

CITY OF STRANGERS:
THE TRANSNATIONAL INDIAN COMMUNITY
IN MANAMA, BAHRAIN

By
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ABSTRACT

The social sciences' interest in transnationalism has grown rapidly over the previous decade. The ethnographic case studies informing this burgeoning transnational literature, however, typically focus upon migration flows with one endpoint in the global North. This dissertation explores the experience of Indian transmigrants in contemporary Bahrain, one of the six petroleum-rich states of the Gulf Cooperation Council, as well as the impact of these transnational flows upon the Bahraini state. Like all the nations of the GCC, foreign guestworkers comprise a majority of the workforce in Bahrain, and a near majority of the absolute population—two aspects of the many that mark the transnational context of the contemporary Gulf as significantly different from those typical of the transnational literature.

The arc of my ethnographic analysis draws upon transnational theory, diaspora studies, and critical approaches to the state, and visits three plateaus. First, I use migration narratives gathered from Indian transmigrants to delineate the *structure of dominance* that shapes relations between guestworker and citizen-host. The parameters of this structure stretch from the global political economy to the apparatuses of the Bahraini state and, through the *kafala* sponsorship system, to the individual relations between citizen-sponsors and guestworkers. This structure comprises the basis for the systemic exploitation of foreign labor. Second, I analyze the strategies different classes of the Indian transmigrant community utilize against this structure of dominance. For the poorest transmigrants, these strategies are often limited to movement between legal and illegal status, while the diasporic elite employ a *strategic transnationalism* to combat the

vulnerabilities rendered by this system. Finally, I analyze the impact of these transnational flows upon the Bahraini state and citizenry. The *structure of dominance*, I argue, is essential to understanding the articulation of state-based power in Bahrain, for it provides a mechanism for citizens to cull profit from the private sector while maintaining a system for distributing state-controlled wealth that favors those well positioned in traditional social, familial, tribal relations. In essence, the Bahraini state comprises a form of resistance to the neoliberal logic of the global political economy—one that simultaneously structures inequities via those traditional fissures.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION



Figure 1.1: A street scene from the central market area on a Friday afternoon.

I. Introduction

Today I decided to spend a few more hours walking around my new neighborhood. I think there are two Bahraini villas on the block, but everyone else seems to be foreign. In my building, I've already met South Africans, a pair of Indians, a Turkish woman, a Canadian, a Lebanese man, and a Sri Lankan building manager. According to the guy running the cold store down the block, himself a Malayalee Indian, the barbershop, cleaner, and bakery are all staffed by Keralite Indians.¹ The internet café is also run by Indians. There's a Filipino clothing store, and an Ethiopian restaurant on the next block. The construction crew working in the lot down the street is Pakistani, as are the two guys who run the DVD rental place. I see Bahrainis shopping on the avenue, and they come in the morning to deal with paperwork at the Population Registration Ministry two blocks away, but once that office closes, the locals are assuredly a minority here (Fieldnotes, November 2002).

¹ Malayalam, certainly the longest palindrome I have encountered, is the language of the South Indian state of Kerala, and the most common Indian language on the streets of Bahrain. Transmigrants from that state are referred to as both Malayalees and Keralites.

In November of 2002, I boarded a plane in Tucson and flew east on the first leg of my journey to the Kingdom of Bahrain, the small island nation off the eastern shores of Saudi Arabia. My interest in the cities and societies of the petroleum-rich states of the Arabian Gulf² is well encapsulated by the social context described in this fieldnote, hastily scribbled at the Costa Coffee shop on Exhibitions Avenue, a boulevard of hotels, restaurants, clubs and stores that, come the weekend, fills with the cars of Bahraini and Saudi teenagers carousing in the nightlife for which the island is renowned. The cities of the contemporary Arabian Gulf are booming transnational entrepôts, cities where citizens are commonly outnumbered by the transmigrants in their midst. In Bahrain, for example, some 45% of the population are non-citizen transmigrants, and foreigners comprise an even larger portion of the workforce: on the factory floors, behind the counters of most businesses, in the warehouses and on the docks of the port, foreign-born non-citizens vastly outnumber Bahrainis.

The ethnography presented here directly addresses the dilemmas and processes endemic to those aspects of globalization characteristic of the contemporary era. As an anthropologist, my work is grounded in the local milieu—my concern is, principally, with how individuals displaced and between nations forge meaningful and productive lives in places far from their home. I describe the Indian diaspora in Bahrain who, as a unit, comprise the largest contingent of foreigners at work on the island. At the same time, the size and durability of their diasporic presence in Bahrain has reshaped the

² The term “Arabian Gulf” is generally preferred by those on the Arabian side of that body of water, and although “Persian Gulf” seems to be the nomenclature currently in use in the United States, I will use the former term throughout this dissertation.

social, economic and political order of the island's indigenous population.³ Digesting that fundamental fact, my attention is also upon the Bahrainis who host them, and the impact of transnational processes upon the citizenry's ability to forge meaningful and productive lives of their own design.

In the course of designing and implementing this project, these concerns came to be reflected in the set of three interrelated questions that guided my time on the island: How can we describe the structure of power that governs transmigrants' lives, a power essential to the dominion of both citizen and state over the foreigners toiling in their midst? To answer this question, I begin with Longva's analysis of the *kafala*, or sponsorship system, as a *structure of dominance* that shapes the experiences of all transnational laborers on the island (1997). Second, how does Indian culture travel in diaspora, and how is it expressed behind this particular configuration of structural power? In providing an answer to this question, I portray the Indian diaspora in Bahrain as a heterogeneous community, and the culture produced far from home is a rendition shaped by the global and transnational context of this particular node in the world-system. And finally, I ask how these transnational populations and processes have shaped the lives of the citizenry in Bahrain. In answering this question, I argue that the citizenry's perceptions and expectations of the state, as well as the imagined bond of nation, are shaped by the contours of this unique transnational environment.

³ I use the term "indigenous" with some hesitation. As a transnational and mercantile entrepôt at the center of the regional political economy for the better part of many millennia, the citizenry today comprises a variety of subpopulations with varying claims on indigeneity.

The structure of the overarching argument is described at length in the overview that concludes this chapter. In brief, however, the argument follows this line: while many scholars investigating transnationalism see the increasing movement of peoples, capital, and culture through global circuits as a challenge to the authority of the nation-state, the transnational processes at work on the island of Bahrain reveal how the apparatuses of the state can be invigorated by these global flows. Indian transmigrants, like those from other the other nations from which labor is drawn, bring an ever-evolving suite of strategies to bear against the structure of dominance by which the citizenry and state seek to derive profit from the transnational flow of labor to the island, to configure their relationship to the different cultural practices and ideas that come with those laborers, and, in a larger sense, articulate their relationship to the global political economy. In unpacking and problematizing the dialectic forces at work in the relationship between the structure of the state and the agency transmigrants deploy against that structure, I trace the coexistence of two distinct systems. The private sector, staffed largely by expatriate guestworkers, follows the conduits of neoliberalism, transparency, and market economics. The public sector, a bastion for the citizenry and the distribution of state-controlled wealth, operates by a logic that builds upon the social, familial, tribal and sectarian relations characteristic of the citizenry and, specifically, of the Sunni leadership. The friction generated by these contradictory logics magnifies the fissure between citizens and non-citizens while simultaneously masking the differentiation and distributive inequity structured by the state within the domain of its citizenry.

II. Anthropology and People on the Move

In the opening decade of the twenty-first century we find ourselves in a world where people, culture, ideas, and money move about the world with astounding frequency. Some hundred, or even fifty, years in the future, the lengthy descriptions of this process and all it entails may seem pedestrian, and critiques of the directionless expansion of “global-babble” have already percolated through the academic literature (Abu-Lughod 1991). Nonetheless, for anthropologists at the turn of the millennium globalization has been a particularly vexing development. Our canonical texts and the methods we use to produce them were pioneered in an earlier era, in times when the distance separating one group of people from another allowed significant variations in social organization, behavior, belief, ritual, language and economy to flourish. For a discipline whose progenitors forged an identity based upon the experience of immersion in a culture different than one’s own, the increasing connections between peoples once distant has blurred the social and cultural boundaries implicit in this mission, making proclamations such as Edmund Leach’s—that “[t]he members of ‘a society’ at any one time are a specifiable set of individuals who can be found together *in one part of the map* and who share common interests of some sort”—altogether untenable (1982: 41, emphasis added). For some, the question of how to conceive of culture without the benefit of these geographical boundaries is a central dilemma in contemporary anthropology. Hannerz, for example, resurrects Kroeber’s notion of a global ecumene to describe networks of culture, or “culture in chains” (Hannerz 1992: 48); Appadurai ties the concept of culture to identity politics, arguing that culture is more than just the

awareness of particular attributes or differences, for it is also the consciousness and deployment of those differences (Appadurai 1996: 13-14). Bashkow mines a similar vein in his reanalysis of the Boasian concept of cultural boundaries, a concept, he argues, that is not antithetical to the “plural, perspectival, and permeable” nature of culture (Bashkow 2004: 443).

Culture is, of course, at once the centerpiece of anthropological focus and the problem at its heart. Anthropological work under the banner of structural-functionalism, the last and most durable comprehensive framework under which anthropology operated, strained under the critique that it sought cultural wholes, stressing structure and conformity over variation and dissent. By the 1980’s, postmodernist theorists disconnected social scientists’ attempts to comprehend and categorize their observations about culture from any “truth” out there to apprehend; rather than a scientific process for describing social and cultural life, anthropology’s categories and cultural boundaries were implements of power, part-and-parcel of the west’s ideological system for subjectifying those soon to be incorporated in late capitalism’s ambit. Coupled with the increasing connections and the movement of people from one place to another, anthropologists emerged from the twentieth century with a much different perspective on people and the boundaries of culture than they had at the outset. Navigating these issues, I rely on a fairly general definition of culture along the lines of that proposed by Ulf Hannerz: those “meanings and meaningful forms which we shape and acquire in social life” (Hannerz 1997: 8). This definition works on a variety of scales, makes no direct claims to the integration of holistic character of those meaningful forms, and provides a

workable stand-in for the “more or less tidy packages we have called “cultures”” (Hannerz 1997: 8). The challenge, then, lies in connecting these congeries of meaning and symbolism to the material processes and relations of power that undergird it.

As an ethnography of the relations between two groups of people—Indian transmigrants and Bahraini hosts—immersed in the articulation of global capitalism, this document draws most heavily upon the literature on transnationalism. Once a term used to describe the corporations and other entities that transcended the “national container,” anthropologists and social scientists in closely allied fields reoriented their work to focus upon the lives of a community of individuals “with feet in two societies” (Elsa Chaney 1979). Gaurnizo and Smith (1998) have called this “transnationalism from below,” and aim to “discern how this process affects power relations, cultural constructions, economic interactions, and, more generally, social organization at the level of the locality” (6), thereby echoing earlier descriptions of transnationalism as “the processes by which immigrants forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement” (Basch et al. 1994; see also Smith 2001: 166).

The central kernel of transnational theory—that the lives of many individuals in the contemporary world increasingly transcend single localities and single nations—is a slightly different proposition than that put forward by those working under the banner of diaspora studies, a literature that sprang from the analysis of those communities and cultures with a more permanent and territorialized existence outside their homeland. To the original model of the Jewry analysts added the Greeks, Armenians, African-Americans, and over a few decades, numerous other populations as a sort of cultural

satellite to that of a homeland (Elazar 1986; Butler 2001: 189). In this document, I call the Indian community in Bahrain a transnational one, using that moniker to describe those processes, social relations, and congeries of cultural meaning that transcend the boundaries of the nation-state. Simultaneously, I often refer to the Indian community as a diaspora, particularly when focusing on the families and institutions with long histories on the island.

