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**Sites of Neoliberal Articulation: Subjectivity, Community
Organizations, and South Asian New York City**

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**Sites of Neoliberal Articulation: Subjectivity, Community
Organizations, and South Asian New York City**

by

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Dissertation

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Dedication

To my parents, Mary and K.V. Varghese

Preface

How does one do research on class in the United States that goes beyond income? In a country that has been marked by a general invisibility of class discourse, and indeed, one which possesses a foundational myth that the lack of class has set it apart from other nations and societies, how and where does class materialize? For me, researching the South Asian community, these questions were complicated by the fact that the South Asian community has been presented and constructed, both materially and discursively, through polar images of classed life: thus, as a solidly middle class community populated by scientists, doctors, and engineers on one end, and a laboring, working class community of taxi drivers and convenience store workers on the other? This picture also begs the question of where women enter into this narrative of male professionals and male service workers. These questions guided my research and analysis of two South Asian organizations in New York City, the Global Organization of People of Indian Origin (GOPIO) and Worker's Awaaz. The research period lasted from May 2000 to September 2002. Given that my focus was on organizations and organizational life, and not the "community," there were periods of lulls and periods of intense research as the activities of each organization dictated.

By the time I entered the field, the South Asian organizational life of New York City had diversified and continued to grow. Worker's Awaaz was one of the many groups that had formed to challenge the control that mostly male South Asian community elites held on representation and resources. A major point of contention was that elite vested interest in representing the South Asian community as highly educated, professionalized and good immigrants was accomplished through the silencing of poverty, gender violence, alternative sexuality and other forms of oppression within the community.

Further, this public construction of the community marginalized any oppositional discourse in the South Asian community as not originating in the community but rooted elsewhere.¹ Organizations such as Worker's Awaaz, Sakhi, the South Asian Lesbian and Gay Association, Desis Rising Up and Moving, Youth Solidarity Summer, and others not only presented an alternative space and vision, but also a new modes of organizing and community formation. Further, as the national, ethnic and religious profile also changed, regional and other "primordial" organizations multiplied to serve cultural and other functions.

Since I was interested in class, I came looking for organizations whose missions were concerned with class. However, I was not only interested in the new, "progressive," groups, but also those organizations that would be grouped with the community elite, such as the Jackson Heights Merchants Association, the National Federation of Indian Associations and, the organization I eventually conducted research in, the Global Organization of People of Indian Origin. As I attended meetings, conducted interviews, and became friends with people, my interest in class was well rewarded. It seemed that class polarization was often central to the analysis and imaginings of the South Asian community in New York City. For example, I was having drinks with a South Asian activist acquaintance who was from a working class family. He worked deportation and detention, and began grumbling about the valorization of South Asian immigration lawyers in this work. Lamenting the way that legal and juridical venues are seen as the solution to all problems, my acquaintance rhetorically asked, "What do those bougie South Asians know about the threat of deportation anyway?" In another instance, a good friend who was very involved in one of the queer South Asian groups felt that middle-

¹ The best known case of this is the National Federation of Indian Association's refusal to allow the South Asian Lesbian and Gay Association or the South Asian domestic violence group, Sakhi for South Asian Women to march in the India Day Parade.

class interests had made it difficult to conceive of queerness outside of identity politics. Class bifurcation even made regular appearances at meetings of elite organizations. More than once at events that GOPIO sponsored or had a heavy presence, someone would point out that in addition to the work that the organization was doing in India around investment and infrastructure, it also needed to attend to the numerous Indians living in poverty in New York City. I think this snatches of class talk speak to many things. But the most salient to me was the implicit division of the South Asian community into two populations, a middle-class or wealthy one, and a not middle-class one. This reflected the shifting demographics of the South Asian population in New York City (discussed in Chapter 1) which was rapidly changing due migration that was no longer dominated by professionals from South Asia. Further, I think, the comments also put forth the various ways that the two populations were being constructed vis-à-vis activism and organizational concerns, and what the relationship between the two may or could be.

In the course of research, my own class positioning was called into play at numerous moments, and in various contexts. Kirin Narayan has written that “the loci along which [researchers] are aligned with or set apart from those who we study are multiple and in flux” (1993: 678). Like any anthropologist in the field, I was continually constituted and reconstituted through the shifting terrains of social relations and power. Given that I am an Indian-American, I was often positioned as a member of the community I was studying if the terms were along nationality or the political underpinning of the South Asian identity. However, though my community-ness along nationality was often taken for granted, my class position provided grounds for both identification and disidentification. In what follows, I relay two incidents in my own fieldwork to introduce moments when I was positioned as a class subject in each setting.

I. Fareen, a Worker's Awaaz member, worked as a low paid aide in a day care center. After a meeting at the organization's office, she asked Mona, another second generation member or "young person" as we were often called, and me if we would help her write a letter to her supervisor requesting a raise. Mona was an immigration lawyer and was often sought out to help write letters or help in matters in which people felt having some legal valence would help their case. I am not sure why I was asked, but I imagine it was because I was getting my Ph.D. and seen as someone possessing professional skills. In any case, we both agreed to help with the letter.

On the set day we went to Fareen's apartment in Elmhurst, Queens. The task took much longer than expected as the writing was punctuated with talk about the organization, general conversation and taking a few breaks to have tea and snacks that Fareen had prepared for us. After almost four hours we were done with a one-page letter that detailed Fareen's work history and service at the day-care, and requested a raise. Two weeks later Mona and I learned that the request for a raise had been denied. Fareen, however, was able to schedule what was essentially a grievance meeting with her immediate supervisor, the head of the day care center and the head of the church to which the daycare was attached. At the end of a Worker's Awaaz meeting that took place a few days before Fareen's meeting at the Day Care meeting, Fareen approached me and Mona, and asked if we could accompany her to the meeting at the daycare. She stated that she would appreciate having someone from "her side" present since there would be three people from "their side," and since we learned about her work history from helping with the letter, we could help her if needed. She added that we were like daughters to her, for who else would help her to this degree? Feeling put on the spot, I agreed to attend the

meeting rationalizing that the day care was only a few blocks from my apartment, and that in helping to write the letter, I had committed myself to the totality of this endeavor.

II. I went to interview Pillai, the owner of an IT/software firm in New Jersey, who was sitting at my table at a lecture sponsored by GOPIO. Though he wasn't technically a GOPIO member, Kumar seemed like a good person to interview: his firm recruited many H1B workers, he was very active in the Network of Indian Professionals (or NetIP) branch of the tri-state area and he wanted NetIP to undertake joint events with GOPIO in order to extend the former organization's scope into the diaspora. When I called to schedule the interview, he asked if I could come to New Jersey where his business was located and where he lived. The city he resided in was a short train ride from New York City. I was always very appreciative of the fact that people were willing to set aside time for me, so working around people's requests was my general MO.

Pillai asked that I come around 4:30 or so, and said he could pick me up from the train station. The interview took place in his 2-bedroom condominium which I was given a tour of before we started the interview. The tour included a minute or two on the balcony looking over the Hudson and across to the Manhattan skyline. The interview went well and took a little over two hours. I was able to get a good history of his business and his activities in NetIP. He also offered to let me come and observe his business and talk some of the H1B workers if I wanted, and added that he was always happy to help out another young Malayali, the Indian ethnic group we both belonged to. As I was getting ready to leave to catch the train back to NYC, Kumar asked if I had anything to rush back to; and if not, perhaps I could accompany him to the weekly salsa classes held in the commons of the building. He added that, if I liked the class, perhaps I could join him weekly. I did have something to get back to in the city, however, so I took my leave.

Not long after, I decided to focus on GOPIO and their Entrepreneurs Conference exclusively, so did not take Kumar up on his offer to observe his business or interview the H1B workers there.

I use these two moments to illustrate the ways that I was placed as a classed subject. In each instance my class position, defined by my potential profession and its appropriateness in each context, was called forth. As will be discussed in Chapter 2, the use of purported skills to position to locate and indicate members' class was common in the Worker's Awaaz. This was in some ways generated by an organizational history in which middle-class members' role was to provide services through their skill sets to low wage worker members. In GOPIO, the same data about my background was used more than once by people who were not GOPIO members, but involved in its activities, to position me, as illustrated above as a suitable mate. I believe this was partially based in the South Asian practice of finding suitable matches predicated on a number of factors including class background. In addition, in GOPIO I was also twice asked to participate in research projects that GOPIO wanted to undertake or help them find other researchers and scholars who would. As an organization that performed some advocacy work and research, I was initially positioned as someone who could further their mission. Again, this related to the skills I was seen as holding.

Of course, each example also highlights other positions I occupy: being second generation, being female, and being a Malayalee among other things. However, and especially in the instance with Fareen, in both groups, class was the main axis that mobilized and animated their work, and as I argue in the dissertation, was foundational to the subjects produced and, in the case of Worker's Awaaz, eventually contested in each organization. Both examples, though individualized and personal, also point to the

gendered nature of these constructions, and how they are crucial to constructing a class subject. Thus for Fareen, the idiom of a daughter's obligation was presented to frame the responsibility that Mona and I had, as people with skills, to help her and other in her position. And for Pillai, a heterosexual economy was set into motion even before the interview through a staging of normative upper middle class markers such as the tour of the condominium that had the coveted "great view." These insights of how gender inflects class discourse in each organization translate in Chapter 3 to an examination of the gendered spaces of the home (for Worker's Awaaz) and Indian State (for GOPIO) that are produced through national and transnational law and activities as sites where the claims to rights are enacted in each organization, respectively.

I do not focus on race, the racialization of South Asians, or the racial state in these settings. Though these are important issues to be examined in the South Asian American and South Asian diasporic contexts, and indeed have played an important role in shaping the histories of exclusion, community formation and activism,² this project is concerned with the classed subject. I do this not only because class was often the idiom of construction used within the organizations, but also in order to find new ways to speak about class in the South Asian diaspora. By investigating the classed subjects produced through organizational activities, I attempt to understand not just the "fact" of income cum class, but the mobilization of class and class talk. I believe this is an important project as the South Asian population continues to cleave along class lines, and further, as this cleavage engenders new forms of organizing. However, I want to emphasize that my interest lay not in presenting the two organizations, and thus the class positions they represent, as separate spheres, but as co-constitutive. Through all this, I hope to bring to

² For works on the racialization of South Asians in the United States see Visweswaran (1997) George (1997), Koshy (1999) and Prashad (2000).

light the limitations and fallacies of frameworks which assumes a middle-class population who are marginalized solely through racial structures in the United States.

When I began research, Worker's Awaaz was grappling with the limitations of service provision and the case-by-case actions to recoup unpaid wages which had set the agenda of the organization since its founding. Though I did not enter into these conversations immediately, I was slowly (and initially somewhat reluctantly) drawn in. The Time and Health campaign, a joint campaign with two other immigrant workers' centers, was taking being developed and I was asked to attend meetings, and help devise strategies around this campaign. As will be discussed in Chapter 2, one of the pillars of this campaign was the questioning of who was a worker. I was not a detached bystander in these conversations. I participated in organization life in numerous ways: helping to file cases, organizing events, running meetings, helping at the office when needed, etc.

As my work with the organization continued, I went from being a volunteer (a term I applied to myself) to being a member, to, by the end of my research period, being a board member. My active and non-objective participation gave me access and insight into the organization that would not have been possible if I was "just" a researcher who remained out of the fray. My involvement with the organization – as evinced by my eventual joining of the board – was intense and as an active member and board member, I participated in discussions and implementation of activities that shaped the direction and concern of the organization. By the time I was a board member, I generally attended more than one meeting a week. These meeting varied in size and scope as they were either campaign specific, general or board meetings. Also, once the office was relocated a

few blocks from my apartment (pure coincidence) I would drop by almost every other day to help the staff organizer with the more mundane tasks of running an office. Though I did not set out to use Worker's Awaaz as a field site, it became clear to me that what I was witnessing was important to write about. However, given my involvement with the group, I did not carry out many formal interviews and relied heavily on participant observation, a "method" I was already using anyway in my involvement with the organization.

My experience with Worker's Awaaz was more intimate, involved and extended than that with GOPIO. This organization presented a much more "traditional" fieldwork experience for me as I never became part of the group. I always made clear that I was a researcher, not a potential member, even though a few times I was made aware of office holders' disappointment that more second generation Indians did not join. To gather data on the organization, I utilized methods of participant observation at their events and interviewing to gather data. I conducted interviews with 5 office holders, attended events that the organization held in New York City, and volunteered at the Entrepreneur's Conference. I did not attend any GOPIO meetings however, due to their location outside of New York City. Even though most GOPIO events were held in New York City and most GOPIO members worked there, most membership lived in the surrounding suburbs in Connecticut and Long Island. It was in these places that many meetings were held, and I was not able to travel to the far flung locations that required a car to reach. However, I between interviews, events, the Entrepreneur's conference, and materials in the Indian American press, I was able to obtain a body of data on the organization and its workings.

What follows is a comparative study about the construction of subjects in organizations that are positioned on opposite ends of the class divide. What emerged as

most intriguing was the mobilization of class as the basis of activism in each organization. Two monikers acted as short-hands for the conditions and production of classed subjects in Worker's Awaaz and GOPIO, worker and diasporic entrepreneur, respectively. While these subject positions were mutually constituted through gender, migration history and migration status among other things, each moniker seemed to coalesce around the possibilities, oppositions and limitations of class positioning. I want to warn against seeing worker and diasporic entrepreneur as symmetrical positions on a spectrum of South Asian American class formation. Rather, as products of organizational entanglement with larger structures and the rights afforded under it, they are uneven, fractured, contingent reflections of organizational missions and their engagement with class positioning in the South Asian diaspora..

**Sites of Neoliberal Articulation:
Subjectivity, Community Organizations, and South Asian New York City**

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Through an ethnographic examination of two New York City South Asian organizations, Worker's Awaaz and the Global Organization of People of Indian Origin (GOPIO), this study attends to the classed subjects produced at the different points of convergence of neoliberal policy in India and the United States. The project is concerned with the workings of South Asian organizations as the demographic profile of this population changes due to new migration patterns marked by gender, class, nationality and status, and new subjectivities borne of organizing and activism that have emerged around these.

With attention to the nexus of capital, labor and rights, I argue that each organization represents two sides of neoliberal tendencies, and that this materializes in the subjects of worker and diasporic entrepreneur that are mobilized in Worker's Awaaz and GOPIO, respectively. Structural adjustment programs (SAPs) in South Asia compelled the migration of the low-wage female membership Worker's Awaaz. Once in the United States, where carework has become increasingly privatized, many of these women find employment as domestic workers whose labor is necessary to the households of upper-middle class and wealthy South Asians. SAPs also opened up South Asian markets to direct foreign investment. Needing outside capital for schemes of privatization and deregulation, the government of India turned to the diaspora, and deployed financial investment by overseas Indians as diasporic duty. This is a role that GOPIO has been at the forefront of organizing.

I specifically explore how economic beings constructed through neoliberal discourse of human capital inhabit, rework, and contest these very discourses and practices. In Worker's Awaaz debates regarding who constituted a worker were contestations over the meanings of class and labor rooted in global migration flows. Within GOPIO the class inflected subjectivity of entrepreneur found nationalist luster as the articulation of entrepreneurialism was cast as a trait of Indian diasporic culture. The subject positions borne from these activities produced different struggles over the terms of national belonging and rights. The dissertation understands these positions as generated from the disjunctive tendencies of neoliberalism, and as sites that give insight into the workings of current capital regimes.

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Introduction: Making Connections in the World System

[Multi-sited ethnography] claims that any ethnography of a cultural formation in the world system is also an ethnography of the system.
- George Marcus

Soon after my arrival in New York City, I learned about both the Global Organization of People of Indian Origin (GOPIO) and Worker's Awaaz (Worker's Voice). I began exploring the former as a potential research site, and the latter as a potential organization in which to volunteer. GOPIO was heavily involved in coordinating diasporic capital investment into India and other nodes of the diaspora, and establishing official venues for the diaspora to engage the Indian state. I quickly decided this was an ideal site to investigate articulations of class, capital and citizenship in the Indian diaspora, and set about contacting key office holders in the organization. Worker's Awaaz was one of a few South Asian workers centers in New York City. It primarily organized domestic workers and pushed for expanded labor rights for low-wage and exploited workers. After attending a few meetings and helping to organize an action, I decided the organization was a perfect place to pursue activism in a new setting. Eventually I realized that the differences in their mission, membership, and terrain of action indexed the way they were related; each organization inhabited two ends of the changing relations between capital, labor and rights engendered by neoliberal policies in India, South Asia and the United States. On one end, wealthier segments of the Indian diaspora were targeted as investors to provide the capital needed to drive liberalization of the Indian economy. Leveraging this, GOPIO was able to produce organizational discourse and practices in which investment and other capital activities were cast as nationalist acts which opened a space for their participation in India's progress. On the

other end, neoliberal policies in South Asia also intensified labor migration as an economic survival strategy for those whose standard of living dropped as privatization and deregulation were carried out. These labor migrants are generally funneled into low-paying and unregulated jobs, such as domestic work in the case of the women in Worker's Awaaz, which are crucial to the functioning of wealthier nations.

A focus on the connections between disparate spaces is advocated as a methodology by George Marcus in his essay, "Ethnography in/of the World System: The Emergence of Multi-Sited Ethnography." Marcus urges the ethnographer to follow connections, associations, and relationships among sites induced by "empirical changes in the world and therefore to transformed locations of cultural production" (1995: 97). This approach makes cognizant macro-constructs of the world system through an examination of its fractured manifestations and, in doing so, focuses on the cultural logics within various sites. The method of tracking and linking illuminates different pieces of the current world system while insisting that the system is more than the sum of its parts, and is always marked by unevenness, contestation, and mutation in place. This produces "mobile ethnographies" (96) in which "the posited logic of association or connection among sites...*defines* the argument of the ethnography" (105, emphasis mine). Thus, this mode of research which begins "*in* the world system...comes circumstantially to be *of* the world system" (96).

The dissertation takes Marcus's advice and examines subjects forged through the nexus of capital, labor and rights under neoliberalism in two Worker's Awaaz and GOPIO. Using an ethnographic approach which analyzes the histories, campaigns and meetings of each organization, I highlight their entanglements with neoliberal evaluation of productivity, mobility and techniques of flexibility as they materialized in the figure of diasporic entrepreneur and worker in GOPIO and Workers' Awaaz, respectively. This

allowed me to explore how economic beings constructed through neoliberal discourse of human capital inhabit, rework, and contest these very discourses and practices. I situate the subjectivities produced in the two groups not only in the global flows of people and capital, but also in the localization of their enactments in New York City which occur in conversation with global city dynamics.

Threaded throughout this project is an examination of the ways that each organization collectively claimed rights and created a sense of belonging on various scales. I intend for the analysis of citizenship to unfold organically through the comparison being made between the two groups vis-à-vis their positioning and self-fashioning as subjects under neoliberalism. I show that, in this instance, subject production was dependent on the transformation of class and professional profile in the South Asian community in New York City. Thus, the membership of GOPIO, a group of mobile (mainly) male professionals asserts economic and legal belonging in the United States in order to make claims of cultural and diasporic belonging in India through the figure of the diasporic entrepreneur. In contrast, the domestic worker membership of Worker's Awaaz initially accessed limited privileges through a complex of laws and rights on varying scales (Das Gupta 2006), and later attempted to organize with other labor groups to assert belonging through an inversion of the value of their role in the producing profit for others. This move was premised on the centering of the laboring body that literally gets used by capital in its drive for profit and recasting the meaning and role of workers in this pursuit. The actions of each organization are reflective of the types of engagement with agency and constraint afforded to both. Thus, I show that the use of local institutions by Worker's Awaaz represents a gendered pursuit of civil rights which sought to make the feminized work of paid social reproduction visible, and in doing so disrupt deeply held notions of the household as an institution outside of labor.

Inversely, I illustrate that GOPIO's push for diasporic rights is dependent on the construction of a masculine diasporic entrepreneur who is able to practice flexible accumulation and citizenship, which in turn, can aid the Indian nation-state. Through this, the project suggests how economic beings constructed through neoliberal discourse of human capital are agentive and inhabit, rework and contest the very modalities through which neoliberal practices attempt to constitute them.

Focusing on these two organizations the dissertation makes an argument about the possibilities and constraints of community organizing under neoliberalism by examining GOPIO's success in constructing itself as a locus of a modern diasporic subject and Worker's Awaaz's difficulty in creating an oppositional worker subject. For organizations such as GOPIO their fashioning as agents of self-entrepreneurialism under neoliberal logic allowed them to thrive as their activities mirrored the reorganization of capital in both the United States and India. However, for Worker's Awaaz, an inability to organize outside the logic of neoliberal capital and devise a truly oppositional stance to the processes of class formation limited the organization's ability to create or participate in a mass based political movement that challenged neoliberal castings of human value. Indeed, I argue that both organizations, one intentionally and the other unwittingly, participated in neoliberal productions of a normative class subject through which the state and other institutions could discipline them. However, given the differing missions and terrains of operation of each group, this was a strategy of success for one, and a tactic that lead to the eventual dissolution for the other.

GOPIO AND WORKER'S AWAAZ

GOPIO's membership was mainly comprised of men who had immigrated to the United States from India as students or professionals soon after the passage of the 1965 Immigration Act. The organization formed at an international conference held in 1989 in

New York City by the National Federation of Indian Associations (NFIA), an umbrella organization for the numerous Indian groups in the United States. The conference was the first of its kind, drawing Indian diasporans from across the globe, and thus providing a space to enact a diasporic identity. GOPIO, whose initial office-holders were drawn largely from NFIA leadership, maintains the practice of working to create and claim a unified Indian community, with the scale of the community having changed from the national as in NFIA, to the global. The aim of the organization is to “pool [diasporic] resources, both financial and professional, for the benefit of People of Indian Origin, the countries they come from and India.”

In contrast, Workers’ Awaaz consisted of women from all nations of South Asia who were employed as domestic workers by professionals like those that constitute the membership of GOPIO and other low-wage workers. Most, if not all, members were part of a later wave of migration that diversified the class and national composition of the South Asian population in the United States. The organization emerged out of the localization of female labor migration in New York City and the need for a way to address the immediate struggles of South Asian domestic workers in the area. Workers’ Awaaz began in Sakhi for South Asian Women, a celebrated South Asian anti-domestic violence group that was one of the first organizations to address gender oppression in the South Asian community. The organization distinguished itself from Sakhi by centering class, in addition to gender, as the prime concern, and was run as a workers’ center with a shared leadership structure, and mission to “fight for respect for our work, a 40 hour workweek at a living compensation, and control over our lives” (Worker’s Awaaz).

GOPIO and Worker’s Awaaz fall respectively into the dual categories of place-taking and space-making organizations as delineated by Monisha Das Gupta in her work on South Asian activist organizations in the United States (2006). According to Das

Gupta's schema, place-taking organizations act in an accommodationist mode in which the organization works to take their place in already existing structures of power, a mode she attributes to conservative, elite organizations such as GOPIO. Space-making organizations, on the other hand, are sites of political contestation and social change that aim to create new spaces for marginalized voices and populations, such as Worker's Awaaz. The former also operates along national lines, while the latter, acting on the identity of South Asian, goes beyond circumscribed national identities and utilizes broader political identities based in feminism, anti-racism, sexuality, and labor.

The modes of political engagement of the two organizations in this study can also be parsed from the terms that each uses to identify itself. GOPIO speaks of itself as a diasporic community organization, while Worker's Awaaz identifies as a community-based organization. As a community organization, GOPIO conceives of itself as a group *for* the community and thus as representatives acting on the interests of the community in various arenas. This is in distinction to Worker's Awaaz which is a community-based organization, signifying that it is a group *in* the community. In this formation, the organization is not a representative of the community, but rather a space in which the community can develop a collective voice, and through this make claims and demands.

As indicated by Das Gupta's schema, groups such as GOPIO, composed of community elites, have an easier time claiming representative status as they often work with and within the networks of political, social, and economic power which groups such as Worker's Awaaz contest. Through working within the dominant power structures in the United States, these organizations have been able to find a voice in discussions not only about the Indian and South Asian communities in particular, but also about the place of migrants in the United States in general. This is partially based on their ability to organize resources and build institutions allows them to claim the mantle of community

spokespersons. For example, Dr. Thomas Abraham, the chairman of GOPIO, is often introduced as a long time community activist, and GOPIO a diasporic community organization. Since he arrived to begin graduate work at Columbia University, Dr. Abraham has founded numerous community organizations that have acted as intermediaries between the community and mainstream institutions in local, national and—with GOPIO— transnational spaces. However, to my knowledge, GOPIO and other place-taking organizations have never gone through a process in which they get community sanction to act on its behalf. Rather, as many space-making groups have charged, South Asian community elite have been able to assert the position as representatives in local, national and international spaces due to their elite status and desire for inclusion into existing power structures (Bhattacharjee 1992), and the need of existing structures to identify representatives who do not present strong challenges to the status quo through which they can access marginalized communities.

Community-based organizations such as Worker's Awaaz were seen as a corrective to these unsubstantiated claims of representation. Based on the Alinskian model of assessing the needs of distinct communities (1971), community-based organizations were to be the conduits for the real collective voice of the community, and in being so, would directly contest the "voice" of community elites. Indeed, as a hidden population marginalized along the axis of gender, class, race and often, migration status, domestic workers were generally absent in the imagining of community undertaken by elite South Asian representatives. Worker's Awaaz provided a space of visibility to this population not only through its public campaigns, but also through establishing an social and political network in which and through which these women could come together and form a collective voice.

However, Biju Mathew offers an insightful critique of the ways that community-based organizations, undertaking what Das Gupta distinguishes as space-making or what I have identified as organizations in the community, also function through unsubstantiated claims to community representation. Mathew traces the emergence of community-based organizations to a breakdown in the dialectical relationship between universal legal rights and the right of each community “to mark itself as different” (2005: 192). He asserts that under multiculturalism, “the marking of difference was institutionalized in the separation of communities at each and every level possible” with each community then producing “its own resources and institutions, its own priorities and campaigns” (ibid). The author states that in this conception community “works” as an “always already formed and fixed entity that has ‘needs,’ and the organization has an unascertained mandate to ‘fight’ for those needs” (2005: 194). In this understanding, community is not produced through practice, but through existing modalities of differentiation such as race or culture. In operating on a pre constituted community rather than attending to how it is operationalized, community-based organizations have something in common with the community organizations they often position themselves against. In neither case is mass based organizing the goal as “the ‘community’ remains out there, its definition static and eternal, while ‘activists’ are located inside the organization” (Mathew 2005: 195) speaking for the community in both formations.

