sense of social and economic inclusion/exclusion. The paper also highlights the implications of the emergent dynamic processes including the multiple dependencies, the emergent regional division of labour and the overall sociocultural tensions precipitated by these flows and counterflows of labour. The contributions made by transnational migrants to the sending region not only help foster its development but also virtually feed and liberate the migrants from neighbouring regions, drawing them out of their subaltern environs, and transforming the region into an evolving vortex of integrating regions, economies and societies. As no single theory could fully capture the intricacies inherent in this complex interplay of socio-economic forces, a meeting of theoretical notions and an exchange of ideas across paradigms are called for at this juncture (see Feyerabend, 1975; King and Skeldon, 2010; Kuhn, 1962; Massey et al., 1993, 1994a; Pryor, 1981). This paper attempts to achieve such an integration of theories by empirically informing the nested complexities of migration processes between India and the Middle East, and within India, from the regional perspective of Kerala, a state known over
the world for its high social development (see Raman, 2010a).

More on premises

In exploring the multidimensional process of migration and its consequences across regions and spaces, my intention is first to strengthen the notion that migration flows do not lend themselves easily to any particular framing (Arango, 2000; Davis, 1988; King and Skeldon, 2010; Massey et al., 1993, 1994; Massey and Taylor, 2004; also see De Haas, 2010; Lucassen et al., 2010; Raman, 2010b; Samers, 2010) but demand a multipronged approach to their study. Secondly, I hope to contribute to the emerging literature on the geographies of labour with the associated question of the blurring of boundaries and spaces, including that of the state/space, with far reaching consequences for regions in terms of a rescaling of the world, nation–states and regions. Thirdly, I also intend to re-articulate the otherwise binary and opposing modes of reasoning—structuralist dependency versus functionalist developmentalist, following by and large the typologies adopted by scholars from critical perspectives (Jones, 1998; also see Goldring, 1991; Taylor, 1999)—by integrating it within the world system, locating migrants in multiple domains across scales, spaces and social locales with historical parallels within and outside of their immediate geo-political landscapes. I would also extend this to a counterpoising of the pessimist school of thought versus the optimists, quite in keeping with scholars whose concern is not so much whether to join one or the other camp, but to unravel the heterogeneities and the nested complexities involved in migration processes (see particularly Binford, 2003; De Haas, 2010; Portes, 2008; also see Cohen, 1995, 1996; Pryor, 1981). Fourthly, I shall briefly touch upon the nature of the ‘host’ state, with respect to both transnational migrants and migrants constituting the smaller eddies. The transnational migrants and those who form the eddies, with due consideration to the concerns of citizenship, civil society and human rights. Before the idea of space and time entered the debate on migration in the 1990s, Zelinsky (1971) hypothesized that the size and scope of migration flows were heavily dependent on the stage of development leading to a ‘mobility transition’, though the notion is not free from limitations (see Jones 1998; King and Skeldon, 2010). Further, migration has ever swung between extremes, with migrants returning home in the face of political upheavals in the host country, only to return when the balance shifts back in their favour, creating an international circulation across geopolitical frontiers that Duany (2002) calls ‘mobile livelihoods’. This allows us to designate the migrants as "mobile livelihood citizens" and enquire into their conditions under different state regimes. My theoretical aim is informed both historically and ethnographically by situating the globally integrated Indian state of Kerala, within the context of comparative interstate/international migratory flows.

In treating migration as a phenomenon inherent to the capitalist world economy, the World System School holds the view that it reinforces the global inequality between the core and the periphery and bulwarks structuralist concerns of growing dependency, unproductive consumption and social disintegration at varying scales (Castells, 1975; Castles and Miller, 1998; Chase-Dunn and Hall, 1997; Portes and Rumbaut, 1990; Portes and Walton, 1981; Samers, 2010; Sassen, 1988, 1991; Wallerstein, 1979, 1988; Wiest, 1984). While the notion of ‘development of underdevelopment’ (Frank, 1966) and persistent poverty in world peripheries formed the basis for radical neo-Marxist thought, the possibility of ‘associated development’ was advanced as a critique by reformists Cardoso and Faletto (1979), although it was the national bourgeoisie that was largely acknowledged here as the agency of development. Wallerstein and his colleagues further enlarged upon centre–periphery relations by locating semi-peripheries, arguing that the prognosis of the underdevelopment of peripheries remained unchanged, given the unequal relations of production within the hierarchized world system; the state, for its part, remains stripped of its autonomy as a critical agent of development. The political–anthropological studies highlighting how ethnically segmented migrant labour contributes to both the widening gap between the sending and
receiving countries and the restructuring capitalism at the core, as has been explored in the case of Mexico (see Binford, 2003; Gledhill, 1984) also, in effect, supplements the structuralist–dependency reasoning. Migrant labour inserted into the global division of labour could not but produce unequal power relations.

