African migration to Delhi: Complexities, discrimination and hopes

Abstract: Migration from Africa to urban India is a relatively recent phenomenon, which at once complexifies racial, religious, classed, gendered, national and linguistic fault lines. In this talk, I will draw on my own and my ethnographic collaborator Gabriel Dattatreyan’s fieldwork involvements in the Delhi hip hop scene in 2013, to trace how African migrants navigate and narrate the city, their participation in global hip hop, their experiences of racism and discrimination and their hopes for better futures. From their stories it becomes evident that African migration in Delhi both contests and reproduces social categories related to language, racialisation and religion. While most West African migrants come from middle-class and Christian backgrounds and make their way to Delhi in search of higher education in the creative and business sectors, most East African migrants are Muslims and were forced to escape the violence that erupted in the Horn of Africa since the 1990s. The different migration patterns are not necessarily understood by local Delhiites, who often generalise all Black people simply as ‘African’ or ‘Nigerian’ (or sometimes use discriminatory denominators). Yet, as I will show, within the African communities in Delhi, the different religious, linguistic and class positionalities are recognised and explicitly (re-)negotiated in interaction and narration. The talk contributes to understanding new African diasporas in Asia, as well as situate their histories of migration within the globally circulating Black subculture of hip hop.

Dr Jaspal Naveel Singh is a hip hop head, knowledge producer and soul searcher. He currently works as a Lecturer in Applied Linguistics and English Language at the Open University in the United Kingdom. His first monograph Transcultural Voices: Narrating Hip Hop Culture in Complex Delhi (Multilingual Matters, 2022) develops an approach called global hip hop linguistics to study breakers, graffiti artists, musicians and rappers in the emergent scenes in urban India. Originally from Germany, he lived and worked in India, Hong Kong and Wales.

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HS 13
Monday 19.12.2022
3-5 pm
Presentation and discussion

Language: English