

Digital viabilities: Technologies of repair and reconstruction in South Asian migration to Cape Town, South Africa

Leah Koskimaki, University of Western Cape

Abstract

This paper explores the use of digital technologies in migration decision making, with a focus on both the digital and material. The paper specifically explores the role of the cell phone in migrant social spaces in Cape Town, with a focus on South Asian (mostly Pakistani) migrants working in the ubiquitous cell phone accessory and repair shops in the city. In these trans local migrant and digital infrastructures, I focus on 1) the link between an older generation of migrants and newcomers between Pakistan and South Africa, through cell phone apps to plan journeys, build futures, and navigate uncertainty, and 2) the less written about material aspect of this technology, namely how the apparatus of the cell phone itself is repaired and reconstructed in these shops. Based on ongoing qualitative research, the paper discusses how migrants have learned new skills of cell phone repair and technology, which have created networked opportunities for newcomers and allowed for ecosystems of viability in Cape Town's urban neighbourhoods. Overall, the paper explores the social life of this digital technology as always being reconstructed. Drawing from Hage (2009), as "life is just going on" for many of the men working in the shops, I explore how this technology is reworked in both a figurative and material sense to sustain their idea of a viable life.

Biography

Leah Koskimaki is Senior Lecturer at the Institute for Social Development (ISD) at the University of the Western Cape in Cape Town, South Africa, where she also is a founding member and Coordinator for the Migration and Mobilities Interdisciplinary Collective in Africa (MMICA). She received her PhD from the University of Washington, Seattle in Sociocultural Anthropology and has conducted research in India and South Africa on migration related issues. She is also a co-investigator on the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) partnership project titled, "Urban Sanctuary, Migrant Solidarity and Hospitality in Global Perspective."