South Auckland Sikhs and Punjab Issues: Justice, Identity Work and Development

Teena Brown Pulu[1], Harminder Singh[2], Gurmeet Singh Sarkaria[3]

[1]Senior Lecturer in Maori and Indigenous Development, Auckland University of Technology, [2]Associate Professor in Business Information Systems, Auckland University of Technology, [3]Retired Science Master, Government Senior Secondary School - Fatehgarh Sukarchak, Amritsar

In South Auckland, New Zealand, we surveyed under three hundred Sikhs on how they used their internet-connected mobile phones to gather and share news on the 2019 Punjab elections. Survey participants identified "Punjab issues" as the main topic they communicated messages about on social media. Our paper explores the notion of "Punjab issues" in the context of Sikh social identity and habitus, or the circumstances and conditions of day-to-day existence for this migrant group. We examine how this habitus is underpinned by an interest in justice, which is based in deep historical memory and has persisted over time, as seen in the experiences of events such as the Partition of India in 1947 and the attack on the Golden Temple in 1984, and across space, as more Sikhs migrate from Punjab. Interwoven in the discussion is how the Sikh emphasis on justice fits with the United Nations' 16th Sustainable Development Goal (SDG16), which underlines that justice and strong institutions determine how well a state practices the social inclusion of minorities by recognising their rights to peace, security, and prosperity.

Keywords: South Auckland, Punjab, Punjab Elections 2019, Sikh, Habitus, Migrants, Justice, Development

INTRODUCTION: MOBILE SIKHS

Two decades ago, Darshan Singh Tatla argued in *The Sikh Diaspora: The Search for Statehood* that Sikh political activism in the northern hemisphere diaspora of Britain, Canada, and the United States was a powerful and passionate influencer of Sikh politics in Punjab, particularly in backing independent statehood and political sovereignty (Tatla, 1998). His emphasis was on the fervour of diasporic Sikhs, especially among the new generations born overseas, whose collective stand for justice and the rights of Sikhs in their ancestral homeland of Punjab, North India, had activated the mobilizing impulse in their communities (Olzak, 1983).

> *Alongside social, economic, and religious ties, the Sikh diaspora possesses a long history of political links with Punjab. These linkages have provided mutual support and exchange between diaspora political groups and their patrons in Punjab. The diaspora has provided funds, support and mobilization for various issues emanating from the homeland. Over the past 30 years, political groups formed in Britain and North America have forged direct links with the main political parties of Punjab. Although individuals have joined the mainstream political parties of their host states, the activities of political groups directly*

130

Teena Brown Pulu et al. South Auckland Sikhs and Punjab Issues: Justice, Identity Work and Development

linked to Punjabi politics have generated far more passion and mobilization.

Our paper extends research on this topic among studies on Sikhs in the global diaspora by shifting the emphasis from the centre, the large settlements of Sikhs in northern hemisphere states, to the periphery, a new community of Sikh migrants in the southern hemisphere, specifically in South Auckland, New Zealand (Nikolinakos, 1975; Titus, 1978). To understand the political setting among members of that community, we surveyed under three hundred Sikhs on how they used internet-connected mobile phones to gather and share news on the 2019 Punjab elections. The survey found that "Punjab issues" was the most popular topic that people communicated about on their mobile devices when reading and disseminating Punjab election news. We unpack why this is so, arguing that "Punjab issues" points towards Sikh concerns over justice and development, themes that have been idealized in the Sikh habitus (Bourdieu, 1995) throughout the community's history. We also highlight that these topics are related to the United Nations' *Sustainable Development Goal 16* (SDG16), which asserts that human security is upheld via stable democratic institutions.

SIKHS IN SOUTH AUCKLAND – BACKGROUND

Compared to their counterparts in the industrial north, there is little literature in academia and journalism on Sikhs in the South Pacific. The reference here to the South Pacific alludes to the New Zealand government's nation-building agenda over the past two decades that has sought to regionally reinvent Aotearoa, an indigenous Maori term for New Zealand (which historically was a nineteenth century British colony), as a small Pacific state currently approaching five million people (Spoonley, 2015; Spoonley, Bedford and Macpherson, 2003). What we mean, and we expand on this later, is that the Polynesian indigneity of New Zealand and the Pacific Islands region that encompasses it, is but one cultural factor Punjabi Sikhs find themselves adapting to and making cross-cultural sense of, as new settlers in South Auckland, an urban centre for the world's largest Polynesian diaspora (Borell, 2005; Brown Pulu, 2013).

Punjabi Sikhs are a minority group from the Indian Subcontinent, including ethnic and linguistic groups from Pakistan and Bangladesh. The South Auckland Sikh population consists mainly of individuals who migrated directly from districts in the Punjab in the past three decades; it also includes a small but growing number of Punjabi Sikhs born in New Zealand. Their relatively recent presence in New Zealand society means that, unlike some (not all) British, Canadian, and American Sikhs, Sikhs in New Zealand do not possess half a century of intergenerational political life and the "cultural capital" (Bourdieu, 1995) that comes about by campaigning for a sovereign Punjab state independent from the Indian state. By no means are we suggesting that political development among the South Auckland Sikh community could not turn that way in time, especially as the number of New Zealand-born Sikhs increases. This latter group, like their migrant forebears, are highly-educated, worldly-wise, and politically aware, but also possess the necessary cultural capital about the New Zealand political milieu and its processes. At this stage of establishing themselves as a permanent community in South Auckland with enduring cultural roots from mainly rural districts – Jalandhar, Amritsar, and Ludhiana, the political activities of NZ Punjabi Sikh migrants focus on their connectedness to their country of origin, and knowing and talking about what is going on back home regarding Punjab politics and society.

A characteristic identity marker of South Auckland Sikhs is that this community's core consists of tertiary-educated, middle-class men and women between 21 to 40 years of age who are focussed on developing their careers in the professional and technical sectors or in establishing independent businesses, along with buying, or investing in, properties in neighbourhoods that lie close to a Gurudwara, a Sikh place of worship. As migrants, they preserve personal connections among their people and in their place of origin by sending remittances, keeping properties, and paying regular visits to their towns, villages, and districts in Punjab. In this global era, some of the transnational activity of upholding ties and loyalties to Punjab, while living in New Zealand, is enabled by IT (Internet Technology)-enabled communication, with internet-connected mobile phones providing them with a fast, efficient, and affordable means of instant communication.