In my examination of GOPIO and Worker’s Awaaz as two formations in the current world system, I do not position either group as representative of the larger community in which they situate themselves. Rather, I view both groups as fragments which do not stand in for the “real” community, but as sites in which the vagaries of neoliberal practices are articulated and thus animate both the “community” itself and fractures within the “community.” I intend for this lens to challenge the notion of a stable

totality through which ethnic and national groups in the United States are often viewed and researched (Glick Schiller, Çaglar, Guldbrandsen 2006) while still attending to how the subject of community is produced and questioned through the practice of community activism. By taking this approach, I also hope to interrogate the dominant practice in ethnic studies and diaspora studies that seeks to reconstruct the “real” community even in the face of evidence of the ways that state intervention, in the form of representation and distribution of resources for example, play a role in assumed *communitas*.

SOUTH ASIAN NEW YORK CITY

Migration is both an act of moving and a highly localized process shaped by varying factors such as profession, law, and the political and social environment into which migrants enter (Rollwagen 1975). New York City, a global city, where “ethnic diversity is the expectation [and] fact of life” (Foner 2001: 7), is marked by a high number of migrants and a density of “ethnic infrastructure” (Lessinger 1995: 45). According to the 2000 census, 36% of the city’s population was foreign born and unlike other metropolitan areas in the United States, such as Los Angeles or Miami where one group is numerically dominant, is highly heterogeneous. Whereas in the past, most migrants to the city were from Europe, after the 1965 Act and continuing to this day, Asia, the Caribbean and Latin America represent the largest sending regions. In addition, the 1980s and 1990s saw a higher percentage of female migration to the city, paralleling this trend in other urban areas. It is this segment of New Yorkers that accounts for the increase of overall population from 1990 to 2000 (NNY 2004: 5). U

The South Asian population of New York City comprises a small group—less than 300,000 of the total 8 million New Yorkers. However, the group has steadily increased and diversified since 1990, in some ways mirroring migration trends for the population nationally. In New York City, the South Asian population has increased by

more than 100% between 1990 and 2000 when accounting for persons with mixed nationalities, and in the case of Bangladeshis 400%. The Indian, Bangladeshi and Pakistani³ communities contain proportions of foreign-born in their total populations, 77%, 85% and 79% respectively, far beyond the city average of 36%.

Indians continued to comprise the largest South Asian subgroup in New York City with 206,228 when including people of mixed Indian descent, and 170,899 for those who identified only as Indian.⁴ This translated to a 118% and 80% increase respectively between 1990 and 2000. As of the 2000 census, 70% of all Indians in New York State resided in New York City, and 52% immigrated to New York City between 1990 and 2000. In regards to education, all but the higher end of the spectrum were on par with the city average, with 51% having some form of post-secondary education as opposed to 48% for the general population. The median household income for this group was higher than city average, \$45,000 as opposed to \$38,293. However per capita income, \$18, 473 was lower than city average of \$22,402. This discrepancy is a reflection of household size.⁵ 18% of the population lived below the poverty line in 2000, slightly less than the city average of 21%.⁶

Though Indians remained the most populous segment, the Bangladeshi population saw the most dramatic growth in the South Asian aggregate. Between 1990 and 2000, this population experienced a 471% increase to 28,269 when including people of mixed

³ A full statistical portrait does not exist for Sri Lankans, thus they will not be discussed in depth. However, according to the Asian American Federation of New York Population Profile for Sri Lankans the population size is 2,640 for mixed descent and 2,033 for single descent, an increase of 225.5% and 150.7% from 1990.

⁴ See Fisher 1980, Lessinger 1995, and Khandelwal 2002 for monographs on the Indian community in New York City.

⁵ According to Madhulika Khandelwal, higher income Indian families have tended to use New York City as an entry point and move to wealthier suburbs in Long Island, New Jersey and Connecticut when they have the necessary financial capital to do so (2002).

⁶ The poverty threshold as defined by the US Census Bureau for 1999/2000 is \$8,501 for an individual, \$10,869 for a household composed of two people without underage dependents and \$16,895 for a family of four including two dependents under 18 (US Census Bureau).

Bangladeshi descent and 286% increase to 19,148 when accounting for single descent. The majority of Bangladeshi immigrants to New York arrived in the last twenty years and entered the United States through utilization of the diversity lottery visa, with 77% migrating between 1990 and 2000. This community in New York City is also the largest Bangladeshi population in any metropolitan area in the United States. Compared to general city levels, they ranked low in measurements of income and high in resultant poverty, with a per capita income of \$10,479 and median household income of \$31,537. Following, 31% of lived below the poverty line. In terms of educational attainment, levels were similar to the city in general with 27% with less than a high school degree and 52% possessing some form of post-secondary education. This is compared with the city averages of 28% and 48%.

The Pakistani population grew 154% to 340,310 when including mixed heritage and 78.5% to 224,099 when only accounting for single nationality. Pakistanis educational attainment broke down with about half the population, 47%, not graduating from high school, and 48% having some post-secondary education. Like Bangladeshis, Pakistanis had lower income levels than the general population in New York City. Per capita income was roughly \$12,000, slightly more than half the city average of \$22,402, and household income was \$34,835. Predictably, this population had a higher than city average living in poverty at 28% (Asian American Federation of New York: 2004).

The profile of these three communities in New York parallel the national diversification of class, nationality and education level in the South Asians in the United States. Between 1980 and 2000, this population exploded from 407,000 to 2.2 million, more than doubling every ten years (Singh 2003). From 1990 to 2000, the Bangladeshi community has increased by 385% (to 57,412), the Pakistani community by 151.1% (to 204,309) and the Sri Lankan community by 124.1% (to 7,212) (Singh 2003). Indians still

comprise the largest portion with 1.7 million in 2000, a 100% increase from 1990 (Rao 2003). Included in this number are the high-tech professionals who came to work in the booming IT industry in the 1990s. Unlike earlier professional migrants, this population was tied to the sponsor companies and did not hold permanent resident status.⁷

The diversification of the South Asian population in the United States can be traced to the “second wave” of migration following the 1965 Immigration Act. While the first wave was comprised mainly of professionals from India, but also from Pakistan, who filled occupations that the United States needed to bolster their position in the Cold War fight (Prashad 2000), this second wave is tied to family reunification, downward mobility through migration, and as shown in the case of Bangladeshi migrants, the American governments own programs to diversify migrant origin.⁸ Many who have migrated in the second wave have entered low-paying service industries and other non-professional sectors. These shifting demographics call for an analysis that moves beyond the now mythic narrative of a professional, wealthy Indian American community to an analysis that takes account of not only of the statistical changes in national, class and temporal positions, but also emergent modes of subject production, community formation and belonging that are accompanying this change.

THE ASIAN AMERICAN SUBJECT WITHIN AND BEYOND THE NATION-STATE

The use of globalized frameworks such as diaspora and transnationalism over more localized ones such as immigrant or Asian American has animated debates about to

⁷ The visibility of this population in public debates, representation and popular imagination, was disproportionate to their actual numbers (see Chakravarty 2005). Perhaps the high visibility of this population was due to their central positioning in debates concerning the “risk” of wage depression stemming from the use and entry of skilled guest workers, rather than “natives” See Wayne (2001), Lowell, Hafner, and Preysman (2003).

⁸ For general works on Indians in the United States see Saran 1985, Jensen 1989, Helweg and Helweg 1990, and Shukla 2003. For works including other nationalities within the identity South Asian and works that take South Asian as their unit of analysis see Takaki 1989, Chan 1991, Leonard 1997, and Prashad 2000.

analyze past and current experiences of Asians in the United States. These debates have also offered new conceptual and theoretical paths for the examination of the Asian American subject, which is one that has been structured by outsider racialization or the continual inscription as foreign and thus, belonging elsewhere (Ancheta 1998: 64), as well as through a “dialectical relation to international histories and locations” (Low and Kim 1997: xiii). Thus, as these approaches recognize the legacies of violence, racial exclusion, immigration and opposition that mark Asian life in the United States on the one hand, they also shine a light on the long history of American entanglement with Asia in the form of wars, treaties, and economic engagement and perceived threat. Against this tableau, discussions and contestation over how to frame Asian experience in the United States signal the importance of “claiming America,” recognizing the effects that changing US relationships with Asian nations have on Asian populations inside America, and the persistent links to their ancestral lands that Asians in the United States make and feel. Hence the debates are as much about declaring a presence in the United States as they are about asserting global connections.

Sau-ling Wong uses the term *denationalization* to explore “the theoretical crossroads at which Asian American cultural criticism has found itself” (2000: 126), one that emphasizes transnational connections over domestic histories. Wong contributes this change in emphasis to three factors: 1) a demographic shift which has eased the cultural nationalist concerns with “becoming American” (128) that drove the Asian American movement and Asian American Studies in its inception, 2) a relaxation between what is Asian American and what is Asian, and following this, between what is Asian American Studies and Asian Studies due to the “ascendancy of Asia as an economic power of global impact” (130), and 3) a “shift from a domestic American to a diasporic perspective” (132) which has heralded the need for an analysis that does not stop at the

borders of the American nation-state. Following her exegesis on the reasons for the trend towards denationalization, Wong offers her reservations. First, she reminds us that the Asian American movement was international in outlook citing its concern with the Vietnam War and its inspiration from Mao as two examples. Second Wong reminds us that the closing of space between Asian and Asian American is tied to American economic interests in the Pacific Rim, and that “Asian Americans have often been regarded as the shock troops in America’s trade war with Asia” (135). And finally, she points out that there is “a class bias coded [embedded] into the privileging of travel and transnational mobility” (136) over fixity and that “class can be erased when an exilic sensibility is promoted as less narrow than an immigrant one” (137). Working from her concerns, Wong suggests that Asian American Studies turn towards developing a located theory that rethinks what it may mean to reclaim America.⁹

Echoing Wong’s concern with the relationship between American capital and the Pacific Rim in recent constructions of Asian American potential, Arif Dirlik turns his attention to the ways that “the emergence of Pacific Asian economies...has had a transformative effect on the Asian American self-image, as well as on the perception of Asian Americans in [American] society at large” (1999: 31). Dirlik recognizes that the Asian American identity materialized in the Asian American movement was flawed and untenable from the start as it was dominated by certain national groups, was masculinist in its construction, and was quickly challenged by a new wave of immigration. However, he points out that this was happening at the same time that the United States was developing portions of the Pacific Rim in the fight against communism, and reconfiguring its relationship with Asia. This latter fact, according to Dirlik, must be

⁹ Wong also highlights a point that seems to be glossed over in Asian diaspora studies, the recourse to an essentialist national/cultural origin as the basis of commonality in diaspora (138-139).

understood as one node of the postnational transformation of Asians in the United States. Thus while he agrees that “the original vision of Asian America may no longer be able to contain the forces reshaping Asian America” (49), he questions whether this is reason enough to render the localized subject of Asian American irrelevant. What Dirlik proposes is a “deeply political” reconfiguring of the Asian American subject, as agents and subjects of transnational capitalism. This would entail a turn to “place-based politics [that] may have something to offer in countering the ideologies of the age” (49).

Wong and Dirlik share many of the same concerns, mainly attention to the link between transnational capital and a deterritorialized Asian American subject and an insistence on the recuperation of localized politics that drove the Asian American movement in the 1960s. Their project is not one that stands in contrast to denationalization, however. Rather, both authors’ calls to place-based politics can be seen as a strategy to counter the elision of the role of capital and US-Asian economic relationships in constructing the diasporic Asian. Neither author is suggesting that Asian/Americans are only constituted within the United States, but that a real politics, one that does take account of our links and relations to populations both inside and outside, must be waged from a rooted position within the United States.

Centering the role of capital in the contemporary creation of the diasporic Chinese, Aihwa Ong and Donald Nonini, enter into the discussion with a lens that looks at the generative possibilities contained in this. They claim that in order to understand the new Chinese diaspora, one must understand “strategies of accumulation by Chinese under capitalism...for such strategies penetrate these phenomena and are in turn affected by them” (1997: 4). These strategies of accumulation produce new intellectual and cultural formations, publics, and cultural production across space. Ong and Nonini’s edited volume, *Ungrounded Empires*, takes diaspora as a shared condition of groups and people

separated by space, and more importantly as a condition “that these persons see themselves as sharing” (18). The essays contained in the work are unified through the theme that the mobility of diaspora Chinese “manifests a wildness, danger and unpredictability that challenges and undermines modern imperial regimes of truth and power” (19) including the Chinese family, capitalist workplace and the nation-state (23) through its ability and strategies to elude localizations. While the collection does not address the Chinese diaspora in the United States, it does locate possibilities for new identities in mobility, though the authors acknowledge asymmetrical power relations encoded and produced in this process (10).

Like Ong and Nonini, Sandhya Shukla’s deliberation on “the constructed term South Asian” finds diaspora to be a generative framework that can contain both the geographical reach of diasporic experience, while at the same time point to place specific racial and ethnic formations (2001). Shukla employs L. Jones notion of the “changing same” to point to the “amazing persistence” of cultural traditions along side “innovative renderings of national, regional and religious identities” (552). These constitutive tensions in the diaspora are indicative of the multiplicity contained in the imaginaries that tie place, culture and identity together. Shukla suggests that narratives of postcolonialism, racial-ethnic formation, and globalization provide “a repertoire of images and experiences from the past and present that meet alternative narrative productions in new places of settlement” (553). The first presents a language of nationalism, the second a “social framework in which South Asian diasporas come to life and are made visible” (554), and the third engages with the current stage of integration of the world economy. Taken together, they speak to historical and current localized imaginaries, as well as globalized experiences.

These four articles provide a landscape of present discussions in the study of Asians in the United States and their lived realities outside the borders of the nation. The authors raise important questions about place, politics, capital, culture and history in their considerations. Taken together, a productive tension emerges about how and where to locate Asians in the United States and beyond. Following Wong, I view these moments and junctures of localization and denationalization as “*modes* rather than *phases* of Asian American subjectivity” thus “an indigenizing mode can coexist and alternate with a diasporic or a transnational mode, but the latter is not to be lauded as a culmination of the former, a stage more advanced or more capacious” (2000:138 emphasis in original). Thus, in my examination of Worker’s Awaaz and GOPIO the two the question of organizational activity and subject production is not concerned with whether they are localized or globalized, but rather what conditions of power engenders and facilitates each.

THE NEOLIBERAL WORLD SYSTEM

According to Susan George, neoliberalism has gone from being “a small unpopular sect with virtually no influence” to a “major world religion with [a] dogmatic doctrine, priesthood [and] law-giving institutions” (2000: 28). At its core, it is a philosophy

that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong property rights, free markets, and free trade (Harvey 2005: 2).

In the West, its emergence has generally been located to the rollbacks and deregulation of social services and major industries, and the fostering of “competition,” in the United States and Great Britain during the Regan-Thatcher era. However, the first neoliberal state “experiment” occurred in 1973 in Pinochet’s Chile in which, with loans

and programs from the IMF, the regime “reversed nationalizations and privatized public assets, opened up natural resources...to private and unregulated exploitation..., privatized social security, and facilitated foreign direct investment and freer trade” (Harvey 2005: 8).¹⁰ This pattern of economic liberalization has continued in the global South and its expansion continues to be facilitated by international financial institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) which compel nations to implement structural adjustment programs (SAPs) that redirect investment from public programs and services to the restructuring of their economies to “compete” in the global market; and international trade organizations such as the World Trade Organization which has emerged as an enforcer of the laws and rules of free trade.

Even where the actual term is not heard, such as in the United States, its underlying logic and attendant practices of bringing all human activity under the domain of the market have seeped into collective common sense. The *raison d’être* of this “utopia of unlimited exploitation” (Bourdieu 1998) has been identified as the re-establishment of “the conditions for capital accumulation and [restoration of] the power of economic elites” in nations where they already exist, and creation of conditions for their emergence in nations in which economic elites were generally absent such as Russia, China and India” (Harvey 2005: 19, see also Dumenil and Levy 2005).¹¹

As an economic system, neoliberalism works through “accumulation by dispossession” (Harvey 2005) in which wealth is created through the commodification of areas and services such as education, health care and utilities provision which, in the past, were outside the domain of profit generation. The commodification of these services entails a transfer of these services from the jurisdiction of the state to that of the market

¹⁰ For works detailed treatments on the neoliberal Chilean state under Pinochet see Winn (2004) and Taylor (2006).

¹¹ For a provocative look at this process in India see Frenandes (2006).

and private corporations. Internationally, countries are urged to integrate into the global economy by reducing restrictions on trade and technology and opening up their economies to foreign investment. All these practices prepare states and other geographic scales¹² for competition as they vie against one another for investment and business. In this process the former must ensure a hospitable environment to business interests in order to be competitive. Thus, the state's duties has become more and more to "create and preserve an institutional framework appropriate" to neoliberal practices (Harvey 2005: 2) rather than provide services and assistance to its citizenry.

As a moral philosophy, neoliberalism has reconfigured the terms of human labor, rights and connectivity by situating the ethic of the market as an appropriate guide to human action and interaction. Under this regime, populations are measured against the stick of productivity which aims "to maximize the returns on doing what is profitable and to marginalize the unprofitable" (Ong 2006: 79). Thus individuals are evaluated in terms of human capital and their ability to successfully take risks and produce profit. Personal well-being is seen as the responsibility of the individual, and as something attained through the entrepreneurialization of the self without public sector aid. However, without the programs and safety nets of the past, more and more of the risk inherent in competition is shifted to the individual (Mathew 2005), and failure in the creation of capital is understood as individual moral failing. As Harvey states, with irony, "if conditions among the lower classes deteriorated, this was because they failed, usually for personal and cultural reasons, to enhance their own human capital" (2005: 157) and not due to structural forces which may have impeded their mobility. However, as will be shown in the proceeding chapters, this valuation of success and/or failure does not go uncontested. Rather, in this dissertation, I position the discourse of human capital to be a

¹² See Brenner and Theodore (2002) for the urbanization of neoliberalism.

generative flash point of organizing and self-fashioning waged both in and against the service of neoliberalism.

This new regime of capital accumulation is one that relies on practices of flexibility (Harvey 1989) which include the international mobility of capital, the decentralization of production, and the use of subcontracted and contingent workers in all points of the production chain. Unlike earlier forms of capital accumulation, this flexible regime is no longer under the purview social and political regulation. As it has fostered “the emergence of entirely new sectors of production, new ways of providing financial services, new markets and above all, greatly intensified rates of commercial, technological, and organizational innovation” (Harvey 1989: 147), flexible accumulation is also marked by “degree of autonomy from real production” (194) that existed under “rigid” Fordist production models. Though David Harvey does not use the term neoliberalism, his early work on flexible accumulation can be seen as a nascent theory of the new practices that neoliberalism was bringing into existence. These practices have brought about three major changes: 1) space-time compression induced by new technology and communications necessary to the current stage of a globalized economy, 2) “tension between the national basis of states and the international connections of national economies,” and 3) growing polarization of wealth between nations and between citizens with in a nation as the bulk of wealth becomes concentrated in transnational networks (Coronil: 2001: 65).

However, as with all world systems, neoliberalism has taken root in an uneven and incomplete manner across the globe and thus varies in form, intensity and implementation from place to place (Comaroff and Comaroff 2001, Brenner and Theodore 2002, Harvey 2005), what Aihwa Ong has called neoliberalism with a small ‘n’ (2006). Attention to the situated manifestations of neoliberalism in various national and

transnational contexts guards against casting it as a monolithic form which wipes out local, national and transnational engagement with its tenets, and highlights the “new relationship between government and knowledge through which governing activities are recast as nonpolitical and nonideological problems that need technical solutions” (Ong 2006: 3).

For most of its existence as an independent nation, India had a planned economy. Though there were small periodic measures of economic liberalization precipitated through agreements with international funding agencies starting in the 1960s, the debt crisis in 1991 hastened full-fledged liberalization of the economy. This was brought on by the invasion of Kuwait by Iraq which led to an increase in oil prices and a decrease in remittances from Indian workers in Kuwait, and the downgrading of India’s credit rating due to political instability. The Indian government requested and received a stand-by loan from the IMF. As per practice, this loan was accompanied with a set of structural adjustment programs (SAPs) including “a regime of ‘liberal imports,’ a progressive removal of administrative controls, . . . a strictly limited role for public investment, the privatization of publicly owned assets over a wide field, an invitation to multinational corporations to undertake investment in infrastructure under a guaranteed rate of return, and financial liberalization that would do away with all priority sector lending and subsidized credit” (Patnaik and Chandrasekhar 1998: 67).¹³

The liberalized Indian economy “relies heavily on foreign capital to raise the rate of investment and assumes that free trade will promote rather than inhibit further industrial diversification” (Ghosh 1998: 326). In this quest for direct foreign investment (FDI), the state has turned to the Indian diaspora as a potential resource. The diaspora has

¹³ Similar reforms have been instituted throughout South Asia. Sri Lanka underwent liberalization from 1977-1988, Pakistan 1980-1988 (Pasha 2000), and Bangladesh in 1991 (Chowdhury 2000). The forms liberalization takes varies between nations.

been courted as a source of FDI before 1991, however the number of Non-Resident Indian (NRI) schemes offered by the Reserve Bank and the discourse of diasporic investment into India greatly intensified after this moment. Despite this intensification, diasporic FDI has remained low, less than 4.25% of total FDI between 1991-2003 (Confederation of Indian Industry 2007: 29).¹⁴ Regardless of the low numbers, the diaspora continues to be targeted with events such as the Pravasi Bharatiya Divas (Overseas Indian Day) hosted yearly in Delhi by the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry's Diaspora Division. There is also continual maneuvering on ways to increase investment such as the recommendation by the Confederation of Indian Industry, a private industry advocacy group, to liberalize sectors in which the diaspora has a strong presence and expertise, such as education and retail.

Liberalization of the economy also dictated a reining in public programs that promoted social and rural development. Some who have been hit by the retreat of the state and experienced a decrease in their standard of living have turned to migration as an economic survival strategy. Citing works by Jaqui Alexander, Chandra Mohanty and others, Das Gupta states that “migration, from a radical Third World feminist perspective is a direct result of displacement induced by structural adjustment programs and neoliberal policies forced on the Third World” (2006: 13). She asserts that the drop in the standard of living which comes about through fiscal austerity programs in the global South combined with the privatization of health care in the United States have produced a pool of low paid and exploited South Asian female labor force who are funneled into domestic work (217-219).

¹⁴ Remittances, however, continue to increase yearly with US 25 billion sent in 2005 (Confederation of Indian Industry 2007: 36)

It is difficult to statistically substantiate Das Gupta's claims. However, the general trend of shifts in the global economy precipitating migration are borne out by the narratives of South Asian domestic workers (see Samar 1994, Chang 2000, and Domestic Workers United 2006 as well as Chapter 3). Unlike the numerical counting of FDI and remittances, the circulation of these women is not an official concern of South Asian governments, and in the case of India, not a part of their target for diasporic investment. For these reasons, they are not tracked and documented as the wealthier segments of the diaspora seem to be. Further it is in the interest of economy of the United States to keep this pool of reserve labor continually filled with women (and men) who occupy a tenuous migration and labor status (Chang 2000). Once in the United States, these women, mainly from India and Bangladesh, are hired by wealthy South Asian households, generally of dual income, who can no longer depend on the numerous state funded programs which in the past aided social reproduction activities. This necessitates the privatization of care which is managed differently based on one's access to resources. As a population with a large disposable income, upper middle class and wealthy South Asians have the ability to by-pass gutted public programs and hire private help. Thus, though I never asked, given both income and professional statistics, it is likely that households such as those that comprise the membership of GOPIO employ female labor migrants from South Asia to do the work of social reproduction.

NEOLIBERAL SUBJECT PRODUCTION

Steven Gregory writes that an understanding of the personal and political requires “an examination of how structural, economic, and political forces are experienced not by the *individual*, but by the person, an embodied nexus of social relationships, meanings and intersubjective agency” (2007: 207). In remainder of the dissertation, I examine what this looks like in GOPIO and Worker's Awaaz as their activities and self-creation

engaged with neoliberal discourse and practices both locally and transnationally. Through this, I attend to the subjects produced in each organization, or the ways that people are made through power that is enacted upon them by “schemes of surveillance, discipline, control and administration” (Ong 1996: 737, see also Foucault 1991).

Neoliberalism as a doctrine is both a somewhat unified belief system as well as a “complex, contradictory cultural and political project... with an agenda for reshaping the everyday life of contemporary global capitalism” (Duggan 2003: 70). As a purveyor of creative destruction, it seeks to reorganize the extant modes of social relations, labor, institutional frameworks, power and as nicely stated by David Harvey “habits of the heart” (2005: 3) through a restructuring of gender, race, and as well as class relationships (Duggan 2003, Mohanty 2003). Nevertheless, it is an inchoate and continually emergent form, hence both resistance and accommodation to it is diverse, contingent, and in some ways, act on the logic of new forms that marks neoliberalism itself.

In GOPIO and Worker’s Awaaz, the methods and terms of neoliberal subject production were manipulated and recast by the subjects’ own terms of engagement. As inverse articulations of neoliberal functioning, GOPIO and Worker’s Awaaz each encounter and tangle with neoliberalism in distinct ways. However, both exist under the prevailing neoliberal ideology of human worth and entrepreneurialization of the self. For migrants in the United States, this discourse translates literally as the evaluation of their labor and its “costs,” or as Vijay Prashad has stated “the United States wants these workers for their labor, but certainly not for their lives they must import as well” (2000: 71). Indeed, though occupying discrepant positions in terms of profession and capital, the migration histories of the membership of both groups can be viewed through the lens of labor migration. In the case of GOPIO, many members entered the United States under the third preference of migrant in the 1965 Immigration Act which gave preference to

individuals trained in needed science and arts professions. This fact of migration is the basis for the middle-class profile of large swathes of the South Asian, particularly Indian, community (Visweswaran 1997, Prashad 2000). In the case of Worker's Awaaz, transnational labor migration was an economic strategy employed by many domestic worker members to manage the effects of neoliberal policy in South Asia. As argued above, their labor is necessary not only wealthy South Asian households but other sectors of the service economy.

Using Prashad's insight as an entry point, I would argue that the excess that is the life of the laboring migrant becomes the site of discipline and, under neoliberal philosophy, the site of self-entrepreneurialization through the management and/or reconstruction of those parts that are deemed of little value. What this allowed and meant for each organization shaped not only their mission but also the modalities of action.

GOPIO was able to manipulate dominant discourses of middle class productive value in the United States, and in India, to claim rights and a place in both nations. In doing so, they illustrated how their class positioning, constructed through a history of migration as both "wanted" and beneficial to the nation, their entry into an bipolar racial structure in the United States through which they were able to disassociate from blackness, and the gendered valences of their family life as heads of normative middle-class households which can handle social reproduction without state aid, allowed them not only to control and order their migrant excess, but bring it into line with dominant discourses of success and worth, through their own efforts.