The functionalists, in comparison, view substantial local investment and levelling of inequalities as a means towards economic growth and a general improvement in local/regional economies (Conway and Cohen, 1998; Grindle, 1988; Jones, 1998; also see Boswell, 2007). The social mobility associated with migration, particularly where none existed before for certain social groups, endows the entire process with progressive and positive connotations in addition to the tensions and conflicts traditionally associated with migration. The new economics of labour migration paradigm propounded by Stark and Bloom (1985; Stark, 1991) and elaborated by Massey et al. (1993, 1994; Taylor, 1999) is less structuralist and more functionalist as it is argued that families diversify their sources of income and thereby minimize the risks in labour and related markets by treating migration as a strategic practice, though contingent on broad-based policy initiatives. The social network framing (Massey et al., 1987, 1993, 1994; Samers, 2010), deriving insights from various disciplines, provides an understanding of the ties that bind migrants, previous migrants and non-migrants within and between the countries of origin and destination and so goes beyond the ‘migration chain’ to encapsulate an entire ‘migration system’. While the adoption of a ‘transnational social field’ approach has helped move migration enquires beyond duality framing linking geopolitical regions (see Schiller et al., 1995; Vertovec, 2004; Vertovec and Cohen, 1999), the consequences of social and economic changes in the sending regions still remain underexplored; the migration of professionals, too, has not been adequately addressed (see Biao, 2004; Portes, 2008).

Neither the centre–periphery relations proposed by the Dependency–World System School nor the anthropological place/locale constitution effectively captures the rapid multicultural changes swamping the world economies with the opening up of new spaces within new boundaries (see Van Binsbergen, 1999) and shifting domains. This necessitates a more nuanced understanding of at least two major domains: the places and people that constitute the peripheries as extremely fluid categories and the role of the state in terms of its governance. Departing from the oft-used paired set of categories, Raman (2010b, 2010c), for instance, asserts that the term ‘periphery’ as a homogenous category is more academic than real and that there are a multitude of ‘peripheries within peripheries’, reflecting the historical reproduction of unequal power relations in terms of space and social hierarchies including the gender dimension. They represent the outer layers of peripheries that in turn constitute the most backward regions with historically marginalized classes, castes and communities and those who are outside of the mainstream development processes. What is a periphery for one class or community could well qualify as the core for another; what is the core for one class or community could be considered a less than fully developed core by another. What is critical in this context is that a movement of labour is by and large shaped by such social–spatial hierarchies that churn out mutually enabling currents and eddies. While those who perceive themselves to be living in the periphery and who can afford to do so move towards the core, those in the peripheries within peripheries move in to fill the niches; a phenomenon touched upon by scholars in various contexts (see Fitzgerald, 2009; Gardner, 1995; King and Skeldon, 2010; Nair, 1999; Pryor, 1981; Raman, 2010b, 2010c).

In terms of the governance of the state, I would assert, in keeping with earlier critiques, that rather than marginalizing the role of the state and placing a unilateral emphasis on the structural hierarchy of the world economy, the state is to be factored in, firstly due to the fact that it takes different forms in different historical contexts and secondly, acts as a powerful mediating agency, the effects of which are not insignificant. Migrant resources could enable the state to support developmental initiatives, while not completely de-linking from its dependent relations with the core. Following this train of thought, what might thus be even more illuminating would be the integration of the structuralist dependant with the
functionalist–developmentalist reasoning by attributing a critical role to the state and civil society as agents of change, in mediating migration and development and their shifting contours. It is through such an exploration of the dynamic and interactive processes involved (Castells, 1996; King and Skeldon, 2010; Massey et al., 1993, 1994; Portes, 2008) that I approach transnational migration from Kerala to the Middle East and in-migration from within India.

Kerala: India’s migrant core

The Indian Diaspora—the second largest in the world with more than 20 million people spread across the continents—is one of the subjects of studies of south–south and south–north migration. India plays a major role in rendering south-south migration greater than south-north migration (see Rathar, Mohapatra, and Silwal, 2011; Rathar and Shaw, 2007; also see Bakewell, 2009). Within India, Kerala is now the single largest contributor to migration in India, in terms of both sending and receiving. This has been made possible by two significant developments, one historical, the other contemporary, involving first, the colonially evolved agrarian landscape and commodity production which encouraged migration, both internal and external (to south Asian colonies such as Malaysia, Sri Lanka, etc.) and secondly, new transnational migration, across the Arabian sea to the Middle East (and then to the West), attracted by the rich oil reserves of the Middle East. Geographically, Kerala has a unique landscape with fertile lowlands as well as highlands where spices and other plantation crops grew and an extensive coastal belt, all of which made global integration possible. The large number of small ports became the centres of trade between Malabar and the Arab world and with Western imperialist countries. The arrival of Vasco da Gama in 1498 was a significant turning point in the history of the state.2

The colonially induced shift of commodity production from one frontier zone to another—with cocoa cultivation moving from Latin America to north Africa, rubber from Brazil to south-east Asia and tea from China to the Indian sub-continent—generated fresh demands for migrant labour. This was met first by the abolition of slavery in the mid-19th century, followed by the mobilization of labour from ‘catchment areas’ (Chakravarty, 1978) or what Skeldon (1997) would call the ‘labour frontiers’. A study of internal migration in India between 1901 and 1931 (Zachariah, 1964) reveals that the movement of workers was consistently westward towards the plantation belt, from Madras to Mysore and to Thiruvithamkuru–Kochi, with women often far outnumbering men. This was followed by other waves of internal migration, this time of poor and marginal peasants from Travancore to Malabar, in the 1930s when the local economy was hit by the Great Depression, and again during the Second World War (Baak, 1997; Raman, 1989, 2010b; Tharakan, 1978; Varghese, 2006).