The ethnographic data presented here is meant to redress a principal gap in the scholarly literature on transnationalism and its related fields of enquiry. Nearly all the case studies upon which transnational theory has been constructed rely on analyses of populations with one foot in the wealthy and democratic nations of the global north (e.g. Basch, Shiller and Szanton Blanc 1994; Smith and Guarnizo 1998; Levitt and Waters 2002).⁴ The monarchies of the contemporary Arabian Gulf, however, present a much different context: the ability of transmigrants to move back and forth across the transnational divide, for example, is often curtailed by the hegemonic structure of dominance into which transmigrants enter; their political activity, and their ability to assert even the most basic of their rights, is highly circumscribed under the dominion of the state and citizenry; their access to the state itself is tightly monitored and controlled; the idea of assimilation, and citizenship, is actively discouraged and rarely, if ever, achieved. Moreover, because transmigrant populations comprise such a large proportion

⁴ One potential explanation for the tendency of anthropologists of transnationalism to focus upon populations in Europe and North America centers on the institution of academia itself. As many anthropologists seek to balance their research interests with the demands of teaching and family, research projects with immigrant communities in their proverbial backyards serve as a neat stand-in for the distant and non-western cultures and societies archetypical to the discipline.

of the population in Bahrain, the association of the transmigrant position with the minority position is called into question (Clifford 1994: 311). In describing the many facets of the relations between transmigrant and citizen host on the island of Bahrain, I hope to expand our knowledge about the variety of ways individuals configure their lives outside their homeland and, alternatively, the variety of ways that people respond to the presence of migrants in their nations, cities, and homes.

III. Anthropological Silence and the Gulf

The scope of anthropology's gaze has not fallen evenly on all cultures of the world. Unlike the bulk of the Asian continent to the east and the African continent to the southwest, the Arabian Peninsula has received altogether less attention from anthropologists than the areas that surround it. In part, there are geographical reasons for this anthropological silence: the Middle East, at the juncture between the African, European, and Asian continents, is at the periphery of all of them. The subtle geography underlying the institution of anthropology—one in which a tenured chair often opens for an Asian specialist or an African specialist—leaves the study of the Middle East at the interstices of the institutional discourse that shapes our discipline.⁵

Furthermore, within the small canon of anthropological work in the Middle East, studies focused on the Arabian Peninsula, and particularly the Gulf, are even less common. Fuccaro, for example, notes that studies of the Gulf are “isolated” in the context of current academic scholarship (2001: 184). Nakleh adds that between 1883 and 1968,

⁵ Appadurai talks about the process by which area studies yielded “geographical divisions, cultural differences, and national boundaries” that tended to be isomorphic (1996: 16).

only one PhD dissertation in U.S. universities even referred to Bahrain (Nakhleh 1976:

1). Perhaps the best argument for this omission rests in the machinations of the academic lens through which the culture and peoples of the Middle East have been comprehended. Edward Said's Orientalism (1979) sketched the long history of the discursive Orientalist juggernaut. As he notes,

My principal operating assumptions were—and continue to be—that fields of learning, as much as the works of even the most eccentric artist, are constrained and acted upon by society, by cultural traditions, by worldly circumstance, and by stabilizing influences like schools, libraries, and governments; moreover, that both learned and imaginative writing are never free, but are limited in their imagery, assumptions, and intentions; and finally, that the advances made by a “science” like Orientalism in its academic form are less objectively true than we often like to think. (201-202)

The result, he argues, is a multifaceted apparatus constructed around a set of re-circulated essentialist idioms that together reinforce the static, unchanging, backwards, and primitive character of the societies and peoples of the Middle East as a whole.

Although Said traces a rich, if problematic, vein of literature concerned with the Middle East, the Orientalist discourse has been particularly vexed with the peoples of the Arabian Gulf, for the cosmopolitan Gulf Arabs, global consumers at home in the shining, hyper-modern cities of the Gulf's littoral, fit poorly in the Orientalist mold. Here are peoples thoroughly enmeshed in the complexities of late capitalism, dwelling in virtual pantheons of modernity. To cull a static, innate connection to the past becomes an even more Herculean task in this part of the Middle East. For that reason, the Gulf is frequently portrayed as a strange and tangential exception to the norm of the Middle East,

an accusation leveled against both western and Middle Eastern scholars alike (Al-Shayej 1999).⁶

Yet the reasons for the dearth of study go beyond the dynamics of the western academic discourse. More than not just fitting with the “tents and tribes” portrayals of Middle Eastern culture, and beyond the difficulties of envisioning the inhabitants of these hypermodern cities as outside of time, there remains an acute resistance to many aspects of anthropological research in the Gulf. Universities rise along the shores of the Gulf with an almost preposterous frequency, yet few have devoted any of their resources to departments of anthropology. Through the Fulbright Program, these same countries host numerous American students and faculty, yet the preference remains for individuals with skills that fit the material vision of modernity predominant in the Gulf: engineering, business, finance, architecture, the hard sciences. Are the nations of the Gulf simply uninterested in the ruminations of western social science? Is cultural anthropology simply seen as useless? Or is the acute resistance I describe part-and-parcel of a resistance to the terms of this social science, a resistance to a system of thought in which the Sunni monarchies and the very order of the societies under their dominion will almost inevitably be painted the villain?

The question of how anthropology fits with Islamic culture is beyond the scope of this study, and hence merits only brief mention. While selecting any particular nation to represent “Islamic culture” is a problematic move in-and-of-itself, the Gulf monarchies

⁶ Al-Shayej notes that, “The Western interest in the Gulf has been sporadic, selective, fragmented, patronizing and myopic, and that Arab intellectuals also exercise a “selective discrimination” when it comes to the Gulf region (Al-Shayej 1999: 4-5).

have not resisted the fundamental impetus of western social science—the concept “that social change was normal,” nor its corollary, that we study society “in order to control it” (Wallerstein 1988: 525). From my vantage point, neither of these edifices has been rejected by Bahrain, nor by the other petroleum-rich nations of the Gulf: in the course of a modernization that, arguably, occurred at a pace unparalleled anywhere else in the world, they have undeniably reproduced the sorts of institutions, structures of governance, and ideas endemic to the West.⁷ Rather, Bahrain and the other Gulf monarchies have been selective in the adoption of this institutional infrastructure, a fact that, along with the discursive terrain outlined by Said and others, has shaped the literature concerning the Gulf. So while universities and colleges spring up with great abandon, the social sciences remain stunted, and there exists no wellspring of indigenous works concerned with the peoples who, for centuries, have made their homes on the island as guests.

In the midst of a literature that is generally perceived as “unreliable” (Franklin 1985: 1), the impact of this selectivity upon the collective understanding of contemporary Gulf migration has been particularly acute. The inherent problems of counting and analyzing transmigrants are numerous—illegal entry, primarily through the Haj pilgrimage to Saudi Arabia, as well as several permeable national borders, pose

⁷ The reasons for this are numerous. Certainly the colonial legacy, explicated in some detail in the second chapter, forged a set of institutions and structures on the island that endured well after the British departure; at the same time, these ‘western’ structures and institutions solidified the Sunni leadership’s dominion and control over the petroleum wealth and the Shi’ite majority on the island, and hence the durability of those institutions and structures ensures the continuation and legitimacy of a particular set of historic socioeconomic inequities.

significant problems to empirical analyses of the contemporary Gulf (Seccombe 1988; Nair 1999); census avoidance by both citizens and non-citizens remains a significant hurdle in establishing demographic baselines for the region (Richards and Martin 1983); source nations for the Gulf transmigrants are often too impoverished to provide the institutional infrastructure to accurately count the men and women who migrate to the Gulf (Nair 1999; Demery 1986: 19). The poor institutional capacity to gather demographic data is compounded by the politically sensitive nature of demographic issues: where censuses do exist, the data are often obfuscated by politically-driven aggregation (Kapiszewski 2000: 27; Leonard 2002: 215; 2003: 133), largely a result of the entrenched elites' desire to mask local unemployment, to marginalize particular sectarian groups, or to downplay national dependence upon foreign labor.⁸ As Bhunian (1996) subtly notes, there is a difference between the inability and unwillingness to collect and publish these data. Both processes are at work in the Gulf States, and as a

⁸ A fine example of the elision of foreign influence upon Arab culture and, more specifically, the very presence of foreigners, can be seen in Mai Yamani's otherwise interesting chapter concerning the evolving cuisine of upper class Meccans in Saudi Arabia. Yamani reads the resurgence of traditional cuisine in Mecca as part of a larger trend of a national identity project—as emblematic of Saudis need “to assert their distinctiveness from the non-Saudi, namely outsiders” (1994: 175). In making her case, she elides the influence and incorporation of foreign foodstuffs and dishes (Indian buryani becomes Arab zurbiyan). More to the point, however, she notes that domestic staff—mostly Filipino—go about the behind-the-scenes preparation (1994: 181), and that the practice of giving alms is carried out by foreign household chauffeurs (1994: 182). The title of her chapter (“You Are What you Cook”) must be taken in a particular light after we learn that the wealthy women of Mecca don't actually cook at all, but instead oversee small legions of guestworker houseservants. While the chapter itself makes many interesting points about the relationship of particular urban cuisines to the larger project of Saudi national identity, it's also emblematic of the process by which the large foreign presence in Gulf societies is frequently omitted from descriptions and analyses of the region's culture.

result, empirical knowledge of migration to the Gulf is premised upon what is widely recognized as problematic and sparse empirical foundation (Nambiar 1995; Nair 1999; ILO 1996; Wilson and Graham 1994: 12).

Several scholars have negotiated the gaps in available data by forging estimates from sources at both ends of the migration flow. These volumes provide an overview and historical perspective on the human geography of Gulf migration by tracing, for example, the impact of the increasing participation of female citizens in the workforce (Shah 1995), or the suite of policies configured to encourage employment of the domestic workforce (Winckler 2000). Andrzej Kapiszewski's Nationals and Expatriates (2001) supplies the most up to date overview of the political and demographic structure of migration to the Gulf. He builds upon a set of disparate data sources, including general sociopolitical histories of the region, specific studies in the human resources literature, and the handful of ethnographic articles and monographs that deal explicitly with Gulf migration. Arnold and Shah's collected volume, put together some fifteen years earlier, provided a similar portrait of Gulf migration (1986). Both these works are supported by a variety of articles and books focused upon migration to particular Gulf monarchies, including Kuwait (Shah 1995, Al-Moosa and McLachlan 1985) and Oman (Winckler 2000). Together, these works provide a general demographic portrait of the contemporary Gulf States and, *en suite*, contend that the near future of these states will be largely defined by the friction between a growing domestic workforce and the ongoing dependence upon the entrepreneurship and both skilled and unskilled labor of the guestworker communities that have for decades comprised a majority of the workforce.

Ethnographic research—conceived fundamentally as people talking to people—falls outside the bounds of the state’s ability to easily monitor and control, and sponsored projects of this ilk have been even less common in the region.⁹ Much of the ethnographic work portraying the various diasporas at work in the Gulf relies on interviews with return migrants conducted in the communities and regions of origin. Here the narratives of time spent toiling in the Gulf become part of a larger agenda exploring the impact of transnational migration upon the families, communities, and states from which this labor comes. The most developed area of this research is the south Indian state of Kerala, where two monographs examine the experiences of transmigrants before, during and after their sojourn in the Gulf (Osella and Osella 2000; Kurien 2002). These works are buttressed by a diverse literature of Indian origin, much of which is devoted to the economics of migration (Sekhar 1996, Nair 1999, Nambiar 1995). Another node of scholarship has focused on the flow of migrants from Sri Lanka to the Gulf. Michelle Gamburd’s detailed ethnography of transmigrant Sri Lankan housemaids is certainly the capstone to this literature (2000); she builds upon the earlier work of Grete Brochmann (1993) and Eelens et al. (1992). A handful of other scholars have published works on the other important communities sending labor to the Gulf (Pertierra 1994, Silvey 2004).