The membership of Worker's Awaaz enter as what Grace Chang has termed "disposable domestics" (2000), immigrant women whose labor is needed for the social reproduction of middle-class households, yet who are criminalized through immigration law and viewed as burdens on the American state and citizenry through welfare and labor

laws. As sites of potential criminality and burden, the excess of these women's lives are seen as the basis of their exclusion from full rights and their "unruliness" under both the state and their own ability to self-discipline. Given these factors, the cost of their excess is seen as outweighing the value of their labor.

In what follows, through an examination of GOPIO and Worker's Awaaz, this dissertation argues that the ability to act collectively under neoliberalism in the United States is dependent on organizational challenges or acquiescence to the discourse and enactment of neoliberal valuation. In the case of this study, I argue that both organizations, in differing ways, presented a narrative of normative class behavior in the South Asian diaspora. While this is very evident from the class composition and mission of GOPIO, I would like to contend that Worker's Awaaz's commitment to advocacy and service provision for low wage workers at the cost of reconfiguring the very grounds of migrant excess which neoliberalism produces, in many ways runs parallel rather than counter to the disciplining techniques of neoliberal power structures. In inadvertently seeking incorporation through engagement with power rather than resistance to it, the organization was always in danger of participating in a normative class discourse that relied on upward mobility, and thus undercutting its own mission.

ORGANIZATION OF DISSERTATION

Through attention to the situated locations and agency of GOPIO and Worker's Awaaz, I examine the contiguous, yet distinct borders of each organization to show the modes through which each group crafted itself, and argue that self-fashioning was based on their ability to contest and rework local and transnational castings of productivity. In the chapters that follow, I move through group meetings, conferences, transnational networking, and New York City in order to trace the disparate formations present in the

two organizations. By concentrating on organizations, I hope to highlight organizational theorizing and interaction with larger structural changes and discursive practices.

Chapters 1 and 2 examine GOPIO and Worker's Awaaz in turn, and focus on the construction of new subjectivities that are developed through organizational activity. I take these subjectivities as reflective of theories grounding organizational work and addressing membership's collective experiences under the differential effects of neoliberalism in both the United States and South Asia. Although the chapters are mainly concerned with the specificities of organizational dynamics, each chapter begins to lay the necessary groundwork to GOPIO's and Worker's Awaaz's anchoring in the dynamics of New York as a global city.

Chapter 1, "Producing a Modern Subject in GOPIO: Entrepreneurs, Human Rights, and the Indian Diaspora" examines the diasporic subject created through GOPIO's twin foci on capital investment in the Indian diaspora and human rights violations against diasporic Indians. I situate the organization's concerns within a narrative of the failure of the Indian state to modernize the nation and protect its overseas diasporans. Through investment and networking activities, and its work on human rights, GOPIO is able to insert itself into these gaps and in the process, cast itself as a platform for diasporic concerns. I focus on GOPIO's corralling of investment through an analysis of its 2002 Entrepreneurs' Conference, and analyze the organization's human rights activities through a reading of organizational literature. I argue that with these campaigns, GOPIO is able to enact a diaspora with affective, concretized ties formed in notions of responsibility and action. Through this, GOPIO presents certain segments of Indian diaspora as agents of modernity that are able to reach their full potential under the liberalization of the Indian economy. I also briefly look at portions of a report published by the High Level Committee on the Indian Diaspora, a committee convened by the

Indian government to research the Indian Diaspora and their relationship to India. With this move, we can see the convergence of GOPIO and state discourse and activity.

In chapter 2, “Contestations Over Worker Subjectivity: Class, Experience and Organizing in Worker’s Awaaz” I examine three moments when class-based distinctions among membership manifest through contestations over the meaning of the subjectivity “worker” propelled organizational activity. The three points are: first, the emergence of the term as it was used to distinguish between a “politicized” faction concerned with activism and a “bourgeois” faction rooted in advocacy in Sakhi for South Asian Women; second, the institutionalization of “worker” as a category in the by-laws of Worker’s Awaaz once the group became independent of Sakhi. This was in order to foreground the standpoint of low-wage workers through a division of membership along lines of workers and supporting members; and third, the tensions which arose when Worker’s Awaaz joined two other workers’ centers in a campaign focusing on work and time that linked a worker identity to current labor structures, rather than income. Through these examinations, I trace how debates about class identity arranged the organizational culture and activity in Worker’s Awaaz and at the same time provided a space for membership to make sense of work and contest neoliberal labor structures in the United States.

Chapter 3, “Self Making and Being Made: Institutions and Subjects in a Global City,” moves from the internal analysis of the each organization to one that situates GOPIO and Workers’ Awaaz in New York City. I introduce the city as an agent in order to draw out the specific dynamics of New York City, a global city and thus a major point in the flows of neoliberal capital. This chapter follows the urban anthropological tradition of taking the city as context and, through this, attends to the ways that the spaces each organization inhabits is created through the polarization of professions and incomes in New York City. The chapter illustrates how neoliberal dynamics produce gendered sites

of engagement for each organization, and further, different venues to demand citizenship. I propose that due to privatization of care and roll-backs in labor protection in the United States, the household, a major site of struggle at Worker's Awaaz, is formed through the migration and employment of low-wage immigrant women to perform the tasks of social reproduction. I then illustrate the ways that the Indian State is materialized in diaspora through interactions between GOPIO and representatives of the Indian government that pass through New York City. In these interactions, GOPIO is able to pressure the government for new modes of diasporic citizenship and recognition, and engage in the practice of flexible citizenship (Ong 1999). The presence of the symbolic state is tied to the position of New York City as a major node of global capital flow, and thus as a site where competition between nations for capital plays out.

Finally, a note on my use of "Indian" and "South Asian." Some have argued that the use of "South Asian," though motivated by the desire for an inclusive political subjectivity, often masks the dominance of Indian-American interests and power based in national origin (Islam 1993, Kurien 2003). However, my employment of the terms reflects GOPIO's and Worker's Awaaz's own casting of organizational, national and regional identities, and is an indicator of the discursive, political and state institutions each organization engages. In other words, the monikers of South Asian and Indian in this instance are not interchangeable or descriptive terms, but are conscious choices that reflect the political projects of the two organizations. For example, 'South Asian' in Workers' Awaaz gestured to the racialization of Pakistanis, Bangladeshis, Indians and Sri Lankans as South Asian in the United States, and the political projects that flow from this. While "Indian," especially in the term "People of Indian Origin," is employed to claim primordial connections not only to the Indian nation-state, but any pre-existing cultural identity that is understood as rooted there.

Chapter 1: The Diasporic Subject of GOPIO: Entrepreneurs, Human Rights and the Production of Modernity

A recent article by Jagdish Bhagwati in *Foreign Affairs* takes on the issue of migration, which he states is central to “global problems that now seize the attention of politicians and intellectuals across the world” (2003: 98). In the article, Bhagwati addresses not only illegal and unskilled migration to developing nations, but also skilled migrants who leave their developing nations for developed ones. A migration pattern commonly referred to as the brain drain. This type of migration, the author argues, as have others, is detrimental to the home nation, robbing it of skilled professionals and their labor, and thus a key component to their development and progress. Bhagwati, however, proposes a reconfiguring of this migration pattern and suggests that we move from a brain drain model, which emphasizes loss, to a diaspora model which “integrates present and past citizens into a web of rights and obligations in the extended community defined with the home country as the center” (2003:100). Speaking of the Indian diaspora in the United States, the author calculates that “aggregate income of Indian-born American residents...is 10% of India’s national income” (ibid). Bhagwati suggests that India tax its citizens living abroad. This would not only create a sense of obligation but would greatly raise the revenues of the Indian government. By highlighting obligations such as taxation, Bhagwati’s model directs diasporic investment through the state or other venues towards structural development.¹⁵

Duty in the diaspora model does not only flow one-way, however. “Home” governments must grant rights and benefits such as property ownership and voting to close the circle of obligation. It is important to keep in mind that Bhagwati is not

¹⁵ Though remittances back to India from its diaspora is a common practice, studies have shown that this route of investment in a home nation often goes to family consumption and upward mobility.

speaking of the entirety of the Indian diaspora, but the “brain drain,” those with high-demand skills who leave due to “developed countries’ appetite for skilled migrants” or the inability of “less developed countries...to offer modern professionals the economic rewards or the social conditions that they seek” (99). The use of Indians living in the United States must be seen as an intentional strategy that cannot be generalized to the rest of the diaspora. Given the variation in localized wealth in the Indian diaspora, not all members would or could play the same role. Rather, certain segments would be more obligated to help the nation, and in turn would be recipients of more benefits. Thus, this diaspora model does not take as its object the entire Indian diaspora, but a small sliver that can purportedly help develop the Indian nation-state.

In this chapter, I attend to the production of diaspora and its obligation to the nation-state through an examination of the Global Organization of People of Indian Origin (GOPIO). By diaspora, I do not mean how people travel or move, but rather the “dynamic social *processes* of diasporization from which ... groups are created” (Butler 2001: 193 emphasis in original). Through their mission of “pooling resources, both financial and professional, for the benefit of PIOs, the countries they come from and India,” GOPIO seeks to “promote a common cultural heritage and therefore create a binding relationship;” “mobilize financial, intellectual and professional resources of Indians abroad for their mutual development and advancement;” and “encourage interaction between communities of Indians abroad on a global level to deliberate and decide on common issues” (GOPIO: 2001). Looking at GOPIO through a lens of diasporization, these are practices and sites are where diaspora is done, where collective acts maintain or create a diasporic community (Tololyan 1996: 15-19). I examine how connections, sentiment, and relationships are produced in a setting that is self-consciously diasporic. In order to undertake this, the chapter offers a close reading of the

organization's annual Entrepreneurs Conference held in 2002. From this I illustrate how an Indian diasporic formation and subject is produced in networks obligation constituted through discourses of transnational investment and human rights.

I start with a history of GOPIO in order to provide background on how these two modes, transnational investment and human rights became foundational concerns of the organization. Following I will outline the concept of diasporas as chaordic transnational formations of co-responsibility that allow flexibility and multiple attachments (Werbner 1998, 2005). After laying out a theoretical framework for diaspora that attends to diaspora created in action, the chapter turns its focus to the Global Indian Entrepreneurs Conference, where GOPIO's mission of pooling diasporic resources is enacted and produces a subject formed in networks of small-scale transnational capital and finance cast in the language of service. A moment at the Conference that pushed for the organization to think beyond (inside?) transnational capital and confront local productions of diasporic Indians as subjects outside the nation is also examined. I conclude with a discussion of the narrative of diasporic modernity that is created through GOPIO and new Indian institutions that target the diaspora. In these tellings, segments of the diaspora are agents of modernity who can help remedy the failures of a planned economy.

THE GLOBAL ORGANIZATION OF PEOPLE OF INDIAN ORIGIN

GOPIO emerged from the First Global Convention of People of Indian Origin in 1989. The convention was convened by the National Federation of Indian Associations¹⁶ and was held in New York City. According to GOPIO documents, over 3000 people from 25 countries¹⁷ attended the convention that "identified and discussed problems facing

¹⁶ The NFIA is an umbrella group for different Indian organizations in the United States.

¹⁷ Two of the attendees were Cheddi Jagan and Badudeo Pandey who later became the president and prime minister of Guyana and Trinidad and Tabago respectively.

people of Indian origin [and] also provided necessary fora at the national and international level to voice their concerns” (GOPIO 1999:14). At the end of the convention 23 resolutions were passed. These encapsulated concerns that emerged at the conference, and while not binding in any way, laid the groundwork for the GOPIO’s mission and activities.

The first resolution, “On Violation of Political and Civil Rights of People of Indian Origin” begins with a statement of belief “in the basic human rights of all people enshrined in the Universal Declaration on Human Rights.” It goes on to state “that in many countries of the world where people of Indian origin comprise a significant proportion of the people, their civil and political, as well as, social and cultural rights are under constant assault.” GOPIO “condemns the oppressive measures and legislation through which racial discrimination . . . is practiced against the people of Indian origin, thereby denying or depriving them of their fundamental rights as citizens of their countries.” This first resolution ends with a call to the United Nations to both set up a special committee to examine the situations in the listed countries – Fiji, Guyana, Malaysia, Surinam, South Africa, Sri Lanka, and Trinidad and Tobago – and take “appropriate measures aimed at eliminating racial discrimination and oppression of people of Indian Origin in these countries.”

With the first resolution delineating human rights violations as a fact in the diaspora, the resolutions immediately following addressed specific nations. The first and most pressing was Fiji.¹⁸ The convention occurred two years after the 1987 coup, led by Lieutenant Colonel Sitiveni Rabuka, which overthrew the democratically elected coalition government of the Fijian Labor Party and the Indo-Fijian National Federation Party. The post-coup government instituted numerous laws that “legislated unequal and

¹⁸ For more on Fiji see Kelly and Kaplan (2001)

reduced representation for Indo-Fijians and established a constitutional basis for racial segregation” (GOPIO resolutions) against Indo-Fijians and lead to the migration of much of the Indo-Fijian population. This resolution and two others address Fiji directly, recommending that the United Nations, the Commonwealth, and “any institution emerging from this Convention” apply pressure and intervene in the situation.¹⁹

Other manifestations and locations of human rights abuse were violence and discrimination against Sri Lankan Tamils, the ongoing state of emergency and apartheid regime in South Africa,²⁰ the rigging of elections in Guyana which prevented the “majority of Guyanese including People of Indian Origin from exercising their democratic rights to choose their government,” and the continued cultural hegemony against PIOs by the Afro-Trinidadian population in Trinidad and Tabago. This set of resolutions end with an exhortation to “all governments to actively promote policies of multiculturalism and that all groups, including people of origins in India be given right to realize their full cultural expression and thus recognize their contribution towards the development of respective national cultures.”

The next set of resolutions aimed to engender new bonds between PIOs and India. “India and People of Indian Origin - Role, Responsibility, Relationship,” “Resolution on Poverty in India,” and “Role of Community Groups for India’s Development” all pinpointed areas that needed to be changed in order to foster a strong relationship between India and the diaspora. The first of these resolutions was passed to “identify a role for Overseas Indians in India’s development by developing a *match* between *India’s Concerns and Needs* and the *resources of Overseas Indians*” (emphasis in original). The

¹⁹ In fact, the United Nations had condemned the coup soon after it occurred. In addition, Fiji was expelled from the Commonwealth after a second coup four months after the first when the Deuba Accord which provided for shared power between the deposed government and the new government under the Governor General.

²⁰ At the time of the 1989 convention, South Africa was still under an apartheid regime.

resolution goes on to suggest that “this body” would “establish a brain trust” to target ten core areas in India including agriculture, bio-tech, telecom, housing, electronics and energy among others. In addition to identifying areas, the resolutions also positioned the organization that was to emerge as a mediating institution between the diaspora and the Indian state.

After the convention, GOPIO was founded and a core group of members from the United States began canvassing diasporic community leaders in other nations, such as Malaysia, Fiji, Mauritius, France, Italy, Singapore, and Argentina, to establish chapters.²¹ As of early 2007, GOPIO has established 25 chapters across 19 nations in North America, Europe, Africa, Southeast Asia, the Caribbean, and the South Pacific. While India was always a point of engagement in GOPIO’s early work, it was not the central node in creating connections. Rather, effort was spent on establishing multiple nodes of diasporic attachment, thus decentering India, and centering the diaspora outside.

The group also steadily acted on a number of resolutions. In 1990, the organization filed a human rights violation petition to the United Nations regarding the Indian-descent population in Fiji, and did the same in 1992 for Tamils in Sri Lanka. In 1993, at the Second Global Convention, a constitution was drafted and elections held. In 1994, GOPIO submitted a proposal to the Indian government to develop a “non resident alien” scheme while the government considered granting dual citizenship. Five years later, a card, named the Person of Indian Origin Card, was made available. According to Thomas Abraham, GOPIO International’s president, GOPIO not only introduced the

²¹ It is worth noting that many of the diasporic Indians in these countries migrated before Indian independence, and the formation of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh (then East Pakistan) in 1947. The only time the issue of who is and isn’t Indian emerged was when talking about the modern nation states that were carved out of colonial India. Thus, the moment of migration, more than region or religion, seemed to mark descendants as Indian.

plan, but also organized and put pressure on the Indian government to bring it to completion.

Beginning from its gestation at the 1989 conference, GOPIO had identified two points of action to solidify diasporic linkages. The first, ties to India and aid in its economic development, laid the groundwork for economic activity to create both concrete and affective ties that situated diasporic connection to the homeland. This was later also extended to cover other “nations with a significant PIO population” where investment opportunities existed. The second, human rights violations against PIOs, has provided a narrative of national exclusion and persecution based on the cultural traits that tie all diasporans together. However, it receded as a main concern as the focus on investment, or pooling resources, became the main organizational activity.

The 1965 Cohort and Organizational Foundations

While an approach to GOPIO that emphasizes the diasporic and transnational nature of the organization locates its creation in denationalized networks ‘out there,’ I want to advance the position that the visions of the organization can also be located in the experience of its founding members as immigrants in the United States. Thus, both “diasporic perspectives” and “claiming America” (Wong 2000) are necessary to adequately understand the subject produced in the organization. Though GOPIO is an international organization, for much of its history, leadership has been composed of Indians residing in the United States. At the time of fieldwork, nine out of 16 non-region specific positions were held by persons in the United States.²² Most, if not all, of the leadership is composed of immigrants who entered soon after the 1965 Immigration Act. This moment of entry into the local-national context of the United States has influenced

²² As the organization grew and established chapters across the globe, the national demographic composition of office holders changed little. Still US heavy, in the current composition half of the 18 non-region specific offices are held by US residents.

how the organization enters into the diaspora (Siu 2001: 12) and how this is reflected in the activities and concerns of GOPIO.

In her ethnography *Other Modernities: Gendered Yearnings in China After Socialism*, Lisa Rofel examines three groups of women who work in a silk factory in Hongzhu, China. Each group came of age during a different moment in China's political and state history. Rofel utilizes these three clusters, grouped by common timing of entry as workers in the factory, to illustrate how gender identity was tied to state structure and ideology at a certain moment. Rofel categorized each group of women into cohorts and deftly establishes how large-scale trends are experienced and understood at the local/personal level. In this conception, *cohort* refers to the groupings that emerge due to the "inspiration, desire and discontents most fully formed within specific political moments that do not map isomorphically onto discrete decades" (1999: 289). Using this reworking of cohort, we can see how the foundational visions of GOPIO are heavily influenced by the ways that the post-1965 immigrant leadership has experienced both class and the shifting landscape of race in the United States.

The 1965 Immigration Act overturned four centuries of immigration policies, based on a national origins quota system. Following the priority for family reunification of immigrants who were already in the United States, both citizens and green card holders, preference was to be given to "professionals and artists, needed skilled and unskilled laborers, and refugees" (Takaki 1989: 419). Both the policy makers and nativists did not worry about the impact that the immigration reform would have on the ethnic composition of the United States for they believed that most immigration, even after the quota system was abolished, would still occur from Europe due to the preference for family reunification. Since there was not substantial Asian presence prior to this moment, many felt there was little likelihood of an influx of people from Asia.

Immigration reform in the United States coincided with a moment when India had the highest number of graduates in postsecondary education of any developing nation (Hing 1994: 101). Under the Nehruvian vision of nation building, science and industry were to be the cornerstones of a developing India. To this end, the government established a number of national and regional technical institutes to train a new cadre of engineers and scientists. Unfortunately, while the education system in India produced these professionals, an industry and technology infrastructure to absorb them did not exist. The United States, however, was expanding its economy and developing new jobs in medicine, science, business and education. It is into this moment in the United States that GOPIO leadership entered as immigrants. In what follows, I profile three GOPIO leaders.

Thomas Abraham

The cover of the November 2002 issue of NRI Today is composed of a close up of a man's bust with the words "Dr. Thomas Abraham: The Man Behind GOPIO" emblazoned across. Abraham is often credited as the founder of GOPIO and has been active since the original conference in 1989. He was also the first president of the organization and is now the Chairman. Dr. Abraham came to the United States in 1973 to pursue a doctorate in Engineering at Columbia. He is now the vice president of Business Communications Co., an industry research firm in Connecticut.

Abraham has a history of being involved in Indian organizations, starting as a student at Columbia University where he was a member of the Columbia University India Club. He has continued his involvement in Indian organizations since this time. It would not be an exaggeration to say that Abraham has had a hand in shaping the organizational history of Indian New York City. He is the co-founder of two pan-Indian organizations. The first, the Federation of Indian Associations (FIA), was established in 1978. The

second, the National Federation of Indian Organizations (NFIA), now the National Federation of Indian-American Associations, just two years later (still NFIA), in 1980. Most of Dr. Abraham's organizational activities have been with founding and leading groups that are space-takers in and for the Indian community.

Jagat Motwani

Like Thomas Abraham, Jagat Motwani came to the United States as a student, first as a Fulbright Scholar at Smith College from 1966-67 while at the University of Baroda, India, and three years later to enter the graduate program in Social Welfare at Fordham College. After receiving his Ph.D. Dr. Motwani held teaching positions at the Institute of Social Sciences, Kashi Vidya Peeth, Varanasi and was a member of the Faculty of Social Work at the University of Baroda, India. In the United States, he was the Assistant Director of Social Services at the NYU Medical Center.

However, unlike Dr. Abraham, Dr. Motwani did not initially become involved in ethnic Indian organizations upon his arrival. Instead, in line with his professional training, Dr. was involved in Heart and Hand for the Handicapped (HHH), a service association that collected funds for institutions in India that aided differently abled people. His first interaction with ethnic organizations was in 1981 when he went to a Federation of Indian Associations event as a representative of HHH. He joined the organization and a year later he became the vice-president of the NFIA. He attributed much of his involvement to Dr. Abraham. When I would ask why he started participating in FIA or the NFIA, his response always included the refrain that "Thomas encouraged me." His initial office in GOPIO was as Secretary General, and is currently the International Coordinator and Academic Chair.

While Dr. Motwani has been heavily involved in the organization, he is not as visible as Dr. Abraham. Rather, he works behind the scenes in numerous capacities.

During the first five years of inactivity, Dr. Motwani was one of the members who traveled to different countries to meet with local Indian diasporic leaders and establish GOPIO chapters. Another contribution has been to do much of the work for the many conferences that GOPIO has organized. Mr. Motwani's most "visible" position is as historian of the Indian diaspora. He has published two books through GOPIO on the subject; and in souvenir brochures, he has extensive essays recounting Indian migration and what holds the diaspora together.

During my interactions with him, he was always keen to speak about what he saw as anthropological fallacies regarding the historical existence of Indian culture and its singularity. The two points of contention he expressed with the discipline was first over the language classification Indo-European. Dr. Motwani believed that Sanskrit, the ancient language of India, was autochthonous to India, and not to be found elsewhere. His second point of contention was the claim that the Mohenjo Daro and Harappa, the Indus Valley civilizations, were not Vedic civilizations. Dr. Motwani believed in the uniqueness and singularity of Indian culture. For him this was the essence that held the diaspora together, and gave it commonality.²³

From these two profiles, two points come to the fore. The first is immigration as students to study in fields that were categorized as preferred professions under the 1965 Immigration Act. As will be discussed below, the professional needs of the United States at the time the Immigration Act was passed constituted the Indian community along specific class lines, and it was through this that one mode of racialization was experienced. The second point specific to Dr. Motwani, is the singularity and endurance

²³ Dr. Motwani incorporated a fair amount of Hindutva discourse about the uniqueness of Indian culture, and its emergence and ties to the actual territory of India in his conversations with me. Though I never had reason to believe he was a hardcore Hindutva believer, one who thought that non-Hindus, particularly Muslims have no place in India, he did argue that there was a primordial Indian culture that predated Vedic times.

of Indian culture across time and space. Though there is a history of attributing a uniqueness to Indian culture (and other cultures as well), the shift in terrain from race to culture that emerges with multiculturalism provides part of the context for an Indian culture that is formed in part through multicultural ideology in the United States, then overlaid on the diaspora.

Given the immigration pattern of Indians who entered after the 1965 Immigrant Act, the community was “designed” and “selected” as an economically successful one (Visweswaran 1997, Prashad 2000). Both Drs. Motwani and Abraham came to the United States in pursuit of advanced degrees in fields that fell under the third preference in the 1965 Immigration Act: Dr. Abraham in engineering and Dr. Motwani in medicine. Both were also able to secure professional jobs, Dr. Abraham after he finished his Ph.D. and Dr. Motwani once he returned to the United States.

Kamala Visweswaran suggests that scholars examine “how class determines the *differential* nature and experience of racial formation” (1997: 7). For the 1965 cohort, class composition greatly influenced how they came to see themselves as racial subjects in the United States. Both Drs. Abraham and Motwani, along with other persons in leadership positions, entered the United States during a shift in emphasis of what the model in “model minority” was. The phrase itself comes from a 1966 *US News & World Report* story that praised the self-sufficiency of Chinese-Americans as “thrifty, law abiding, and industrious people” as opposed to African Americans who were organizing for and demanding civil rights. A similar article about Japanese-Americans appeared in the *New York Times Magazine* the same year. Both articles detailed how these groups, once the target of racism and oppression, were able to succeed through their own hard work. In effect, the basic idea behind the model minority is that “some ‘minorities’ are able through their self borne efforts, without relying on state support to be socially

mobile, whereas others seems to be constitutionally unable to do so” (Prashad 2000: 176, also see Omatsu 1993, Bhattacharjee 1997, Palumbo-Liu 2001). However, after a decade the focus shifted from overcoming adversity through self-sufficiency to “economic success based on an extremely aggressive work ethic and strong family cohesion” (Gotanda 2000: 384). Indeed, one of the first edited volumes about this group of “Asian Indians” is titled *An Immigrant Success Story: East Indians in America* (Helweg and Helweg 1990).

The model minority conception has often been called a myth. In doing so, diversity in the Asian American community is highlighted, and an attempt is made to deflect the racial positioning that the term contains. However, Neil Gotanda urges us to examine if there is some truth to the myth. The truth he is questioning is not whether a cultural inheritance of success and hard work exists, but rather, relating to Visweswaran, one that recognizes class privilege, and not only oppression, in emergent Asian American racial categories (2000). Along with other members I interviewed, both Drs. Abraham and Motwani believed that the Indian community made itself through hard work. Dr. Motwani was explicit about this in my first meeting with him. After the interview was over, Dr. Motwani asked me to have tea. He asked me about my family, education, and experiences growing up in the United States. During the course of the conversation, he complimented me on pursuing a graduate degree. Then asked me, as someone who grew up in the United States, why I thought African Americans did not take opportunities handed to them. The conversation quickly turned to a discussion of discrimination and the demographics of the Indian community that entered under the 1965 Immigration Act. While the discussion was lively and friendly, at the end Dr. Motwani emphasized that there was something in Indian culture that strove for excellence. This idea of Indian excellence has been writ large onto the diaspora in much of GOPIO’s literature. Phrases

such as “expertise and financial resources of the diaspora,” and “endowed with a strong entrepreneurial capability” are repeated in different variations.

