

Abstract - Circulatory labour practices and the constitution of a trans-regional scale of social relations: circuits of migration in the Bhojpuri region, 1910s-1980s.

My research project focuses on circulatory labour practices originating in the Bhojpuri region throughout the 20th century. I especially focus on circulatory practices linking the districts of Ghazipur, in eastern U.P., with the rest of eastern India, as this area has been host to a variety of circulatory practices. The project will build on a variety of sources, gathered in the localities that have constituted the migrants' trajectories. The collection of family histories of migration will be followed by visits and interviews in some of the areas where different generations of migrants have been going. This will be supplemented by a variety of written sources – administrative reports, vernacular magazines, collected in the State archives, divisional commissioner's office and district record rooms in Bengal, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. Bhojpuri folklore and Hindi literature will also constitute an important source. A long-term perspective will allow us to look at circulation through an inter-generational prism, and to study the interplay of mobility practices with political, cultural and social developments throughout the period.

At this stage of my research, I am especially concerned with the question of the dynamics underlying the constitution of circuits of circulation, and how these contributed to shape the (trans-regional) space in which social, political, cultural and economic processes have been played out.

Circulation takes place through the interplay of various processes and actors, the outcome of relations of power, interdependence, autonomy and contestation. These trans-regional labour markets have been remarkably segmented, as some specific groups (variously constituted through an interplay between caste, religious and regional identities) have tended to monopolize specific employments. In this perspective, issues such as the role of the State, and the recruitment strategies of employers have been much debated in the scholarship. A genealogical approach through the collection of family histories will especially allow looking at the family – and village-based circuits of migration. The role of formal and informal networks and support systems, organised around a variety of institutions, political, religious, social or cultural, will also be investigated.

A mediating process, circulation links together geographically distant areas as migrants contribute to integrate spaces that are usually held apart – most powerfully along an over-emphasised urban/rural dichotomy. Beyond the simple question of the impact of migration on the village (or on the city), this raises the issue of the linkages between political, cultural, and social processes developing over this trans-regional space – and the limits to the role of migrants as mediators in this context.