Together, these works provide a partial portrait of the transnational flows of labor

⁹ The situation is much the same even for Gulf-native researchers (see Osama 1987: 3, 31-4). Of course, neither Bahrain nor the other Gulf States are unique in possessing this trait. In the contemporary political atmosphere one can imagine the difficulties a Bahraini anthropologist might encounter in seeking permission from the United States to wander along the southern border talking with illegal immigrants about their migration experiences, or to meander through the gated suburban communities of my home, Tucson, asking homeowners about their conceptions of the transmigrants trimming their trees, cleaning their swimming pools, or building the next house out in the desert.

with one endpoint in the Gulf. Collectively, these ethnographic works describe the wholesale changes wrought by the transnational livelihoods configured across the Indian Ocean. The economic impact of remittance flows to countries of origin have reshaped the status and social structure of village, town and city (Kurien 2002; Osella and Osella 2000a, 2000b; Gamburd 2000); gender roles within the household have been reconfigured around the absence of fathers and mothers (Gamburd 2000; Sekhar 1996); and the structural components of these labor flows, centered largely upon in-country labor brokers and their agents, has been described in detail (Gamburd 2000; Fuglerud 1993). However, while transnationalism, as a branch of the social science literature, builds upon the multiple geographies that underpin many contemporary livelihoods, these ethnographic portraits of the communities from which Gulf labor is drawn have not been equally complemented by ethnographic work that explores the experience of these transmigrants time in the Gulf States. Only a handful of ethnographers have addressed this anthropological silence. Sulayman Khalaf and Saad Al Kobaisi (1999) provide brief ethnographic snippets of expatriate life in the Emirates, while Anh Longva's seminal monograph (1997) explores the relations between citizens, non-citizens and the state in contemporary Kuwait. Sharon Nagy's work in Qatar (1998) yields an ethnographic portrait of perhaps the most difficult migrants to actually see—household labor. Robert Lee Franklin (1985) in Bahrain and Karen Leonard (2002, 2003) in the United Arab Emirates focus directly upon the Indian community, and in that sense, are the most closely related to the work presented here.

IV. Conducting Research in the Gulf

The difficulties of conducting research in the Gulf region played an important role in the articulation of this study. My interest in transnational migrants first bloomed during a two-week stay in Jeddah, the cosmopolitan hub of Saudi Arabia, perched on the shores of the Red Sea. As the junior member of a team of ethnographers commissioned to examine the impact of the 1991-1992 Iraqi conflict upon the Bedouin nomads of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's Eastern Province, we arrived in Jeddah to discover that the various bureaucracies overseeing our work had yet to procure the money and documents necessary for our trip to the remote deserts to the east. The government offices seemed to close around one in the afternoon—or at least the individuals we needed to speak with were absent after that—so in the afternoons I wandered through the center of the city, strolling through the winding streets and alleys of the central *souq*, and then basking in the air conditioned environs of the modern shopping malls that had arisen around the aging center of the city.

In those first days in the Middle East, I had an experience much like the one I describe in the fieldnote presented at the outset of this chapter. In the stores of the *souq* I met Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi merchants; in the hotels, I was greeted in English by the Filipino concierges. One evening, near the city center in search of an internet connection, I found my way to a large bowling alley and, just before the doors were locked for the evening prayer, I dodged inside. There I found myself amidst the playoffs of a Filipino bowling league. By the time we left Jeddah for the deserts to the east, I had met men from a dozen different nations, all there to make a better life for themselves and

their families back “home.” Yet my first look into the world of Gulf migration hardly ended at the city limits. In the weeks that followed, we spent our days on the dirt tracks that lace all points of the Eastern deserts together, work described in two articles (Gardner 2004; Gardner and Finan 2004). Here we found transmigrants alone on the sands of the desert, enmeshed in the livelihood systems of the Bedouin nomads, tending herds of sheep, goats or camels for a Bedouin family now relocated to town.

It was these experiences—speaking with two Sudanese men, alone at a gas station waypoint in the middle of the great eastern deserts of Arabia, and then again with the Indian shopkeepers of central Jeddah—that first spurred my interest in this particular flow of transnational labor. In its original form, the proposal I configured sought to conduct research in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. After two or three months of work on the proposal, I began communicating with my professional contacts in the Kingdom, and they rapidly noted the naiveté of the document I had constructed: echoing the point made earlier regarding the political sensitivity of migration as a research topic, they informed me that the Saudi government would never allow this research to be conducted, and under the guidance of my advisors, I retailored my Fulbright proposal for Oman.¹⁰ Meanwhile, on the heels of two months of intensive language training in the United Arab Emirates, I prepared a proposal to Wenner-Gren to conduct my research in Dubai, the cosmopolitan and transnational apex of the contemporary Gulf (a city where, according to my contacts in Bahrain, expatriates outnumber citizens ten to one).

¹⁰ As an interesting aside, amidst my fieldwork in Bahrain I received a panicked email from the Saudi Arabian embassy in Washington D.C. suggesting the Kingdom was “very interested” in my research proposal, which after two years in bureaucratic limbo, had somehow percolated to the attention of someone at the Saudi Embassy.

Although my proposal was initially approved by the U.S. Fulbright program, a month later I received word that they were unable to find an institution in Oman willing to sponsor this particular research. Rather than decline the proposal altogether, a senior administrator had taken a personal interest in the proposal, and through her efforts, the Fulbright program “shopped” my proposal to the other petroleum-rich Gulf nations, all of which hosted large foreign communities. Two months before my slated departure—and amidst my comprehensive exams—I was informed that although the University of Bahrain had also declined to sponsor my research, the director of the Bahrain Training Institute (a Bahraini and former Fulbrighter himself) would provide institutional sponsorship for my study.¹¹

In that same window of time, I received word from Wenner-Gren that they, too, had approved my proposal for research in the United Arab Emirates. After a brief discussion with them about the status of my Fulbright proposal, I reconfigured the Wenner-Gren proposal to them to cover some of the ancillary operating costs and expenditures not covered by the Fulbright Grant and secured their permission to conduct my research in Bahrain. With less than two months to spare, I began checking out books from the library about Bahrain and poured over the brief chapter on Bahrain in the Lonely Planet travel guide.

Although my literature review prior to departure was piecemeal, I was surprised to discover that I was not the first to follow this path. In the early 1980s, Robert Lee

¹¹ Sadly, he was released from his position three days prior to my arrival on the island, largely, it was suggested to me, because of his refusal to hire unqualified Bahraini faculty for the Training Institute.

Franklin, an anthropology student at Harvard, configured a research project to be conducted in Iran. With the revolution underway, he found his way to Bahrain, a safe haven in the Gulf where he might study the large Shi'i community, many of whom continue to identify themselves as ethnically Persian. Amidst the tensions between the Sunni leadership and the Shi'i majority (ongoing to this day), the government of Bahrain deemed this topic too sensitive. Franklin reconfigured his research project and emerged with "a study of the foreign communities in Bahrain, and of the Indian community in particular" (Franklin 1985: 1), producing what is to date the sole ethnographic portrait of the Indian community in the Kingdom of Bahrain.

V. Language and Fieldwork in Bahrain

Seminal anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski's call to render the "verbal contour of native thought as precisely as possible" represented a watershed moment in the development of a codified set of anthropological methods (1953: 23). Gone were the days of the armchair anthropologists, reliant as they were upon the firsthand observations of missionaries and colonial emissaries. Soon the days of anthropology from the colonial verandah, an enterprise that brought only fleeting contact with the peoples anthropologists sought to study, would also end. Malinowski's sentiment, reinforced by W. H. R. Rivers and Franz Boas, emerged as central to the journey anthropologists take, a journey outside the synergy of the anthropologist's native language and thought, and into the mental worlds of those they wish to know. That language is central to the sentiments, expressions, emotions, thoughts and behavior of human beings remains a cornerstone to the discipline. The case of my work in Bahrain is a caveat to this tenet, but a challenge to

its corollary—that the boundaries of language neatly coincide with the boundaries of culture. In Bahrain, at the hub of transnational migration for millennia, complex and varied patterns of language use mark the island as a bellwether of processes endemic to global capitalism.

The official language of the Kingdom of Bahrain is Arabic. While never fluent, my own abilities in that language were at their apex upon arrival on the island. Yet from my first moments on the island, my greetings in Arabic commonly drew an appreciative smile from locals followed by a reply in English. In fact, English is common in many of the transnational spaces and places where foreigners come together, and in Bahrain those spaces are nearly everywhere. English's prevalence certainly owes much to the colonial dominion of the British Empire which for many decades rested squarely on the island of Bahrain (a topic explored at length in Chapter Two). Under that dominion, English not only functioned as the official language for much of the municipality, but also, as an extension of the colonial administration of British India, brought colonial transmigrants to Bahrain—Indians serving as clerks, accountants, quartermasters, and security guards in that second wave of Indian migration at the turn of the nineteenth century. The language of that bureaucracy and those early colonial transmigrants carried English to the streets of Manama.

In the 1950s and 1960s, as Bahrain parlayed its role as the nexus of relations between the Gulf and the West into its position as the center of Gulf finance and management, the predominance of English was again reinforced. The nation's movement into the English-speaking “financescapes” of the now-global political economy coincided

with increasing reach of global “mediascapes”: English and American television programs, movies, and news permeated the lives of those on the island.¹² Today, the impact of global culture upon Bahrain is pervasive. In my year in Bahrain, the sounds of the street included Eminem’s Detroit-based rap and the mesmerizing buzz of British-born Panjabi MC’s ‘Mundian to Bach Ke’, featuring Brooklyn-born Jay-Z and a prominent sample from *Knight Rider*, the David Hasselhoff vehicle that so captivated my younger brother in the early 1980s. LaserVision, the DVD store around the corner from my flat, was widely known to have one of the best collections of new American movies, and at night cars from around the island blocked the narrow streets around its entrance as Bahrainis and expatriates selected the latest releases from the United States and other points abroad.

While the predominance of English certainly owes much to the historical processes described above, perhaps the strongest argument rests in the transnational milieu itself: In a context where nearly half the population are foreign-born expatriates, including Indians, Bangladeshis, Pakistanis, Sri Lankans, Filipinos, Indonesians, South Africans, Egyptians, Britishers (as they are called on the island), Americans, and countless others, English is increasingly the basic means for communication between diasporic communities. All members of the professional class of the Indian diaspora speak English, and its influence now reaches into the laboring class. Midway through my time in Bahrain, I volunteered to teach an introductory English course to Indian laborers as part of the community service organized by the Indian Ladies Association. Before the

¹² The terms “financescapes” and “mediascapes” were coined by Arjun Appadurai (1997) and appear throughout this text.

first class was held, dozens of laborers had to be turned away, and for the eight weeks of class the room was always full.

At the same time, the predominance of English on the island should not eclipse the other important and interesting patterns of language use concurrent with the processes described above. Bahrain, like all the states of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), is ruled by a Sunni elite.¹³ Only in Bahrain, however, does that Sunni elite rule over a Shi'i majority, many of whom trace their familial heritage to Iran. Powerful Shi'i families still foster their Persian identity, and Persian is widely spoken within this subcommunity. Moreover, the longstanding connections between Bahrain and the Indian subcontinent have lodged Hindi in the linguistic palette of contemporary Bahrain. The popularity of Hindi movies and other media, the historic presence of Hindi-speaking bureaucrats and merchants, and the presence of Hindi-speaking housemaids and nannies have pushed this language to prominence as well, as the children of middle class and wealthy Bahraini families often learn to converse in Hindi and/or other Indian languages.