If racialization via model minority provided one mode through which notions of success could be mapped onto the 1965 Cohort and then onto the diaspora, multiculturalism provided another. Although ideology of the model minority located economic success in cultural values, it was explicitly about race and racial hierarchies in the United States. Multiculturalism, however, sidesteps race in favor of discrete groups marked by cultural beliefs and traits. It is a vision of pluralism that promotes tolerance of differences and places them on a level grid. Thus difference is not produced through networks of raced and classed power, but rather through static cultural practices and norms traced through lineage.²⁴ Not only does multicultural ideology locate the production of difference in culture, by doing so it obscures social relations built on inequalities of race, ethnicity, gender and work (Palumbo-Liu 1995).

One aspect of the multicultural moment is the establishment of cultures as absolute and authentic. As official pressure to assimilate weakens in Western nations,²⁵ diasporic populations can reference and create a global culture (Tololyan 1991). Dr. Motwani’s pursuit of documenting Indian culture and its persistence in diaspora can be seen as part and parcel of this moment. Writing about the Chinese diaspora, Arlif Dirlik writes that “because the very phenomena of diaspora has produced a multiplicity of Chinese cultures, the affirmation of ‘Chineseness’ can be sustained only by recourse to a common origin, or descent, that persists in spite of widely different historical trajectories” (2000: 44).

²⁴ For extended critiques of multiculturalism, see San Juan (2000) and Goldberg (1994).

²⁵ Though this statement must be revisited in light of the “War on Terror” and renewed debates about Western tolerance of immigrant presence.

Ashook Ramsaran

The same can be applied to this conception of Indian-ness. Ashook Ramsaran, GOPIO's Secretary General, came from Guyana to New York City in 1968. He was one of the few twice-migrants (Bhachu 1985) holding an office in GOPIO. Like both Dr. Abraham and Dr. Motwani, Mr. Ramsaran came to go to school. However for him, it was to get his bachelor's degree in electrical engineering. After receiving a master's in the same, Mr. Ramsaran worked at an engineering company until it folded. At that time Mr. Ramsaran started his own company and has been running it since.

Mr. Ramsaran is and has been very involved in local community organizations, though none besides the Guyanese East Indian Civic Association were Indian associations. He came to GOPIO through a brief article about Dr. Motwani's book, *Global Migration of Indians: Saga of Adventure, Enterprise, Identity & Integration*, in the local Caribbean newspaper. He called and obtained the number of the author and contacted Dr. Motwani, who invited him to join GOPIO. Though Mr. Ramsaran was already involved with an Indo-Guyanese association, it is only with GOPIO that he began to identify as a part of the diaspora. When I asked him how GOPIO has formed his position as an *Indian*, he answered that it was through their commitment to address the situation of Indians globally, speak up for their rights, and through their willingness to "bend the ear" of commissions and other officials on the situation of Indo-Caribbeans that he felt part of the diaspora. He felt that, people of Indian origin in the Caribbean "had a more difficult time to survive culturally" than those who emigrated from India to the United States. This was not only due to the amount of time that had passed, but also because the former had to integrate into a diverse population. Being a global organization, GOPIO, had a larger view of Indian identity. Mr. Ramsaran stated that people from the Caribbean do not have a link to where they came from. But through

GOPIO's efforts, especially being a watchdog for discrimination against people of Indian origin, the links are being forged.

Woven in and out of Mr. Ramsaran's narrative is the loss of Indian culture that occurred with migration to the Caribbean. This is compounded by temporal distance, and more importantly, participation in the hybrid culture of Guyana. However, as seen by Mr. Ramsaran's re-entry as an Indian, not Indo-Guyanese, this lost cultural identity was reclaimed through GOPIO and its activities. In other words, the loss has more than stopped, it has been reversed as GOPIO brings all members of the diaspora into the Indian fold. As indicated by Mr. Ramsaran, this could not happen in Guyana since participation in the national community is premised on a different understanding of belonging.

CREATING DIASPORA

Writing against what she describes as the "aestheticization of the diaspora concept," Pnina Werbner urges scholars to rethink the imagination of diaspora as "constituted by a compelling sense of *moral co-responsibility* embodied in material performance which is extended through and across space" (2005: 42, emphasis mine). This shifts how diasporic subjects envision themselves as co-diasporans, not only through texts and other cultural products that are created in and speak to the experiences of diaspora spaces (Gilroy 1993, Appadurai 1996, Brah 1996, Gopinath 2005), but also in transnational diasporic *action*.

Werbner's consideration of co-responsibility as vital for diasporic formations, as opposed to other formations of movement such as immigrant, refugee, etc., echoes William Safran and others whose typological definition of diasporas include valences of "ethnocommunal consciousness and solidarity" (Safran 1991: 84). For Safran this is dependent on the centrality of the homeland in diasporic visions and orientations. While

picking up on the importance of ethnocommunal consciousness and solidarity as necessary preconditions for co-responsibility, Werbner troubles the affective unidirectional production of diaspora by decentering the homeland as the North Star. Rather, she points to the multidirectional sensibility of diasporas by employing a notion of diasporas as chaordic formations, arrangements that “reproduce and extend themselves without any centralized command structures (2005: 34). While they have no center that can exert control, they “paradoxically...continue to recognize the center and to acknowledge at least some obligations and responsibilities to it and the larger whole” (ibid).

A chaordic formation is both independent from and dependent on the homeland, and GOPIO’s mission statement attests to these dual tracks. The mission and activities of GOPIO also point to the interplay between transnational formations, such as diaspora, and the nation-state as mutually constitutive but not mutually exclusive as each reacts to the other’s maneuvering. This, as will be discussed below, can be seen in the organization’s relationship with the India, not just as an affective site, but one that it presses for official recognition and policy changes.²⁶

The notion of the Indian diaspora as a chaordic formation, and GOPIO as one node, allows attention to the flexibility and various modes of diaspora-making the organization carries out. Though the Entrepreneurs Conference is the main manifestation in the creation of service, other demonstrations include raising money for calamities in diasporic settings, pressing the Indian government to be responsible for its citizens who emigrate abroad as labor migrants through pressuring the governments in the United Arab Emirates to change labor laws for migrant workers, and hosting visiting Indian and PIO

²⁶ For work on the role that national governments and diasporas play with each other see Parreñas (2001), Basch (1994), Nyiri (2001), Roth (2002).

diasporic dignitaries. Thus, GOPIO provides one venue for the Indian diaspora to manifest as a “mobilized” diaspora (Sheffer 1995), for the benefit of the diaspora itself, the nations they come from, and India.

Pooling Resources

From September 12-15, 2002, the Global Organization of People of Indian Origin (GOPIO) held the third Global Indian Entrepreneurs Conference. Themed “People of Indian Origin – Technology, Investment, Business and Networking Opportunities,” it brought together business people, investors and government officials from different parts of the Indian diaspora to gather and network with each other. The conference took place at the Crown Plaza Hotel in Queens New York, eight miles from downtown Manhattan, three miles from the closest subway station, and a quick drive from Long Island and Connecticut.

A short walk through the lobby and conference activity was immediately visible. In the wide hallway of the conference center was a registration table. The registration fee was \$135 for the three days of panels and talks. A few people stand near the beverage table, fixing themselves tea or coffee. The hallway quickly fills as the session “Opportunities in the Hospitality Industry” finishes. There is a fifteen-minute Networking Break before the next set of speakers begins. About 40 people are milling about, some talk with each other, some wait near the beverage table. As the speakers from the session come out a few conference attendees approach them.

Opposite the registration table is a table for Kali Travels, an Indo-Caribbean travel agency. One of their specialties, and the one being advertised with colorful flyers, is the *Bharat Yatra* or India Journey Tours. The tours are marketed specifically for diasporic Indians from the Caribbean to help them “reconnect” to India. The agency has a “deep understanding of India’s cultural heritage” which the packaged tour is designed to

showcase. The only other table in the hallway belongs to The Federation of Indian Chambers of Industry and Commerce or FICCI. Founded in 1927, FICCI has long been an organization that represented private industry in India. They have been courting smaller businesses and ventures in the past decade. In the space of the conference, located in suburban Queens, entrepreneurialism, culture, and India are entangled to create the Indian diaspora.

The Entrepreneurs Conference opened on September 12 with an inaugural address by Sir Anerood Jugnauth, the prime minister of Mauritius, who is of Indian descent. At a banquet dinner attended by about 90 people, the Prime Minister began by describing the upcoming conference as a place to “share...vast experience ...for mutual benefit” and a “platform to rekindle the bond of friendship and to establish new partnerships in the global economy.” He then went onto to map a circuit of exchange in the diaspora against the backdrop of “the changing characteristics of international trade [which has] brought about accelerated liberalization and globalization.”

Standing at a podium, the Prime Minister began plotting points in the diasporic circuit:

From ... Canada, from Mauritius to Trinidad and Tobago. This transactional community is imbued with a strong business acumen and dedication to hard work. From the trader of the Fiji Islands to the whiz kid of Silicon Valley, from the banker of Singapore to the scientist of NASA, PIOs perform very well wherever they are settled.

Adding some humor, and self-deprecation, he added, “and some of them have been successful in politics even becoming Prime Minister and President.” He continued,

India today occupies a prestigious position in the league of nations as regards entrepreneurship and technological development. It is a country of reference in information and communication technology. India has a large pool of qualified IT

professionals and countries in the Diaspora can rely on their expertise in developing their own local IT resource base.

In the remainder of the twenty-minute speech, Jagnauth lays out what is needed to develop India and also his country, Mauritius. The Prime Minister sets up the Indian diaspora as global financial actors marked by a shared culture, history and potential future. In his speech, Jagnauth points to the differently situated position of various diasporic segments through the financial roles that each play in their respective countries. This was a fitting opening to the conference as it linked the Indian diaspora to its capital practices.

The arrangement of the panels for the conference mirrored the two ways that the inaugural speech plotted the diaspora, trade and place. Friday sessions were industry-specific, highlighting Nanotechnology and Biotechnology, Software/Networking/Wireless Technologies, the Hospitality Industry and Franchising and Service. In addition to the topic matter of all but one panel focusing on high tech or cutting edge technology, the language was of new and emerging areas of investment. All sessions were oriented towards the future. Most presentations addressed “What’s New,” “Emerging Opportunities,” and the “Change Ahead.” Even the franchising group joined in on this with one speaker prophesizing the day when “McDonald’s will be run by robots” thus eliminating the current need to hire human workers.

Saturday was the last and busiest day. Region-specific sessions focusing on India, North America, the West Indies and Africa and Europe, the Middle East and Far East divided and mapped major regions of the diaspora. These sessions ran parallel with workshops lead by businesspeople in the tri-state region. All presenters were government representatives in commerce and finance, businesspeople who held high positions in their company, or members of non-governmental capital bodies such as chambers of

commerce. Presenters were from all points in the diaspora, and sessions tended to follow a general pattern, with each presenter speaking of the conditions for investment in their particular country and providing statistics. The conference ended that evening with cultural performances and a ceremony honoring three PIOs who were given GOPIO's Leadership Award. Anil Gayan, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Regional Cooperation in Mauritius was honored for his political leadership. Gopal Khanna, the Peace Corps Chief Information Officer and Karan Bhatia, US Department of Commerce Deputy Under Secretary were honored for political and business achievements. The conference was well attended. From registration records the organizers estimated that 300 people from fifteen countries had participated.

The conference was a testament to the flexibility that some in the Indian diaspora can exercise and highlighted the potential flow of small-scale finance across national borders. Ties among the diaspora were created in these flows as individuals and businesses established connections and expanded networks. This was done not only through a focus on specific industries and nations, but also by convening financially successful members of the diaspora who have the resources to create and participate in networks of financial investment. In other words, the Entrepreneurs Conference provided a space for the diaspora to be actualized, not only through the networking the panels emphasized, but also by being a space where people from all points of the diaspora could gather. Thus, a conference attendee could meet the director of Nanocrystal Technology located in New York and also talk to the chairman of the Demerara Bank in Guyana and both can talk to the president of the Fil-Indian Chamber of Commerce from the Philippines or the representative from the government of Mauritius to ascertain the commercial climate in each country and flush out ideal sites for investment opportunities.

An Atrocity Inflicted on One PIO is an Atrocity Inflicted on Us All

The first session after the Networking Lunch on Saturday was “Opportunities in West Indies and Africa.” I was told earlier in the day by Mr. Ramsaran to make sure I attended this session. He assured me that it would be unlike all others at the conference. There were four speakers, one of which was Ravi Dev, the head of the Guyanese political party Rise, Organize and Rebuild (ROAR).²⁷ Mr. Dev was the last speaker and according to the program was to present on the topic of development opportunities in Guyana. He began his presentation with the polemical statement, “Indians are political eunuchs.” Needless to say, he did not go on to discuss investment opportunities in Guyana.

Rather, Mr. Dev used the example Guyana to talk about the disenfranchisement of Indians in diasporic sites. He argued that while globalization has brought the world closer, it has also “facilitated the retention of separate identities” in the same national space through the establishment of multicultural nations. In each of these nations, groups function through social and cultural comparison with each other, and based on these comparisons, claim different entitlements, specifically around political power in its various forms.

Upon independence in Guyana, Mr. Dev continued, the descendents of African slaves were seen as the group that had suffered the most. They had also Westernized by adopting European clothes and converting to Christianity. In contrast, the descendents of indentured Indians had lived separately and kept their cultural markers, including clothing and a Hindu religious identity. In comparing the two populations, the African-Guyanese were seen as the inheritors of the nation due to both their historical suffering, and closer cultural proximity to the leaving colonial rulers. The establishment of Guyana as an African descent nation in which Indians have been marginalized, both culturally

²⁷ Mr. Dev went on to become a member of parliament in Guyana.

and politically, has lead to continuing violence against Indians, including anti-Indian riots and killings in 1998. ROAR was founded because of the silence around this violence and the powerlessness of the Indian community in general. Mr. Dev believed that even a government led by Cheddi Jagan, who is Indo-Guyanese, was no guarantee of the incorporation of Indians. Mr. Dev passionately proposed that groups like GOPIO and events like the Entrepreneurs Conference focus on the political interests and advantages – or lack thereof – of PIOs worldwide, and the ways that political power has been taken away or kept from them. His presentation ended with the exhortation that Indians cannot do business “outside of politics and the political situation.”

As Mr. Ramsaran had promised, the session was unlike any of the others. Mr. Dev was a fiery speaker and his presentation was meant to incite. And it did, as evidenced by the momentary shift in tenor during the question and answer period that followed. On the panel with Mr. Dev was Cobs Pillay from the Department of Trade and Industry in South Africa. During his presentation, after a brief introduction to the new South Africa, Mr. Pillay listed the numbers of growth and industries ripe for investment in South Africa. The first question was directed at him.

The audience member began by stating that she had read reports of increased violence against Indian South Africans. Taking a cue from Mr. Dev’s presentation, she stated that we needed to be concerned with the well being of PIOs, not just investment and money. Mr. Pillay answered by pointing out that South Africa is a new nation and that there is violence against all citizens. This explanation did not quell the audience member who quickly offered a retort, making reference to the class positioning of Indians in South Africa. She stated that since most Indians in South Africa are well off, violence would affect them disproportionately. Mr. Pillay responded by saying that it is a nationwide problem, and that he feels himself to be a South African first, not an Indian,

thus addressing the violence as purely an Indian problem is erroneous. During this exchange, one or two audience members heckle that the conference is about entrepreneurialism and not these other concerns. This was enough to steer the conversation back to investment opportunities and such.

Though the remainder of the questions followed the usual track, as did the rest of the conference, Mr. Dev's presentation temporarily ruptured the narrative of diaspora that was being created at the conference. Instead, Mr. Dev drew attention to the human rights agenda that had been eclipsed both organizationally and at the conference by a focus on investment and entrepreneurialism through his polemic on the political powerlessness of Indians in the diaspora. By emphasizing political disempowerment, Mr. Dev questioned diasporization enacted mainly in networks of flexible capital,²⁸ and in doing so, he moved the diaspora from a transnational space of mobility to diasporic experiences rooted in specific national configurations. In addition, by eschewing a focus on capital for one on violence against Indians in Guyana, and the silence in its aftermath, the image of a homogenous diaspora was replaced with one fractured by different histories of migration and national publics. Finally, Mr. Dev recentered nation-states as past sites of diasporic conflict, not solely as future sites of diasporic investment.

The challenge that Mr. Dev was putting forward to GOPIO could only be tackled through the organization's human rights, and not investment, work. This could not be done under the conception of the diasporic subject deployed at the conference, one who exists solely in the transnational spaces of the present and future moments. Rather, a diasporic formation shaped through human rights places co-responsibility along a

²⁸ In one sense, he was referencing one of GOPIO's original concerns, to organize against human rights abuses perpetrated against PIOs.

different configuration of diasporic space,²⁹ one located within discrete national boundaries rather than outside of it.

Vijay Mishra has divided the Indian diaspora into two “historically separated diasporas,” one of exclusivism and the other of the border (1996: 422). Diasporas of exclusivism occurred during British colonialism and involved indenture³⁰ or non-indentured labor migration. Movement was to the other colonial sites. The second type, diasporas of the border, occurred during the mid- to late twentieth century and was composed of voluntary migrants to the “metropolitan centers of the Empire, the New World and the former settler colonies.” The former is marked by the “creation of relatively self-contained ‘little Indias’ ” while the latter is marked by mobility. Further, the associations with India took on different forms as diasporas of exclusivism “transplanted Indian icons of spirituality to the new land” whereas the diaspora of the border “kept in touch with India through family networks and marriages” (ibid). As delineated by Mishra’s taxonomy, the diasporas of exclusivism and the border occurred during two different global arrangements.

GOPIO does recognize the different waves of the Indian diaspora, and in an essay titled “GOPIO: A Global Unifying Movement” published in their tenth anniversary brochure, these are laid out. The author, Dr. Jagat Motwani, writes about the “indentured coolies in the 1830s,” “recent brain drain wave starting in the 1960s,” trading castes from the 19th century, gypsies, Hindu and Buddhist monks during the 3rd century, and a “pre-history (sic) wave to the north-west” (1999: 17). However, one of GOPIO’s many goals are to bring the particulars of Indian migration into the universal of an Indian diaspora, to

²⁹ For work about space in the South Asian Diaspora, see Van der Veer *Nation and Migration: The Politics of Space in the South Asian Diaspora* (1995).

³⁰ The two classic books of Indian indenture are Hugh Tinker’s *The Banyan Tree: Overseas Emigrants from India, Pakistan and Bangladesh* (1977) and *A New System of Slavery: The Export of Indian Labour Overseas 1830-1920* (1974). Also, Marina Carter *Voices from Indenture: Experiences of Indian Migrants in the British Empire* (1996).

“foster harmony with a feeling of brotherhood and fellowship amongst the PIOs” (GOPIO 2002). This is done through emphasizing a common cultural heritage, a common responsibility to India, and a common future. Through this, the diaspora is linked through time, a common past built on culture and a common future built on destiny³¹ not only to India but also the transnational space that is the diaspora itself. Though he did not negate this vision, Ravi Dev pointed to a different past located in the experience of national spaces, in this instance specifically through the experience of indenture and colonialism, which shaped the position of Indians in independent Guyana. By invoking Guyana and disempowerment, he was able to momentarily crack the universality attributed to the diaspora through the transnational entrepreneur and traversable spaces with the particularity of national identities and effects.

Diaspora theorists have cast diaspora as a formation that poses a challenge to the nation-state. James Clifford states that diaspora discourses “are in constitutive tension with nation-state/assimilationist ideologies (1994: 308), while Paul Gilroy offers the Black Atlantic as an alternative model to the nation and/or nationalist impulses (1993). Theorists such as Gilroy and Safran have also pointed out that a condition of diaspora is marginalization from the “host society.” As Safran states in his enumeration of what constitutes a diaspora, “they believe that they are not – and perhaps cannot be – fully accepted by their host society and therefore feel partly alienated and insulated from it” (1991: 83).

Invoking her childhood in newly independent Tanzania, May Joseph writes,

I recall my own efforts at expressively staging citizenship in those early years of independence, my enthusiastic attempts to demonstrate that I was, indeed, a good Tanzanian socialist: marching along with my peers, emulating the best *ngoma*

³¹ Though he is speaking of the nation-state, Benedict Anderson’s claim that “if nation-states are widely conceded to be ‘new’ and ‘historical,’ the nations to which they give political expression always loom out of an immemorial past” fits with this conception of diaspora. (1991: 11).

dancers...beefing up my Swahili so that I would be among the handful of Asians accepted into the local Swahili medium secondary schools...I was determined to prove that I had assimilated. But being defined inauthentic proved a more potent force than my expressive stance. Clearly, more was needed...a sense of historicity in relation to the transition place of Tanzanian socialist citizenship. (1999: 2).

Diasporas of exclusivism have had to negotiate the emergence of a national culture forged in the battle of anti-colonial struggle. Partha Chatterjee has argued that before anti-colonial struggles began their battles over political power, they had already created alternate spaces of sovereignty that were often marked by notions of essential cultural identity (1993). This reclaiming or uncovering of a national culture was a large part of anti-colonial struggles. And nations, even those with diverse populations, were seen as culturally homogeneous entities based on common ancestry or history (Taylor 1989). In many countries, the diasporas of exclusivism were often placed outside these national-cultural configurations, while still remaining subjects of the new state which was articulated along “already constructed administrative boundaries” (Balibar 1991: 81). In contrast to the entrepreneur or other manifestations of the flexible citizen upon whom “pooling financial and professional resources” in the diaspora depends, co-responsibility through human rights centers a nation-bound diasporic subject. Paradoxically, though nation-bound, they are often not of the nation itself.

However, the nation does make its presence known in transnational practices of investment, and action against human rights violations carried out within the boundaries of the nation-state is dependent on a transnational discourse. The format of the panels on the second day of the conference was divided into regions, and the speakers presented on individual nations. Thus, the nation-state does not recede as a transnational formation acts on it. Rather, as stated by Aihwa Ong, as “mobile subjects plot and maneuver in relations to capital flows, governments also articulate with capital and entities in complex ways” (Ong 1999: 6). Conversely, human rights is a movement that uses supranational

universalizing notions of rights and freedoms to make claims on nation-states. Though its targets are found in discrete national and state boundaries, mobilization is dependent on both a transnational framework that is able to work despite the specificities of nation-state regulations and practices and the claims of the nation-state to follow up. Thus, the dual tracks of diasporic investment and mobilizing around human rights engage both spaces, or rather creates them as interdependent.

THE DIASPORIC MODERN

As mentioned above, the future was present at the Entrepreneur's Conference in the highlighting of cutting-edge technology and industry. The diaspora as purveyors of progress through their ingenuity is part of the narrative of modernity that runs through organizational discourse. Through its activities, GOPIO presents segments of the diaspora as new modern subjects, ones constructed against the failure of state planning that marked India for over forty years, and one fully realized in diaspora.

Aihwa Ong has suggested that "state projects of modernity are engaged in the production of national subjects, whereas alternative modernities associated with flexible accumulation celebrate self propelling subjects" (1997: 173). While continually referencing India, the diasporic subject that GOPIO attempts to constitute, is not one it folds into the nation-state, even while engaging it. Rather, it stands outside the nation-state, and is a product of an enduring culture found in the diaspora. By highlighting characteristics such as business acumen, wealth and mobility, a diasporic modernity emerges through the practices of flexible citizenship, or the "the strategies and effects of mobile managers, technocrats, and professionals seeking to both circumvent and benefit from different nation-state regimes by selecting different sites for investments, work, and family relocation" (Ong 1999:112). The flexible citizen is not only valorized, but positioned as a modern subject against the past of state planning in India.

Crucial to this project, and highlighted in the title of the conference itself, is the entrepreneur. Dr. Sid Gautam, a panelist on “Opportunities for NRIs/PIOs in Franchising and Service Industry” believes that, “The unifying characteristics among all entrepreneurs are that they embrace challenges and eschew the status quo...The difference between entrepreneurs and everyone else lies in one word, that word is *vision*.” The entrepreneur is a risk taker, someone who has the ability to take an opportunity and turn it into profit. The entrepreneur is not just a successful diasporic Indian giving back, however. He, and it is generally imagined as a he, also stands in stark contrast to the state-planned economy which many feel did not allow innovation and hobbled advancement. A common complaint during discussions and presentations about investing in India was about “red tape-ism” and the “license raj” bureaucracy and lack of infrastructure that made it difficult to set up businesses. The entrepreneur represents the new, potential India freed of dirigiste fetters. The diaspora, a transnational formation is in a unique position exactly because it is not bound by national space and rules.

The liberalization of the Indian economy has vaulted the entrepreneur into a valorized figure. Sandhya Shukla has written that the formation of the Non-Resident Indian or overseas Indian connects “the local interests of Indian migrants in the diaspora and the broader needs of the [Indian] nation-state” (1999/2000: 23). Not only was this population a source of financial capital, but given both their training in India and the furthering of their skills in North America, they also possess the technical and scientific knowledge India needed. This relationship cannot be understood outside of an economic regime change, from a planned to a liberalized economy that was implemented in India in 1991, prompting not only new venues for investment and capital flows, but also an accompanying discourse of obligation by the Indian government targeting wealthy diasporic Indians.

To better facilitate the affective relationship of obligation, the Indian government set up a High Level Committee (HLC) on the Indian Diaspora in 2000. The mandate of the HLC was to review what status Non-Resident Indians (NRI) and People of Indian Origin held under the Indian Constitution and other laws, both in India and where they live; study the expectations that NRIs and PIOs have from India; “study the role that PIOs and NRIs may play in the economic, social and technological development of India,” among other things. The HLC was to recommend a policy framework and country specific plans for “forging a mutually beneficial relationship with the PIOs and NRIs and for facilitating their interaction with India and their participation in India's economic development.”

The HLC produced a report running upwards of 500 pages.³² The language of the report closely mirrors the language found in many GOPIO materials. It extols the accomplishments of the diaspora, “Many members of the Indian Diaspora have risen to high ranks in their adopted lands, some even reaching positions of Prime Ministers and Presidents.” And points to the diaspora as a financial resource, “The Indian Diaspora can, therefore, play an influential role in enhancing investment, accelerating industrial development and boosting our international trade and tourism efforts” (HLC: 417). A background paper prepared for the HLC by the Ministry of External Affairs is more explicit. It states,

The policy of economic liberalization and reforms since 1991 has opened vast opportunities and investments in India. The PIOs are naturally keen to make use of those opportunities. The 1990s have witnessed the emergence of the new generation Indian entrepreneurs particularly in the Silicon Valley...The time is therefore, most opportune to launch a concerted effort for developing a strong and

³² The HLC also instituted an annual gathering, the *Pravasi Bharatiya Divas*, or the Overseas Indians Day. It is a three-day event, and has been held since 2003. The three days always include January 9th, the day Gandhi returned to India from South Africa. GOPIO also holds its own, but supplementary conference either before or after the Divas.

mutually beneficial relationship with the Indian Diaspora, which has an estimated income of US\$300 billion. (no date, quoted in Dhume 2002: 114).