It is in this culture-specific context where Punjabi Sikhs are adding a new layer of migrant culture, indigenous language, and British colonial and postcolonial history to a shifting South Auckland "ethnoscape" (Appadurai, 1996) that our survey took place on Sunday November 18th 2018 at Gurudwara Sri Kalgidhar Sahib, Takanini. Gurudwara Takanini, which is its abbreviated name, is a Sikh place of worship gathering the regular attendance of up to six hundred Sikh devotees of voting age, 18 years and over, on any given Sunday from 11am to 1pm for prayers and langar (the Punjabi reference to a shared community meal). We distributed the written survey at the temple entranceway on the Sunday's proceedings from eleven in the morning until two in the afternoon in a four-page questionnaire asking people if they used their mobile phones to read news about the 2019 parliament election in Punjab; how often they did that; which social media, news sites, and YouTube channels they went to; what kinds of traditional media they used, such as television, radio, newspapers; where they shared news articles, and; what election issues they sent messages about. After finishing at 2pm, we distributed a small number of surveys door-to-door at South Auckland Sikh homes in walking distance from Gurudwara Takanini to recruit as many participants as we could. From a possible six hundred participants, just under three hundred responses from males and females aged 18 to over 60 years old were collected with a small number not answering all survey questions because they did not read news about the Punjab elections on mobile devices. The majority of the survey respondents were males between 21 to 30 years old (with the next age group being males aged 31 to 40) who hold university, polytechnic, and postgraduate qualifications and work in the professional and technical sectors, or as self-employed business owners.

"PUNJAB ISSUES" AND THE SIKH *HABITUS*

Pierre Bourdieu's theory of habitus – the common circumstances and conditions of a people's everyday existence- goes some way to illustrate how the practice of Punjabi Sikhs using internet-connected mobile phones to follow news about the 2019 Punjab elections impacts on their situated identity as a migrant community of South Auckland (Bourdieu, 1995). An aspect of habitus which rings true is that differences between the political views of older and younger migrants are not necessarily a product of age and cultural differences. Paraphrasing Bourdieu, "age-classes" do not naturally create "generation conflicts"; instead, different age groups are exposed to very dissimilar "conditions of existence", which trigger variations in political tastes and interests from one cohort to the next (Bourdieu, 1995, p. 78):

> [I]n the logic of the constitution of habitus, practices are always liable to incur negative sanctions when the environment with which they are actually confronted is too distant from that to which they are objectively fitted. This is why generation conflicts oppose not age-classes separated by natural properties, but habitus which have been produced by different modes of generation, that is, by conditions of existence which, in imposing definitions of the impossible, the possible, and the probable, cause one group to experience as natural or reasonable practices or aspirations which another group finds unthinkable or scandalous, or vice versa.

In our survey, respondents across all age groups, from 18 to over 60, reported that they focused on "Punjab issues" when they used mobile devices for obtaining and sharing Punjab election news. Where the line of reasoning gets knotty is theorising how the "conditions of existence" (Bourdieu, 1995, p. 78) specific to South Auckland Sikhs influences the process of reading election news and instantaneously connecting the images, stories, and information to Punjab issues.

Conceptualising Punjab issues involves remembering past and familiar narratives in Sikh history of standing for justice and fighting against injustice, that is, well-known stories recognized as indicators of social identity that underpin the Sikh habitus; there is a lot of identity work and emotional investing going on (Berger, 1997) when Punjab issues are emphasized. The culture-specific origins of what this group knows to be justice and development (a synonymous expression for Punjab issues) has deep-seated roots in Punjab politics and society in North India (Bhabha, 1996). But a disjuncture becomes salient when migrant Sikhs from South Auckland

132

Teena Brown Pulu et al. South Auckland Sikhs and Punjab Issues: Justice, Identity Work and Development

exchange political news and engage in collective sense-making about the 2019 Punjab elections, because Punjab and New Zealand are not culturally or politically similar.

Applying Bourdieu's theory, when underlying principles of the Sikh habitus – justice and development, are moved across borders and oceans to new living environments in the South Pacific, they can seem out of place when situated in a new location and cultural orientation (Polynesian) (Bourdieu, 1995, p. 78). The Sikh habitus developed from the history of the Punjab, a land-locked territory belonging to an indigenous Punjabi population that was divided between two countries, India and Pakistan, and has had to be modified, customized, and adapted to find a fit and remain relevant in settings, situations, and surroundings outside of its origins.

> Thus, as a result of the hysteresis effect necessarily implied in the logic of the constitution of habitus, practices are always liable to incur negative sanctions when the environment with which they are actually confronted is too distant from that which they are objectively fitted.

This is the first paper of a series we intend to write to detail the justice and development narratives framed by Sikh social identity and habitus. This is not to propose that there exists a one-size-fits-all identity for Sikhs that eliminates multiplicity and variety, but to say that the mutual practice of using mobile phones to figure out the 2019 Punjab elections signifies collective identity work that has a cultural logic to it. The South Auckland Sikhs whom we surveyed make sense of cultural complexities when weighing up Punjab issues in the news. This is explored in the paper's next sections, *Sikhs at the Border* and *Sikhs in South Auckland*, which are arranged into two storyboards that migrate from North India to New Zealand, revealing the ethos driving the importance of Punjab issues (another way of saying justice) as it travels "from one place to another" (Said, 1983, p. 226).

As co-researchers from diverse backgrounds and lived experiences where Teena is Polynesian and European and an anthropologist, Harminder, a Singaporean Sikh and a business information systems analyst, and Gurmeet, a Punjabi Sikh and a retired secondary school science teacher, we may appear to have little in common, apart from our current location of living in the same migrant city of Auckland. But this is the whole point of coming together to write a travelling diary from Punjab to South Auckland: to study disjuncture in the modes and means by which migrants transfer their habitus from origin homelands to new destinations, and in the process, reassemble social identity by selecting pieces of the past, characteristics of culture, that they want to keep in, and make relevant to, their present living environment which is constantly changing (Hall, 1996).