Apart from this internal migration within southern India, there was a movement of the rural populace to other colonies which themselves were being incorporated into the world economy through commodity production. In these, migrants were subjected to multiple labour relations such as indentured labour, contract work, and military recruitment. There was an outward flow of Indian labour to Mauritius, Trinidad, Guyana, Surinam and Myanmar and, more particularly, to neighbouring Sri Lanka and Burma in the second half of the 19th century and to Malaysia in the early 20th century as people migrated as free and unfree workers to work on the newly emerging colonial plantations (Amrith, 2009; Bose, 2006; Markovits, Poucheaud and Subramanyam, 2003; Mohapatra, 2007; Tinker, 1974). There was also a large Muslim population that migrated during agrarian unrest in Kerala in early 1920s; Muslim dominance in certain areas of Sri Lanka is also attributed to migration from Malabar. In the post-colonial period, it was also Muslims who first made use of the opportunities to migrate; they were soon followed by other communities who moved to the oil-rich Middle East, opening a new chapter in the history of Kerala’s transnational flows that now spread westward creating their own eddies in the south.

Kerala is not only a migrant-dense state but also contributes extensively to migration literature3 and is thus perhaps a notable exception to what Gardner and Osella (2003) term the ‘northern bias’ in migration.
research. The vast majority of the works on Kerala focus on the push–pull factors involved in migration and the complex interrelationships among population, remittances and development. While these studies in general, and the wealth of demographic and socio-economic data generated by studies conducted at the Centre for Development Studies, largely led by Zachariah and Rajan in particular, illuminate different facets of transnational and intra-national migration, what is missing is an understanding of the multiple processes involved and the nested complexities of impact of migration on the regional economy from an integrationist theoretical perspective. With few exceptions, this scholarship suffers from the same affliction that blighted North American migration scholarship for more than a decade until the intervention by Massey et al. (1993, 1994) in the early 90s—that of a devotion to a methodological, descriptive approach, rather than theoretically driven analytics. As Massey et al. (1993) noted, the lack of a ‘shared paradigm’ could not advance a theoretical understanding of the ‘forces that shape and control international migration’, suggesting instead, a common dialogue across theoretical perspectives, informed by empirical evidence.

Post-1970s oil boom: systemic migration to the Middle East

The post-World War II boom was brought to an end by the Arab–Israeli war in 1973 when the oil-producing Arab states declared an embargo on the export of oil to the USA and the Netherlands, the allies of Israel, forcing oil prices up. As the West reeled under this shock price rise in oil from the Middle East, US Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger, described OPEC’s decision as ‘one of the pivotal events in the history of this century’ (cited in Parra, 2004, 190). These events were crucially important for India in general, and for Kerala: the increased wealth in the oil producing Middle East necessitated a construction and urban infrastructure boom, by and large similar to the post-War recovery in northern Europe that had attracted the relatively jobless workers from southern Europe. The post-70s pattern of migration from Kerala, however, differed in that the bulk of migrants flowed towards the Middle East, the Gulf Cooperation Countries (GCC) of Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, none of which permitted permanent settlement, leading to a state of fluid trans-Arabian regional integration. Kerala contributes nearly half of India’s emigration to the GCC, which is the third most important labour receiving region in the world, after North America and Europe (Adams, 2009). It was the neighbouring sources of cheap labour—more than one third of the expatriates in the GCCs come from the Arab MENA region (see Naufal, 2011; Naufal and Vargas-Silva, 2010)—that initially saw the GCC through the early 70s oil boom but the increased demand was far in excess of supply from these areas, opening up a new world of opportunity for South and South East Asian labour, including Indians/Keralites. The absence of pan-Arab nationalist sentiment, as indeed the inherent threat of the same, might have persuaded the GCC to privilege Asian labour over that from the MENA region (Kapiszewski, 2006); the potential competition remains and may take new forms in the context of the recent “popular movements” and political upheavals in the region (see Naufal, 2011).

The flow of labour from Kerala began first with unskilled workers—as in the case of the Mexicans in the USA and the East Europeans in the UK, including the Turks (see Martin et al. 2006)—followed by semi-skilled and skilled professionals. While Mexico provided the case of property owning classes moving to the USA, in Kerala, it was specifically the relatively underprivileged classes, save the dalits and the indigenous tribes, who moved to the Middle East. The number of Kerala migrants living outside India in 2008 was 2.19 million; this is against the total employment of 11.4 lakh in the public and private sector taken together. A decade earlier, it was only 1.36 million, an increase by 0.83 million since 1998 (Zachariah and Rajan, 2010). The number of emigrants per hundred households increased from 21.4 to 29 over the same period. The workers were mostly educated up to primary level, reflecting the state’s achievement in terms of universal primary education by the early 1980s. Contrary to general belief, barely 3% of the migrants were drawn from the
agricultural sector; 39% were from non-agricultural sectors, 14.5% were self-employed and 16% employed in the private sector (Zachariah and Rajan, 2010, 64) and nearly 12% were job seekers and got absorbed into the oil and construction sectors, to help build the Gulf cities, as in other global cities (Price and Benton-Short, 2008; Sassen, 1988, 1991). Kerala also saw a ‘feminization of migration’, 15–17 of emigrants were women, which is, however, far lesser than the Philippines where female migration outnumbers male migration (Barber, 2009; Piper, 2009).