GOPIO (and other organizations and individual actors) has responded to these changes, and in certain instance, such as the PIO card, pushed for official spaces and recognition through which the diasporan can practice the flexibility necessary for transnational capital investment. Indeed, of the 24 resolutions passed at the conclusion of the 2002 Entrepreneurs Conference, half exhort the government of India to speed the rate of privatization.

According to Nick Dirks, “modernity persists as a powerful narrative because the nation-state organizes the body politic around it” (1990, cited in Rofel 218). But how are we to understand subjects who stand outside the nation-state? In this case, the HLC and subsequent annual Bharitiya Pravasi Divas (Overseas Indian Day) held by the Indian government, is an attempt to incorporate the diaspora into its narrative of modernity. However, the narrative of modernity is cast differently in its various tellings (Rofel 1990).

For GOPIO, Indian diasporic modernity lies not in the Indian nation-state, but in Indian culture that the diaspora both retains and exemplifies. The very fact of diaspora is one mode through which diasporic modernity is enacted. An essay by Dr. Motwani in GOPIO’s tenth anniversary brochure begins with the lines “People of Indian Origin (PIO) are global. The sun never sets over PIOs. No country, however small, is without Indians.” Following, the author recounts numerous waves of migration to establish that leaving India has long been an Indian trait. Thus the inherent globalness of Indians is a sign of their modernity.

Attached to the inherent characteristic of migration, is the myth of Indian business acumen and success. In popular accounts, such as those by Thomas Sowell (1994) and

Joel Kotkin (1992), and popular press articles about IT millionaires, the Indian diaspora is a paradigm of hard work and economic know-how. Indeed, this sentiment opened the conference when Prime Minister Jagnauth named the diaspora a “transactional community” that is “imbued with a strong business acumen.” It is also a prevalent belief in GOPIO. In the conference brochure, a welcoming letter from Inder Singh, the president elect, states, “Many people of Indian origin, particularly in the Western societies, have become highly successful in their profession or business.” Business acumen, risk taking and the ability to expand financial capital becomes “the moral capital used to claim a communal identity” (Ong 1999: 267). The emergence of the Silicon Valley millionaire entrepreneurs dovetails with this development. Figures such as Vinod Khosla of Sun Microsystems, Sabeer Bhatia, inventor of Hotmail who in 1997 sold it to Microsoft for \$400 million, and Vinod Gupta, founder of the leading provider of business databases InfoUSA, embody the entrepreneurial “whiz kid,” and have become symbols of diasporic modernity found at the intersection of the raw material of Indian ingenuity and diasporic success.

CONCLUSION

By looking at GOPIO, an organization “engaged in promoting the well being of People of Indian Origin, enhancing cooperation and communication between Indians living in different countries” (GOPIO pamphlet) this chapter attempted to locate one point of materiality to diasporic formation. While acknowledging that diaspora is often experienced through imagining and desire, examining GOPIO provided a point of entry as to how desire is translated into action. And further, how action creates not only diasporic connections, but the diasporic subject itself.

In GOPIO, diaspora is created through two tracks of commonality. The first, located in networks of small-scale finance, is investment in India and nations that have

substantial diasporic populations. This flow challenges the idea that diasporas stand in opposition to the nation-state as in this instance, part of the diasporic project is the engagement with the nation-state itself. As GOPIO has established itself as a mediator between the diaspora and India, India itself has responded to demands and established official governmental spaces for the diaspora. This relationship, however, must be placed in the context of shifts in the Indian economy from a planned to liberalized one, and the need for foreign investment. Though India is central to GOPIO's vision of diaspora, it is seen as an entity that can only be recuperated by the "India outside of India" which possesses both the intellectual and professional know-how to bring India into the present moment and take it into the future.

The second track of action that produced commonality was human rights abuses directed against People of Indian Origin. This was initially GOPIO's main concern, but was overshadowed by a new mission of pooling resources. However, the issue emerged periodically and challenged the narrative of successful Indian communities which bolstered the narrative of diasporic creation through investment. A focus on human rights violations shed light on two distinct waves of diasporas and histories of incorporation. However, the organization did eventually establish human rights violations as a track of concern, and in 2003 held a one-day conference on the subject. Taken together, the pooling of resources and addressing of human rights violations create the diaspora through networks of obligation that produce material relationships and connections.

In the course of diasporization, both GOPIO and the Indian state made use of a class identity recast in the neoliberal tenets of productive subjects and flexibility. While the Indian state constructed modalities of diasporic necessary to the new regime of liberalization, GOPIO was able to answer the call and, more importantly, use the very principles deployed by the Indian state to push for expanded rights in India. GOPIO

accomplished this by exploiting their position as successful, professional migrants in the United States and creating what I termed a diasporic modernity. Diasporic modernity was dependent on the creation of a normative diasporic middle and upper middle-class rooted in the valorized neoliberal trait of the entrepreneurial self and refracted in the figure of the diasporic entrepreneur. Unlike the modernity of the state which is rooted in place, this construction was based in mobility and the ability to traverse multiple spaces. Though they did bring labor migrants and non-skilled workers into the narrative of diaspora they were constructing, these populations were not incorporated into the imaginary of diasporic modernity. Rather, their experiences stood outside and in some sense, symbolized the failure of the Indian nation-state to provide for its overseas citizens. Given the ways that these two disparate groups were positioned within the power geometry of global flows, they occupy differing fields of possibilities. Thus while GOPIO traverses the globe and produces a diasporic subject, those constrained by their positions in the workings of global capital inhabit limited fields of possibility and in occupy a tenuous space vis-à-vis modern diasporic subjects.

Chapter 2: Contestations Over Worker Subjectivity: Class, Experience and Organizing in Worker's Awaaz

In the last chapter, I examined the organizational activities of the Global Organization of People of Indian Origin and the diasporic subject that is produced through this. I argued that the shift in the Indian economy from state planning to liberalization opened up spaces for the organization to enact diasporic engagement with India and through this produce a new diasporic subject. I also showed that the class positioning and migration history of GOPIO's membership in the United States contributed to their diasporic vision. Through their ability to corral financial resources and move across national spaces, their ability to enact flexibility, GOPIO was able to cast itself as modern diasporic subjects.

In what follows, I turn my attention to Worker's Awaaz. By placing this organization in contrast to GOPIO, I hope to illustrate the differential effects of neoliberalism on those populations that do not and cannot participate in the new modes of capitalist accumulation, and are compelled to migrate as a strategy against marginalization. Though I position the populations of the two groups against each other, they do inhabit the same community in the racialized landscape of South Asian America. As will be discussed below, the class polarization which the two organizations represented was foundational to the existence of the organization and the "worker" in Worker's Awaaz was constructed in opposition to middle-class and upper middle-class hegemony in the South Asian community. However, the chapter explores the limitations of the this oppositional positioning through an examination of the tensions that arose when a campaign which sought to define worker not by their inverse class positioning to

wealthier segments of the community, but through one's relation to labor and the capitalist production of profit was given priority in the organization.

WORKER'S AWAAZ

Established in 1997 in New York City, Workers' Awaaz was one of the first groups that addressed labor exploitation in the South Asian community, and attempted to follow an organizing, rather than service or advocacy model. Its emergence is situated in the shifting demographics of gender and class in the South Asian American community and new immigrant labor rights institutions that were taking root. In order to center class formation, Workers' Awaaz highlighted the experiences of low-wage workers, and distinguished between the subject positions of worker and volunteer. Worker, however, was not a stable or uncontested category, and struggles over definition and the relationship between workers and supporting members periodically erupted. I trace the shifting construction of a worker subjectivity and its utilization at three moments in the organization's history: its emergence in the Domestic Workers' Committee at Sakhi for South Asian Women, its institutionalization in Workers' Awaaz, and a challenge presented when Workers' Awaaz joined with two other organizations in a campaign focusing on time and health. Through this, I argue that the group's work was initially arranged around a commonsense analysis of the relationship between class and income, and show that by privileging individual workers' experiences of exploitation, Workers' Awaaz did not always succeed in addressing labor exploitation structurally. However, the joint campaign addressing time and health had the potential to actualize mass based organizing through a theorization of new labor regimes across industries and the effects this had on social relations. This also required a reformulation of worker that challenged the emblems of identity (Nash 2005:11) foundational to Workers' Awaaz.

The analysis that follows, one that highlights what became a hindrance to organization work and cohesion, is in no way meant to detract from the crucial and important work undertaken by Workers' Awaaz. The organization brought the exploitation of South Asian domestic workers to public attention, was directly responsible for settlements and favorable judgments in unpaid wage cases, held heavily attended health fairs, helped develop a campaign that addressed the effects of 9/11 on immigrant labor, worked with other organizations on innovative challenges to unjust labor laws, and successfully pushed for an expanded definition of trafficking. However, even in struggles for social and economic justice, there is contestation and contradiction. Through my involvement with Workers' Awaaz, I eventually came to understand that tensions and impasses are not always signs of failure, but often sources of new insights (Ang 2001). It is with this knowledge that I write.

Workers' Awaaz had its beginnings as the Domestic Workers' Committee (DWC) in Sakhi for South Asian Women. Sakhi, a domestic violence organization founded in 1989 in New York City, was one of the first groups established in the South Asian American community that addressed gender oppression, patriarchy and violence against women, issues that had long been silenced (Abraham 2000, Bhattacharjee 1992, Shah 1997).³³ One of the few South Asian women's advocacy and service organizations in the area,³⁴ Sakhi began receiving phone calls for help from South Asian female domestic workers facing abuse. These women were generally employed by other South Asians. Though Sakhi did not have programming to handle domestic workers' issues organizationally, domestic workers were able to access services already in place for

³³ For works which discuss South Asian domestic violence groups see Purkayashta et al, (1997), Shah (1997), Krishnan et al (1998), Abraham (2000) and Rudruppa (2004).

³⁴ The others are Manavi (NJ), Sewaa (PA), Sneha (CT)

domestic violence survivors, such as legal referrals, ESL classes and classes teaching daily skills such as learning how to read a subway map. As the numbers of domestic workers calling and coming to Sakhi increased, “domestic workers’ meetings along the lines of the domestic violence support group where women came and shared their problems” (Aliani 2003) were also instituted. Through these meetings, the domestic workers identified important issues such as redress for unpaid wages and exploitative working conditions, and in 1994, the DWC was formed to address issues specific to domestic workers.

Driving the development of the DWC was the migration beginning in the late eighties onwards of women who entered low paying service occupations and often migrated by themselves. South Asian countries, along with other nations in the global South, were undergoing reorganization of capital, production, and economic structures. This precipitated female migration both from rural to urban areas within Southern countries, and also to Northern industrialized nations such as the United States (Sassen 1988, 1998). Most of these women have been funneled into low wage manufacturing and service industries and have contributed to the feminization of low-wage labor (Ching Louie 2001, Parrenas 2001, Sassen 1988, 1998). Class positioning has mediated South Asian experiences of immigration, gender and racial formation in the United States (Bhattacharjee 1992, Bose and Varghese 2001, Mazumdar 1989, Prashad 2000, Visweswaran 1997). The DWC was one reflection of this.

Once the DWC was established, Sakhi divided its programming between the DWC which would attend to the needs of domestic workers, and the Domestic Violence Committee which would continue Sakhi’s original mission. The DWC, which had between 30-40 active volunteers and clients, developed new tactics, outreach strategies and materials particular to domestic work. It

called old help wanted ads to try and contact domestic workers [to find out about working conditions and also to inform them of their rights]. They also called new ads to argue about rates, document existing wages and also to try to negotiate higher wages. Domestic workers who called were given help leaving a bad job, told about minimum wage, etc. There was also a “know your rights” and “how to protect yourself” brochure which was given out at outreach activities and events. The DWC also filed their first lawsuit against an employer in late 1996/early 1997 through [New York University’s] Immigrant Rights Clinic (Aliani 2003).

The organization also employed a tactic used for domestic violence cases, holding protests outside the home of perpetrators.³⁵

Although there were some shared mechanisms of control and abuse between exploited domestic workers and domestic abuse survivors, such as limitation of mobility and threats of deportation by abusers (Das Gupta 2003), the two populations were eventually seen as distinct from one another. When I asked Monika Batra, an ex-DWC and Sakhi board member, if the DWC and Domestic Violence Committee had expressly different missions, she answered by demarcating the distinct subjects that emerged in the committees, “The ‘worker identity’ ... [of the DWC] was very different from the ‘survivor identity’ [in the rest of the group]” (2003). Based on this distinction, the DWC perceived of itself doing a different type of work, stemming from the same service model that Sakhi had always operated on, “but with an activist twist, and a growing political consciousness...more ‘political’ and ‘left’ than the rest of Sakhi” (Batra 2003).

June Nash has termed the “reductionist categories” necessary for mobilization in social movements emblems of identity. These are used to “unite distinct groups around

³⁵ This juncture also brought additional changes to the organizational infrastructure. Previously in Sakhi, the “board maintained the role of overall program management, supervision of staff, and set the direction and vision of the organization” (Batra 2003). In an attempt to create shared-leadership model in which decision making and power was distributed within the organization, a representative from each committee was incorporated into the board. Further, two separate staff members were hired to direct the program areas of each Committee in conjunction with the general executive director. A steering committee composed of board members, staff, and active volunteers was also formed.

common elements of group consciousness” and allow group members to contest denigration and demand respect (2005:11). Survivor, an emblematic identity firmly established through the work of the domestic violence movement, pointed to gender oppression and the discursive negation of victim status for women who experience marital and partner violence, and through this empowered them. Worker, on the other hand, was deployed to highlight class oppression³⁶ through its reference to work, specifically exploitative underpaid work. Like survivor, worker was not seen as a position of victimhood. But unlike the individuality contained in survivor, worker held potential for collective action. The two positions also precipitated different modes of activism. Sakhi worked within the well-established service and advocacy model developed in the domestic violence movement. To many in DWC, however, mobilizing around exploitation of female domestic workers required an organizing model that would collectivize the power of the low-wage workers for structural change. The tension between activism and service provision, worker and survivor exploded around an articulation of class and the ways that class positioning dictated the work of the organization, and in 1997, a majority of the Sakhi board decided to dissolve the DWC and effectively end its work around the exploitation of domestic workers.

Annanya Bhattacharjee (1997) and Margaret Abraham (2000) have offered detailed, and contrasting views of the ejection of the DWC from Sakhi. Both were members of Sakhi during the establishment of the DWC and its dissolution. An examination of each rendering, and their contrasting accounts, is insightful in understanding how the subjectivity of worker and the discourse of class and class interests were deployed.

³⁶ Although one can argue that as feminized labor, domestic work is located at the intersection of both gender and class.

Bhattacharjee, a founding member of Sakhi, gives an account of the disbanding of the DWC and the events leading up to it in an essay titled “A Slippery Path: Organizing Resistance to Violence Against Women” (1997). The essay is anchored in the question of how being “bourgeois women, politicized by bourgeois feminism...affects ... [the ability] to fight violence against women” (31). According to Bhattacharjee, a dominant bourgeois standpoint prevented class differences from being discussed in the organization, while at the same time, it privileged unacknowledged middle class status and ideals that shaped the route the organization took. This is partially attributed to the desire to be “inclusive to all South Asian women” which pushed for homogeneity in the organization, and was dependent on an ideology which “reflected the lowest common denominator” rather than the intersectional positionality of membership (ibid).

When the opportunity to directly address class difference presented itself in domestic violence work, through someone’s inability to pay for public transport or speak English fluently for example, it was generally dealt with through changes in service provision, such as providing transportation reimbursements and offering ESL classes. Such “adjustments” allowed Sakhi to show “class sensitivity” without ever “delving into the systematic roots of class exploitation” (1997: 32-33). Bhattacharjee also identifies hiring staff, setting up an office, and seeking a range of funding options to maintain this, as rooted in “motivation, as professional middle-class women, to build ‘professional’ operations.” Once established in this manner, Sakhi sought to diversify its funding sources by “cultivating...financial support from wealthy community members.” Bhattacharjee believes that Sakhi’s, and other domestic violence organizations’ acceptance by the mainstream is due to the fact that they “do not threaten important principles of straight, bourgeois society: individualism, ideas of privacy, reluctance in naming the oppressor, a belief in the legal system, and a desire for feel-good benevolence” (1997: 33).

The DWC presented an opportunity for the organization to address class head on both through the change in membership, the mission of the DWC, and the focus on organizing rather than providing direct services. For Bhattacharjee, organizing domestic workers and continuing domestic violence work in the same organization could have succeeded if there was a reframing of Sakhi's mission in terms of radical politics which challenged the foundations of exploitation; something she feels was prevented by investment in bourgeois feminism.

Abraham was a long time member of Sakhi and the organization is a main site of research in her book *Speaking the Unspeakable: Marital Violence among South Asian Immigrants in the United States* (2000). Abraham discusses this same "period of crisis" (174) in Sakhi's history in a chapter considering "some of the issues [South Asian Women's Organizations] need to contend with in organizing to end violence against women." Like Bhattacharjee, Abraham locates the stances that volunteers took in their "personal histories and their social, economic and political backgrounds" (2000: 176). However, for Abraham, the conflict was not between working class members and their allies, and middle-class members who did not want to address class exploitation. It was between first generation middle-class immigrant women who founded Sakhi and others like them, and the middle class 1.5 and second-generation volunteers. Abraham identifies the founders of Sakhi as women who came from "middle-class or upper-middle-class backgrounds in South Asia, ... were professionals in the United States" and familiar with service and social work models (ibid). In the mid 1990s, however, a large number of "young upcoming professionals or college students whose worldview is shaped by the ongoing discourse on the politics of class, race, and sexuality" and who "often take a more structural view" (2000: 178) became involved in the organization.³⁷

³⁷ This clean division is questionable however, as Bhattacharjee and other Shaki founders, like Malika Dutt, were first generation immigrant women who "came from middle-class or upper-middle-class

Though never directly stated, Abraham's exegesis can be read as a direct rebuttal to the charges that the DWC made against Sakhi. Against the charge that many middle class members of the board could not see past the interests of their own class privilege, Abraham points out that those who made these charges shared the same class background since they were "children of wealthy professionals or immigrant families whose parents ... were economically vested in their children's education," and as stated earlier, were women already occupying or being trained to enter a professional milieu. Thus it is not class positioning, but political experience borne out of generational differences and attendant discourse about social injustice and political consciousness that drew the lines of disagreement.³⁸ Since class concerns was seen as lining up with class positioning in the other account, Abraham's recounting can be seen as a challenge to the radical class politics that were being espoused by 1.5 and second generation middle class members.³⁹

In both accounts, members' generation and class standpoint correlates to attendant beliefs about the role DWC. Through this, class standing became a marker of oppositional or hegemonic class ideology. It is also worth noting that in both accounts, the conflict is presented mainly as one between two opposing groups of middle-class women. Further, in Abraham's account, she locates what she sees as class radicalism primarily in the second generation, and not the domestic workers themselves. In Bhattacharjee's account, since the focus is on bourgeois women, what is highlighted is

backgrounds in South Asia," and were members of the DWC. In addition, other volunteers fit this profile were members of the DWC and eventually left to help form Workers' Awaaz.

³⁸ Batra echoed this observation about generational differences when she recalled that "young politically coming-of-age folks, many young women, college students, grad students and activists were attracted to the DWC." However she states that it was the attention given to class oppression that drew this population (2003).

³⁹ There are a number of disagreements about what caused the final decision to dissolve the DWC. Sakhi maintained that there was always a plan to transition the DWC into a separate organization. However, in a letter sent to its supporters in December 1997, they also state that dissolution was the result of "increasing autonomy exacted by the volunteers in the DWC." Another point of debate whether the ejection was a response to a threat from a former employer to sue the organization for protesting outside his home. While Sakhi denied this was a factor, members of Workers' Awaaz felt otherwise.

middle-class inability and/or unwillingness to address class issues rather than the positions of the domestic workers' themselves.

Though taking a stance on opposite sides, both Bhattacharjee and Abraham arrive at common conclusions about issues that lead to the split: addressing class in the organization, the tensions that emerge between service provision and organizing (consciousness raising in Abraham's phrasing) and engagement being shaped by experience. These issues would again surface in the new organization.

Officially established at the end of 1997, the mission of Workers' Awaaz was to organize domestic workers, and other low-wage workers, in the South Asian community. When asked in an interview what type of organization Workers' Awaaz is, Sushila Patel began her answer with the claim "Awaaz means voice and the name of the organization says it all" (Aliani et al: 1999). Unlike Sakhi, where, according to many members, direction and leadership was controlled by middle-class women, the leadership of Workers' Awaaz would be low-wage workers. Feminist standpoint theory asserts that knowledge is produced through "historically shared, group based experiences" (Collins 1997: 375, italics in original) located in hierarchical power relations. By affirming that this is a valid form and site of knowledge production, standpoint theory allows oppressed groups to have a voice "within a structure of power and experience" (Collins 1997: 379). To ensure that the voices of workers were prominent, organizational bylaws stipulated a membership infrastructure of 75% workers and 25% supporting members. Though there was no clear definition of who a worker was, there was an implied understanding that it referred only to low-wage workers. The institutionalized leadership of low-wage workers was based on the belief that they best knew about exploitation and could provide leadership as to how best to fight against it.

The organization was also set up as a membership, as opposed to volunteer organization, which would guard against “unilateral” decisions made through a top-down structure. Though it had a board, it was not solely responsible for the direction of the organization. As stated by Batra

People wanted [Workers’ Awaaz] to be an organization in which all members had power ... There were mechanisms to ensure a democratic process of decision making ... There was no executive director – the members were to have the most power. Members elected board members, and members could change the by-laws. There was a planning committee that was also to have a role in setting the direction of the organization so that the board didn’t have all the power either (2003).

While Workers’ Awaaz was structured partially in contrast to the arrangement of Sakhi, it was also fashioned on the workers’ center model, a new organization form that was and continues burgeoning in the United States. Workers’ centers are “community-based mediating institutions that provide support to and organize among communities of low-wage workers” (Fine 2006:11). This new form has emerged at the nexus of two currents in community organizing: the “decline of organized labor and the institutional narrowness of the contemporary labor movement” (Fine 2006: 244) and the rise of organizing practices that “place race and ethnicity squarely in the center of its analysis and strategy.” These institutions are marked by leadership development, collective action, and the fight for the enforcement of existing labor laws and improvement in working conditions in low wage industries. Finally the activities of workers’ are a combination organizing, advocacy, providing services and working to change public policy.⁴⁰ Though they are focused on labor concerns, Janice Fine suggests that workers’ centers be viewed through the lens of social movement organizations, rather than labor market institutions,

⁴⁰ Laura Liu (2003, forthcoming) has also written about workers’ centers as a new form of immigrant organizing in the United States.

due to their strong emphasis on community mobilization and organizing, instead of “job training, placement, benefit provision, and workplace organizing” (2006: 246).⁴¹

True to the workers’ center model of engaging in many strategies of community mobilization, in the first three years after its inception, Workers’ Awaaz worked with public interest law centers such as the National Employment Labor Project (NELP), the Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund (AALDEF) and the New York University Immigrant Law Clinic, to pursue unpaid wage cases, offered ESL classes to bring in new members and provide information on workers rights, held periodic know-your-rights workshops and collaborated with NELP and AALDEF in the publication of a know-your-rights handbook for domestic workers titled *Rights Begin at Home: Protecting Yourself as a Domestic Worker*.

The organization also provided a space outside of the private homes where live-in domestic workers both resided and worked. The need for a space outside of their job/residence emerged early in the support group session as Sakhi. As stated by Aliani,

Where... do you sit down and talk to a domestic worker? In her employer’s house? No way. If they are working, if they are at their employer’s beck and call sixteen hours a day, they can’t even really make phone calls. Where do you get time to talk? (Aliani et al 1999: 189).

Through shared experiences and collective struggle, a sense of community formed that cut against the isolation inherent in the industry.

When I joined Workers’ Awaaz in 2000, the organization was mobilizing around the unpaid wages case of Ms K. This case was to lead the Campaign Against Workplace

⁴¹ It is also interesting to note that in delineations of organizational forms in the progressive South Asian community (Khandelwal 1997) and of South Asian women’s groups (Vaid 1999/2000), organizations focusing on labor, such as Workers’ Awaaz, did not appear until Das Gupta’s 2006 book *Unruly Immigrants*. Though part of the South Asian community, Workers’ Awaaz is closer in form and activity to other groups concerned with workplace and labor issues.

Servitude (CAWS), the campaign that continued the organization's focus on domestic workers. Ms K came to Workers' Awaaz after being fired from a job where she often worked above twelve hours a day, 6 or 7 days a week with no break.⁴² Her days usually began at 4:30 am when she prepared tea for one of her employers, Dr Chada, which was then served in bed. After this, Ms K would start other tasks: cooking, cleaning, laundry and the continual preparation of freshly cooked meals served at four different times for different family members throughout the day. At the end of one such grueling, overworked day, her employers requested that she go to the house of one of their friends and prepare a meal for 25 people. She refused and was fired on the spot.

After being dismissed, Ms K contacted Workers' Awaaz. Her case served as a flashpoint for legal and community mobilization. A federal case seeking \$70,000 in compensation for violation of labor laws including withholding of regular and overtime pay formed the legal component of the campaign. Ms. K's case was filed by NELP and later taken over by New York University Immigrant Rights Clinic. Rallies outside the Manhattan hospital where Dr Chada worked, collections of signatures attached to a statement condemning the treatment of Ms K and demanding a public apology from her ex-employers, and publicity in the South Asian and other media composed community mobilization. The Chadases agreed to an out of court settlement of \$50,000 in unpaid wages and other compensatory damages. It was the largest settlement Workers' Awaaz had attained to date.

Ms K's case was declared a success. This was due to the large settlement, and also because both legal and community mobilization made her case very public. One of the main tasks in organizing live-in domestic workers was to make their lives and

⁴² This, unfortunately, was not an uncommon experience for many of the domestic workers who came to Workers' Awaaz.

exploitation, often hidden away in the privacy of their employer's home, visible. There are three main factors that account for invisibility of domestic workers. The first two, the general belief that monetary relationships do not exist within the household (Andersen 2000)⁴³ and the place of work and residence being one and the same for live-in domestic workers, apply to domestic workers across communities. The third, representation of the South Asian community as a solidly middle-class, professional community, was particular to the South Asian community. Ms K's case was publicized in both in the mainstream New York City press and the local South Asian press.