Punjab is not the same place it was ten to fifteen years ago when Punjabi Sikhs from North India were arriving in notable numbers to resettle in the South (an idiomatic reference to South Auckland). On the same note, South Auckland is not the same place either and has undergone continual makeovers to the landscape and "ethnoscape" (Appadurai, 1996) as new migrants move in, altering the appearance and character of neighbourhoods and publics. Thus, the mood and tone that the storyboards capture when read side-by-side, *Sikhs at the Border* and *Sikhs in South Auckland*, is not an authoritative account of the Sikh experience of Punjab issues, but alternatively, what it looks and feels like – Punjab issues that is – when reading election news on a mobile phone from a distant location in South Auckland. Although justice and development are prevailing themes interwoven throughout the text, this is not always obvious to outsiders when a Sikh habitus from Punjab moves into South Auckland neighbourhoods and transforms their look. Nonetheless, it is how insiders of these communities go about doing identity work through collective acts of gauging the ebb and flow of the 2019 Punjab elections on their mobile phones (Huddy, 2001).

STORYBOARD 1: SIKHS AT THE BORDER

On November 17th 2018 at a quarter past ten in the evening (NZ time), Sukhpal Singh Khaira posted on Facebook his peaceful protest pictures of Sikhs at the border praying for the Kartarpur corridor (Figure 1). The special corridor he desired was an access strip allowing Sikh pilgrims to cross three kilometres for religious devotion from Punjab state in North India to Gurudwara Darbar Sahib Kartarpur in Narowal district, Pakistan (Sharma, 2018). The 1947 British partition of India instigated the brutal killings of millions of people, severing

Fig. 1. Picture posted on Sukhpal Singh Khaira's Facebook page (10.13 pm, November 17, 2018)[1].

Punjab into a state of India and a province of Pakistan divided by religion where Sikhs and Hindus were herded together on one side and Muslims on the other. Contrary to allowing people to ethnically and linguistically identify themselves as indigenous Punjabis, the border split the natives of Punjab into nationalities in which the dominant religion – Hinduism in India and Islam in Pakistan – also dominated political life. Nowadays, indigenous identities in the subcontinent are subordinate to religious nationalism in the sense that India is synonymous with Hinduism and Pakistan with Islam.

This raises a recurring question of where that leaves the Sikhs, considering their population makes up seventy percent of Punjab's 30.4 million people but only two percent of India's 1.35 billion nationals. Forced separation has meant that for seventy-three years since partition, Gurudwara Kartarpur has not been a Sikh place of worship which India's Sikhs were allowed to access freely, along with other temples on that side of the border. In twenty-four hours, Khaira's internet post attracted two thousand plus reactions and almost two hundred comments – a chorus of praise for his actions – "*Waheguru ji*," "*Khaira sahib zindabad*." Gathered on social media was a mixed crowd of Sikhs in Punjab and right through India and the diaspora eyeing India's general election set for April-May 2019 with a pained feeling that his image symbolized their collective experience of waiting for justice (Crossette, 2004).

For a fleeting moment if Khaira, the public figure, could escape his social categorisation as a Punjabi Sikh politician and the hierarchy of race, religion, and class in which he is positioned, then his mode of operation on social media personifies an IT (Internet Technology)-savvy politician per se, no matter what his social identity, simply by the skilful method in which he manoeuvres Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp to capture supporters at home and abroad. Carefully crafted messages are communicated through images, captions, film clips of himself taken on a mobile device, and news pieces of his interviews in Punjabi interspersed with English. Viewers therefore go beyond Punjab's borders and a strictly Sikh audience because his local brand is on digital platforms giving him an international stage to exhibit his bilingual, bold as brass, justice driven politics. No one questions whether his social media team is shaping the digital communication purely for public relations, and why would

---

[1]The note accompanying this photograph said in Punjabi: "ਅੱਜ ਅਸੀ ਡੇਰਾ ਬਾਬਾ ਨਾਨਕ ਵਿਖੇ ਜਾ ਕੇ ਗੁਰਦੁਆਰਾ ਕਰਤਾਰਪੁਰ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਦੇ ਲਾਂਘੇ ਵਾਸਤੇ ਅਰਦਾਸ ਕੀਤੀ ਅਤੇ ਪ੍ਰਧਾਨ ਮੰਤਰੀ ਨੂੰ ਇੱਕ ਪੱਤਰ ਲਿਖ ਕੇ ਸਮੂਹ ਗੁਰੂ ਨਾਨਕ ਨਾਮ ਲੇਵਾ ਦੀ ਇਸ ਮੰਗ ਨੂੰ ਪਰਵਾਨ ਕਰਨ ਲਈ ਬੇਨਤੀ ਕੀਤੀ। ਭਾਰਤ ਸਰਕਾਰ ਕੋਲ ਇੱਕ ਸੁਨਹਿਰੀ ਮੋਕਾ ਹੈ ਜੇਕਰ ਉਹ ਪਾਕਿਸਤਾਨ ਨਾਲ ਗੱਲ ਕਰਕੇ ਇਹ ਲਾਂਘਾ ਲੈ ਦਿੰਦੀ ਹੈ ਤਾਂ ਸਮੂਹ ਪੰਜਾਬੀ ਇਹ ਸਮਝਣਗੇ ਕਿ ਉਹਨਾਂ ਵੱਲੋ ਦੇਸ ਲਈ ਕੀਤੀਆਂ ਕੁਰਬਾਨੀਆਂ ਨੂੰ ਮਾਣ ਬਖ਼ਸਿਆ ਗਿਆ ਹੈ – ਖਹਿਰਾ"
In English, this translates as: "Today, we have gone to Dera Baba Nanak to do a collective prayer (Ardaas) for a crossing to Gurdwara Kartarpur Sahib. We have also written a letter to the Chief Minister to ask him to prioritize this request from all the followers of Guru Nanak. The Indian government has a golden opportunity: if it talks to Pakistan and obtains this crossing, all Punjabis will view this action as honouring the sacrifices they have made for their country. - Khaira"