Post-Gulf integration development

Remittances to India kept pace with these developments, increasing from a meagre US $120 million in 1970 to 2.76 billion in 1980, 3.29 billion in 1991, 12 billion in 2000 and to about 55 billion in 2010. Zachariah and Rajan, 2010 estimate an inflow of a little more than US $10 billions (about Rs 432,880 million) into the Kerala economy as remittances in 2008, almost one third of the state domestic product, as against 4% of the gross domestic product of India: the importance of remittances to Kerala thus far outweighs that for India as a whole. This places the state among the top 20 remittance-receiving regions in the world (World Bank, 2010; Zachariah and Rajan, 2010), estimate an inflow of a little more than US $10 billions - about Rs 43,288 crores into the Kerala economy as remittances in 2008, which rose to nearly 50,000 crores in 2011. Remittance have surpassed export earnings from spices and cash crops, as well as the income from the export of marine products, and this in a state endowed with rich coastal resources (Zachariah et al., 2001, 63–64). This also shows a shift from a plantation state to a migrant state and from old/commodity integration to new/human integration (Raman, 2010c), both part of the global division of labour. The remittances, in terms of cash plus goods, are even higher; this is in addition to what are termed in the migration literature as ‘pocket transfers’: money carried in hand that remains unaccounted for. Moreover, the depreciation of the rupee as a direct outcome of the shelving of the fixed exchange rate system as part of the wider neoliberal reforms, further augmented these remittances (Human Development Report, 2005, 77; Kannan and Hari, 2002), though this trend has recently become flexible. In Kerala, another major shift is evident is in terms of money transfers to the state: until the late 1980s, nearly 40% of money was transferred through informal channels, often called Havala networks—outside of the formal banking system (Sasikumar and Hussain, 2007) which is now barely 4% (Zachariah and Rajan, 2011).

While there was a substantial rise in investments in land, housing construction and consumer durables, connected to the wave of migration to the Gulf countries (see CMIE, 1978; Prakash, 1978, 1998; Zachariah et al., 2007), there was also a marked increase in per capita consumption of non-food items such as foreign liquor, medicines and toiletries (Pushpangadan, 2003); household consumption and subsistence expenditure was followed by education and repayment of debt; savings accounted for hardly 4% (Zachariah and Rajan, 2007). This mirrors the trend in many poor and developing countries right from the 1970s (see Lipton, 1980). Notably, while the average per capita consumption in Kerala was below the all-India average until the late 70s, it was the highest in the country by 2009–2010 with its per capita consumption being 41% higher than the all-India average. The high proportion of remittances devoted to consumption reflects the fact that migration forms part of the individual and household strategy for migrants and their families, as the ‘new economics of labour migration’ scholars would highlight, to move towards decent levels of living and reduce livelihood risks in one’s own land, which, as we shall soon see, has come to be the norm. While the agency of the individual migrant in this process is well acknowledged (see Bakewell, 2010), its historical significance would be greatly marginalized, were it to be contextualized outside of the state and civil society, aspects to which I turn later on in the paper.

Migration has also gone a long way in ameliorating the heavy burden of unemployment in the state; more importantly, the Kerala model could perhaps not have sustained itself without migrant resources (Jeffrey,
1994; Zachariah and Rajan, 2010), though Kerala still has the highest incidence of unemployment among the Indian states at three times that of the rest of the country. The fact that migration has helped reduce unemployment levels in the state is reflected in poverty levels, with Kerala having one of the lowest rural poverty figures among all the Indian states: 15% as against the national average of 28%. However, though remittances do play a major role in poverty reduction, attributing the fall in poverty entirely to their growth would be to undermine the value of the proactive and autonomous role played by the state.

The concern expressed by Zachariah and Rajan, 2010 about the bulk of the general population—nearly 80%—being excluded from the ‘great phenomenon that is transforming Kerala’s economy and society’ is worth focussing on as the proportion of households receiving remittances from abroad has remained stagnant at about 16–18% over a decade. Could this be a signifier of the non-inclusive migratory cycle in the state, as elsewhere? This seems to be the case and perhaps offers an ideal opportunity for the state to intervene. An equally important concern would be the persistence of pockets of poverty both in rural and urban locales. Kerala is one of the very few states in India where urban poverty is higher than rural and it is quite likely that this is more marked in slums that increased in absolute number of late. To what extent this could be attributed to rural–urban migration from within the state or to in-migration from the other states needs further exploration. Further, a high incidence of poverty and a higher work participation rate among the historically marginalized social groups—the adivasis and dalits—is clear evidence that they have not benefited, either directly or indirectly, from the migration boom in Kerala. The spaces of inclusion that migrant resources generate in the state too remain out of reach of such marginalized communities: the complexity of the relationship between poverty and migration (Skeldon, 1990, 1997), particularly, in historically hierarchized and stratified societies. The state, in turn, has to deepen further or stretch its redistributive role downward in scale.