However, an exchange that took place two years later between Ms K and other members at a meeting exposed some of the shortcomings in Workers' Awaaz's strategies. During a meeting for the current CAWS case for Ms P, Ms K, who had not attended meeting for some time walked into the office. For some time now, Ms K had used the organization's address to receive mail⁴⁴ related to her settlement. This was done so that her current employers would not know that she had once sued her previous employers, and to provide some privacy since many live-in domestic workers and their effects were under the continual surveillance of their employers. It was an unexpected and welcomed surprise to see Ms. K, and she was immediately asked to join the meeting.

The twelve or so women gathered around the table, both current members and potential new members, made space for one more chair, and Ms K sat down. She was told about the work being done on Ms P's case and was then asked to share her own

⁴³ It was common for employers who were being sued for unpaid wages to counter allegations by reinscribing the relationship between the household and the domestic worker as one based on voluntary care giving and familial ties. Refrains heard in most, if not all, cases included: "But she was part of my family," "she was like a sister/daughter/mother (depending on the age differential) to me," and also, "the children thought of her as a second mother. They cannot understand why she is doing this to them." However, rather than making the household more agreeable for the domestic worker, this deceptive familial relationship "enforces, aggravates, and perpetuates unequal relations of power between domestic workers and employers" (Parreñas 2001: 179, see also Romero 1992) and allows the employer to use "family ideologies for the extraction of unpaid labor" (Parreñas 2001: 179).

⁴⁴ Using the Workers' Awaaz address was a common practice for much of the domestic worker membership.

story. She began by talking of the unending tasks and hours she worked in the Chadha's house cooking, cleaning, and babysitting. Some members nod their heads acknowledging familiarity with her situation. Others shake their heads in knowing incredulity. At one point, Ms K recalls that one of her ex-employers, a doctor, complained about how tired he was from working a full day at the hospital. One of the leaders of the organization, an active member in CAWS with a sense of dry humor says, "It's a good thing he had someone to cook and clean for him since he was so tired from working." Ms K continues that her employers had many other relatives in the New Jersey, where they resided, and that she would often be sent to a relatives' house if they needed help. This leads her to recount her firing.

Ms K then spoke fondly of the camaraderie and support she has found in Workers' Awaaz and of the mobilization around her case. She states that through participation and membership in the organization she was able to gain some dignity and respect for her work. This entire time Ms P sat listening. As was the practice, when possible, members who had cases being developed or in litigation were always encouraged to speak to members who had already gone through the procedure. Ms P periodically chimed in to make connections between her case and Ms K's case or comment on the exploitive working conditions she endured. When Ms K spoke of the support and dignity that being part of Workers' Awaaz gave her, Ms P confirms that it is through participation and the relationships she has made in Workers' Awaaz that she has found a community.

Ms K continues and bemoans that it is difficult it is to find a good job. That if she speaks out against exploitive requests, people fire her. She informs us that she has held a succession of jobs since the settlement of her case. Again, some members around the table nod their heads knowingly since going from job to job is a common strategy to deal

with bad work situations. She then surprises us by claiming that the organization is to blame for her difficulties finding a job. She claims that Workers' Awaaz was behind her when she had a legal case, but once that was settled, the organization had done little to help. Most shocking however, was her claim that the group used her and her case, that she is of no value to Workers' Awaaz now, and that the organization should also focus on helping people find jobs.

Though startled by the turn in conversation, many members at the table have something to say. The staff organizer, an ex-domestic worker, points out that it is not due to the organization that employers make unfair demands, and tries to steer the discussion towards the fight against deteriorating working conditions. But Ms K persists: Workers' Awaaz has made it difficult for her to secure employment and should help her find a job. Another member, points out that Ms K is a member of the organization and that change comes through collective action. Ms P and another domestic worker member acknowledge that going from job to job is tiring and unfair, but situate this in the working conditions the organization is working to change. The conversation goes back and forth for some time. Finally, Ms K begrudgingly concedes and says she has to leave to catch a train back to Long Island where she is currently employed.

Some of us who remain briefly discuss what had just happened. None of us were sure that Ms K changed her mind, but agree that we need to encourage her to come to meetings⁴⁵ and, if that is not possible, to find other ways to involve her. Many of us were perturbed that someone who was once a leader in the organization could lose sight of the mission and demand that Workers' Awaaz, in effect, become an employment center. Once past my initial astonishment at the exchange, however, I realized that Ms K had

⁴⁵ Although Ms K was in touch with a few members personally, her connection with the organization had weakened due to her absence from meetings and other organizational work.

exposed some limitations and tensions that had been laying below the surface of Workers' Awaaz's structure.

One of the foundational beliefs of Workers' Awaaz, following feminist standpoint theory as discussed above, was that those who are exploited are in the best situation to lead the fight against that exploitation. This was most clearly manifested in Workers' Awaaz through a somewhat vague notion of leadership development. However, utilizing an uncritical and transparent understanding of experience, leadership often seemed to mean that workers' individual needs and ideas, rather than a collective position, set the direction of the organization. Often leadership seemed about dictating the actions of a group based on personal experience. According to Wing Lam, however,

Leadership is not something inside a person. [It is] a dynamic process developed through collective actions among a group of people. The leadership process involves three essential elements, which form a continuing, endless spiral. They are learning, planning and action (and back to learning) (2003).

In this understanding of leadership, it is a collective process forged through action and not something inherent in a person.

Through identifying low wage-workers as ready made leaders, Workers' Awaaz took what has emerged in the United States as an identity, class based on income, as equivalent to structural analysis of class relations. Jean and John Camaroff have stated that the market logic of neoliberalism as it is applied to work has come to further "intensify the abstractions inherent in capitalism" (2001: 14). This they suggest has created a "more radically individuated sense of personhood" in which "the personal is the only politics there is, the only politics with a tangible referent or emotional valence" (2001: 14-15). What this meant for Worker's Awaaz, and also earlier in Sakahi, was that what was identified as working class experiences, rather than attention to what produced those experiences, tended to drive organizational direction.

Joan Scott writes “when experience is taken as the origin of knowledge, the vision of the individual subject ... becomes the bedrock of evidence upon which explanation is built” (1992: 25). This allows personal experience to stand in for analysis. Scott suggests that we move beyond the “evidence of experience” and see “subjects who are constituted through experience” rather than “individuals who have experience” (26). Thus the relations of power that produce the experience, not the experience itself, provide the frame of understanding.

At its founding, Workers’ Awaaz attempted to establish itself along principles of organizing, rather than pure service provision.⁴⁶ The two main distinguishing characteristics of organizing are collectivizing power (Sen 1999/2000) and creating a “structure [members] can claim ownership over and embolden into action” (Mathew 2005: 195). Membership control over the organizations (Hart 2001) was to ensure that the membership themselves were empowered to bring about change and commitment to the “long term politics of social transformation” (Mathew 2005:195). Though service provision and advocacy are part of a workers’ center model, the key task of the center is to function as an institution through which collectivized worker voices are developed and heard. However, mobilizing around individual cases of labor exploitation and holding individual employers accountable was not leading to a collective voice or the transformation of working conditions within the industry.⁴⁷ Rather what Workers’ Awaaz provided was redress for individual cases of exploitation and through this empowered the individual. This recentered service and made little headway towards

⁴⁶ A further split occurred in the organization. The staff organizer at the time, and some membership began Andolan, another domestic worker group. For an analysis of this organization, see Das Gupta 2006.

⁴⁷ One attempt to do this is being carried out by Domestic Workers United, a cross national and cross racial group in New York City which is working to promote and institute an enforceable fair labor contract for domestic workers.

changing the nature or value of domestic work, or the structures that produced this as a site of exploitive labor.⁴⁸

The strict separation of the organization into workers and supporting members played a part in this. The twin categories were seen as a way to keep class, based on income earned, in view. Though they were understood as separate, they were dialogic, constituting each group against the other, and establishing roles each would play in the organization. The categories contained unstated relational expectations that it was supporters who would provide the help that the workers needed. Thus, Ms K, in her frustration came to the organization not as a worker member who was fighting against labor exploitation, but as a low wage-worker who needed services. Though there was a critique of pure service provision during the conflict between Sakhi and the DWC, the division of membership into workers and supporters actually set up a model for supporters and the organization to act as resources for the needs of the workers, rather than an institution engaged in the systematic transformation of working conditions. While the organization did locate the working conditions as the locus of exploitation, a systematic approach to changing these conditions, though part of the mission, remained elusive. Rather individual back wage cases and individual workers' needs galvanized the organization into action.

Uncertainty over the role of worker and supporting members frequently plagued the organization. The following examples of problems experienced by Khaleda, a long time member who was on the board and who held various low-wage jobs since she migrated to the United States, and by Asha an ex-domestic worker, illustrate another point of confusion regarding the needs of worker members and the purview of Workers'

⁴⁸ The petition often contained a demand for public apology and also a pledge that employers not treat domestic workers unfairly. However, this was symbolic since Workers' Awaaz had no way to enforce this or to monitor working conditions in households.

Awaaz. Khaleda and her husband had purchased a one family house with a basement, which they converted into rental unit. At some point, their tenants began causing problems. They started paying their rent later and later and there were more people living in the unit than Khaleda and her husband preferred. Eventually, the tenants were asked to move out but refused to do so. Khaleda brought this problem to the organization and asked that she receive help in evicting the tenants. Asha was a live in domestic worker who had recently left her job. She resided in New Jersey and took a train to come into New York City. During a commute on a New Jersey Transit train, she suffered an injury when she exited the carriage and fell. She wanted compensation from the New Jersey Transit Authority and brought this up at a meeting as a case that the organization should work on. Neither case involved problems stemming from the working conditions of the members involved. Rather, both were problems that happened to belong to people who were low-wage workers. In both cases, a distinction between problems that arise from exploitive work conditions and the problems of those who work in these conditions was not made. Rather, they were easily conflated. In other words, any experience or problem that a worker had was perceived as a legitimate concern for the organization.

Neither Asha or Khaleda were advocating that the organization mobilize behind them, holding rallies against New Jersey Transit, for example; nor were they asking for the help of all members in the organization. Their requests were targeted specifically at supporting members, those middle class people who were seen as possessing access to resources and skills that would help them settle their disputes. The expectation that someone in the group would address the problems was premised on the divide between workers who set the agenda and/or brought problems to Workers' Awaaz and supporting members who helped solve them. In each case, supporting members volunteered to help.

Researching available solutions, they were able to find a lawyer willing to give advice to Khaleda and a personal injury lawyer who took on Asha's case pro bono.

The demands made by Khaleda and Asha did push Workers' Awaaz to revisit the mission and discuss exactly what the work of organizing domestic and other low wage workers entailed.⁴⁹ Given the personal nature of the two cases, discerning their links to the organizational mission was not difficult. More complex was the same question in the case of Ms K discussed above since it involved work. Even though the emblem of worker was supposed to point to structural inequalities, it did not succeed in constructing a group that could then be organized since it was income based exploitation, and not social relations that construct this that defined one's position in the organization.

TIME, HEALTH, AND THE NEW WORKER

The joint Time and Health Campaign offered Workers' Awaaz a new approach to organizing. It was an innovative campaign the zeroed in on overwork, under- and unemployment, deteriorating health conditions and the effects all these had on social relationships. The campaign fought against the established trend of people working more hours for less pay, fewer benefits and increasing job insecurity, what it identified as sweatshop working conditions across industries; and what can also be understood as the technologies of flexibility that are imposed on workers across industries and income levels.

This framework was referred to as the work-time crunch by the two organizations that originally developed the campaign, The Chinese Labor Organization (CLO) and the Anti-Sweatshop Organization (ASO). The work-time crunch was shorthand to the ways that work has become the institution around which we arrange our lives and find worth.

⁴⁹ Requests like this, i.e., helping someone fill out immigration or other official forms, would arise periodically. It became practice to take care of this between membership, and not through the organization.

Focusing on the increasing amount of time people spent working, the campaign highlighted deteriorating health conditions and strained social relationships engendered by long hours at work. Points of agitation against these developments included crafting legislation that would guard against dismissal for refusal to work overtime and place a cap on the number hours people are forced to work, reforming the New York State Workers' Compensation Board,⁵⁰ the institution set up to help injured workers, and putting forth a 40 hour work week at a living wage as a human right, both for those who are forced to work long hours and those who are un- and underemployed and thus unable to make a living.

The CLO, a twenty-five year old workers' center in Manhattan Chinatown, initially formulated the campaign with the ASO, a newer group that emerged from youth organizing in the former and had developed as a multi-national, racial and intergenerational group. The Time and Health campaign emerged from CLO's work organizing garment workers, one of their most successful and best-known campaigns which took on the practice of sub-contracting. In the course of organizing boycotts and fighting for the rights of the mainly female Chinese and other garment workers in New York City, the effects of sweatshop conditions on health surfaced. Long work hours, repetitive motion performed for ten or more hours a day, working in unventilated spaces, continued exposure to chemically treated fabric, and bathroom restrictions had left many garment workers ill, injured or both. Once their value was "used up," the workers were a drain on profit production and were generally fired without any compensation. In addition to their deteriorating health, many garment workers also spoke of losing connections with their children, other family members and friends since they had no time

⁵⁰ Repetitive stress injuries and exposure to chemicals, the most common health ailments cause by working conditions, have also been hardest to prove as causes of health injuries under New York State Workers' Compensation Board decisions.

to build those relationships. While there are specific mechanisms that cause deteriorating health and loss of control over time in the garment industry, these effects were seen across industries. From these insights borne of an analysis of working conditions and organizing for change, a new theorization of labor extraction in the workplace and its impact on people's bodies and lives outside the workplace was formulated.

Joint meetings were held regularly to further develop the Time and Health Campaign. Discussion at these meetings centered on strategy, tactics, the work being done in each organization, and joint work carried out between the three organizations. A meeting of the campaign leaders was called to discuss the direction of the campaign. However, due to a great deal of interest expressed by general membership in all three organizations, a general discussion of the campaign's tenets was to be held.

The meeting was at the CLO office in Manhattan Chinatown. Nine Workers' Awaaz members attended. We arrived in two groups and settled into chairs and a couch. There were about 40 people seated in a misshapen circle. The discussion was led by a leader from CLO. She was a young female staff organizer who was fluent in both English and Mandarin. She began by talking about the campaign generally, its foundations, goals, and activities, pausing at regular intervals for translations in Bengali, Cantonese, Hindi, Polish, and Spanish.

After the general discussion of the campaign, the executive director of CLO took over. He had been an organizer for three decades, and with the organization since its inception. His style could often be didactic, but in this instance it was needed. He asked why work is important to people's lives. There were a few broad answers given: it provides income, gives meaning to our lives, defines who we are, it is what we spend a large part of our day doing. Other answers reflected the ideological precepts of the campaign: that work arranges our time, that we are being overworked, and that the

demands of work are robbing us of our time and health. He used the second set of answers to advance the argument that sweatshop labor conditions existed across industries: the increased work hours, decreasing pay and benefits, and the lack of control over one's life.

He knew that disarticulating worker from low wage work was being met with resistance in the organizations. Strategically, he introduced the example of high paid lawyer to illustrate that sweatshop labor conditions existed across all wage levels and labor sectors. He spoke of hypothetical recent law school graduates who land a job at a firm.⁵¹ The CLO executive director points out that the recently minted lawyers are required to work overtime without pay or other compensation to finish cases, and that even workers in white collar industries can be fired for refusing to work overtime.⁵² This is used to show that people across industries are being effected by the same conditions of work, and more importantly, that all working people are workers. He ends this segment by stating that to succeed as a true workers' movement, one that can alter current working conditions across industries and not just wage levels in low wage industries, the Time and Health Campaign has to show that loss of control over time and health effects all working people.

In the ensuing discussion about the campaign's policy work, Khaleda, the Workers' Awaaz member mentioned above, raises her hand to ask a question. She asks in Bengali, and another Workers' Awaaz member translates into English. She asks how both she and the employer that hires her can occupy the same position. Pointing out that her

⁵¹ See Aronowitz (2003), Ehrenreich (2005), and Ross (2002) for discussions on the declining conditions of professional work.

⁵² In 2002, the third partner organization began a campaign calling attention deteriorating work conditions for white-collar workers, especially women. The campaign was lead by a young female member who was working for the non-profit World Conference on Religion and Peace. During her employment, she was forced to work long hours without overtime pay, denied time to eat her lunch and expected to be on call 24 hours when assisting her boss during business trips.

employer makes substantially more than she does, enough to hire someone to take care of household work, she states that she is the worker, not her professional employer.

The executive director points to the need to hire a domestic worker as an indicator that the employer is also being sweated in her workplace, and that the distinction is in the amount she gets paid. He continues this line in hopes of showing both similarities and differences in the two women's situation. As the domestic worker feels pressured by her boss to be more productive, so does the domestic worker's boss. However, the CLO executive director makes sure to point out that the campaign's focus is low wage workers since they are the most exploited and the workings of the sweatshop system is exacted most stringently on them. He ends his answer by stressing that a mass based movement is necessary to tackle the current labor system, and that this involves finding common points of exploitation. Khaleda, however, is not swayed, and states that both she and her boss cannot both occupy the position of being workers. At the next Worker's Awaaz meeting she heatedly argues that the organization refocus its attention on individual cases and helping domestic workers develop skills to move into other professions and that the Time and Health campaign is moving the organization away from its mission of "helping workers."

In Worker's Awaaz, the ability to claim the position of worker had always been the domain of low-wage workers, and was seen as a distinction necessary to center class oppression and exploitation. It was not a distinction that could easily be given up since, as discussed above, it dictated the roles of membership and, to a large degree, coordinated the work of the organization. The Time and Health Campaign provided an opportunity to engage in structural analysis and collective action. Through its focus on the ways that the workings of the current regime of labor, in the guise of productivity, exacted flexibility across industries, it also proposed a different mode of participation in

organizational work for both traditionally identified workers and supporting members. This held the potential for new grounds of mass based organizing that decentered transparent experience, individual empowerment and addressed new regimes of labor extraction that was being enacted on all workers. There was great reluctance by many Worker's Awaaz members, both low-wage workers and supporting members, to rethink the category. This eventually became a polarizing issue within the organization. Just how opposing these categories became was made clear when some members began referring to membership as workers and non-workers, rather than supporting members, thus drawing a stark divide between the two.

According to Sandra Harding and other feminist standpoint theorists, the knowledge gained through the standpoint of oppression provide insights into the workings of power and also the dismantling of this power. Sharing this knowledge with people in other standpoints also allows them greater understanding of structures of power and oppression. However, Harding is not advocating that those who are oppressed teach others so that the latter can appropriate this knowledge and speak from the position of oppression. Rather, she insists that through engaged activity, "another's insights" (1991) can generate insights in order to fight the same struggles from the positions disparately constructed subjects occupy.

The campaign recognized sweatshops, business downsizing, the reserve army of temporaries, and the pressure placed on recent college graduates to exploit themselves as part of the same system that pushes for greater productivity while it cuts costs. The Time and Health Campaign also organized people who were unemployed, especially those whose unemployment was caused by workplace injuries. The campaign's foundational concern was fighting current work arrangements and exposing that through the time it demands work has come to manage all aspects of a person's life – from the number of

hours they spend doing the same task over and over, to the amount of time someone can devote to forming a community. In other words, the Time and Health Campaign sought to illuminate the fact that human interaction has become conditioned through the logic of the market. The Time and Health Campaign was based on the knowledge that the current regime of labor causes both a loss of control over one's time and adversely affects one's health, and fought for a structural transformation of working conditions that sought to "change life by transforming some fundamental aspect of social relations" (Aronowitz 2003: 52).

By identifying loss of control and deterioration of health as a concern to all working people, across all industries and wages, the Time and Health Campaign entailed a reconstitution of "worker." Whereas previously, worker correlated with income or wage, the Time and Health Campaign proposed that worker was a subject produced through the workings of capital extraction and new modes of flexibility demanded by the current regime of labor. Thus anyone who was responsible for producing wealth, whether a domestic worker through paid social reproductive labor or a young office worker who continually works overtime, was a worker. By centering working conditions across industries and wage levels, the campaign identified everyone, even those who are unemployed, as a worker. While the campaign required that connections be made across industries, the focus for Workers' Awaaz and the other two organizations remained low-wage workers, the segment that experienced the worst effects of forced flexibility often meted out through overwork, underpay, job insecurity, the construction of their labor as disposable, as well as the loss of control over their very corporeal beings through extreme forms of disciplining and surveillance.

Given that most of Worker's Awaaz's membership remained live-in domestic workers, required flexibility that caused lack of control over their time and injuries from

overwork and repetitive stress were daily realities. Working and living in their employers' homes, most domestic workers felt as though they were constantly on the clock. As stated by Rekha Devi, a domestic worker and Workers' Awaaz board member, "I felt like I had to impress my boss –work harder and longer, or else she would fire me" (2001). In addition, for most domestic workers, their days followed the rhythm of regimented household chores. Ms. Devi had a shoulder injury caused by daily vacuuming, others had back pain from standing hours at a time, and some members complained about headaches and rashes from daily exposure to cleaning chemicals. Recognition that exploitation through inadequate payment was only part of the problem forced Workers' Awaaz to rethink its strategies.

The organization highlighted the loss of control over time and health in individual CAWS cases. However, by focusing on the operation and ideology of labor exploitation, the Time and Health Campaign held out the possibility of situating the individual cases of unpaid wages in larger structural mechanisms.⁵³ Despite its potential, the campaign had difficulty growing organically in Workers' Awaaz. Even though most members were able to make the connection between overwork and lack of control over time and health, Workers' Awaaz was unable to adequately integrate the campaign into its existing work and generally followed the lead set by the CLO and ASO. The main hurdle was the redefinition of worker necessary for the campaign which would overturn the worker-supporting member structure that buttressed the organization and its workings. The rift engendered by this would lead to the implosion and eventual dissolution of the group marked by a battle over the organizational funds and control of the board, two items seen as necessary to setting the direction of the organization.

⁵³ As part of the Time and Health Campaign, Workers' Awaaz also held health fairs for low-wage women workers in the South Asian community. Working with occupational health professionals and clinics, the health fairs served both as an outreach tool and a way to gather statistics on health and work conditions.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I have attempted to trace the meanings and production of “worker” as a subject position in three moments in the history of Worker’s Awaaz. I did so in order to analyze the possibilities and limitation it allowed. While worker was seen as a way to center class in the United States, its internal logic was dependent on to static notions of class positioning vis-à-vis wages. By hitching worker to wages, worker often functioned as an identity rather than a subject produced through a set of relations. The tensions over its classification and meaning were attempts to deconstruct, claim, expand, and make sense of class subjectivities; the workings of which are generally invisible in the United States due to hegemonic discourses of equal opportunity, upward mobility, and individual responsibility.

The split from Sakhi was premised on the need for a different analysis of power and social justice. In part, it was seen as a way to challenge essentialized notions of South Asian women and attend to class cleavages in the population. However, as an identity rooted in income, rather than a position produced through the relationships between labor and capital, worker had more in common with identity based or new social movement politics that are concerned with the rights to difference and recognition, than older class based movements. Accordingly, though mobilization relied on legal and community mobilization, individual experiences of exploitation became the grounds of battle.

The history of worker illustrates the modalities through which class subplanted national identities. As the genesis of differentiation from women marked as middle-class, a working class identity was paramount the activities that the organization undertook. Further, as most of the domestic worker members faced exploitation at the hands of co-ethnics and nationals, these axes of commonality were often questioned as natural axis of solidarity. This is in no way to ignore the fact that members did see themselves as

Bangladeshi, Indian, Pakistani and the regional differences contained in each. However, since exploitation was constructed along lines of class marginalization, within the organization class was the dominant axis of identification.

However, this mode of organizing limited activism to a succession of individual cases. The Time and Health Campaign, through its analysis of new regimes of labor extraction under neoliberalism, offered a way to shift from mobilizing around aggrieved individuals to a potential mass based movement. This also presented an expansive definition of worker that was not based on one's occupational standing but the fact that one's labor produced profit for bosses and was arranged by the neoliberal ethic of flexibility.

The contestation over who was and wasn't worker was a struggle over positioning within the larger South Asian community. The original articulation of worker spoke to class divisions engendered by changes in migration patterns of gender, nationality and profession. Worker also situated members in economic and social structures in the United States, and was in essence a short hand for a complex of power relationships. Each attempt to rearticulate what, or rather who, could rightly occupy this subject position constituted a piece in an ongoing conversation about migration, class and new subject positions produced through neoliberal practices in the United States. Within the organization and in the joint campaign, they also presented flashes of theory-making and macro-level analysis of working

Chapter 3: Self Making and Being Made: Institutions and Subjects in New York City

In the previous two chapters, I examined the subjects produced in Workers' Awaaz and GOPIO through a focus on organizational history, mission, and activity. I argued that these were indicative of how each group, marked by gender, class and migration patterns, negotiated difference within networks of power which opened up and constrained possibilities of action under neoliberalism. In this chapter, I move from the internal workings of the two organizations to their place in the context of New York City. Looking at the campaigns as narratives of larger processes, I propose that the subjects of diasporic entrepreneur and worker are produced through a dialectical relationship between organizational work and the processes of capital accumulation and capital flows found in a global city. My use of the global city thesis situates the dissertation within the tradition of urban anthropology, and grounds the investigation of subjectification practices in both groups in the localization of global processes. This framework allows me to attend to the specificity of New York City as well as to the transnational links and connections engendered by this configuration that is heavily dependent on new capital formations. These "fields of social forces" present another site of subject formation as they are "produced simultaneously by numerous institutions in different combinations and doses" (Hardt and Negri 2000: 331). Thus, the subjectivities diasporic entrepreneur and worker are generated not only through the internal logics of the organization, but also in dialectical conversation with the structures of New York City.

New York City has been identified as a world or global city, a central place where the work of globalization gets done (Sassen 1992, 2000). Global cities do this work

through the localization of globalized capital and labor. This includes the creation of a supply of low wage jobs and laborers required for the existence of the high-income activities specific to this urban formation. However, the global city is not only divided along lines of class. As this chapter will show, for GOPIO and Worker's Awaaz respectively, it is also a space of masculinist engagement with capital through transnational practices of flexible citizenship, as well as the site of feminized pursuit of civil rights through practices which sought to make visible hidden domestic labor that was necessary for capital accumulation. The context of the city is crucial to this analysis, as working from Sassen's theorizations, global cities play an important role in the new regime of finance capital and its circulation. I would add that the shadow this casts on the city-scape is one that falls even on those not directly involved in those areas which Sassen identifies as important to new capital regimes. In order to attend to those that are not directly inside the financial workings of the global city, I place the global city thesis in conversation with the city as context methodology employed in urban anthropology. Through this pairing, we can see the city holistically, rather than just as a set of financial institutions and their attendant services.