134

Teena Brown Pulu et al. South Auckland Sikhs and Punjab Issues: Justice, Identity Work and Development

IT consumers ask such things in an age of Trump on Twitter where it is widely accepted that Trump tweets and his messages are often read as a live link to the United States President. However, if Khaira's point of difference marketed to a niche audience of voters lies in being a Sikh politician appealing to his own people at home and overseas, then what does his image at the Kartarpur corridor convey to Punjabi Sikhs on social media, and why is the Sikh diaspora important for politicians to appeal to in the lead-up to the India general election 2019 for thirteen Punjab seats in the Lok Sabha, which is India's Lower House of five hundred and forty-five seats? The straightforward answer is justice represents his trademark politics. The more complicated answer is that Khaira's campaign for justice is borrowed and modified, either consciously or unconsciously, from an original 1984 model remembered as the Bhindranwale political era, a reference to Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale.

To explain our theory on how justice is a politicized signifier of Sikh social identity and habitus, Pritam Singh and Navtej K. Purewal's paper, *The resurgence of Bhindranwale's image in contemporary Punjab*, showed that in many ways Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale gained a high-profile reputation through news reporting. Recalled as "one of the most well-known Sikh leaders of the twentieth century," he was killed on 6 June 1984 for "resisting the Indian army's entry into the Sikhs' holiest shrine, the Golden Temple in Amritsar" (Singh and Purewal, 2013, p. 133). Shrouded in controversy, Bhindranwale was alleged to be a religious extremist who wanted Punjab to be an independent sovereign state. Getting pigeon-holed as a radical made him newsworthy in India and internationally in the way that he was widely photographed, filmed, and talked about. But it also produced media reports on his politics and style of leadership that were poles apart, depending on the niche audiences and tastes the news was marketed to for sales (Tully and Jacob, 1985). In saying that, to what extent have people's perceptions about Sikh politics and social identity been moulded according to mediated images and texts disseminated by a go-between, such as news outlets? It is true that in current times IT has facilitated direct digital communication (without an intermediary) between politicians and their publics, such as Sukhpal Singh Khaira and others on social media. However, 1984 was an era before mobile devices and internet news because the media as we knew it then comprised journalists writing for newspapers – the printed press, and radio and television newscasters. Consequently, we could argue that a historical trail of conflicting media constructions and social memories have cultivated a political climate inside India's border today in which the public recognize Bhindranwale's image on memorabilia sold in street markets in terms of a binary public figure – martyr or militant.

The point we want to impress is that how individuals remember Bhindranwale as a Sikh leader is couched in how they have been politicized and socialized to situate him in the nation's modern history. To some degree, public opinion is sculpted by personal identity politics and one's location in the majority – the dominant Hindu population, contrasted against one's dislocation out on the borderlands of Punjab and Kashmir in North India, or, the seven sister states of Northeast India. Muninder K. Ahluwalia wrote that "[t]he ideal for a Sikh is to aspire to be a saint-soldier – to pray and meditate, but also be willing to fight against injustice" (Ahluwalia, 2013, p. 52). Reflecting on the saint-soldier role in society, it is understandable that Bhindranwale's leadership is not judged as dualistic by Sikhs in Punjab and the diaspora, but more, that the two functions are mutually compatible. Recapping some of our ideas in relation to Punjab issues, a synonym for justice, travelling through borders and oceans and transplanted in new places, migrant Sikhs do reproduce nationalist loyalties to their place of origin and preferred political figures while living in diasporic communities, which informs and influences how culture is transmitted and practiced from one generation to another in the case of migrants and their overseas-born descendants.

Bhindranwale's leadership and death as a catalyst for current political activism for Sikh justice and rights has been written about elsewhere (Sandhu, 1999; Van Dyke, 2009). In particular, the literature accentuates the Indian army's 1984 Operation Blue Star under the rule of Indira Ghandi's Congress Party government, which not only killed Bhindranwale, his supporters, and innocent bystanders by firing on and destroying parts of the Golden Temple, but prompted Ghandi's assassination by her Sikh bodyguards. In retaliation for the slaying of India's Prime Minister came, what Sikhs refer to as the 1984 genocide (Kumar, Singh, Agrawal, and Kaur, 2003). Barbara Crossette's article, *India's Sikhs: Waiting for Justice*, described the origin moment of the Sikh genocide

(Crossette, 2004, p. 70).

> In the days that followed her death on October 31, mobs encouraged by Gandhi's Congress Party roamed Sikh neighbourhoods, butchering men and boys with savage brutality, setting fire to the still-living and the dead. Sikhs were hauled from vehicles and killed on the roads; they were hacked to death on trains. About 3,000 Sikhs (the number is still in dispute) were murdered in nothing less than a pogrom, most of them in Delhi. In many neighbourhoods, the police were nowhere to be seen.

Purposely we have adjusted the theoretical lens from examining how the printed press fashions people's perceptions of politics and political figures to viewing how migrant Sikhs thousands of miles away from Punjab in North India, reconstruct Punjab issues as an alternative expression for justice when they muse on news about the Punjab election 2019. From scanning the literature on justice for Sikhs and its origin moment in 1984, Bhindranwale is centred as a modern-day prototype of saint-soldier leadership. If his image is a prototype that all others are measured by, or read in relation to, how does this critical time and place in history and social memory play out in migrant perceptions of Punjab issues?

Returning to why Sukhpal Singh Khaira and other politicians use IT communication to win over social media crowds in Punjab and the diaspora heading into the India general election 2019, securing votes is the obvious answer. An obscure response is to suggest that the diaspora constitutes a valuable vote bank that politicians draw down on at every five-year ballot to swing up at the polls. We say obscure because although Sikh migrants comment on social media about returning home to vote, without research data on the actual numbers undertaking this political activity, their collective power to influence election results remains unclear. What we do know is that Sikhs in the diaspora who share common experiences and likeminded politics, especially those who have obtained education qualifications in Western universities, form powerful advocacy networks for justice and rights with links to politicians who will take up their calls for collective action. Again, Barbara Crossette noted this point (Crossette, 2004, p. 77).