The link between migrant remittances and inequality has long been a subject of debate as has the potential costs and benefits of remittances, with the historical structuralists and functionalists taking polar views (see Binford, 2003; Conway and Cohen, 1998; Jones, 1998). In his study of remittances and inequality in Mexico, Jones supports the proposition that inter-familial inequalities decrease with migration up to a point, after which they increase, and that rural places improve their income position vis-à-vis urban centres. While his case study is more relevant to regions ‘bypassed by global trade liberalization’, Kerala offers a slightly different experience. Evidence shows that although there was no increase in the income disparity between the rich and the poor during the first 10 years of the migration boom in the state, this has not been the case since the 1990s (see Oommen, 2008; Subrahmanian and Prasad, 2008). It implies that migration brought wealth to the state, raised average living standards and since the initial migrants came from the relatively poor groups in the state, this must have reduced income inequality at various levels. It is also worth noting that, for the first time in history, many migrant families, who otherwise belonged to some of the most backward and deprived sections of society, managed to send their children to good schools, build good houses, raise their standard of living and achieve upward mobility (see Osella and Osella, 1999). Yet, the over-representation of certain religions and communities within migration flows—as in the case of Muslims and Christians, and amongst them the more economically advanced in recent years—has created concerns about new inequalities across castes and communities.

This should not discourage us from pursuing the wider question of Kerala’s regional development vis-à-vis the recent economic boom within the larger Indian economy nor does it allow us to bypass the pertinent question of multiple dependence that migration has generated in Kerala’s economy. Although there are scholars who argue that Kerala has lost out relatively in the context of the current neoliberal climate, there has been a significant improvement in the subsistence and well-being of many social sections. Further, there has been a major ‘turnaround’ in economic growth in the state since the mid-80s, which could also be partly attributed to migrant-led investments and the performance of other service sectors in the economy (Human
The expansion of the service sector and the improvement in infrastructure suggest that migrant money has had a major impact on the economy and society. The migrant money that poured into Kerala also helped expand the domestic market associated with a bolstering of the social and economic infrastructure. By the time the housing boom subsided, new waves of social infrastructure as investments by the state, catering to new developmental shifts continued to sustain interstate migration to the state, now drawing migrants from beyond its immediate neighbour Tamil Nadu. Kerala has thus come to be a mini-Gulf or an ‘Indian Gulf’ for migrants from the peripheries of India.

**Signs of dependency: oil war, global recession and return migration**

The invasion of Kuwait by Iraq in 1990 led to the mass exodus of migrants from the Gulf (van Hear, 1993; Ratha, 2003): Keralites were no exception, resulting in the first major flow of return migrants to the state. Nearly 80,000 Keralites were repatriated from Kuwait alone in a very short time (Isaac, 1992; Nair, 1999; Prakash, 2000; Saith, 1992). As educated Malayalis sent their hard-earned money home—causing a 10% increase in foreign exchange remittances from the Middle East—the state extended various temporary support measures to people affected by the war. A similar situation occurred in the contemporary global crisis. As the GCC countries are integrated with the monetary policies of the USA on varying scales (see Siddiqi, 2009; Pamela Ann, 2008), the growth in the region as a whole is likely to suffer a temporary setback (International Monetary Fund, 2010); the World Bank highlighted a sharp slackening of cash remittances to developing countries owing to falling oil prices and uncertainty in exchange rates, all directly related to the ‘global financial distress’. Recent increases in inflation, capital flight, contraction of stock markets and the depletion of sovereign wealth resources within the GCC could largely be attributed to the global recession. Migrants have already begun to feel the consequences of these changes: the construction boom, the mainstay of the migrants, was badly hit with cancellations; the decline of trade and related activities affected 40% of the workers in the form of redundancies in jobs, non-renewal of contracts, reduction of wages and increasing workloads (Rajan and Narayana, 2010); 61,000 migrants from Kerala were affected by the recession (Zachariah and Rajan, 2010). In South Asia as a whole, the number was around 170,000, bringing to light the plight of migrants during conflict and crisis periods, which is not fully addressed here.

Return migration, over and above that associated with crisis situations, remains a concern for the state of Kerala, in terms of both the flow of people and cash, thus supporting the structuralist arguments with respect to dependency within the world system. However, what weakens the structuralist–dependency framework are the options left for return migrants, including return to the Middle East, ‘a real option … to cope with the stress caused by involuntary return emigration’ (2011, 4). This supports the position taken by Cardoso and Faletto (1979) on the essential transience of ‘situations’ of dependency in different historical and social contexts. However, while it is true that many ‘return options’ are open to the migrant, it is equally true that many fall victim to migration processes, with neither the option of returning to the Middle East or to a decent level of living in their native villages—such victims are to be found aplenty along the coastal belts of Kerala which form one of the peripheries of the state. This brings us back to the limitations of the dualist framings in understanding the migration processes and the shortcomings of the otherwise acclaimed Kerala model of development (see Parayil, 2000; Raman, 2010a).