CITY AS CONTEXT

In the second half of the twentieth century, a fair number of anthropologists and ethnographies were located in cities as anthropologists turned their lens towards urban migration, adaptation, ethnicity and poverty (Sanjek 1990, Breitborde 1994). Despite a growing body of work in what eventually coalesced as urban anthropology, the sub discipline was not comfortably settled as questions remained as to whether the discipline could adequately study populations in urban settings (Gulick 1973). At the core of these discussions was the concern that participant observation and other "holistic" methods could only be applied with great difficulty to research in cities. Would participant

observation be adequate to examine large-scale social fields, population dispersal, and fragmented communities? Or would anthropologist have to resort to the sampling and survey methods found in sociology?⁵⁴

Richard Fox viewed the hand-wringing as misplaced and presented a new framework for urban anthropology in his essay, “Rationale and Romance in Urban Anthropology” (1972). Fox advances the belief that urban anthropology was “something less than it could be,” stuck in a rut due to its continued pursuit of “exotic and marginal” populations in a new setting (205). According to Fox, this prevented anthropological contributions to the general study of urbanism because it took “the urban environment as a given, a mere location” (218) in which exotic peoples had migrated. He termed this approach anthropology *in* the city. Within this, the foci were on urbanization, the relationships this forged with rural populations and the networks that various social groups created in the city. Rather than focus on these questions and topics, Fox believed the goal of the urban anthropologist should be to “[clarify] the nature of the city” (221). While rural-to-urban migration led anthropologists to the city, there was little rumination of the city as its own subject of research. He directed anthropologists to embark on anthropology *of* the city, an approach that would take the city and the urban itself as the focus and thus address concerns over holistic methodology since the city itself would be the examined institution. Thus, research examining rural-to-urban migration in Africa and Latin America must take account of the colonial forces that shaped the cities and the structures that prompted migration, and further, the place of these cities on larger regional or national stages. Fox’s call reoriented urban anthropology (Breitborde 1994, Low 1996) and pushed researchers to look beyond the narrow confines of the populations they were

⁵⁴ See Foster and Kemper 2001 for a succinct discussion of the changes in methodology needed for urban research.

studying. The dictum to conduct anthropology *of* the city guided researchers to view the city as distinct formation that needed be accounted for when looking at populations living within them, and provided the grounds for anthropological contributions to urban studies.

Though written 35 years ago, Fox's clarion call to examine context offers a way to reground the importance of place as transnational and global frameworks continue as the prevailing spatial and analytical models in play. This is not to negate the very necessary and welcome critiques that "postnationalist" theories have offered, including questioning the primacy of the nation-state as a unit of sociospatial analysis, challenging the "natural" connection of people to nations, and recognizing that migrants have multiple attachments and social fields across nations. However, the focus on movement between nodes rather than the anchoring points (Szanton Blanc, Glick Schiller, and Basch 1994, Appadurai 1995, Hannerz 1996, Ong 1999, Glick Schiller and Fouron 2001) can have the effect of eliding an analysis of place and place based context. Fortunately, an increasing number of researchers across disciplines have argued that transnationalism, globalization, and other categorical descriptors of movement are spatially situated and that these processes are intensified in urban settings (Massey 1991, 1994, Brenner 1998, 1999, McDowell 1999, Holston and Appadurai 1999).

A leading city as context framework has been the global city hypothesis that emerged in the 1990s and remains influential to this day. Though there are numerous scholars that have advanced what a global city may be (Freidmann 1986, Knox and Taylor 1995, Scott 2001) Saskia Sassen has become one of its chief proponents and thinkers (1991 (2001), 1998). Her initial set of essays outlining the global city hypothesis, *The Global City: New York, London, Tokyo*, states that "the world economy has shaped the life of cities" (1991: 3) and identifies a particular urban form as the global city. These cities serve as "command points" of the global economy and are the main location for

finance and “specialized service firms” (ibid). Sassen points to the paradox of the concurrent expansion and centralization of financial capital and businesses in this configuration: as transnational corporations globalize economies, there is an intensification of central functions of coordination and control in a few key central sites. Unlike earlier theories of global or world cities that focused on the presence of transnational headquarters or nodes, Sassen argues that what marks global cities is their role as producer sites of services necessary for the running of spatially dispersed organizations. These institutions stimulate innovations in secondary services crucial to their running such as law, actuary, etc. Coupled with an increased presence of these institutions and the hegemony of finance and its attendant services, is an increase in low-paid labor, generally performed by women, that is necessary to both the businesses and the life-styles of those who work in that sphere (1991, 1996). Sassen has cast the bifurcation between those who work in the central industries of finance and those who provide low-waged services for them as sectors of the population that are valorized and devalorized, respectively, in accordance to their deemed necessity and proximity to the global economy (1996). As mentioned in regards to David Harvey’s theory of flexible accumulation in the introduction, the word neoliberalism does not enter into Sassen’s global city hypothesis. However, it is clear that many, if not all, of the factors she identifies as signs of a global city were emergent practices necessary for the workings of neoliberalism.

While Sassen’s theory, and the global city theories in general, have been influential in understanding the workings of new formations of global capital, there have been criticisms.⁵⁵ One critique, and subsequent alternative framework comes from Peter

⁵⁵ Critiques include the necessity to see that not all global cities share the same political, social or spatial structure (Hill and Kim 2000), the ties global cities have to the regions and nations in which they are located (Scott 2001), the necessity to historicize and look at earlier formations (abu-Lughod 1999), and the need to factor migration as an indication of a global city (Benton-Short, Price and Friedman 2005).

Michael Smith who takes issue with the functionalist approach employed in the global city thesis, one premised on the assumption that there exists an entity that can be identified by its role and operations in the globalization of capital. Smith advocates a constructionist approach and believes that “the global city is best thought of...not as a place or an object consisting of essential properties” (1998: 482) nested in a hierarchy of cities worldwide, but rather one type of city produced through “an endless interplay of differently articulated transnational networks and practices best deciphered by studying the agency...of actors that shape and sustain transnational networks and their attendant practices and outcomes” (ibid). Following, he offers a theory of transnational urbanism (2001, 2005), which is

a marker of the criss-crossing transnational circuits of communication and cross-cutting local, translocal, and transnational social practices that ‘come together’ in particular places at particular times and enter into the contested politics of place making, the social construction of power differentials, and the making of individual, group, nation and transnational identities, and their corresponding fields of difference” (2001: 5).

Though Sassen has written about the role of migrants and those “below” in global cities, the majority of her work focuses on finance and technology which not only produce certain types of cities, but links them together in somewhat identical operations. The shortcoming of Sassen’s theory has been its inherent totalization. Indeed Sassen and other global city theorists have done a poor job exploring how those outside finance and its attendant support services experience and exist in these cities. For this, we can utilize Smith’s focus on agency and social construction, the multivocality of experience, and how these condition new subjectivities, and thus attend to context, difference *and* process. This pushes us to understand the theory outlined by Sassen in terms of a fragmented city experience, rather than a unified and totalizing one, and allows a consideration of the influences and impacts felt by those who are in the proximity of

global city processes, but not fully incorporated by them. In what follows, I view Worker's Awaaz and GOPIO as two sites composed of people who live in the shadow cast by global city dynamics, and explore the ways that Worker's Awaaz contest these in their production of worker, while GOPIO utilizes them to produce the diasporic entrepreneur.

THE SUBJECT OF THE HOUSEHOLD

Good help is hard to find. Look in the classified section of any South Asian newspaper in New York City and one can easily find ads seeking live-in domestic workers. Requirements abound: language skills, regional affiliation that matches the hiring family, rapport with children, ability to cook and clean, the appropriate skills needed to help run a household and of course, it is always advantageous to have past experience. For employers, hiring a South Asian is a potential way to maintain certain cultural, linguistic and social formations in the household. For domestic workers, this arrangement is thought to mitigate against abuse and exploitation due to assumed feelings of national, regional or religious solidarity, sharing of cultural and social referents and overlapping identities. For many undocumented South Asian immigrant women, this is one of the most easily attained jobs.⁵⁶

Through its organizational focus on domestic work, Workers' Awaaz enacted a much needed feminist analysis of private spaces which are often written out of considerations of neoliberalism since these tend to focus on units associated with the public sphere such as economics, professions, and ethnic and national culture. Through their efforts to disarticulate the household as a site of solely affective emotional relationships, and rearticulate it as a site of paid, and often exploitative, labor, the

⁵⁶ My usage of South Asian here refers to women who have migrated from South Asia. South Asian Carribeans utilize the social networks of their national group and/or domestic work agencies.

organization shows how multiple institutions come together to produce the household in the global city. A 2006 report issued by Domestic Workers United and the DataCenter, *Home is Where the Work is: Inside New York's Domestic Work Industry*, present the inner workings of the domestic work industry.⁵⁷ The report combines historical and legal analysis with data gathered from 547 surveys of domestic workers, 14 domestic worker testimonies, and interviews with 7 employers. Though the report focuses on domestic workers across nationality, race and ethnicity, and does not disaggregate along these lines in presenting their findings, much of the data resonates with evidence gathered during my fieldwork.

There are 200,000 domestic workers in New York City, almost all immigrant women of color (2).⁵⁸ This continues a long legacy of women of color and immigrant women providing domestic work in the United States, starting with enslaved black women and after the abolition of slavery free black women and immigrant European women to the current situation in which immigrant women of color make up the bulk of this workforce (Amott and Matthaei 1996, Romero 2002,).⁵⁹ Indeed, 99% of the women who participated in the survey were foreign born, and 76% were not US citizens.⁶⁰ Over half of the women, 59%, were the primary earners for their families, the majority of

⁵⁷ Following DataCenter's mission to provide research tools to community organizations and marginalized communities, researchers at DataCenter worked with domestic workers from DWU to develop a survey and train DWU membership in survey methods and data collection. For more information on DWU <http://www.domesticworkersunited.org/>. For information on DataCenter, <http://www.datacenter.org/>. For a full copy of the report, <http://www.datacenter.org/reports/reports.htm>

⁵⁸ The definition of domestic worker in the report encompasses "anyone employed to work in a private home by the head(s) of household" (1), and included both live-in and live-out workers. The statistic is garnered using baseline extrapolation of households with incomes \$100,000 or greater with children under 18 or elderly over 65 (ibid).

⁵⁹ The one historical exception has been the employment of Chinese men as domestic workers in the American west during the mid-19th and early 20th centuries (Glenn 1986). However, Chinese men were already constructed as feminine, and thus the workings of gender and race in this instance served to mark them as appropriately suited for domestic tasks (see Lee 1999, Okihiro 2001).

⁶⁰ The report did not account for migration status beyond US citizenship. The survey itself did not pose the question about migration status beyond the classification of citizen or non-citizen.

whom live in the domestic worker's nation of origin. Not surprisingly, 72% sent remittances back home on a regular basis (26). This was reflected in the experience of membership in Worker's Awaaz. Asha became the main financial supporter for her three children and aged parents after her husband, a pilot for a domestic Indian airline company, unexpectedly passed away. Another member, Ms P decided to migrate after she and her husband calculated that a few years of employment as a domestic worker in the United States could provide enough money to buy property in their village, build a house and perhaps start a small business. Despite the fact that many domestic workers enter into a field that is highly exploitive and unregulated, the decision to undertake domestic work should be viewed as a transnational strategy⁶¹ (Garcia 2006, DasGupta 2006) that many women assume in the face of personal and structural conditions.⁶²

Domestic workers are a stable work force, generally staying in the industry for most of their working tenure in the United States. 61% of survey domestic workers had worked in no other occupation in the United States, though half worked in other occupations in their home countries (2, 11). In addition, the majority tended to stay with one employer over long periods of time. This was typical in Workers Awaaz, with many members, even those who eventually left employment due to bad treatment, employed in the same household for two or more years. While a few members did switch jobs semi-frequently as a tactic to avoid poor work circumstances this came with its own set of problems since references from past employers were very important in securing new jobs, and the domestic worker would have to learn new routines and family dynamics.

⁶¹ In the case of both women, their plans and strategies for family care altered once they arrived in the United States. For instance, Asha was able to attain a greencard through marriage and was able to sponsor her teenage son.

⁶² This is an important point to recognize in order to avoid constructing these women as lacking agency and as mere victims.

Nearly half of the domestic workers who were questioned worked overtime weekly, but less than one-third received overtime pay. One-third of all workers and nearly half of all live-ins answered that they had experienced abuse by their employers. This ranged from being made uncomfortable (24%, 36% for live-ins) and verbal abuse (21%, 37% for live-ins), to physical and sexual abuse (1%, 2% for live-ins). However, as stated in the report, “Survey collectors noted that the question was uncomfortable for workers, and that this implied that there may have been underreporting” (21). 33% of the workers believed that immigration status contributed to employer abuse (2), 32% said their race or ethnicity contributed and 18% believed language did (22).

Many studies on domestic workers center their analysis on the workings of race and ethnicity within the domestic space, as women of color and their white female employers interact (Rollins 1985, Romero 1992, Chang 2000, Hondagneu-Soloto 2001, Tucker 2002). Indeed, as per *Home is Where the Work Is*, 99% of domestic workers were immigrant women of color, while 77% of their employers were white, and in 78% of employing households, one or both employers were from the United States. However, the report does not disaggregate statistics by nationality or race, telling us what percentage of Barbadian respondents work in white homes for instance.⁶³ Given that there are different venues and networks through which domestic workers are placed— such as agencies in the Philippines, American agencies, word of mouth or ethnic newspapers—the particulars of domestic work for different groups, often shaped by their immigration status and their nations relationship with the United States, is not accounted for. From my involvement with Worker’s Awaaz and newspaper articles in the South Asian American press covering domestic worker abuse cases, I would surmise that a large number of South

⁶³ The report does, however, give a breakdown of domestic workers by race: Asian 20%, Black 65%, Latina 7%, Mixed Race/Ethnicity 3% and White 1%.

Asian domestic workers are employed in wealthy South Asian households. – often matching nationality, if not linguistic affiliation. Thus, while racial, gender and immigration structures in the United States have tracked these women into domestic work, the axis of differentiation within the household often rests on the interplay between class and migration status.

A characteristic of a global city is the polarization of incomes between those in valorized fields such as finance and high tech industries, and those in devalorized industries that are peripheral to the former (Sassen 1996, 2001). The latter are “frequently as internationalized a presence as is capital” (Sassen 1996: 106) which marks the former. A demographic profile of New York City undertaken by the New York City Department of City Planning’s Population Division, found that 64% of workers in manufacturing and 58% of those in construction in New York City are foreign born. In the former, one-third work in the garment industry. 54% of the service industry is also comprised of immigrants with restaurant, private household and traveler accommodations dominating the fields of employment. Not surprisingly, this population was underrepresented in Information Technology, Administration and Finance/Insurance/Real Estate (the so called FIRE industries) (2004: 37) This “internationalized presence” is inflected by gender and race as it is “embedded in a massive demographic transition towards the presence of women, African Americans and third world immigrants into the urban workforce” (Sassen 1996: 110). These trends affect the make-up of domestic workers. Indeed, in an article examining the “macrosociology” of paid domestic work, Milkman, Resse and Roth argue that, “a crucial determinant of the extent of employment in paid domestic labor in a given location is the degree of economic inequality [in a city] (1998: 487).

It would be a mistake, however, to view paid domestic labor only against the scale of the city. Feminist geographers such as Dorren Massey and Linda McDowell have identified a gender bias in discussions and applications of space that are manifest through a disregard of “smaller” units such as the household in favor of city, region, nation and international. Thus, if we take seriously the notion that the simultaneous interactions of multiple institutions produce subject positions, the household cannot fall by the wayside in examinations of global cities. Using the case of Ms P and the challenge to the material and discursive divide between the private and public that operated at the intersection of home and work, the remainder of this section illustrates the relational construction of the household, and in turn the domestic worker within it, as dependent on the convergence of transnational processes of gendered migration and national labor laws in New York City.

It is well rehearsed in feminist theory that the household has been erroneously constructed as the realm of the private, associated with women and set apart from wage labor and the maneuvers of capitalism and capitalist production (Rosaldo 1980, Yanagisako and Collier 1987, Brown 1995, Massey 1996). However, working from Engles’s writings on the role of the family and industrial capital ([1884] 1978), one could easily show that private household labor was crucial to the functioning of capitalism as it relieved men of chores needed in the running of a household, and produced more workers. Indeed, as stated by feminist political theorist and philosopher Carol Pateman,

It is ‘forgotten’ that the worker, invariably taken to be a man, can appear ready for work and concentrate on his work free from the everyday demands of providing food, washing and cleaning, and care of children, only because these tasks are performed unpaid by his wife (1988: 132).

A demographic fact of the global city has been growth in dual income households. In fact, the majority of employing households in the DWU survey consist of couples with children “whose lives do not provide enough time to take care of their families and

home” (32). This was also borne out in Worker’s Awaaz where the only instance of a single career household was the case of a wife who left her job after giving birth. The truth that their labor was directly supporting the labor capacity of those in valorized jobs was not lost on membership. Ironically, more than one member relayed stories of employers’ own recognition of this fact in passing comments of how crucial their labor was to the household. However, these moments of recognition did not translate into better working conditions as the type of work domestic workers perform has long been seen as devalued “women’s work,” whether it was performed for pay or not.

Ms P was brought to the United States by her employers’ parents from India. She had been working as a domestic worker for years in the household in New Delhi and had slowly worked her way up to being in charge of the kitchen. Her employers knew that their friends’ son, A. D., was looking for a domestic worker to help with the arrival of a newborn and offered to approach her. For Ms P, her old employers’ recommendation was a sign that they thought highly of the offer and also of her. At the time of her interview and hiring in New Delhi, she was told that her only responsibility would be to take care of the newborn. For this she was to be paid 4000 Indian rupees a month (at that time approximately \$111) and be provided with room and board in the family’s home. Her soon-to-be employers helped her obtain a visiting visa to enter into the United States, and she was soon brought to New York City by A. D.’s parents.

Upon her arrival at the residence, though, she was also expected to cook, clean and care for the entire household as needed. Her duties increased and decreased according to the work schedules of the couple, the wife, N. D. a doctor and husband a businessman. If N. D. was on call, Ms P would be solely responsible for child-care. Other household tasks increased if A. D. went away on business trips.

In the global city, “the domestic labor of the expanding number of highly qualified women entering the labor market...is replaced by other women’s poorly remunerated labor” (McDowell et al 2005: 445). The majority of women who performed the work of social reproduction in this situation are immigrant women of color. As defined by Laslett and Brenner, social reproduction involves those

activities and attitudes, behaviors and emotions, responsibilities and relationships directly involved in the maintenance of life on a daily basis, and intergenerationally. Among other things social reproduction includes how food, clothing, and shelter are made available for immediate consumption, the ways in which the care and socialization of children are provided, the care of the infirm and elderly, and the social organization of sexuality (1989 382).

Thus, for a certain class of global city residents, the very construction of the household, contingent on the functions performed inside to constitute a family is dependent on the labor of transnational female migrants.

The presence of a live-in domestic worker, needed for the existence of the household, presents a point of tension in its very construction through the blurring of boundaries between private (household) and public (paid labor). According to Bridget Andersen, “for the relations of the employment contract to hold, the domestic worker must be constructed as selling her labour power rather than her personhood – but this is extremely difficult within the private domain as it is currently imagined” (2000: 167). In this conception, the private sphere, one of domesticity and family, cannot be the site of paid labor. Rather, the household is generally understood as a place of love-based relationships: between spouses, between parents and children, and between siblings. Indeed, it is these affective relationships that are a hallmark of the “home.” It is into this network of love and/or kin based relationships that the domestic worker enters. Indeed, these affective relationships went a long way towards minimizing the fact that the domestic worker was a paid laborer.

For Ms P, the distinction between her presence in the household and that of the “real” family constituted through affective relations was enacted, of course, through her (under)paid labor, but also through the regulation of literal space within the household which the family occupied. Ms P was not given any space to establish as her own. Instead, unless sleeping on the floor of the baby’s room if the child was ill, Ms P usually slept on the floor of the living room, despite the fact that there was a sleeper sofa in the room. If sleeping in the baby’s room, she was able to use a trundle bed in the room. All these tactics set her apart from the rest of the family, and precluded any integration into the household as a member with any authority or control, even over large parts of her own life. Instead, a situation was created where, as Andersen points out, it is not the domestic workers’ labor power that was being commodified but the domestic worker herself.

Though during the course of her employment Ms P was seen as a worker, and not family member, it was these very affective relationships that her employers deployed in their defense during the case for unpaid wages that Ms P eventually brought against them. Her employers’ defense rested on their ability to articulate the household as existing outside the relationships garnered by waged work. They rendered their household and Ms P’s presence in it as a relationship based on voluntary care work and family arrangements. Actions such as withholding her passport and wages were explained as concerned gestures to protect her from herself and what they viewed as potential reckless behavior. The wages owed were also denied by casting much of the work Ms P performed as emanating not from her duties as a domestic worker, but from her love of, and thus desire to care for, the couple’s infant. In both explanations of why Ms P’s work was not work, her ex-employers attempted to cast the relationship between them as a normative one between family members.

The ideology of the household as a private space of affective relationships is also reflected in national labor laws which tend to take a position of non-engagement with the space of private households. As pointed out by the Rachel Coen and Hena Mansori, the exclusion of

certain *categories* of workers, such as agricultural or domestic workers, who are, in practice women, people of color, and/or immigrants...suggest that U.S. laws do not recognize domestic work as 'real' work, and very often do not recognize women and people of color as real workers (2006: 7).

Indeed, numerous national employment and labor laws generally seen as protecting all workers, exclude domestic workers either by name, function or work environment, and in doing so construct the household as a site outside of the purview of the state regulation.

The National Labor Relations Act (NLRA), passed in 1935 and revised many times since, forms the cornerstone of workers' rights to organize and petition for improved working conditions, and join unions. However, it does not cover those who work in the domestic service of any person or family in a home. The Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) which sets federal minimum wages, maximum work hours, and overtime pay completely excluded domestic workers from its concern until 1974, when it added domestic workers to the occupations covered under federal minimum wage regulations. However, domestic workers are still not covered under overtime provisions of the FLSA. Domestic workers are also not covered under the Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSHA) of 1970. This act, passed to ensure safe and healthy working conditions and environments excluded domestic workers. While these three Acts name domestic workers as exempt from their scope, Title VII of the Civil Rights Act which pertains to discrimination in employment only covers workplaces where there are 15 or more employees. Given that most domestic workers are solitary employees in someone's household, they do not have recourse to employment discrimination laws. The four Acts

taken together either exempt the household by name or scale from being beholden to national labor laws, and in doing so, reinscribe it as a private space outside the reach of the state regulation.

Hegemonic notions of what is public and private, the growing dependence on the labor of women of color in general and immigrant women in particular to run the household, and the legal construction of the household as outside labor relations, order the experiences of Worker's Awaaz members and contribute to their subjectification as workers. These dynamics are exacerbated in a global city as the deemed productivity of labor is measured on a scale of its contribution to the workings of global capital. In this formation, the household, marginalized due to its gendered status, has generally been absent as an institution that produces subjects outside the family. However, using the DWU report and the case of Ms P, I illustrated how the household, constructed through the transnational labor of immigrant women of color and the exclusion of paid domestic labor in national labor laws, constructs those who enter into it as invisibilized workers.

THE SUBJECT OF THE STATE

In Manhattan, the Indian nation-state makes its presence known through a few institutions. There is the Permanent Mission of India to the UN on 43rd St, the Consulate General of India on 64th and two branches of the State Bank of India, one in the financial district and the other close to the Consulate. Chances are most people of Indian descent living in New York City will have limited contact with each of these institutions. Perhaps one will notice the Mission, built in a style that “embodies the cultural iconography of the country it represents” (United Nations) while visiting the United Nations, or call the Consulate to check times for getting a passport renewed or a visiting visa, or go to one of the State Bank locations to open an NRI checking account or buy a special Millennium

India bond. Regardless, they are symbols of the Indian State in the built environment of New York City, and though marginal to the functioning of New York City, they are in line with the city's function as a global city.

Taking a cue from recent anthropological writings of the state which seek to examine how the state is produced, Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson write that "states are not simply functional bureaucratic apparatuses, but powerful sites of symbolic and cultural production that are themselves always culturally represented and understood in particular ways" (2002: 981). From this, they consider questions of the space and scale of the state such as "Through what images, metaphors, and representational practices ... the state comes to be understood as a concrete, overarching, spatially encompassing reality?" (ibid). Their theory of the spatialization of the state begins an exploration of the "relationship between states, space and scale" (994) and the quotidian practices through which this materializes.

A main point put forth in their argument is that states are producers of spatial hierarchies, and that this is central to its functioning. However, questioning the spatial metaphor of vertical encompassment that has been the dominant spatial framework "where the organization of capital coexisted more easily with the hegemony of nation-states" (995), Gupta and Ferguson offer a theory of transnational governmentality. This theory is rooted in the challenge to the traditional spatialization of the state that neoliberal globalization presents in the forms of international NGOs, organizations and supranational entities such as the WTO, all of which, in differing ways, have taken on tasks previously under the sole purview of the state. Importantly, this conception of transnational governmentality is in no way positioning itself directly against the state. Rather, it should be seen as something that "overlays and coexists with [the state]" (994). Central to this is Foucault's notion of governmentality, the management of a population

through diffuse tactics found in the powers of the state, discursive practices, identities, and self regulation (Foucault 1991). The theory identifies myriad milieus of conduct and organization. Thus, rather than viewing transnational governmentality as a recalibrating of scale, with the topmost position now occupied by supranational and transnational entities, the authors promote a collapsing of scales (Gupta and Ferguson 2000: 996).⁶⁴

Their notion of “collapse” takes us away from assertions of the demise of the nation-state that transnationalism and globalization signal, to an examination in the ways that the state has reconfigured itself (also see Comaroff and Comaroff 2000, Trouillot 2001, Aretxaga 2003) and continues to participate in subject formation. This follows from the premise that the state is not an easily identified empirical entity with “institutional and geographic fixity,” a characteristic Trouillot asserts has been “exacerbated by globalization” (2001:126). Under neoliberal practices we can approach the state as a set of processes that produce subjects through specific effects of governance, which consists of “a broader configuration of state and key elements in civil society” rather than through government or “state power on its own” (Harvey 2005: 77).

GOPIO’s activities such as hosting state representatives and sponsoring their talks and lectures are moments in which the Indian state materializes in the diaspora and dialectically construct each other. GOPIO often accesses these reterritorialized resources and agents of the Indian nation-state that enter New York City and force the Indian state to engage with its overseas “citizens” who test the boundaries of incorporation. At the same time the state needs to present a controlled image of national identification. In these exchanges, the global Indian subject that GOPIO creates through organizational work is

⁶⁴ Though Gupta and Ferguson do point out that state-like entities “are attempting to reinstate verticality and encompassment” (996).

dependent not only on the circulation of culture and finance but also in the reterritorialized presence of symbols of the Indian state.