> Young, secular-minded, Western educated Indians like [Jaskaran] Kaur – passionate about rectifying abuses in Punjab or Kashmir or Gujarat or the unhappy Indian northeast – have had enough of this political spinelessness and amnesia. India does not need any more commissions or inquiries. To stand tall among democracies, India needs to open broad criminal cases and give investigators and judges the power to put under oath – and in jail – officials of any party who condone violence and the abuse of human rights. Furthermore, such punitive powers must be institutionalized so that the next time churches burn, mosques are demolished, or members of minority groups are slaughtered in the streets, politicians will know that these crimes will no longer go unpunished.

We have situated side-by-side Sukhpal Singh Khaira, a twenty-first century Punjabi Sikh politician and Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, a 1980s Sikh leader in Punjab for a reason. These are two different men from different epochs in history with different political agendas fashioned as famous public figures by a Sikh habitus, their common existence and experiences as Native Sikhs of Punjab. Despite these political actors emerging thirty-four years apart and diverging in their speechmaking styles and how they have envisaged Punjab's development, they do intersect on one subject – justice for Sikhs, which in practical terms amounts to rights to peace, security, and prosperity.

Alan Whaites' paper, *Achieving the Impossible: Can We Be SD16 Believers?* highlighted that inclusive conversations and consensus decision-making on the roles of state institutions in respect to a country's development have never before materialized at an international level (Whaites, 2016). His discussion gestured to SDG16, the 16th United Nations Sustainable Development Goal promoting justice and strong institutions. Whaites felt that in reality it is politics, politicians, and governments of the day that dictate the success or failure of the SDG16 "development outcomes," which are political "stability, economic growth" and a functional democratic state (Whaites, 2016, p. 3).

> SDG16, with its emphasis on inclusion and accountability, recognises that it is the nexus of politics and institutions that shape directions of travel. Put simply, the strategies followed by those who dominate

136

Teena Brown Pulu et al. South Auckland Sikhs and Punjab Issues: Justice, Identity Work and Development

the political settlement in using or neglecting institutions impact greatly on development outcomes. On these twin pillars of institutions and politics rest the prospects for stability, economic growth, and the ability to deliver on the expectations of ordinary citizens.

For Sikhs in Punjab and the diaspora, the core tenets of SDG16 – justice and strong institutions, are echoed and evoked in the cultural politics of a common history. If anything, to stand for justice and democratic institutions that are secular and where the state treats minorities as equal citizens is reproduced by generations of Sikhs as an essential role of their social identity. But this collective creed has a much longer history than a top-down model of the seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that the United Nations set as achievable targets for its 193 member states for fifteen years from 2015 to 2030 (Grewal, 1998; Macauliffe, 2004; Owen, 1978). A new generation of scholarship by "secular-minded Western educated Indians" (to cite Barbara Crossette) has reasoned, in so many words, that the genesis of social identity is highly politicized because the Sikh religion itself developed as a resistance movement to the oppressive, unjust, and irreconcilable regimes of power and authority presiding over fifteenth century India – the Mughal Islamic Empire and an indigenous Hindu caste system (Khan, 2018; Mahmood, 1989; Sidhu, 2009). Reconstructing the past to convey cultural truths that make sense of complex politics in the present urges Sikhs to name their side, to battle against injustice and to stand up for a just society that is, and be upfront about it (Baixas and Simon, 2008).

STORYBOARD 2: SIKHS IN SOUTH AUCKLAND

Undoubtedly the two events in Sikh modern history that stir up recollections and sentiments of justice and injustice are the 1947 partition of India and Pakistan that carved Punjab into two countries, and the 1984 Sikh genocide. It is not difficult to fathom that any human group who have suffered mass slaughter and have survivors with direct memories of horrific events are not likely to forget the past, but shoulder the burden of history for generations, especially if their calls for justice are repeatedly denied by the Indian state and the dominant Hindu religious and cultural group controlling the major parties and national governments. The challenge for wider New Zealand society lies in understanding how justice manifests itself in the everyday development of the South Auckland Sikh community. Edward Said's chapter, *Traveling Theory*, from his book, *The World, The Text and The Critic*, is pertinent to exploring justice and development as identity markers that move "from one place to another" – Punjab to South Auckland, and upon arrival in the new location are reworked for the purpose of cultural sustainability (Said, 1983, p. 226).

Like people and schools of criticism, ideas and theories travel – from person to person, from situation to situation, from one period to another. Cultural and intellectual life are usually nourished and often sustained by this circulation of ideas, and whether it takes the form of acknowledged or unconscious influence, creative borrowing, or wholesale appropriation, the movement of ideas and theories from one place to another is both a fact of life and a usefully enabling condition of intellectual activity. Having said that, however, one should go on to specify the kinds of movement that are possible, in order to ask whether by virtue of having moved from one place and time to another an idea or theory gains or loses in strength, and whether a theory in one historical period and national culture becomes altogether different for another period of situation.

For diasporic Sikhs, the enduring strength of cultural structures that replicate common experience (habitus we are gesturing to) are symbolized in the Gurudwara, a Sikh place of worship, which is pivotal to sustaining community life and social identity (Singh, 2018; Stanford, 2018). There are nine Gurudwaras in Auckland with six in South Auckland where the majority of Sikh migrants to New Zealand have established roots. Out of the six Gurdwaras in South Auckland, the Gurudwaras in Takanini and Otahuhu are administered and organized by a single management committee elected annually. Gurudwara Takanini (Figure 2) opened in 2005 to cater to a burgeoning Punjabi Sikh population that could no longer fit in the smaller Gurudwara Sri Kalgidhar Sahib, Otahuhu, which was established in 1986.

Fig. 2. Gurudwara Sri Kalgidhar Sahib, Takanini, South Auckland.