If it was the depreciation of the rupee that helped augment the growth of remittances in the 1980s, the situation appears to have reversed now, raising fresh concerns, as expressed by George and Remya (2010) about losses incurred by non-resident Keralites owing to the rising exchange value of the rupee per year ranging from Rs. 10,260 million in 2003–2004 to Rs. 18,900 million in 2005–2006. For the first half of the year 2007–2008 alone, the loss amounted to Rs. 27,660 million, signalling increasing losses. This
has wider implications and the kind of dependency this generates is one of subservience by the state of Kerala to the federal government of India which could well be viewed as yet another source of surplus drain (Raman, 2009; Rammohan and Raman, 1990). However, this unfavourable situation is open to change subject to the level and dynamics of integration of the remittance economy with the host countries and the overarching influence of the world financial economy. It hinges on how best the social democratic state of Kerala capitalizes on the net benefits brought by such global integration and liberalization including the possibilities for yet another phase or moments of appreciation/depreciation. It also hinges on how the state approaches non-resident Malayalis and the returnees, encouraging them to engage with the economy as entrepreneurs, traders and investors, particularly through industrial policies and interventions. As Indian immigrants face various forms of social and racial tensions in their temporary homes overseas, whether in the Middle East, Southeast Asia or Africa (Lessinger, 1999), this provides an added incentive to return and invest in their own country.

With its low level of industrial development to date, Kerala has never had a strong regional bourgeoisie save for a few big merchants, traders and business entrepreneurs, although the recent interest in development has come with the state acting as the catalyst; this has opened up new spaces for state-level entrepreneurs to invest in new ventures. Having relatively bypassed the intermediate phase of development, namely manufacturing, the state is yet to formulate a policy that effectively dips into its knowledge pool to invest in an environment-friendly knowledge economy. The fast emerging technoparks and IT networks in Kerala including the UAE–State partnership projects could become harbingers of a new era of developmental shifts that are both labour absorbing, particularly of the educated unemployed in the state, and presage a ‘crowding in’ in terms of state level capital formation. This is not to overlook the dangers involved in the ‘false sense of a successful model’ which is produced by the interaction of ‘spatial hierarchy and social inequality’ as has been critically highlighted by D’Costa (2011). Having invested in professional education in a significant manner, Kerala, however, could not afford to ignore the opportunity for software developmentalism at least in the current phase of its historical transformation. But a break with structural dependency, which remains a desirable end, should also be put in perspective considering the fact that heterogeneous, uneven and dependent forms of development still qualify as development per se; it is for the state and the civil society to smooth the contours of such angular forms of progress. Further, the state in Kerala, by and large, manages to insulate its resources from the onslaught of multinationals unlike the experience of the growth triangles in the East Asian ‘developmentalist’ states; the civil society–state interaction proves an effective deterrent to the creation of a corporate regime of accumulation as well as to the risk of the state being held hostage by any particular business class thus setting it apart from the classical notion of dependent development.

### Migrant-driven new regional division of labour

When people flow out, it is not money alone that comes in; smaller eddies of in-migration are set in motion as part of the inevitable circuit of labour flows. Interstate migration in India has accelerated since the 1990s, coinciding with the liberalization phase, with states such as Punjab, Haryana, Delhi, Maharastra, Gujarat and Kamataka, with their expanding industrial base and expanding cities (Bhagat, 2011). Kerala too sends its educated youth to these states; while there are around 25–30 lakh Malayalis in Mumbai, Delhi has around 20 lakhs, most having settled with family, with south Indian cities such Chennai and Bangalore, too, having a significant Malayali population. A recent trend in out-migration is that of nurses seeking jobs in the major Indian cities, with some moving on to the GCC and then to the West—the second shift; it would be pertinent to note here that three-quarters of nursing students in Kerala aspire to work abroad (Walton-Roberts, 2010; see also Arun, 2010).

While the migrants from Kerala treat the Middle East as their immediate core, the interstate migrants subjected to multiple oppressions from the im
mediate employers, the state and state apparatus (see Breman et al., 2000; Harriss-White, 2003; Rogaly, 2009) from the neighbouring peripheries—Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Rajasthan, Bihar, West Bengal, Assam—in turn look to Kerala as their immediate core. This reinforces the necessity of an understanding of peripheries (and core as well) as a fluid category and a shifting domain. These are the Indian states—the ‘peripheries within peripheries’—both spatially and socio-economically, serving as an analytical category and a historical reality, now serves the increasing demand for its urban infrastructure both within homeland and outside; this also finds an indirect expression in the ILO’s A Global Alliance against Forced Labour that explains how coercive recruitment and debt bondage have affected migrants moving from poorer states to wealthier states. Dindigual, one of the most poverty-stricken regions in Tamil Nadu, sends the highest number of migrants to Kerala (Anand, 1986; Surabhi and Kumar, 2007). Of the total immigrants, nearly half are dalit women, and the highest sending state is neighbouring Tamil Nadu, followed by Karnataka in south India, the new migratory cycle reminiscent of the colonial migratory cycle wherein the dalit women, subject to coercive recruitment and debt bondage moved in gangs to Kerala’s plantations (Raman, 2010b). However, the new spatial recruits in Kerala are largely from the north and northeast of India; it is not yet clear how many of these view Kerala as a temporary stop en route to the ‘real’ Gulf.