Following the claim of multiple attachments advanced by diaspora theorists, these occasions in which GOPIO and the Indian state actively engage one another can be seen as producing an “identification effect, that is, a realignment of the atomized subjectivities along collective lines within which individuals recognize themselves as the same (Trouillot 2001: 126, see also Aretxaga 2003 p. 395). By focusing on those moments, my interest lies in examining the ways that the Indian state makes itself present outside its referential national territory through the process of diasporic recognition. However, this effect is not solely produced by the workings of the Indian State abroad, but works in conjunction with the creation of the American nation-state as a racialized white space that continually indexes insiders and outsiders. By pursuing this line of examination, I begin an exploratory path to Begoña Aretxaga’s contention that “scholars must focus not only on those discourses and practices that produce [the] state form as real but also on the actual social and subjective life of this formation we call the state” (2003: 401).

In the spring of 2001, a five-member delegation of the High Level Committee (HLC) on the Indian Diaspora came to New York City as part of their mandate to gather data on the conditions and concerns of members of the India diaspora around the world. The team was comprised of Dr. L.M. Singhvi, former high commissioner to the UK and then (and current) chairman of the HLC, former foreign minister of state R.L. Bhatia, former special envoy to South Africa J.R. Hiremath, former Indian Consul General in Canada J.C. Sharma, and Baleshwar Agarwal the head of an Indian NGO that focuses on the links between India and the Indian diaspora. The delegation held two meetings in New York City. One was sponsored by the General Consul at the time, Shashi Tripathi,

and held in the Consulate. GOPIO and the India-America Chamber of Commerce organized the other event, which was open to the public and held at Maharaja restaurant in mid-town Manhattan near the United Nations.

Three issues topped the GOPIO sponsored event: the high fee for the Person of Indian Origin Card, the possibility of dual citizenship and a seat in the Rajya Sabha reserved for a Non-Resident Indian. On the first issue, the committee said it would recommend that the fee be revised. On the second and third issues, the committee was less forthcoming. Dr. Singhvi pointed to the fact that the PIO card grants all rights and privileges to the holder other than voting. He also identified citizenship as an emotional issue for the diaspora, and through this made a distinction between emotional and structural attachments by stating that the Indian government is not ready to handle the logistics that would come with that such as “voting booths around the world to facilitate the voting rights of NRIs” and the necessary change to the Constitution of India. As for the matter of an NRI seat in Parliament, Dr. Singhvi pointed to the lack of such a system anywhere, though again, said that he would recommend that the government look into it.

In each of these concerns presented by GOPIO and the India-America Chamber of Commerce, the Indian State was called into existence outside the general territory associated with it. In some sense, what was occurring was the negotiation of an imagined community (Anderson 1991 [1983]) and its relationship to governance. Indeed, Dr. Singhvi referred often to a deep connection between India and the diaspora, calling on common desires and hopes for the nation-state in the global economy. However, he was careful to temper this discourse with an indicator of the type of relationship this must become. Towards the end of the event, Dr. Singhvi said that the current feeling of “renewal” between the Indian State and the diaspora needed “to go beyond nostalgia” and

turned to the discourse of investment, thus turning the diaspora into potential economic citizens.

The creation of the HLC and their presence in New York City, as well as the other sites on their information-gathering tour, pointed to the identification effect that the Indian government was orchestrating in its diaspora. However, the HLC seen as a circulating symbol of the Indian state was also engaged in a containment of the claims the diaspora could make on the Indian State. Made concrete through a bureaucratic exercise which walked the line between recognition and limitation, the Indian state showed that “it is not only the people who imagine the state but also the state itself in its multiple incarnations that has, and enacts, its own fantasies” (2003: 399). In this case, the desire for incorporation regardless of diasporic location was mirrored by the state’s limitation of permissible paths for attachment and inclusion.

A more recent moment of materialization occurred during the visit of Vayalar Ravi, the Union Minister of Overseas Indian Affairs. On July 8th, 2006, GOPIO held a luncheon for the Minister. It was attended by over 200 people and held at the Five Star Banquet Hall in Queens. Other representatives present were Indian Permanent Representative to the UN Nirupam Sen and the then current Indian Consular General A.R. Ghanashyam. Between the five years of the HLC’s panel and Ravi’s visit, the dual citizenship or Overseas Citizenship of India (OCI) has become available. Initial comments directed towards Minister Ravi were general complaints about the waiting period and bureaucracy involved in obtaining OCI. The second topic which dominated the luncheon was the proposed establishment of a university of People of Indian Origin, a project that was awaiting approval from the Indian Parliament at the time of the visit. The Minister also spoke highly of Indian Americans work in lobbying the United States government for deals that benefited India. Of the luncheon and the other events with

Indian Americans during his two-week trip to the United States, Ravi stated “It gave me the opportunity to interact, discuss and convey the message of emerging Indianness among our people” (Mehra 2006: 25).

The Minister’s comments highlighted the new venues of incorporation that the diaspora can now utilize through claims of citizenship, and the recognition of the role that Indian Americans play in American policy towards India. Contained in these two moments are different paths that bring the diaspora into the realm of the Indian State. What is essentially dual citizenship, straddles the space of two nation-states, and in doing so, reconfigures traditional notions of the relationship between an individual and a state. Indian American petitioning of the American governing apparatus for favorable policies to India exists in the national space of America and the transnational space of international relations. Each of these enacts distinct relationships between the diaspora, the Indian State and the American State.

This traversing of multiple spaces has always been part of GOPIO’s operation. Critical to the organization’s mission and activities is an engagement with multiple institutions that produce a diasporic subjectivity. Through this GOPIO has facilitated claims and provided a contingent space for the Indian State to come into being outside its territory. This constructs the state as a multi-spatial entity which comes into being through its interactions with, in this case, overseas Indians who want to make claims on the Indian State through both affective and material attachments.

CONCLUSION

The positive narrative of diaspora is one that hinges on a dispersed and displaced people’s shared sense of collectivity, memory, and cultural imaginary (Hall 1990, Gilroy 1993, Shukla 2003, Siu 2005). The sense of collectivity is integral to GOPIO’s campaigns and activities of establishing concrete diasporic links in all corners of the

world. However, diasporic collectivity was fractured in Worker's Awaaz as the employment in the household of a co-national family in no way guaranteed good working conditions, but often highlighted differences of class, internal ethnicity, immigration status and profession.

Though celebratory claims that diasporas present a challenge to traditional configurations of the nation-state through their multiple national loyalties and contestation of the hegemony of dominant cultures within these nation-states (Clifford 1994, Dhaliwal 1994, Appadurai 1996, Brah 1996) have been complicated, the use of diaspora as an undifferentiated category continues. However, as this chapter has shown, the experiences of members in the two organizations, and the overlapping communities each occupied present contrasting positions not only in New York City, but globally. This unequal terrain is produced by the subject positions that situated the two distinct memberships in a deterritorialized frame. Doreen Massey has called this unequal terrain of mobility a power geometry, or the fact that

different social groups and individuals are placed in very distinct ways in relation to ...flows and interconnections. [Power geometry] concerns not merely the issue of who moves and who doesn't...it is also about power in relation *to* the flows and movement (1994: 149).

Disparate engagements with the terrain of mobility point to disparate notions of rights and citizenship in each organization, and their experience of being "diasporic." Modern migrations have made it more and more difficult to contain analytical notions of citizenship purely within the realm of the juridical. As large portions of migrants are denied citizenship, and exist in the legal wasteland of "undocumented" the claims to rights based on territorial and legal belonging have been refashioned. The experience of citizenship, defined broadly as the ways in which one belongs to a nation and makes claims on it, is always charted on the uneven terrain of subject positions, and thus, can

never be the ground for equality. However, citizenship as an experience disarticulated from the juridical realm does allow examination of the ways that populations are able to express and practice tactics of claiming rights and recognition.

If under neoliberalism, the role of the state is no longer to ensure rights and a sense of belonging to its citizens, but rather to create favorable and attractive climates for free trade, the question as to what deterritorialized citizenship looks like comes to the fore. As illustrated by GOPIO's campaigns to gain rights vis-à-vis the Indian state, the continual anxiety that existed in Worker's Awaaz about their status as "illegal," and the current polarizing debates around immigration and amnesty in the United States which interestingly saw some of the largest protest mobilizations in years, citizenship is still a site of struggle. However, as people come to be evaluated through notions of human capital and worth, citizenship becomes differentiated along axis of assessment. Indeed, under a neoliberal regime, "citizenship is not conceptualized as simply a legal relationship between citizens and government, but as the effect of flexible strategies of governing that unevenly invests in different kinds of bodies, privileging rational, market-driven subjects over others" (Ong 2005: 260). Citizenship, though never universal in its practices of ascribing rights and protections, is now unabashedly selective of its proper subjects.

Conclusion

On September 23, 2007, the *Pravasi Bharatiya Divas* (Overseas Indian Day) Conference, or PBD was held in New York City at the Chelsea Piers. Since 2003, the event has been held annually in New Delhi, India; this was the first time it had traveled overseas to the diaspora. The one-day mini-conference,⁶⁵ titled “Engaging the Diaspora: The Way Forward,” sought to “re-connect [the diaspora] with the Indian growth story” (CII 7) and consisted of 3 panels, a lunch plenary and a diaspora feedback session. The Government of India and the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) co-convened the event. The latter is a 112 year old industry-led private non-profit which

is India's premier business association, with a direct membership of over 6500 organisations from the private as well as public sectors...A facilitator, [it] catalyses change by working closely with government on policy issues, enhancing efficiency, competitiveness and expanding business opportunities for industry through a range of specialised services and global linkages (CII website).

The fact that the traveling PBD was sponsored by CII was significant. All PBDs in India had been co-sponsored by the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI), a government affiliated business organization that began as part of the nationalist movement. However, the CII has risen to prominence since liberalization of the Indian economy as new companies join them, rather than FICCI which is associated with the days of India's planned economy, red tapism and the license raj.

GOPIO chairman Thomas Abraham was on the last of the three panels, titled “India's Social Building Blocks: Education and Health for the Masses.” He was introduced by the moderator as “Dr. Thomas Abraham...well, I won't go into his history because he is very well known in this crowd.” The current GOPIO president, Inder Singh,

⁶⁵ The annual conference held in India runs three days. The event takes place in early January and always includes January 9th, the day that Mohandas Gandhi returned to India from South Africa.

was a member of the final event of the day, the feedback session at which the diaspora was to air their concerns to Shri Vayalar Ravi the Minister for Overseas Indian Affairs, Neelam Deo the Consul General Of India and, if going by the panel make-up, Inder Singh of GOPIO. As with Dr. Abraham's introduction, Mr. Singh was also introduced as an agent of the diaspora. Former Indian Ambassador to the United States, T.P. Sreenivasan introduction started with "Here is someone from your side, Inder Singh, the president of GOPIO which represents the diaspora" before he went on to give Mr. Singh's professional profile.

Mr. Singh began his presentation by drawing a direct line of descent between the 1989 NFIA convened conference on the Indian diaspora at which GOPIO formed and the newly annual PBD conferences, including this one. Through this, he presented the NFIA conference and the subsequent GOPIO conferences as the model of the Indian governments own efforts to engage the diaspora, as well as a reason for the latter's concern. Mr. Singh was the first to offer feedback from the diaspora to Shri Ravi, presenting a list of seven points on behalf of the diaspora to the minister. These ranged from granting PIOs voting rights in Indian elections, to the need for the Indian state to provide rehabilitation and services for exploited Indian workers in the Gulf States to the bizarre request of creating laws that protect Person of Indian Origin husbands from dowry abuse from their conspiring wives.

As a panel, and not audience, member, Mr. Singh and moreover GOPIO were positioned as an intermediary between the diaspora and the Indian government. Sitting with the two government officials on the panel, Mr. Singh and GOPIO represented the world of civil societies, NGOs and the private-public partnerships that were continually hyped at the conference. Indeed, some of the issues and concerns raised by audience members such as a request for philanthropic organizations in India to be vetted and

cleared were passed along to Mr. Singh as a task that GOPIO could undertake. In addition, in reaction to a request to put the transcripts of the conference on-line, the moderator asked Dr. Abraham who was in the audience, if GOPIO could place these on their website. There was no consideration of the Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs or the Confederation of Indian Industry archiving the transcripts on their site.

By the end of the mini-conference, GOPIO's position vis-à-vis the diaspora was clear. Between my first interactions with organization and the present moment, GOPIO seems to have secured official status in the eyes of the Indian government. And following, narratives of having to meet, plead the case, and hand over resolutions is now supplanted with some recognition by the Indian state of GOPIO as unofficial representatives *for* the Indian diaspora. This is not to say that all their requests are granted. Indeed, in response to the call for a diasporic Member of the Legislative Assembly, Minister Ravi was blunt in assessing its impossibility. However, by casting themselves as proper modern subjects, they have entered into parts of the space that the state had evacuated under neoliberalism and parts of the space that the state created under the same regime.

Unfortunately, I cannot relay a parallel narrative of "success" for Worker's Awaaz. At the time of writing, the organization has been defunct for roughly two years. In the end the split which began by the disagreements over the meaning of worker, combined with life circumstances of some of membership, allowed the original vision of who was a worker and how they were to be helped prevailed. However, this was a slow process, one buttressed by economic insecurity that 9/11 visited upon many undocumented low-wage workers in New York City.

As the discord over the changes to organizational culture and philosophy precipitated by the Time and Health Campaign looked like it may split the organization

apart, Worker's Awaaz in effect became two organizations. Working from the momentum of the Time and Health Campaign generated by the Chinese Labor Organization and the Anti-Sweatshop Organization, those active in this campaign focused their energies on the joint campaign, and in many ways, gave up on attempting to integrate it into all organizational work. At the same time, the Campaign Against Workplace Servitude, with a few unpaid wages cases in its hand, continued as it had in the past, placing organizational resources in litigation and individual labor violation cases.

Added to this tension was a temporary campaign that was to address the effects of September 11th on low wage, undocumented workers. Strategically, the campaign was linked to the Time and Health Campaign in that it would be used to gather statistics and document health issues, both prior to 9/11 and since, as well as work routines. Tactically however, the campaign operated as a service and advocacy campaign that provided monetary aid and job-training references that a few charitable organizations in New York City had earmarked for undocumented workers who were generally shut out of government benefits due to their status. Though these organizations had resources, what they lacked was presence in immigrant communities and access to networks. This is where organizations like Worker's Awaaz were to step in.

Though short-term, the campaign took up much of the staff organizer's time and required that Worker's Awaaz create an additional part time organizer position to handle the work. The campaign also took up the attention and energies of most active members. Within the organization this provided both a new area of concentration and an infusion of a large amount of funding that was marked for promoting and facilitating the programs of the charitable organizations. As a node in disbursement, Worker's Awaaz was responsible for publicizing the funds and services, which was undertaken through setting

up tables in different South Asian commercial areas, holding open information sessions and for a while, canvassing at the Red Cross center in downtown Manhattan. The organization, specifically the full-time staff organizer, also served as a liaison to the charitable groups and the numerous other institutions that were also part of this push. In that Worker's Awaaz was able to indirectly provide aid to hundreds of undocumented South Asian low-wage workers, the campaign was successful. However, of all the people that came through, only three joined the organization and became active. Due to the limitations set by the charitable organizations, the temporary yet intense centering of the campaign, service provision, rather than organizing, became front and center again. In the context of the earlier discussions and disagreements in the organization, this further reinscribed the notion that a worker was someone who worked in low-wage industries as this was the target group of the post 9/11 campaign.

Through a combination of voluntary and involuntary events such as moving away from New York, joining other organizations and in the case of the ex-domestic worker staff organizer, eventually being fired by the faction who wanted the organization to mainly provide services and advocacy, a substantial number of members, including myself, who were pushing the organization to reconfigure the understanding of worker left the organization. I would periodically get updates through the grape vine, from a friend who had moved back to Pakistan and received updates from a remaining domestic worker member who had been with the organization since its incarnation as the DWC in Sakhi.⁶⁶ According to this chain of information, as service provision now also in the form attaining funding for job training⁶⁷ in addition to court cases became primary concerns,

⁶⁶ The domestic worker member eventually left the organization also as her employers moved from the New York area and she moved with them. However, by this time, Worker's Awaaz was a shadow of its former self, at the precipice of closing down, it was working on one unpaid wage case in conjunction with an immigrant legal clinic.

⁶⁷ The emergence of job and skill training can be seen as both indicative and the culmination of another tension inside the organization. A muted but steady discourse of upward mobility was always present in the

the organization was not able to generate or keep new members as the structure changed from providing a voice to providing services. Through inattention to the Time and Health Campaign, the organization was also effectively removed from work with the two other groups. As Worker's Awaaz was duplicated the efforts of the other South Asian domestic workers' organization, Andolan, and was unable to draw new membership or funds, the organization eventually folded.

In their push to only provide services and advocacy, the organization operated within the constraints of neoliberal subjectification. Rather than cultivate and enact oppositional politics as potentially held out by the Time and Health Campaign, a continual focus on court cases and the recuperation of unpaid minimum wages did not allow a questioning of the discourse of value and worth that underpins neoliberalism. Rather, and I would argue unintentionally, the separation of these cases from any larger push for structural change actually reinscribed the given monetary value of domestic work. When this is used as a tactic in a larger program of social justice, it could serve to mobilize support for social change and opposition. However, when it is reduced to a strategy that is to aid in upward class mobility, it no longer hold the promise of a tool for organizing.

The project at hand engaged in ethnographic theorizing about the workings of South Asian organizations in New York City as the demographic profile of this population changed due to new migration patterns marked by gender, class, nationality

organization. Thus, periodic proposals pushing for training in computer skills or that called for funding the education of low wage workers would be put forth. In fact, I was told that towards the end of the organization, funds had been set aside to pay for professional courses for a few remaining domestic worker members (courses such as nurses aid or home health care training). While it is certainly understandable that no one wants to remain in low wage jobs, the focus on upward mobility cannot address structural issues of labor exploitation. Indeed one can argue that it actually supports class hierarchies by leaving the system in place.

and status. I chose to focus on two organizations which I believe are both representative and atypical of new organizational subjects born in the dynamics of neoliberalism. I did this to highlight the fact that these subjectivities were continually in creation and flux, and often locations of the production of new subjectivities. And further, that these subjectivities were sites of struggle as the organizations constructed themselves through and against larger relations of power.

Against the backdrop of a financescape, Worker's Awaaz and GOPIO present two contrasting articulations of neoliberal operation. Neoliberal policies enacted through structural adjustment programs have compelled the migration of Worker's Awaaz members from South Asia. Once outside the nation-states of South Asia, many of the women who used migration to the United States as a survival strategy find employment as domestic workers, supporting the life-styles and households of upper-middle class and wealthy South Asians in the United States. At the same time that the decisions of South Asian governments to liberalize their economies created a new flow of migration, it also opened up the nations as sites of direct foreign investment. Under these programs of privatization and deregulation, or Harvey's accumulation by dispossession, the government of India (and Pakistan Pasha: 2000) has begun to deploy financial investment into the nation as diasporic duty. Through the positioning of the women who migrated within the global economy, Worker's Awaaz and its campaigns became a site where debates about common sense notions of class hinged on creating a worker subjectivity. In GOPIO however, the class inflected wunderkind subject position of entrepreneur found a nationalist voice through an articulation of entrepreneurialism as an inherent trait rooted in the culture of diasporic Indians.

These experiences and the subject positions borne from them in turn produced different struggles over the terms of national belonging and rights. For Worker's Awaaz,

the specificity of feminized global city dynamics led the organization to initially mobilize around individual cases of labor exploitation as they sought redress through rights ostensibly guaranteed in state and national wage labor laws, and later participate in a campaign that attempted to push the organization beyond individual cases to a general attack on the compelled flexibility demanded by the new labor system. In contradistinction, GOPIO engaged in the transnational frameworks of human rights and dual citizenship to assert belonging within both the nation-states of America and India. The dissertation presented these contrasting and conflicting positions as being generated from the disjunctive tendencies of neoliberalism. Thus the articulations of worker, diasporic entrepreneur, and sites in which each is materialized give us insight into the discrepant functioning of new capital regimes.

This reality of the differential positions occupied by the two organizations guided my analysis. These differences matter: they not only situate the two groups on a divided terrain, they also provide spaces of possibility and limitation enacted through technologies of governmentality. Aihwa Ong has offered the concept of graduated citizenship as a way to understand these distinctions and the appraisal of value attached to them. However, as I illustrated through the case of Workers' Awaaz, this ideology does not go uncontested. The organization's campaigns are rooted in the knowledge that the labor of low-wage workers, deemed of little value, is crucial to the production of profit in those professions seen as valuable. On the other end, this discourse of value, amplified as governments reconfigure themselves and devolve duties under neoliberal regimes is utilized by GOPIO as they participate in a in constructing the diaspora via a discourse of human capital in terms of both monetary worth and the innovative ideas that are seen as necessary to India's emergence as a "world player." Through attention to the processes of subject formation in these two sites, I argued that the unpredictability of global flows is

productive in nature, as the interaction between the various –scapes produce subjects that are articulated and disarticulated within the new world system of neoliberalism.

The project was also interested in the possibilities and limitations of community organizing and constructions of community under the logic of neoliberal subjectification. Using Das Gupta's delineation of place-taking and space-making organizations, I situated organizational work vis-à-vis strategies of either demanding inclusion in power structures (GOPIO) or contesting these very structures (Worker's Awaaz). I also offered a critique of this neat division of "doing politics" through a discussion of the ways that each type of organization makes unsubstantiated claims to represent the community. However, as should be made clear by my active involvement with Worker's Awaaz, I do believe that the two types of claims to community representation carries real distinction in terms of political ideology and social justice. Thus, it is with some sadness that I write this conclusion with the knowledge that Worker's Awaaz has ceased to exist.

I would like to take this opportunity though, to begin to think through the reasons of why Worker's Awaaz was not able to thrive, while GOPIO is flourishing and able to "flex" with the twists and turns of neoliberalism in the United States and India. At this point, I want to using the schema of place-taking and space-making in order to turn my attention to the role of institutions in the life of each organization. I believe one way to enter into this discussion is to look at the convergence of the neoliberal practices of flexible citizenship and graduated citizenship as they existed and were practiced in both organizations.

Navigating the spaces opened up by neoliberal accumulation by dispossession, GOPIO's engages in flexible citizenship (Ong 1993, 1999) or the "strategies and effects of mobile managers, technocrats, and professionals seeking to both circumvent and benefit from different nation-state regimes by selecting different sites for investments,

work, and family relocation (1999:112). Flexible citizenship acts on the reconfiguration of the nation-state as it adjusts its structures to account for the different populations and forms of capital entering, exiting and bypassing literal and metaphoric borders. In the practice of flexibility, citizenship comes to be less about the state, and more about the “self-actualization of the flexible, neoliberal entrepreneur who can engage in an array of private, corporate and social practices” (Ong 2005: 275). However, looking at the collective activities and goals of GOPIO, flexible citizenship as a practice has to be extended beyond optimizing citizenship options, and rearticulated in conjunction with service to the nation-state. Thus for GOPIO, place does matter as they project place-making strategies onto a global scale to claim diasporic rights as the Indian state changes its relationship to the diaspora under neoliberalism.

Though flexible citizenship is associated with mobile managers and other elites, I want to propose that this is also a strategy used by exceptions to neoliberalism, or those populations that are excluded from the benefits of neoliberal policies (Ong 2006), to make claims to protection and belonging in an attempt to rearticulate their relationship to rights. Speaking of deterritorialized space-making groups, Das Gupta argues that these organizations do not engage in the traditional struggle for seeking rights from the nation-state but rather utilize a transnational complex of rights by

inventively [drawing] on rights regimes that are local, national (laws of more than one nation can be involved), and international in order to claim entitlements for their constituencies, who are otherwise treated as practically without rights in their nation of residence. Within this complex, migrants, not citizens, claim and bear rights (16).

In order to illustrate how the transnational complex of rights operates, Das Gupta uses the example of Nahar Alam, the executive director of Andolan, a South Asian domestic workers’ group. Alam migrated to the United States from Bangladesh to escape a violent marriage with a “powerful police officer.” Once in the United States, Alam was

employed as a domestic worker in a household in which she was overworked and underpaid. These two experiences constructed Alam as a survivor of both domestic and an exploited domestic worker. With help from Sakhi, Alam was granted gender asylum, and through this was able to regularize her immigration status and thus leave one of the few professions open to poor undocumented immigrant women in New York City by allowing her to work legally in the United States. According to Das Gupta, this narrative “tells us that the process of seeking justice in New York City in the face of domestic violence experienced in Bangladesh and labor exploitation in the United States” was transnational. Further, though Alam remained localized in the United States, what “circulated and crossed borders were the international and national statutes” through which Alam was able to claim certain rights (16). In reading Das Gupta’s narrative of Alam’s history, the transnational complex of rights began to look like flexible citizenship from below. Like flexible citizenship from above this is also dependent on the ability of individuals to navigate the spaces that open up as neoliberalism privatizes and deregulates even the individual self, and become self-enterprising citizen-subject.

In this casting of the management of rights by a place-taking and space-making organization, the tactics used to gather benefits follow the same logic – one of flexibility and the enterprising citizen-subject. Thus, perhaps one potential road to organizational vitality is the successful engagement with available institutions that have come into being under neoliberalism.⁶⁸ In this practice, neoliberal subjects that are constructed as “fixed” populations with limited access to mobility are able to make use of entities such as laws, regulations and universal rights which, unlike them, travel. This is one explanation for the

⁶⁸ See Shannon Speed (2006) “Dangerous Discourses: Human Rights and Multiculturalism in Neoliberal Mexico” for an examination of the relationship of “progressive” discourses to neoliberalism.

demise of Worker's Awaaz which in the end could not let go of the practice of mobilizing around individual wage cases which were adjudicated through state and national courts.

However, I would like to think that the downfall of Worker's Awaaz was actually due to its inability to let go of multicultural logic under neoliberalism. As I stated earlier, the fight for community representation that is arranged along the lines of place-taking and space making still adhere to the notion of a community rooted in national/cultural distinctions and Taylorian notions of recognition. For Worker's Awaaz this meant that though it presented itself as an organization concerned with class, its concern was limited to the South Asian community. Through this the state is able to "delimit" and "produce" cultural difference, and in some regards, the community itself. Though Worker's Awaaz was not fighting for cultural rights per se, its construction as South Asian had much in common with GOPIO's construction of itself as Indian in that both referred to discrete groups which referenced identity. I would argue that under neoliberalism, space-making groups have to develop a solid political subjectivity that inherently critiques and attempts to resist neoliberal subjectification. This potential was held out by the reconfiguring of worker as someone who produces profit and whose social being is arranged by the predatory logic of the free market thus dislodging subjectivities that are produced by the management techniques of neoliberalism.

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