As the largest Sikh place of worship in New Zealand, Gurudwara Takanini serves a community which was around 8,000 people in 2011 (Basiala, 2011) and is estimated to have doubled since then. The increase of New Zealand-born Sikh children motivated Gurudwara Takanini's management committee to develop a sports complex, community gardens, a library, and an early childhood centre on its ten-acre site (Moffiet, 2017; Mohammad, 2018). Thus, the Gurudwara today does not only have a religious function; it has matured into a multipurpose campus to meet the development needs of all age groups and to foster youth leadership opportunities.

However, if we return the Western gaze by looking at how Gurudwaras are seen (and used) by local and national politicians in the developed countries Punjabi Sikhs migrate to, such places are not merely cultural and religious sites for minorities to gather, but also strategic vote banks for making "withdrawals" from at elections. Minority places of worship in developed countries are often referred to conversationally and in the media as vote banks where political parties line up clusters of voters affiliated to these establishments and the surrounding vicinities. Politicians in New Zealand elected to the Auckland constituencies are no exception, with both the centre-left Labour Party and the right-leaning National Party visiting Auckland's nine Gurudwaras during the Sunday proceedings with a single-minded agenda to campaign for votes.

As a practical strategy for practising good governance in the community, the face-to-face interchanges that take place when politicians make speeches to migrant clusters at the Gurudwara can be problematic, particularly if policy platforms are not clearly communicated to distinguish how the major parties standing against one another for parliamentary seats and to win the government will, if elected, address special concerns of Sikh voters and advance their group aspirations. For migrants, a palatable manifesto would take into consideration that their political interests for justice and security are spread across two countries, New Zealand and Punjab state in North India, but take on different forms and meanings in these locations.

By the same measure, if we scan New Zealand media to see how South Auckland Sikhs have been portrayed through journalism lenses and story angles, occasional pieces on Gurudwara Takanini's anniversary celebrations do appear in New Zealand Indian media, or alternatively in mainstream media, items about the community gardens and langar (community meal). The latest media trend observes Punjabi Sikhs performing their social identity in, and among, wider South Auckland by operating a "Sikh Sangat Free Kitchen" out of one of the local Gurudwara providing "food to the homeless and the needy," a community service that "is now spreading around the country" (Stanford, 2018). Although this is a custom from the place of origin – Punjab, which diasporic Sikhs have replicated in their places of resettlement, the New Zealand framing of the story lays emphasis on charity work linking to a Christian tradition of religious organisations such as the Salvation Army. Our point is, justice as a driver of Sikh social identity and habitus is not underlined to accentuate the cultural difference of migrant

138

Teena Brown Pulu et al. South Auckland Sikhs and Punjab Issues: Justice, Identity Work and Development

Sikhs and their practices.

> *"This is how we spend our Saturday night," smiles Singh, a father of one who works in Auckland as a finance manager for a software company. "Giving back is the only way forward."*

In academic media, by comparison, the dearth in literature deepens when thinking about the absence of research articles on the resettlement of Sikhs in South Auckland. Pacific migration studies have adopted the idea that cultural sustainability takes place via transnationalism and the everyday practice of keeping alive the loyalties and bonds to two countries. For migrant Sikhs, an area of inquiry we expect to develop is examining how transnationalism is bolstered by IT communication exchanges to Punjab in North India, for the simple reason that the physical distance that migrant Sikhs navigate in maintaining their connections to their home state is greater, and costlier to travel to, than taking a three to four-hour flight from Auckland to South Pacific countries such as Samoa and Tonga. This leads us to ask what is the culture-specific context that sets Sikhs apart from other migrant communities: if justice is a definer of identity and belonging to a people, then why is this link vague in the way South Auckland Sikhs are pictured and written about in the public media? Darshan Singh Tatla's essay, *The Morning After: Trauma, Memory and the Sikh Predicament Since 1984*, gives some insight into the silencing of Sikh views on power and politics after the 1984 Sikh genocide (Tatla, 2006, p. 57).

> *The Indian army's attack in June 1984 on the Golden Temple, Amritsar, the most sacred centre of the Sikh religion, constituted one of the most traumatic experiences for the Sikh community. The destruction of the Akal Takhat and extensive damage to the whole complex of sacred buildings was felt by most Sikhs at the time as nothing less than a declaration of war on the community itself. As a reaction to the desecration of the Golden Temple, a Sikh resistance movement began against the Indian state in which over 80,000 Sikhs were killed by the security forces, while an even larger number of families suffered losses and indignities, and several thousand men were listed as 'disappeared.' After twenty-two years, hundreds are in prisons facing various charges. A tiny minority in the underground is committed to fight for independence. Sikhs have undergone a decade-long period of privation, sufferings and traumatization. The fallout of the Indian security forces' action on the Golden Temple and their subsequent excesses continue to haunt Sikh minds in many ways. Much of the Sikh reaction, though, has found no other expression but silence.*

The cultural truth for South Auckland Sikhs is that they read the 1984 genocide as part of a longer history of acts of violence and persecution against their people. The missing link in New Zealand media reportage is that the inherent sense of social justice among Punjabi Sikhs resonates in the widespread logic that progress and development means "giving back [to society's vulnerable] is the only way forward" to a just society (Stanford, 2018). Conversations we engaged in while carrying out our survey showed that South Auckland Sikhs were astutely aware their population was made up of young adults because their community size had conspicuously grown due to students arriving from Punjab to obtain university or polytechnic qualifications. A familiar migration and resettlement pattern, we were told, was to study, graduate, find jobs, and stay on as permanent residents to marry and have families. Ideals of justice among migrants come to the forefront when they compare New Zealand to their home state in North India: they see New Zealand as a peaceful country with educational and employment opportunities, but also feel that if the Punjab government was not riddled in corruption; if Punjab's farmers were not losing their farmland to bank debts causing some farmers to commit suicide; if the Punjab education system paid teachers and university professors liveable salaries; and if consecutive governments in Delhi had not persisted with policies after 1984 that weakened Punjab's agricultural sector, leading to a depressed economy and political instability; then they would not have had to migrate for peace and security.