Even within the expatriate labor camps, locations where the largest and poorest contingent of the Indian community live, rapid changes and linguistic struggle seem to be characteristic. The great majority of Indian laborers who arrived over the last two decades come from the southern state of Kerala, and few of them speak Hindi (the national language of India). Upon arrival, many begin to pick up bits of Arabic in order to communicate with sponsors, bosses, managers and customers. Owing to the Keralites' numerical prominence, those from other Indian states might begin to learn Malayalam,

¹³ The GCC was formed in early 1981. Its membership comprises the heads of the six Gulf States: Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Qatar, UAE, and Oman (Zahlan 1989: 135).

the language of Kerala and one so predominant amongst the Indian diaspora that many Bahraini government documents are now published in Arabic, English and Malayalam.¹⁴

In the elite classes of the Indian diaspora, altogether different processes are occurring. Unlike the transnational working class most of the diasporic elite arrive on the island with families in tow, and regardless of their state of origin, their children are taught in English and Hindi at the Indian School or the other schools that serve the diaspora's children. Oftentimes their mother tongue is consciously spoken in the household—the only refuge from the confusing plurality of languages in the city outside. Conversely, a handful of the most powerful Indian families have attempted to master Arabic as part of their citizenship campaign.¹⁵

In the complex linguistic terrain of the contemporary Gulf, I ended up conducting a majority of my interviews in English. In the cases where I made use of a translator, that translator was also Indian, so in the final accounting, all the interviews were recorded in some version of English. I toyed with the idea of cleaning up the grammar and syntax of these quotes to better fit the American ear, but in the end I decided to reproduce the quotations much as I received them. Reading over the interviews, there are very few junctures where the meaning is not clear, and with the larger subjects of transnationalism

¹⁴ The Bahrain government published the 2000 Census in Arabic, English, and Malayalam. There was much consternation in the papers about the last of these—Indians claimed that Hindi is the national language of India, and hence Malayalam was a poor choice on the government's part. The official Bahraini response noted that the purpose behind the choice was to simply reach as many individuals as possible, and with the large Keralite community on the island, Malayalam was the logical choice.

¹⁵ While most scholars report that citizenship in the Gulf States is not available to transmigrants (Leonard 2003: 139; Falzon 2003: 675), Bahrain does provide a small window through which those seeking citizenship might climb. One of the key junctures of this process is a demonstration of facility with Arabic.

and globalization lurking behind this ethnography, the point is this: the “verbal contour of native thought,” to again quote Malinowski, is in linguistic flux, a process itself wrought by the transnational processes described here. The inability to communicate, the struggle to learn the necessary bits and pieces of three or four different languages—these processes characterize the mental worlds of all inhabitants of the small island, and particularly that of the many diasporas that make their home in the city.

VI. Methods

Like most anthropologists before me, those first weeks in the field were a bewildering experience. I spent many of my nights alone in my small flat, or, alternatively, on long walks through the city. Peering into shop windows or restaurants, I saw men from around the world immersed in conversations, yelling and laughing, arguing, engaged in life. Outside that window I was not only outside their ‘culture,’ but I was also beleaguered by the anthropological removal, the gaze of anthropology that is at once on others and on oneself. By day I struggled with very real dilemmas of conducting research in Bahrain: my visa status, arranged by the Fulbright Program and the Bahrain Training Institute (my host institution), was upon my arrival officially recorded as a tourist/visitor, forcing me to periodically fly to Qatar and back for a renewal—a situation finally remedied after four trips to and from the airport in Doha. With nothing but a temporary visitor’s visa, I was unable to obtain the Population Registration Card, or CPR, the keystone in one’s bureaucratic identity on the island, and necessary for day to day activities—for paying bills, purchasing a mobile phone, and securing utilities.

All of these problems were eventually solved, and it was only then that I began to realize that the issues I had faced—the feelings of homesickness, the struggles to work through the government’s bureaucracy, the feelings of being outside the thousands of urban lives going on around me—were actually an important form of participant observation unique to the transnational milieu I was studying. For an island like Bahrain, where hundreds of laborers and professionals from around the world arrive and depart every day, the experience of finding one’s way into the cultures and communities of the island is as much a part of the transnational experience as actually ‘belonging’.

My participation in and observation of the lives of both citizen-host and transmigrant included numerous other activities. Shortly after arriving on the island, I joined the Manama Toastmasters, a cosmopolitan group of mostly professionals who sought to improve their “leadership skills, self-confidence and communication through public speaking,” and do so in English. I also joined the Riffa Chapter of the Lion’s Club, a group of mostly Muslim Indian and Pakistani men (and two women) committed to improving the health and welfare of those less fortunate. I spent countless hours at the many Indian social clubs on the island, including the mother club of them all, the India Club. I attended numerous parties and events organized by these clubs for the laborers, and in conjunction with the Indian Ladies Association I taught the aforementioned introductory English course to expatriate Indian laborers. Eventually, these associations and institutions emerged as one of the focal points of my research on the island.

I also got to know many of the expatriate instructors at the Bahrain Training Institute who, ironically, serve the frontline of the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs’

attempt to forge an educated and skilled workforce capable of replacing the large contingents of expatriates on the island. Through all these channels, I seemed to have an endless list of people to interview, most of whom belonged to the diaspora's middle and upper class—the successful businessmen and, less frequently, professional women, as well as the merchant families with longstanding ties to the island. All of these interviews were conducted in English. In my first visits I utilized a semi-structured interview format that explored a sequence of topics, including the basis of the decision to migrate, recollections of their arrival in Bahrain, a description of participation and membership in social clubs and other organizations, narratives about the experiences with periodic trips back to India, and their aspirations for the future. The bulk of the interviews I recorded were what Karen Leonard calls “experience narratives” emphasizing family and individual migration experiences (Leonard 1999: 45). Follow-up interviews were often unstructured and focused upon particular gaps in my understanding of their individual and collective experiences.

My contact with the laboring class of the diaspora was much more difficult to achieve. In the beginning of my time in Bahrain, I spoke with the custodians and cafeteria staff at the Bahrain Training Institute. However, my failed attempts to befriend and interview the maven of Indian expatriate activism on the island, a woman integral to the formation of numerous formal and informal outreach groups, left me adrift for the better part of a month. Through other channels, I met a young Tamilian pharmacist named S. Kumar. Through his own ingenuity and desire, he had reconfigured his elected position at one of the Indian social clubs on the island into a social service position. He spent many

of his evenings visiting labor camps, dealing directly with the sorts of problems laborers encounter in the difficult environment of Bahrain. Our friendship rapidly bloomed, and once or twice a week I would accompany him to the labor camps. Here too I conducted interviews based on the “experience narratives” template described above, and I worked closely with S. to alter and improve the topical outline used in these interviews. We met with these men in the evenings, after they had returned, tired and hungry, from a long day of labor in the hot sun. After explaining the purpose of the project and reviewing our promise of confidentiality, we sought one individual to interview. Upon return to the same camp, we would occasionally continue with the same individual; other times, we sought a new individual interested in sharing his migration experience. Typically, many men would gather around us in the course of the conversation, and what began as an individual interview often ended in the form of a focus group. All in all, few of these interviews were conducted in English: I relied on S.’s linguistic facility to work through the TAMILIAN, Malayalam, Kannada, and other languages we encountered in these trips. Although we offered no remuneration for these interviews, we often brought a large bag of rice and two dozen packets of fruit juice for the men as a token of our gratitude.

While most of my contact with the laboring class of the Indian diaspora drew upon S.’s network of contacts, I also had the chance to teach an introductory English course, sponsored by the Indian Ladies Association, to approximately forty men and women who, roughly, fit into the laboring class of the Indian community. My students—clerks, manual laborers, concierges, drivers, electricians—were one step above the manual laborers I encountered in the camps, and all were eager to improve their English.

Any notions of the course being a chore were cast aside after our first meeting. The students arrived in the evening, always punctual, and often after a ten or twelve hour work day. Our conversations in class and afterwards provided me with another set of perspectives on the dilemmas and tribulations of Indian transmigration.

Finally, I interviewed numerous Bahrainis in the course of my time on the island. Many of these interviews were with government officials charged with some aspect of managing the bureaucratic structure of migration on the island. Other interviews, however, were with Bahrainis from all walks of life. I had a small group of Bahraini friends that I spent time with regularly—we trekked to the horse track on the weekend, meandered through the malls and markets of the island by evening, or wandered out to the southern deserts and beaches on Friday afternoons. Their perspectives on work and life on the island came to play a central role in my portrayal of the dilemmas faced by citizen-youth. With most of these individuals, I utilized unstructured interviews that explored their perspectives on the presence of such a large migrant population in their midst, their perceptions of the effect of this population on Bahraini culture, and the government's efforts to 'localize' the workforce.

Most of the individuals with whom I spoke were men. The flow of transnational labor to the small island is far from gender balanced: the great majority of the arrivals from India are men, both single and married, who arrive with the idea of staying a few years, sending money back home, and saving for a marriage or better life. This is not to say that women do not arrive to work on the island, for many do. The largest segment of the female expatriate population comprises the housemaids, estimated to be 40,000.

While I did speak with and observe these women on several occasions, access to them is generally out of the question, for of all the transmigrants on the island their time and movement most strictly controlled. As one moves up the economic ladder of the Indian diaspora, the proportion of women increases: some women arrive as professionals, employees like any other, while others arrive on a spousal visa. Of the latter category, many play powerful social and professional roles within the diaspora through their occupations, churches, temples, schools, social clubs, and voluntary associations. I also befriended and spoke with numerous second-generation Indian women, the daughters of families that had made their home on the island for decades or longer. My opportunities to meet and/or interview Bahraini women were few and far between, although through my contacts at the University of Bahrain I was able to meet a handful of female students. Our interactions often fell short of public meetings—more frequently we would have long discussions over our mobile phones.

Although many of the men and women I spoke with insisted that their comments were “on the record,” I have reproduced them under the auspices of anonymity—with the exception of those in official posts, either at the various embassies or in Bahraini government offices. In part, this is to protect the participants from potential repercussions, be it from their Bahraini sponsors, other members of the expatriate community, their employers, or, in some cases, their families and friends. This issue is particularly critical to the Indian laborers. A question regarding the problems encountered in the workplace, for example, would often be followed by silence, a furtive look over the shoulder to make sure no one outside their close circle of friends was present, and then an

answer. The reasons for the clandestine character of the interviews should be evident by the conclusion of this study: for many of these men, their livelihoods and those of their family hang by a thin thread and, more specifically, upon the good will of their citizen-sponsor. My presence in the labor camps was unusual, to say the least, and the anonymity guaranteed to the men who shared their stories with me only partly measures up to the risks they took in simply speaking with me.

In the final accounting, I conducted a total of 66 formal, semi-structured interviews. Eight of these were with women. The majority were also with individuals of Indian descent, although they may have possessed a Canadian, Bahraini, Australian, American, or other passport. Of the remainder of that total, seven of these long, structured interviews were with Bahraini citizens, and five were with individuals from other transmigrant communities on the island. Together, these migration “experience narratives” comprise the foundation of my ethnographic data. Upon that foundation I have made significant use of my fieldnotes, which include the details of interactions, conversations, and shorter interviews with hundreds of other individuals on the island. I regularly attended meetings and other social gatherings, and the minutiae of those experiences, also recorded in my fieldnotes, pervade this study. I maintained a set of clippings from two newspapers on the island, both of which provided a wealth of detail about the transmigrant experience. Finally, I have continued correspondence with many of the individuals I met during my stay on the island, and in that sense, I am still collecting data.

Finally, in the interest of protecting my informants from repercussions stemming from their participation in this study, I have changed the names of all individuals and businesses that appear in my interviews.

VII. Transnationalism and the State

Transnationalism, as an emergent theoretical framework that crosses disciplines in the social sciences, is an outgrowth of the much older branch of inquiry concerned with the study of migration. Early studies operating under the banner of migration studies focused largely upon the assimilation of foreign-born minority groups into the dominant sociocultural context of the majority population (Gordon 1964, see Castles 2003).