Migration and new concerns
In Kerala, two levels of cultural tensions are evident, one from transnational migration, the other from interstate migration. Kerala’s government reports that there are between 70,000 and 1 million people with HIV in Kerala. Regions with a migration history are those with the highest rates of HIV in Kerala (Priya, 2003; Srinivasan and Sukumar, 2006; Thimothy et al., 2006); equally the status of the host society—in this case the Middle East with a very low incidence of HIV/AIDS—influences the HIV statistics back in Kerala. The high incidence of HIV in Kerala is thus difficult to explain, although it could well be that intermediate ports of call such as Mumbai, which have a high prevalence of the infection are the reason for this apparent paradox. Concerns have also been voiced about in-migrants moving from relatively poorly immunized regions such as Maharashtra, Orissa and Bihar to Kerala that has a nearly completely immunized population (about 96%). However, as Raman and Harper (2008) note the relationships between ‘medical discourse and diasporic “others”’ is complex, the resultant outcome being ambivalence towards migration and health services.

Media reports on human rights abuses in the Middle East are not rare, and in this context, the incorporation of Kerala into the Middle East economy translates into what Castles (2002) terms ‘differential exclusion’. Migrants face the problems of barrack-like accommodation in the labour camps, long working hours, often exceeding 8 h a day, wage deductions, withholding of remuneration, lack of medical facilities, retention of passports and so on. Furthermore, the absence of effective labour legislation means that employers can act with impunity, secure in the knowledge that their arbitrary and oppressive actions will remain unchallenged. Women workers are even more vulnerable to oppression: housemaids are often sexually harassed and underpaid, as reported by the High Level Committee on the Indian Diaspora (2002). While minimizing the extraction of remittances from its population, the state being ‘rentier’ and ‘neo-patrimonial’ with a restricted notion of citizenship (see Hanieh, 2011; Schwarz, 2008), it drives home the advantage through an increased extraction of labour power from the global peripheries. Moreover, the rentier state would by nature resist all moves to recognise the migrants as mobile livelihood citizens. Cities thus remain saturated with only the barest minimum of political mobilization that these cramped spaces permit.

In contrast, Tamil or Bihari migrants, citizens towards an encompassing citizenship in their home territories, discover a new identity within the social democratic milieu and the civil society of Kerala. First, the very act of migration frees them from their semi-feudal bondage and poverty and brings them into a society that has rid itself of its feudal mindset.
through its communist experience. Secondly, political identities are formed among in-migrants in the state owing to its historically evolved social institutions, political empowerment of the larger civil society. While the political dividends of politicization are largely denied to Malayalis in the Middle East, such benefits are reaped by the in-migrants to Kerala who, as many have expressed to this author, feel empowered the instant they cross the state borders, notwithstanding the tensions inherent in the move.

**Concluding comments**

It is widely acknowledged that a particular and successful theoretical framing of migration, whether transnational or internal, remains elusive; this problem is accentuated by the fact that migration not only begets migration but contemporaneously feeds migrants within multiple spatial and social locales. Apart from initiating a succession of population flows from within a region, it opens up spaces of inclusion for new arrivals from the rest of a sending country, providing deeper insights into the whole process of fluid integration of regions, economies and societies. As outlined elsewhere (Raman, 2010c), in contrast to the old integration of the state wherein the world economy and its regional constituents represent a classical form of dependency, with primary commodities being exported to the metropolis and the consequent drain of surplus and reproduction of the periphery, the outcome of this new human integration is multifaceted, depicting phases of sustainability and dependence. While the traditional trade dependency survives amid a climate of vulnerability in the era of globalization, a new labour dependency thrives alongside it, ushering in an era of development in Kerala in terms of improved living conditions and wealth and employment creation, although not completely free from economic and sociocultural tensions; it also simultaneously offers spaces of inclusion for those who moved into the state from within India.

There has been a recent trend towards an institutionalization of the ‘culture of migration’ as a primary route to social and economic mobility with the West—Europe and North America—being the preferred destination, forming yet another contour in the migration trajectory of the Malayalis. There has even been an extrapolation of migration backwards to the pre-University phase, with parents competing to send their children out of the state and country for their higher education. While female migration in general was the outcome of the expansion of industrial and urban services, as in Southeast and East Asia (see Kundu, 2007; Skeldon, 1990), in Kerala students, too, have joined the outward flow, redefining borders and creating a fluid integration of spaces and regions in terms of gender and generation. Further, there is now in Kerala a preoccupation with migration that permeates various strata of the population, including professionals who otherwise might have led quite secure lives in the state. To what extent this movement of professionals is sustainable and which professions are more likely to be involved remain to be seen—in engineering, for instance, a reverse migration into the country is now evident, with the highly enskilled retracing their steps, reversing the classic ‘brain drain’ (see Khadria, 2001).