Therein lies a research gap in area studies on migration and development in New Zealand and the Pacific region. The numbers of transnational Sikhs who regularly travel back to Punjab to maintain properties, homes, and farm lands, as well as their kinship and community relationships via remittances is not known, and subsequently, not considered or calculated when state bureaucrats design public policy. Conversely, the rationale for building inclusive and just societies speaks a logic of sustainable cities in the way that culture-specific contexts

drive the political economy of migrants in South Auckland, New Zealand. What we are saying is that the transnational activities of migrant Sikhs are relevant to ensuring policy frameworks complement the core values of communities and that democratic institutions reflect the city's diversity it says it represents.

We have sketched the contours of community development for Punjabi Sikhs to push open the boundaries of social inclusion in a contested public space – South Auckland as a migrant city. A blind spot in South Pacific migration literature which may or may not be politically motivated is the fact that migration and diaspora research in New Zealand, expressly material produced about South Auckland, is preoccupied with attaching Pacific communities to deprivation theories. South Auckland has been singled out in New Zealand literature, film, and journalism as the world's urban capital for migrants from Pacific Island states and their New Zealand-born descendants who have branched out to four generations, mostly Polynesian by ethnicity – Samoans, Tongans, Cook Islanders, Niueans, and Tokelauans (Brown Pulu, 2014, 2016).

More than a decade ago, Teena Brown Pulu critiqued how this urban landscape was manufactured in the New Zealand social imagination to symbolize "the national icon of Aotearoa/Pasifika culture – [a] brown-skinned ghetto" (Brown Pulu, 2002, p. 14). Her argument contended that the people and place had been imagined into existence by a racial hierarchy in which Maori and Pacific "group allegiances" are ranked lowly in "media images, local government marketing, and national construction," and filtered out to colour public perception (Brown Pulu, 2002, p. 15).

> *South Auckland is the imagined terrain of brown-skinned urban-ness and migrant Maori and Pacific communities in crisis. It is visualised as the Nation's poor house: cheap homes, State housing on market rents, flea markets and backyard sales, island produce and cheap meat off-cuts, white tank-loaves, pani popo and pani maa from largely Asian owned bakeries, and brown-skinned bodies.*

Sixteen years on from Brown Pulu's article, we are in a stronger position to challenge the structural racism that has been duplicated for decades by simply capturing South Auckland in images and texts of urban Pacific poverty (Roy, 2018). We mean to say that the growth and visibility of Punjabi Sikhs in certain suburbs of the South Auckland "ethnoscape" (Appadurai, 1996) – namely Otahuhu, Papatoetoe, Manurewa, and Takanini, draws attention to the shifting demographic composition of New Zealand society. In actuality, the Indian sub-population is the fastest growing minority cluster at 3.9% of the total population recorded at the 2013 Census. For the cohort identifying as Punjabi, which was less than 1% of the Indian sub-population in 2013, 72.2% were migrants with 71.3% living in Auckland. Although the 2018 Census data is yet to be released in a breakdown of ethnic, linguistic, and religious groups, it is projected that the Indian cohort has rapidly increased in New Zealand's overall population, which currently sits at 4,749,598. The scenario that is not being contemplated by migration researchers and public policy analysts is that ethnic, linguistic, and religious groups from South Asia – India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, may grow en masse to be equal in number to, or possibly overtake, Pacific peoples who historically were the largest group of migrants to Auckland.

We close our first paper on *South Auckland Sikhs and Punjab Issues* with some reflections on where to from here, as we continue with fieldwork in South Auckland, New Zealand and Punjab, North India. There are two interrelated points we want to make in respect to the direction of migration and development studies in the Pacific region. With the movement of Asian ethnicities and linguistic groups in, and around, the South Pacific where we are located, the intellectual trajectory will veer towards interregional studies in which the intersections between Asian and the Pacific populations are theorized and analysed. However, this does not necessitate the conflation of two distinct and different regions into one expansive area, because the risk for researchers is that Asia, as a region, may dictate development theories and models applied over, and about, the Pacific. The corridor we want to walk across, and we are alluding to Kartarpur that links East Punjab (India) to West Punjab (Pakistan), is one that goes beyond traditional borders and boundaries by looking at culture-specific identity markers in Punjabi Sikh history that are well-looked-after in the South Auckland diaspora because they are relatable and practicable for the pursuit of a just and peaceful society.

On an endnote, 'Okusitino Mahina theorized that for indigenous Pacific Islanders, especially for his people,

Tongans, "there is really no future, only past and present" (Mahina, 2002, p. 79). By no means was Mahina alluding to dystopian ideas in which Oceanic cultures were religiously locked into Christian apocalyptic scriptures about the end of the world and the last days on earth. Instead, he touched on the significance of carrying the past into the present as a compass for navigating the safest way forward. In final, his words resonate in the collective aspirations of all indigenous peoples in pursuit of justice and strong institutions, remembering that their pasts have "stood the test of time" and provide baseline cultural truths inspiring them in the present (Mahina, 2002, p. 79).

> In the Moana [Pacific] generally, and in Tonga, specifically, it is thought that, in a circular style, people walk forward into the past, and walk backward into the future, both in the present, where the seemingly fixed past and elusively, yet-to-take-place future are constantly mediated in the conflicting, ever-changing present. It is… like looking forward into the past, and looking backward into the future. Given that the past has stood the test of time, it must, therefore, be positioned in front of people as guidance for them, in the present, and because the future is yet to happen, it must be brought to bear on the past behind people, in the present. By implication, there is, in Moana thinking, really no future, only past and present.

REFERENCES

Ahluwalia, M. K. (2013). "What's Under There?" The Questioning of Civil Rights for Sikh Men. *Journal for Social Action in Counselling and Psychology*, 5 (1): 50-58.

Appadurai, A. (1996). *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Baixas. L. and Simon, C. (2008). From Protestors to Martyrs: How to Become a 'True' Sikh. *South Asia Multidisciplinary Academic Journal*, 2: 1-18.

Basiala, H. S. (2011). Takanini Gurudwara Celebrates 6th Anniversary. *The Indian Weekender*, March 17.