Transnationalism shifted the focus to the social processes (Kearney 1995), social fields (Basch et al. 1994; Goldring 1998), or simply those individuals and communities whose lives are spread across two or more nation-states. While the field of transnational studies is recognized as an *emergent* one—a field of inquiry yet to develop a “well-defined theoretical framework and analytical rigour” (Portes 1999: 218)—in general terms the transnational literature examines relations of power and, more specifically, how those relations of power have been reshaped by the increasing mobility of labor and capital endemic to late capitalism.¹⁶

The idea that the increased mobility of labor and capital has fundamentally altered social relations in the contemporary era is at the hallmark of transnational studies and the

¹⁶ Portes also notes that transnational studies frequently rely upon disparate levels of analysis, stretching from individual to the state, and oftentimes mix levels of abstraction (1999: 218).

basis for the contention of its own discrete status as a field of inquiry. Transnational scholars argue that the deterritorialized, multi-sited, and transnational lives observed in the contemporary world signify a fundamental 'break' with past conditions. Linda Basch and her coauthors, for example, argue that "current transnationalism marks a new type of migrant experience, reflecting an increased and more pervasive penetration of capital" (1994: 24), while John Gledhill (1998) notes that, "the sheer scale of flows in the modern world, and their diffusion into the lives of ordinary people through mass media, amounts to more than a purely quantitative difference." Alejandro Portes is even more specific: he argues that the unique character of contemporary transnationalism comprises three aspects: "the number of people involved, the nearly instantaneous character of communications across space, and the fact that the cumulative character of the process makes participation "normative" within certain immigrant groups" (1997: 813). Based on these sorts of contentions, much of what operates under the banner of transnational studies accepts the premise that the movement of capital and labor in the contemporary milieu has significantly reshaped the social relations in which large numbers of people live.

While the majority of transnational theorists focus upon the mobility of labor and capital as the structures forged by those processes, Appadurai provides an alternative perspective on the conditions wrought by contemporary capitalism by considering this 'break' in terms of imagination. He argues that, "more people than ever before seem to imagine routinely the possibility that they or their children will live and work in places other than where they were born: this is the wellspring of the increased rates of migration

at every level of social, national, and global life” (Appadurai 1997: 6). By configuring a theory of a ‘break’ around the concept of imagination, Appadurai seeks an explanation for transnationalism that is at once attentive to the agency individuals bring to bear in deciding to depart their homeland and to the forces that structure that agency (hence he presents the concept of *mediascapes* as the regional and global circuits through which the material of this imaginative work is purveyed).

The general idea of a ‘break’ helps unpack the complexities of the transnational environment of Bahrain. While Indian transmigrants have been present in Bahrain for centuries, only in the last decades have they been able to move back and forth between the Arabian Gulf and the Indian subcontinent with a frequency that allows them to comprehensively maintain transnational social fields. The poorest of the laborers on the island, while often facing the difficult task of finding profit in a system configured to exploit their labor power and, more precisely, to frequently separate them from the even the minimal profits of that labor through both legal and illegal means, nonetheless maintain almost constant communication with home, and those lucky enough to receive the bi-annual trip home typically guaranteed in their contract often marry or father children before their return to the island. Their wealthier countrymen and women—what I call the diasporic elite—have configured a multi-sited set of social and familial networks that link them to points well beyond the Indian subcontinent, a strategic transnationalism that is premised upon the communicative and infrastructural changes that comprise the transnational ‘break.’ For both rich and poor, the infrastructural

changes underpinning the contemporary transnationalism allow transmigrants, in some sense, to live in two or more places at once.

As Appadurai argues, however, there is more to this ‘break’ than airplanes and cell phones. These technological changes have reshaped the horizons of imagination. In the villages of South India, men now imagine the possibilities of a life abroad, of a global life that may begin in the petroleum-rich nations of the Arabian Gulf and, perhaps, lead to opportunities elsewhere. This imagination is structured, as Appadurai suggests, through mass mediation (1997: 6), but also through the interpersonal contacts with return migrants in the villages of South India. Remittances from the Gulf fuel the economy of Kerala and other south Indian states (Kurien 2002: 69-70; Nair 1999); in some of the “Gulf pockets”—regions of these states with high rates of outmigration to the Gulf—ethnographers report over a quarter of the total male working population are working elsewhere, and many of them in the Gulf (Osella and Osella 2000: 119). The *Gulfan*, or return-migrant from the Gulf, has a particular image in south India—one associated with conspicuous consumption and new wealth (Osella and Osella 2000; Kurien 2002). Prema Kurien begins her ethnography about return migrants with short descriptions of a man who used the money earned in the Gulf to fulfill his lifelong dream of owning an elephant and of former servants building palatial houses on properties purchased from their former masters (2002: 1). Or as Vijay, a laborer in a garment factory whose migration experience is described at length in chapter three, described:

At home, I was a master tailor in the showroom—I was a supervisor. I decided to come to the Gulf because everybody around me was coming to the Gulf, or coming back from the Gulf, and they had lots of money. Everyone respected them, and I wanted to get that respect. All my friends were going to the Gulf.

In this sense, imagination is not an idle anthropological concern, but rather a force that shapes the actions of these migrants-to-be. It provides imagined (and sometimes real) avenues out of poverty and out of the social relations of the homeland. It guides young men and women to the labor brokers with connections in the Gulf and, eventually, into the flow of labor crossing the Indian Ocean. As Portes (1997) suggests, the idea that this is both a possible horizon for young laborers in India and, more to Portes' point, a normative behavior, is symptomatic of the 'break' described by theorists working in the transnational milieu.

The basic premise of a transnational break has often been interpreted as conjuring up a field of inquiry blind to the significant historical continuities between past and present. The debate over how history—and, particularly, a global history filled with the large-scale movement of peoples from one place to another—fits with the break hypothesized by transnationalism is an active one. Sidney Mintz, for example, uses a review of the political economy of the nineteenth century Caribbean to argue that what is today called 'transnationalism' has significant historical precedents (1998). While this general point is certainly on the mark, his admission that, "these people had no telephones or facsimile machines; they were not able to move back and forth quite like the Senegalese peddlers of knock-off perfumes on Fifth Avenue, or St Lucia *revendeuses* plying their trade in the marketplace of downtown Fort-de-France, Guadeloupe" (Mintz 1998: 126), does little to alter his central thesis, which depends upon the conflation of nineteenth century Caribbean migrants (often slaves, indentured servants, and other forms of forced migrants) typically moving in one direction with the mobile laborers of the

contemporary era who move back and forth between the homeland and worksites around the globe. Unlike the slaves, caneworkers, and indentured servants of the nineteenth century Caribbean, even the poorest contemporary laborers in the Gulf maintain transnational social fields, albeit oftentimes with great difficulty.

Other critics have brought more detailed data to bear against the notion of the ‘break’ underlying the study of transnationalism. Unlike Mintz, whose argument omits any evidence of functional transnational institutions and social fields in the nineteenth century Caribbean, Nancy Foner uses a comprehensive analysis of nineteenth and early twentieth century migrants to New York City to uncover continuities between contemporary transnationalism and the migration experiences of a hundred years ago. She clearly demonstrates that early (trans)migrants to New York City often maintained what are today called transnational social fields (Foner 2000: 169-187). Money flowed back and forth between the New York City and the various homelands from which the immigrants came; political and social institutions spanned the transnational divide; and large proportions of migrants to the United States returned to their countries of origin (Foner 2000: 169-176). Foner concludes her argument by seeking a middle ground. Like Mintz, she argues that while something new may be afoot, the sorts of transnational processes observed and theorized by contemporary scholars have significant precedents in world history, precedents that are often elided in transnational analyses.

While the case study presented here certainly lends credence to the notion of a ‘break,’ the historical continuities between past and present in Bahrain are both formidable and essential to the experience of transmigrants today. This point is an

important component of the argument presented here, albeit in a more nuanced fashion than Mintz and Foner might recommend. Indian transmigrants, and for that matter all foreigners who come to Bahrain for work, enter into a structure of dominance that is itself the culmination of historical forces. The configuration of the power relations between guestworker and citizen builds upon the legacy of Bahrain as a mercantile hub in the trade routes between South Asia and the Arabian Peninsula; upon the relations of production forged first under the political economy of pearl production and, later, upon that of petroleum extraction; upon the bureaucratization forged under British colonialism; and upon the articulation of traditional tribal relations within the template of the state. The portrayal of these processes at work in the lives of transmigrants in Bahrain is a recurring theme throughout this study.

Contextualizing the case presented here in the transnational literature, my analysis of the relations between Bahraini citizens and Indian guestworkers seeks to accomplish two tasks. First, it provides an opportunity to examine transnational processes in a context much different than that of the wealthy nations of the global north. As others have noted, transnational theory has largely been shaped by the analysis of transmigration from the underdeveloped global south to the wealthy and democratic nations of the global north (Ong 1999: 8-10, Gledhill 1998). I join others in reexamining the premises of transnational theory in contexts outside the global north (Ong 1999, Leichtmann 2005; Schmitter-Heisler 2000).¹⁷ In Bahrain, for example, assimilation and naturalization are

¹⁷ This was the subject of an American Anthropological Association session that I co-chaired with Heather Hindman entitled "Movements Outside 'the West': Contemporary Issues and Current Dilemmas in Transnational Anthropology," November 2003.

discouraged, if not impossible; the state is arranged around the distribution of wealth generated by an extractive economy; transmigrants are controlled and managed through a guestworker system unique to the Gulf; and finally, the proportions of transmigrants to citizens in all the Gulf States is extraordinarily higher than host countries in the global north.

Second, while much of the transnational literature concerns the processes by which transmigrants escape the ambit of their home state (Appadurai 1996; Kearney 1991; Hobsbawm 1990: 182-183), I focus my analysis upon the relationship between the host-state and the transmigrant population that makes its home on the island. In some sense the transmigrants that arrive from points around the globe to work in Bahrain escape their home state's reach; in doing so, however, they enter the ambit of the Bahraini state. Conceived as a structure of dominance (Longva 1997), this set of power relations orchestrates relations between citizen and guestworker. Building upon Bahrain's long history as a hub in the regional and global flow of capital, labor, and culture, I argue, this structure of dominance is the product of an intricate dialectic between the shape of the state and the evolving strategies of the transmigrant populations on the island. In other words, the state itself has adjusted and readjusted to the flow of transnational labor to Bahraini shores; in doing so, the state continually reframes its claims to legitimacy and authority in light of the new, transnational strategies these populations bring to bear upon this structure of dominance. In the push and pull between these forces, transmigrant populations struggle to derive profit from their work abroad while the structure of dominance, codified in the state, masks the processes by which the ruling family and the

Bahraini elite manufacture hegemony over the disenfranchised and indigenous Shi'i majority and aggrandize profit from the economy. As this study demonstrates, the experience of transmigrants, or outsiders, on the island provides a window into the processes by which this ideological domination is constructed and, in a more general sense, how the citizenry on the island have configured their relationship to the global political economy.

VIII. Organization of the Dissertation

William Roseberry envisioned an anthropology that manifests

an intellectual commitment to the understanding, analysis, and explication of the relations and structures of power in, through, and against which ordinary people live their lives ... The routes toward an analysis of power can be various, from the political-economic analysis of the development of capitalism in a specific place, to the symbolic analysis of the exercise of power in a colonial state, to a life history of a person who experiences power from a particular position, in a particular way (Roseberry 1996:6).