But, equally, complacency about these multiple processes is short sighted. As noted earlier, global and regional crisis make workers vulnerable. Again, there is significant migration within the Arab MENA region, which is a potential competition for South and South East Asian labour, including Indians/Keralites, although it remains to be seen which of these channels will finally prove more sustainable. There may also be a formation of currents and eddies within the GCC-MENA owing to recent economic and political developments, including the ‘Arab Spring’. The consequences of this for south-Asian migrants are yet to manifest. The crisis and the emerging Arab political economy may result in a sustained pattern of movement of labour across spaces and at different scales from within the GCC-MENA—a movement from Saudi Arabia to Dubai and Qatar for instance—or from the GCC to the West and then back to the homeland, defining and redefining borders, making them more fluid than ever before. Regions, economies and societies shape and are being shaped by the shifting waters of migration. Journeying with the mobile livelihood citizens and charting these complex flows and their multiple effects across regions, countries and continents remains a task worth undertaking.
Endnotes

1 This is largely explained as a direct critique in the context of newly industrializing countries with its state-led development, see for early literature Lall (1975), Smith (1979), and Browett (1985) also see Schiller et al., 1995; Raman 2010b, c. For a theoretical and practical understanding of the historical contexts and various versions of developmentalist state, see Evans (1995), Johnson (1999), and Leftwich (2000)

2 Malabar was one of the eastern theatre of trade wars and the first region to be colonized by the Europeans, beginning with the landing of Portuguese sailor cum admiral, Vasco da Gama in 1498; the Portuguese were followed by the Dutch, French and the British. The other ‘Malayalam’ speaking regions that formed modern Kerala after the state reorganization along linguistic lines in 1956 were the princely states of Travancore and Cochin, the territories indirectly ruled.

3 There are four broad approaches, which sometimes intermingle—the historical (see particularly Joseph, 1988; Tharakan, 1978; Varghese, 2006; Zachariah, 1964), the demographic–economic (Zachariah, 1964; Zachariah, Mathew, and Rajan, 2001; Zachariah and Rajan, 1998–2011), the economic (see Gulati and Modbi, 1983; Harilal and Joseph, 2003; Kannan and Hari, 2002; Nair, 1988, 1998, 1999; Prakash, 1978, 1998; Prasad, 2006; Pushpangadan 2003; Zachariah et al., 2001; Zachariah et al., 2002; Zachariah et al., 2003; Rajan and Narayana, 2011; George and Remya, 2008; also see Balakrishnan, 2002; Sasikumar, 2001; Varghese, 2004; and the anthropological–cultural (Osella and Osella, 1999; 2003; 2007).

4 The Kerala Migration Surveys have so far completed five major rounds (1998, 2003, 2007, 2008, 2010) generating an impressive amount of data with the sample size of households being 10,000–15,000; http://www.cds.edu/


6 A higher figure at around Rs. 40,717 million or 18% of the state domestic product in 1998(cited in State Human Development Report, 2005).

7 In fact there are signs of such interventions in terms of strengthening the rather weak industrial base in Kerala through industrial parks, IT networks, new private–public investment ventures through the Non-Resident Keralites’ Affairs.

8 Ideally, this requires an ethnography of the everyday negotiation of crisis, in terms of citizenship, livelihood and human rights; a great deal of work has been done in this area, particularly in relation to refugees in Africa (see Hammond, 2004; Kaiser, 2006; Lindley, 2011).

9 One such case is UAE–State project of SmartCity Kochi; http://www.itmission.kerala.gov.in/general/516-smart-city-kochi.html

10 On corporate state formation, see Kapferer (2005); Evans (1995) highlights the reasons why the state should be close to, while keeping a safe distance from the business class, thereby avoiding the risk of capture by the latter. In Kerala, the initial phase of a corporate regime of accumulation was stalled through a new social movement activism directed against the Birla-owned Gwalior Rayons in the late 80s (see Rammohan and Raman, 1988); this form of ‘transverse solidarity’ was further consolidated with the anti-Cola struggle in Plachimada (Raman, 2010d). In both cases, civil society participation was significant to the effect that both the Birla’s and Coca-Cola had to withdraw from the state; a similar success was achieved by the anti-Endosulphan struggle in the state.

11 Also see the other contributions on this theme in the special issue of International Migration, 46 (5), 2008.

12 This does not mean that such concerns remain uncontested under liberal democracies (see Castles and Davidson, 2000; Schierup, Hansen and Castles, 2006; Modood et al 2005; Parekh 2000); the author is currently engaged in such work, focusing on mobile livelihood citizens in the GCC.

13 I do not mean to assert that Kerala is free from human rights violation (see Prasad, 2006; also see Barbora et al., 2008); however, this is a relatively minor problem in the state and one that is attributable more to the contractors who bring labour into the state rather than the employers in the state itself. Yet, the state could intervene to help the migrants’ integration on equal terms with the Malayali population.

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