Berger, A. (1997). *Narratives in Popular Culture, Media and Everyday Life*. London: Sage Publications.

Bhabha, H. K. (1996). Culture's In-Between. In *Questions of Cultural Identity*, edited by S. Hall and P. Du Gay. London: Sage Publications, pp. 53-60.

Bourdieu, P. (1995). *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, translated by R. Nice. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Borell, B. (2005). Living in the City Ain't So Bad: Cultural Identity for Young Maori in South Auckland. In *New Zealand Identities: Departures and Destinations*, edited by J. H. Liu, T. McCreanor, T. McIntosh, and T. Teaiwa. Wellington: Victoria University Press, Pp. 191-206.

Brown Pulu, T. (2002). Turangawaewae/Tu'ungava'e: Echoes of a place to stand and belong. *Journal of Maori and Pacific Development*, 3 (2): 14-30.

Brown Pulu, T. (2013). Voluntary Work in the Transnational Village. In *Mana Ngakau: Community Compassion – Maori and Pasifika Voluntary Work*, edited by F. Te Momo, L. George, and T. Brown Pulu. Auckland: Pasifika Directorate at Massey University, Pp. 23-48.

Brown Pulu, T. (2014). Free Roast Pig at Open Day: All you can eat will not attract South Auckland Pacific Islanders to university. *Te Kaharoa: The eJournal on Indigenous Pacific Issues*, 7 (1): 570-606.

Brown Pulu, T. (2016). Rewi Stood With His Tongan Side. In *The Journal of Urgent Writing, Volume 1*, edited by N. Legat. Auckland: Massey University Press, Pp. 225-241.

Crossette, B. (2004). India's Sikhs: Waiting for Justice. *World Policy Journal*, 21 (2): 70-77.

Grewal, J. S. (1998). *The Sikhs of Punjab*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Hall, S. (1996). Who Needs Identity? In *Questions of Cultural Identity*, edited by S. Hall and P. Du Gay. London: Sage Publications, Pp. 1-17.

Huddy, L. (2001). From Social to Political Identity: A Critical Examination of Social Identity Theory. *Political Psychology*, 22 (1): 127-156.

Khan, M. A. (2018). *Jihad Blood and Slavery: From Muhammad to ISIS*. Wellington: Yuleton Publishers.

Kumar, R. N., Singh, A., Agrawal, A. and Kaur, J. (2003). *Reduced to Ashes: The Insurgency and Human Rights in Punjab*. Kathmandu: South Asia Forum for Human Rights.

Macauliffe, M. A. (2004). *The Sikh Religion – Its Gurus, Sacred Writings and Authors*. India: Low Price Publications.

Mahina, O. (2008). From *Vale* (Ignorance) to *Ilo* (Knowledge) to *Poto* (Skill): The Tongan Theory of *Ako* (Education). *Alternative*, Special Issue, 68-96.

Mahmood, C. K. (1989). Sikh rebellion and the Hindu concept of order. *Asian Survey*, 29 (3): 326-340.

McLeod, H. (2004). *Sikhs and Sikhism*. London: Oxford University Press.

Moffiet, N. (2017). Sikh Temple opens up acres of land for community garden project. *Stuff NZ*, August 7.

Mohammad, R. (2018). Sports and Kirtan – The Highlights of Takanini Gurudwara's 13 Anniversary. *The Indian Weekender*, March 16.

Nikolinakos, M. (1975). Notes towards a general theory of migration in late capitalism. *Race and Class*, XVII: 5-17.

Olzak, S. (1983). Contemporary Ethnic Mobilization. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 9: 355-374.

Owen, C. W. (1978). *The Sikhs: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Roy, E. A. (2018). Has the 'New Zealand dream' turned sour for Auckland's Pacific Islanders? *The Guardian*, November 19.

Said, E. W. (1983). *The Text, The World and The Critic*. London: Vintage.

Sandhu, R. S. (1999). *Struggle for Justice: Speeches and Conversations of Sant Jarnail Singh Khalsa Bhindranwale*. Dublin: Sikh Educational and Religious Foundation.

Sharma, M. (2018). India clears Kartarpur corridor till Pakistan border to help Sikh pilgrims visit Gurudwara Darbar Sahib. *Business Today*, November 22.

Sidhu, D. (2009). *Civil Rights in Wartime: The Post-9/11 Sikh Experience*. Ashgate Publishing.

Singh, M. (2018). Kirtan resounds at NZ parliament lawns. *Asia Samachar*, November 30.

Singh, P. and Purewal, N. K. (2013). The resurgence of Bhindranwale's image in contemporary Punjab. *Contemporary South Asia*, 21 (2): 133-147.

Spoonley, P. (2015). New diversity, old anxieties in New Zealand: The complex identity politics and engagement of a settler society. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 38(4): 650-661.

Spoonley, P., Bedford, R., & Macpherson, C. (2003). Divided loyalties and fractured sovereignty: Transnationalism and the nation-state in Aotearoa/New Zealand. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 29(1): 27-46.

Stanford, J. (2018). Night riders: The Sikh community's Free Kitchen helps the homeless. *North and South*, December 4.

Tatla, D. S. (1998). *The Sikh Diaspora: The Search for Statehood*. London: Routledge.

Tatla, D. S. (2006). The morning after: Trauma, memory and the Sikh predicament since 1984. *Sikh Formations: Religion, Culture, Theory*, 2 (1): 57-88.

Titus, M. J. (1978). Interregional Migration in Indonesia as a Reflection of Social and Regional Inequalities. *Todschrift voor Econ. on Soc. Gijogra/ie*, 69 (4): 194-204.

Tully, M. and Jacob, S. (1985). *Amritsar: Mrs Gandhi's Last Battle*. New Delhi: Jonathan Cape.

Van Dyke, V. (2009). The Khalistan Movement in Punjab, India, and the Post-Militancy Era: Structural Change and New Political Compulsions. *Asian Survey*, 49 (6): 975-997.

Whaites, A. (2016). *Achieving the Impossible: Can We Be SDG16 Believers? OECD*, GovNet Background Paper No. 2: 1-14.