In the chapters that follow, I approach the relations and structures of power that shape the interactions between guestworker and citizen in Bahrain from, as Roseberry suggests, various routes of analysis. In the most general terms, the arc of the analysis presented in this dissertation can be best described in three basic steps. First, using ethnographic data collected from both the transnational working class and the diasporic elite, I delineate a *structure of dominance* into which all transmigrants arrive (Longva 1997). Peering at the relations and structures of power encompassed in this structure of dominance from the perspective of non-citizen Indian transmigrants, I follow Paul Farmer in seeking to portray the “processes and forces that conspire—whether through routine, ritual, or, as is more commonly the case, the hard surfaces of life—to constrain agency” (2003: 40).

Second, I mine that same ethnographic data in portraying the strategies transmigrant individuals and the Indian community as a whole bring to bear against this structure of dominance. In describing that constrained agency, I tack between the theoretical frameworks of diaspora studies (Safran 1991, Clifford 1994, Butler 2001) and transnationalism (Basch, Schiller and Szanton Blanc 1994; Smith and Guarnizo 1998) to analyze the strategies Indian transmigrants deploy in the hopes of forging lives that are economically productive and meaningful. In doing so, I repeatedly return to the question of how these non-western migration flows fit with the canonical components of both transnational and diaspora theory. Third, in an effort to move beyond the portrayal of Bahraini citizens as merely conduits or ‘structural dopes’ through which dominance is deployed (Giddens 1979: 52), I contextualize the structure of dominance portrayed in earlier chapters in the larger arena of the global political economy. Here I argue that the shape of the state and the meaning of citizenship in Bahrain, configured in dialectic with the Kingdom’s long history as a hub of transnational activity, themselves comprise the basic nexus for the citizenry’s resistance to the neoliberal calculus of the global political economy. I conclude with a brief discussion of the utility of an ‘anthropology of power’ in untangling the complexities of relations in the highly heterogeneous and transnational milieu of contemporary Bahrain. In more detail, the path through the dissertation passes through the waypoints described below.

I begin with an overview of the historical political economy that enmeshes both Indian transmigrants and citizens alike. Interestingly, the history of Bahrain largely revolves around a succession of extractive industries: first, a robust industry based upon

the extraction of pearls from the rich beds surrounding the island; and second, the petroleum industry that brought great wealth to the island in the twentieth century. Following Fuad Khuri's insightful analysis of Bahrain (1980, 1985), I see this history and the subsequent emergence of the state in Weberian terms—not just as a relation of men dominating men—but as a process of continually renegotiating Sunni tribal authority and legitimacy through the colonial period and into the bureaucratic form of a 'modern' state.¹⁸ Undergirding the continual assertions of authority and legitimacy, my analysis also utilizes Marxist perspectives on the state: in effect, the authority gained and the legitimacy maintained perpetuate inequities within the citizenry, largely along sectarian lines (see Engels 1884). To the terrain covered by Khuri's analysis I add two things: first, I extend the analysis to the role that foreigners and, principally, Indian transmigrants played in this process; and second, I extend the analysis to the contemporary post-petroleum era. This portrayal of the state brings the foundational analysis provided by Khuri more in line with Longva's resurrection of Mazrui's concept of 'ethnocracy,' itself an attempt to grapple with modern political systems based on kinship (Longva 2005).

In chapter three, I analyze the structure of dominance that hems and confines the lived experiences of all transmigrants on the island. For Longva, this structure of dominance is a set of power relations roughly analogous to the *kafala*, or the sponsorship system that orchestrates relations between citizens and guestworkers throughout the Gulf (Longva 1997: 77-109). Keeping in mind the transnational lives of these guestworkers, I

¹⁸ Albeit one, like the other Gulf States, of a very unique character: the state collects no taxes, its income is largely based upon the wealth derived from a single natural resource, and the bureaucracy is largely a means for distributing that wealth, unequally, to various components of the citizenry.

extend my analysis of this structure of dominance to India itself and the conduits of migration that carry men and women to the Gulf. I draw upon Paul Farmer's notion of structural violence, and demonstrate that the structure of dominance in place in Bahrain is contingent upon the systemic and crippling poverty that drives families in India to mortgage land, incur debt, sell productive assets, and seek some incremental improvement of their livelihood through a sojourn in the Gulf (Farmer 2003).

I also extend my analysis of this structure of dominance beyond the formal aspects—the laws, bureaucratic processes, and other procedures—codified in the state. While the legal and bureaucratic systems of governance codified in the state certainly comprise one facet of this structure of dominance, like Foucault I see the state as merely one terminal form that relations of power take (Foucault 1978: 92-93). As he clearly states elsewhere,

[R]elations of power, and hence the analysis that must be made of them, necessarily extend beyond the limits of the state. In two senses: first of all, because the state, for all the omnipotence of its apparatuses, is far from being able to occupy the whole field of actual power relations, and further because the state can only operate on the basis of other, already existing power relations. The state is superstructural in relation to a whole series of power networks that invest in the body, sexuality, kinship, knowledge, technology and so forth (1985: 64).

Like Eric Wolf, whose analysis of power progressed in his ultimate work to essentially Foucauldian concerns of governance (in Wolf's words, "the power manifest in relationships that not only operates within settings and domains but also organizes and orchestrates the settings themselves" (Wolf 1999: 5)), I use these theoretical approaches to comprehending power to understand the difficult, everyday interactions with citizens

described by my transmigrant informants. These strata represent another facet of the structure of dominance I seek to delineate.

In the fourth chapter, I peer at this structure of dominance through the eyes of the Indian diasporic elite. Like the transnational working class, the diasporic elite face the same facets of this structure of dominance, from the intricacies of the *kafala* system itself to the habitus of everyday interactions with their citizen-hosts. At the same time, they face a suite of additional vulnerabilities, including the ‘sleeping partner’ system, a product of the mandate that all business ventures include Bahraini citizen, as well as the difficulties involved in raising a family in particularly difficult diasporic conditions. To this scenario, however, the diasporic elite bring a set of strategies unavailable to the working class. To explicate and analyze these strategies, I draw up on Aihwa Ong’s notion of flexible citizenship (1999) and Arjun Appadurai’s notion of a diasporic, nonterritorial transnation (1996: 173; see also Falzon 2003) to analyze the global social, familial, and professional networks, or *strategic transnationalism*, that comprise the diasporic elite’s insurance policy against the systemic abuses of the structure of dominance they encounter in the Gulf.

In chapter five I examine the social clubs and other diasporic associations that, in the larger context of the Gulf, make Bahrain particularly unique.¹⁹ After surveying the wide variety of social clubs and voluntary organizations with which I had direct experience, I turn to theories of social capital to analyze their instrumental value to the Indian community. For even the poorest transmigrant, these social clubs and the activities

¹⁹ As I describe in this chapter, none of the other Gulf States have allowed the efflorescence of social clubs and voluntary organizations one encounters in Bahrain.

they organize represent one of few institutional networks by which he or she can gather information about how to cope with the systemic injustices wrought under the structure of dominance and, ideally, improve their chances of profiting from their venture abroad. Using Bourdieu's (1986, 1992) theory of social capital—one in which social capital is always considered in relation to economic and cultural capital and, more importantly, analysis is focused upon the ability to transmodify one form of capital into another—I argue that while the Indian social clubs are key venues in the construction of social capital, the juncture at which this social capital is exchanged for economic capital rests squarely within the dominion of the *kafala* system, effectively rendering this exchange impossible. This, I argue, comprises another facet of the structure of domination in which all foreigners in Bahrain dwell. Moving beyond the instrumental value of these clubs and associations, I spend the remainder of the chapter analyzing the role these institutions play as venues for constructing particularistic Indian identities in a diasporic context that elides those meaningful differences.

As transnational theorists Smith and Guarnizo note, the “dialectic of domination and resistance needs a more nuanced analysis” (1998: 6). Throughout the chapters leading to this point I have used that dialectic to unravel the forces that shape the lives of non-citizen guestworkers and the strategies—as resistance—they bring to bear against that structure of dominance. To achieve that more nuanced analysis, I use the sixth chapter to contextualize the power relations specific to guestworkers and citizens in Bahrain within the larger arena of the global political economy. My analysis describes

how that structure of dominance serves the citizenry and, simultaneously, structures inequities between citizens.

I begin with an examination of Bahraini nationalism. My analysis reveals a tight syncopation between the rendition purveyed by the royal family, that discernible in the media, and the everyday iterations of this nationalism found in the conversations and interviews I conducted with citizens on the island. This vision of modernity takes form in the city itself, an urban pantheon to postmodernity, a trophy case displaying the royal family's beneficence. Ideologically, this nationalism serves as a beacon that will carry the nation beyond its dependency upon petroleum, and simultaneously incorporates the fundamental neoliberal calculus of the global movement of capital: free trade, entrepreneurship, transparency, meritocratic idealism, and a suite of other neoliberal concepts figure prominently in all renditions. As Appadurai has noted, however, there is an increasing disjunction between the nation and the state (Appadurai 1997: 39); after analyzing the contour of this nationalist vision I utilize a Weberian framework to define the shape of the Bahraini state. Following Khuri's analysis, I trace the perseverance of traditional—in this case, tribal—forms of authority that operate side-by-side with those legal/rational forms of authority in cadence with the nationalism I describe at the outset of the chapter (Weber 1968). *Wasta*, an indigenous concept similar to social capital, provides an explanation for how the state goes about distributing wealth in the form of posts in the public sector.

The structure of domination is a system for deriving profit from the human capital necessary to the nationalistic vision of modernity cultivated by the Bahraini citizenry and

state and, alternatively, for asserting dominance over those processes and the transmigrant populations that comprise them; as such, the state itself represents a key juncture for the citizenry's resistance to the neoliberal calculus of the global flows of capital upon which they have come to depend and in which the citizenry themselves are, generally speaking, poorly equipped to compete.

In the conclusion to this dissertation I assess the utility of an anthropology of power as a lens by which one might unpack the complexities wrought by the increasing movement of people, capital, and culture through transnational and global conduits and, more importantly, for gauging the systemic suffering endemic to those processes.

CHAPTER TWO

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND



Figure 2.1: A Bahraini man and children in central Manama.

I. Introduction

In setting out to explore the context of interactions between Indian transmigrants and citizen-hosts on the island of Bahrain, I begin with an overview of the history of the small island. The points I wish to make in the course of this chapter are fairly straightforward: first, that the processes one might identify as transnational have a long history on the island—long enough that they precede the solidification of the nation-state by several millennia.²⁰ Second, I argue that while Bahrain shares much with the other petroleum-rich states of the Arabian Gulf, that commonality should not obscure the

²⁰ Vertovec notes that, “Transnationalism (as long-distance networks) certainly preceded “the nation.” Yet today these systems of ties, interactions, exchanges and mobility function intensively and in real time while being spread throughout the world. New technologies, especially involving telecommunications, serve to connect such networks with increasing speed and efficiency” (1999: 447).

particular history of the island's place in the regional and global political economy.

Finally, I argue that this particular history, and the social relations that comprise it, played an important role in shaping the structure of contemporary relations between the peoples of Bahrain, both citizen and foreigner.

Undergirding these tasks, I hope that the reader will emerge from this chapter with some sense of the fabric of contemporary life in Bahrain. The ethnographic detail included here, along with a small set of important junctures in the historical record of Bahrain, will be the necessary building blocks upon which the analyses of later chapters will be constructed. Our attention here is on the islands of Bahrain; the Indian diaspora, in many ways the centerpiece of this dissertation, make only occasional appearances in the historical record. Nonetheless, the context into which they arrived is an important factor—a necessary, if circuitous, path to contextualizing the dilemmas the diasporic communities face, the strategies they bring to those dilemmas, and the complexities of their relations with citizen-hosts.

II. Early History

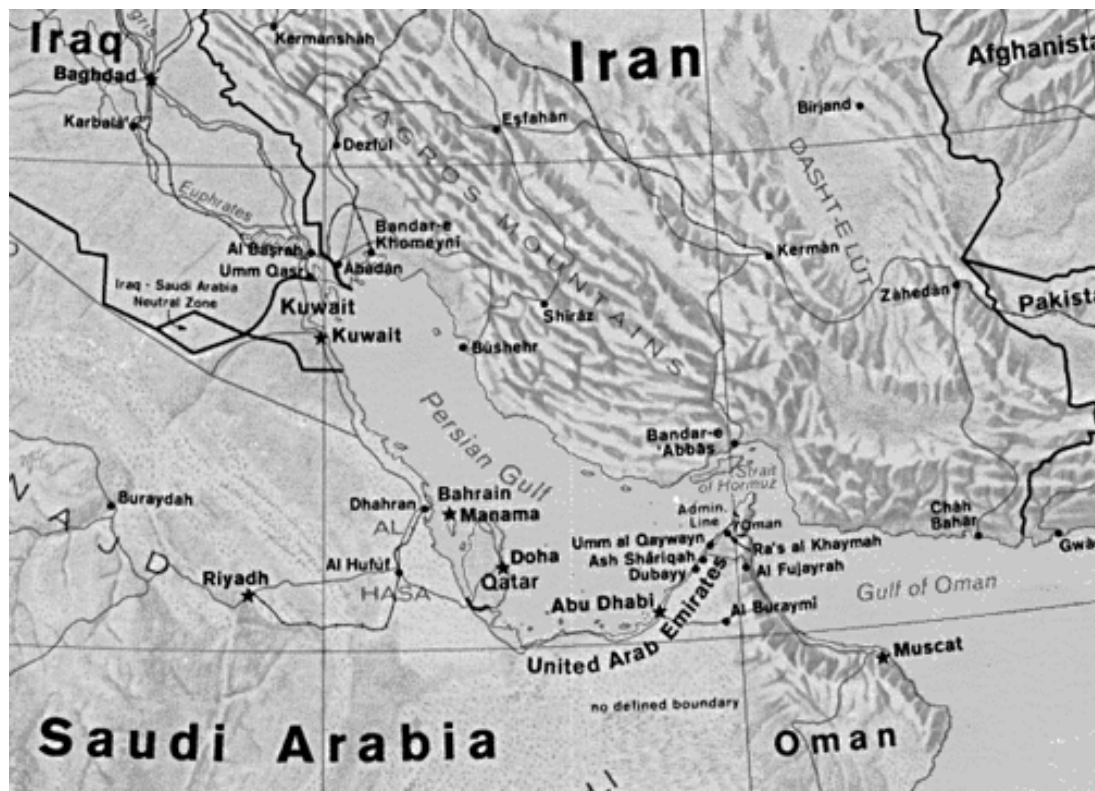


Figure 2.2: A map of the Gulf region (Adapted from Arab Peninsula and Vicinity, Central Intelligence Agency, 1984)

The island of Bahrain is actually a collection of low, geographically unremarkable islands off the eastern coast of what today is Saudi Arabia.²¹ The two largest islands, Awal and the smaller Muharraq, are separated by a shallow bay, once traversable by human and donkey at low tide. For millennia Bahrain served as an entrepôt on the maritime trade routes between Asia and the continents to the west. In the 3rd millennium BC the island was known as Dilmun. Its strategic location on the route between Mesopotamia and the Indus Valley, combined with an abundance of freshwater springs

²¹ I will nonetheless continue to refer to this collection of islands in the singular, not only because this is common usage in Bahrain itself, but also because through continual infill in and around the urban centers on the island, the many islands are slowly merging into one.

found on the island and in the shallow waters that surround it, enhanced the island's mythos—it is edenic Bahrain to which wise men and heroes are transported to live out an eternity in the Epic of Gilgamesh. The island was also known to the Greek empire: an admiral under the command of Alexander the Great visited Tylos (the Greek name for Bahrain), and Pliny made note of the island's renowned pearl beds. Islam arrived in 640 AD, but the religious continuity did little to steady the fate of the small island and, at the fringes of various empires, Bahrain continued to change hands in the passing centuries.

The Omanis, building upon their strategic location at the mouth of the Gulf, captured the islands in the fifteenth century, and they are responsible for Arad Fort, a large fortress that today has been refurbished as a national and historic emblem of Bahrain's long history. The next century belonged to the Portuguese; their fleets conquered ports from the Straits of Hormuz north to those on the southern fringe of the Mesopotamian delta. Historians have often remarked on the peculiarity of Portuguese control—noteworthy for how little influence these outposts had upon the people, culture, artwork, and architecture beyond the walls of their fortresses (Khuri 1980: 16). Perhaps as a result, they were driven from the island in 1602 by the indigenous population, and the rebellion's merchant-leader appealed to the Persian Empire for protection (Lorimer 1908b: 836, Khuri 1980: 17).²²

²² The Persians controlled the island until 1718, when the Arabs of what is today Oman gained control of the island (Lorimer 1908b: 836 - 7). By the middle of the Eighteenth Century, the Hawala Arabs lived on the island in great numbers, and are still represented today (Lorimer 1908b: 837). In 1753, the Persians again moved on the island. They were driven from the islands by the Utub in 1783 (Lorimer 1908b: 839). The Portuguese were ousted from Bahrain in 1602 (Khuri 1980: 17).

The Persian grasp on the island was not firm, and the Omani fleet regained control of the islands for a brief period in the eighteenth century. The Persians returned in 1753, but they did so in a climate of chaos. The Arabian Gulf was a notoriously difficult, if lucrative, mercantile venue. Caught on the seams of empires, the ports on the Arabian side of the Gulf often functioned as maritime city-states—as important trading bazaars connecting the inland tribes with the production of the east, and also as entities capable of collecting fees from passing boats. By the eighteenth century, the English had expanded eastward into Asia, but the Gulf remained beyond their sphere of control. The primary arm of their colonial enterprise, the English East India Company, was aware of Bahrain and its riches from Portuguese deserters as early as 1613, but had been unable to locate the island and its surrounding pearl beds (Lorimer 1908b: 838).

In 1782, perceiving weakness in Persia's position in Bahrain, a maritime Arab tribe from the coastal regions of the peninsula descended upon Bahrain by sea. The 'Utub tribe comprised three lineages, and while their homeland was on the southern shores of the Euphrates delta in what is today Kuwait, the lineage that set sail for Bahrain departed from Zubarah on the Qatari coast (Farah 1985: 3). The 'Utub combatants defeated the Persian forces in the field, and those of the local Sheikh's forces still alive retreated to the fort. The 'Utub plundered the market town of Manama, and after taking possession of a Persian vessel, they retired en masse to their home port on the Qatari coast. After a failed counterattack by the Persian fleet, the Kuwaiti 'Utub intercepted a Persian messenger upon the seas, and they turned south to assist their tribal brethren. This time, upon arriving in Manama, they seized the town and burned it. The Persian troops retreated to

the citadel where they withstood a two month siege by the 'Utub forces, which now included the Zubarah contingent as well. The citadel—and Bahrain as a whole—eventually fell to this Zubarah clan, otherwise know as the Al Khalifa family (Lorimer 1908: 839).

The island the Al Khalifa branch of the 'Utub came to rule was already a transnational hodge-podge of peoples. The axes of difference between these various groups will recur throughout this book; perhaps the most important to our purposes here are the sectarian differences. The 'Utub, and more specifically, the Al Khalifa, were a Sunni tribe in the strictest sense of the word, although not part of conservative Wahhabism of the Saudi mainland. The population of Bahrain they came to rule was, for the most part, Shi'i.²³ Furthermore, as a mercantile hub for the region, Bahrain also included significant populations of Persians (also, for the most part, Shi'i), Basrah Arabs, Hindus, and Jews. In many ways, the Al Khalifa were merely one chapter in a long tome of trans-regional movement.

On the outskirts of contemporary Manama, the capital city and international hub that has spread south to encompass nearly all of the hinterland villages of the island, one can still see the remnants of the famous Bahraini burial mounds or tumuli, fields of small dirt hills stretching as far as the eye can see. Although many have been disrupted by

²³ Writing in 1908, J. G. Lorimer of the Indian Civil Service described the following groups: the Baharinah, although not really a tribe, consisted of those Shi'ites who, as families, predated the arrival of the Sunni Al Khalifas. The Sunni Hawala, mostly townsmen, were (and are) Persians who claimed an Arab genealogy. In addition to the 'Utub, two other Sunni tribes—the Dawasir and the Sadah—made their home on the island. As a mercantile hub for the region, one would also find Persians, Basrah Arabs, Hindus, and Jews on the island.

construction projects, estimates as to their original number reach 150,000 (Clarke 1981: 69). Even today, the vast scope of these remains suggests something unfamiliar to those of us from the New World—some clue as to the sheer number of lives that have been lived on the small island. And for much of the island’s history, the lives that passed on the island intersected with the lucrative pearl trade.

III. Pearls in the Global Ecumene

Bahrain, under a variety of monikers, appeared in the numerous documents that chart the earliest years of Eric Wolf’s revision of the world system,²⁴ and the islands’ mythic notoriety had much to do with the rich pearl beds that surround the island. Greek accounts noted the presence of “fish eyes,” as pearls were known, and later accounts mark their presence in the markets of Manama.²⁵ By the nineteenth century, when the small island had become thoroughly enmeshed in the mercantile trade routes of regional and European powers, Bahrain emerged as the principal pearl market in the Arabian Gulf (Lorimer 1908: 245). Noted as better in quality than those of Ceylon (Buckingham 1829: 456), the pearls of the Gulf made their way to markets on several continents. Many of the earliest historical accounts spend time describing the minutiae of this livelihood

²⁴ Wallerstein originally posited the world-system framework in the social sciences, but it was Wolf’s revision of this framework that most captured the attention of anthropologists, particularly for his contention that the “history” of the peoples who came into contact with colonial powers, and more importantly, the history of the cultural and mercantile interconnections between those peoples, predated European contact (Wallerstein 1974; Wolf 1982). The history of Bahrain provides rich support for this contention.

²⁵ Buckingham notes that the pearls are called the *roomaan el bahr*, or pomegranates of the sea.

(Buckingham 1829: 454-457; see also Muraikhi 1991: 77-90).

In the period after the Persian defeat, pearling vessels were principally controlled by the Sunni tribesmen of the island—members of the ruling Al Khalifa clan, as well as the handful of other Sunni tribes that made their home on the island (Khuri 1980: 36; Franklin 1985: 75). The Al Khalifa rulers extracted revenue through a system of levies upon the industry (Farah 1985: 5). Boats plied the waters around the islands, and the pearling crews, comprising both Arabs and slaves of African origin, worked the bottom of the sea in depths exceeding seventy feet.²⁶ Work was seasonal: the boats spent just over four months on the seas around Bahrain, beginning in June when the sea is hot and calm. Working vessels returned to the island only occasionally to replenish supplies. At the conclusion of the pearling season, crews passed the winter months in idle anticipation of the next season (Buckingham 1971: 456-7). Divers shared in the profits obtained by the sale of pearls, each receiving an advance at the beginning of the season and during the off-season. Both payments were debited against future earnings.²⁷

The work of pearling itself was difficult. A typical pearling dhow held a crew of sixty, including the divers, the pullers, ship's boys, captain's mate, and captain (Jenner 1984: 27).²⁸ The captain sailed the dhow to the chosen location, and the anchor was lowered. Divers quickly descended to the bottom, accompanied by two ropes, one with a

²⁶ Jenner cites evidence that the divers occasionally worked in depths as deep as twelve fathoms (seventy-two feet), although dives in depths of six fathoms (thirty-six feet) was more common (Jenner 1984: 27).

²⁷ Belgrave clearly describes the systemic indebtedness characteristic of the mode of production forged by the pearling industry.

²⁸ Although he includes no page reference, Jenner refers to Sir Charles Belgrave's work throughout this section.

stone weight, the other with a collection bag. After collecting ten or twelve oysters from the sea bottom, the diver surfaced while the pullers retrieved the haul. The divers worked in shifts, and after a sequence of ten dives, the diver warmed himself by the fire while another took his shift. The pearl merchant's vessel traveled between the dhows of his fleet, and the merchant courted buyers one at a time on the deck of his vessel.

The importance of the pearl industry certainly preceded available historical accounts. By the eighteenth century, Bahrain was a central hub in regional commerce. The pearl trade certainly comprised the cornerstone of its position, but the gleam of the pearl often obscured other important attractions of the island. Bahrain functioned as a source of fresh water for passing ships. The islands contained numerous freshwater springs, and the shallow waters around the island also bubbled with fresh water, for which the local population configured technologies for extracting fresh water from saline (Buckingham 1971: 456-7). The interior of Bahrain, by all accounts, was a veritable garden. In his trip to Bahrain in the early nineteenth century, Buckingham noted, "no less than three hundred villages scattered over the small island, and every portion of the soil is cultivated; producing dates, figs, citrons, peaches, and a species of almond, called loazi, the outer husk of which is eaten as well as the kernel" (Buckingham 1971: 452).

Agricultural production was, for the most part, a Shi'i activity, and while their interior villages were connected to the booming port of Manama by trade, they were disconnected from the wealth derived from the pearl industry (Khuri 1980: 36). Palgrave, in the discourse typical of the British colonialists of the Nineteenth and Twentieth centuries, notes that the "fifty or sixty hamlets that lie scattered in its interior keep up

much communication with the thriving emporium on the north-west, and hence their inhabitants bear an almost savage look, indicative of an uncultivated mind, the result of isolation” (1982: 210). These “uncultivated” minds were responsible for much of the agricultural production on the island, and hence part of the reason that the emporium to the northwest thrived in its role as an gateway to the populations of the eastern peninsula.

While the Sunni inhabitants of the island controlled the production of pearls, the distribution of this same commodity brought diverse constituencies to the island. In the seventeenth century, Venetians, Jews from Aleppo and Banias from Gudjerat were the chief exporters of Gulf pearls (Slot 1993: 498). By the early 1800s, however, the bulk found their way to the markets of the Indian subcontinent (Buckingham 1971: 454). As pearls reached the markets of India, the production of the subcontinent flowed back along the same lines of trade: a short list of the items for sale in the 1800s included “cotton and silk fabrics, embroideries, rice, spices, coffee, sugar and tea, fiber ropes, timber, metals, iron and sundry gewgaws all coming from India” (Al Muraikhi 1991: 106).²⁹ With a reliable mercantile connection to the Indian subcontinent, Bahrain rose from an important entrepôt to the preeminent emporium of the Western Gulf (Lorimer 1908: 245). The success of the Indian merchants in this equation enhanced their power on the island. By the end of the nineteenth century, they controlled the customs port and served as personal bankers to the ruling family. Through much of the twentieth century, the Indian rupee served as the Bahraini currency.

With many millennia at the crossroads of regional trade routes, and with the

²⁹ A *gewgaw* is a decorative trinket or bauble.

increasingly solidified mercantile connections to the Indian subcontinent and to the Arabian Peninsula's interior, the port of Manama was widely recognized as a heterogeneous and multicultural trading hub. As Palgrave ably noted in his travel diary, "The arrival of strangers, many or few, from north or south, is an every hour occurrence here; and a passing look, or a chance "good morrow," was all the notice taken of us by the many who thronged the landing place," and continues,

Mixed with the indigenous population are numerous strangers and settlers, some of whom have been established here for many generations back, attracted from other lands either by the profits of commerce or of the pearl fishery, and still retaining more or less of the physiognomy and garb of their native countries. Thus the gay-coloured close-cut dress of the southern Persian, the saffron-stained vest of 'Oman, the white robe of the Nejd, and the striped gown of Baghdad, are often to be seen mingling with the light garments of Bahreyn, its blue and red turban, its white silk-fringed cloth worn Banian fashion round the waist, and its frock-like overall; while a small but unmistakable colony of Indians, merchants by profession, and mainly from Guzerat, Cutch, and their vicinity, keep up here all their peculiarities of costume and manner, and live among the motley crowd, "among them, but not of them" (Palgrave 1982: 205 - 212).

The historical record repeatedly makes not of the heterogeneous character of the island. Certainly a plethora of different cultural and ethnic groups made their home on the island. Some arrived by choice, such as the Indian merchants, and others by force, such as the African slaves that worked the sea bottom for the bounty of pearls. Moreover, the indigenous population, if one can even be delineated, comprised a variety of groups—demarcated not only by the Sunni/Shi'ite schism, but also by regional affiliation, such as those with a genealogical connection to Persia or the eastern districts of Saudi Arabia. In most cases, the pluralism of the social milieu did not extend to the local level: villages were homogeneous, and within the port city of Manama, specific quarters became the home of particular groups. The ruling Al Khalifa maintained their grasp over the people

and economy from the satellite island of Muharraq.³⁰

Nor should this portrait of pre-modern Bahrain be conceived as a sort of static social arrangement. The booming pearl industry of the late nineteenth century reshaped society on the island. As the connections to the pearl markets of India solidified, agricultural land in the hinterlands of the main island was abandoned. “[P]roduction for internal consumption continued,” Nelida Fuccaro notes, but the “export of agricultural produce, especially dates, decreased considerably as the local agricultural workforce increasingly became absorbed in fishing and pearling controlled by the new tribal elites” (2000: 54). The industry thrived as the market for pearls and other luxury goods expanded in the decades following the First World War³¹

In 1893, however, Kokichi Mikimoto, the son of a Japanese noodle vendor, patented a process for cultivating pearls, and after another twelve years spent perfecting the process, cultured pearls began to make their way into the global market as Japan’s first successful export. In Bahrain, the impact of this technological shift was slow, and the industry continued to thrive in the 1920s. But when the American stock market collapsed in 1929, demand for luxury goods dwindled, and with the global prominence of

³⁰ Muharraq was the principal bastion for the Sunni Arab population. As Owen noted in his travel journal, authored in the middle of the Twentieth Century, “I was the only Englishman living in the old town of Muharraq, apparently the first European there’d ever been ... In Muharraq the Pakistani [his neighbor] was almost as much of a stranger as myself, for Muharraq was probably more than 99 per cent an Arab town” (Owen 1957: 65).

³¹ “Natural pearls attained unprecedented value around 1910, when elite upper classes vied with each other to buy them. The fact that a two-strand natural pearl necklace (128 pearls) was considered fair exchange for a six-story Renaissance mansion on Fifth Avenue in New York City says it all. As both were valued at \$1 million, it was a trade Mrs. Morton Plant confidently made with Jacques Cartier in 1917” (Misirowski 1998).

the cultured pearl, the Bahrain industry collapsed in the early 1930's (Zahlan 1989: 22).

Although the pearl trade in Bahrain all but vanished in the decades that followed the global collapse of the industry, the legacy of the relations of production established over the course of centuries of pearl production lingered on. Like the pearl beds, petroleum provided the basis for an essentially extractive industry; the tributary relations between the Sunni royal family and the captains of the pearling dhows were in some sense replicated with oil production, albeit under the guise of legitimacy provided by the colonial bureaucracy. Furthermore, the indentured servitude and circle of debt that characterized relations between pearl boat captains and the divers comprised an early rendition of the contemporary *kafala* system. Like the pearl divers of the last century, transmigrant laborers today arrive with a burden of debt that is difficult to escape. Finally, for millennia Bahrain's lucrative pearl industry drew foreign traders, merchants, and laborers to the island. The petroleum era, while drawing new groups of individuals to the island from afar, was nonetheless only the latest chapter in a long history of transregional movements of people through Bahrain.

IV. The Arrival of British Colonialism

The British entry into the Gulf region, premised upon the strength of their maritime forces, was a gradual one. The arrival of the Al Khalifa Arabs to Bahrain, of course, marked a significant milestone in Bahraini history, but in the larger context of the Gulf, it was one chapter in the history of tribal relations in the region—a set of relations carried from desert to the sea. Between the Persians, the Utub Arabs, the Omanis, and the

famous “pirates” of the lower Gulf (the tribes of what today are the United Arab Emirates), the Arabian Gulf of the eighteenth century has been characterized as a veritable “free-for-all attack and counterattack, alliance and counter-alliance” in which ports and territory frequently shifted hands (Franklin 1985: 64).

British entrée into the region sought legitimacy through the eradication of these attacks and counter-attacks, or of “piracy,” the nomenclature used by the Europeans to describe the fiercely competitive economic warfare waged by the various ports of the Gulf (Franklin 1985: 61). Piracy, while often portrayed as a guerilla response to the encroachment of the Portuguese, French, English and Dutch, also relates to the gradual erosion of the Persian empire and the stability it granted to mercantile activity in the region, to the increasing volume of trade in the region, and, most importantly, to the fact that British definitions of piracy often included the Arab enforcement of a “protection fee” system that mirrored the relationships between caravan routes and tribal lands on the peninsula (Khuri 1980: 19 – 21).

The British, after devastating several ports in naval attacks, brokered a set of treaties with the various sheikhs of the region in 1820. In return for the British promise to forego political and territorial ambitions in the area, the local leaders promised to abstain from the practice known to the British as “piracy.” These treaties, individually known as the General Treaty of Peace, marked the genesis of the Gulf States, and while brokered under the threat of force, these treaties eventually legitimized the Sunni leadership in all the nations of the contemporary GCC (Zahlan 1989: 7 – 8). Bahrain signed this agreement, and eventually became part of the greater tracial system in 1861, at which

time Britain took responsibility for protecting the island from attack by sea (Zahlan 1989: 9). At the conclusion of the General Treaty of Peace in 1820, Bahrain fell under the imperial authority of the British Political Residency which, at the time, was located at the Persian port of Bushire. The Political Resident of the Crown sent an Indian assistant to man the office in Manama (Khuri 1980: 86), and by the end of the century, Britain had a permanent Political Agent stationed on the island (Zahlan 1989: 49).

The presence of the British Residents and Agents in the new Gulf States served multiple ends. A calculated move by many accounts, their growing involvement in the region was ostensibly based upon the protection of trade routes to India and the east. In practice, British presence eradicated the indigenous shipping industry of the Arabian Gulf, for as British steam ships captured the long distance trade that flowed through the Gulf, the entrepôt system, through which Bahrain served much of eastern Arabia, was also reshaped (Landen 1967: 99-101). Furthermore, the stabilization of borders and regimes in the region turned group competition inward rather than outward (Franklin 1985: 66).

Through the agreements forged in the nineteenth century, Britain also took complete control of the external relations of the fledgling Gulf States, thereby forging a *de facto* protectorate status for Bahrain and the other new nations of the western littoral (Franklin 1985: 66). This move would become the window for the colonial forces' increasing involvement in the internal affairs of the port cities and the states which held them. The British concerns expanded to include, "port facilities, pearl production, exports and imports, and a general political order that stimulated international trade" (Khuri

1980: 86). In Bahrain, direct connections to the markets of India and other ports far afield drew increasing numbers of merchants and traders to the city: Germans, other Europeans, and a contingent of fifty Jewish pearl merchants that had arrived in the 1890s sought the protection of the British representative on the island (Khuri 1980: 86).³² The protection of these foreigners became part of the foreign relations managed by the British, and soon India, Germany, America, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and other nations placed their constituents under British control (Khuri 1980: 87).

As the jurisdiction of the British colonial administrator expanded, power was centralized in the court system. A “joint court” was established to deal with cases brought by foreigners against Bahraini subjects, and a municipal court in which foreigners and Bahraini subjects were equally represented began to deal with issues as diverse as “public hygiene, transportation, traffic, water, and electricity” (Khuri 1980: 89 – 90). Councils and governing bodies were established, eclipsing the indigenous institutions of leadership.³³ The degree of involvement the British took in Bahrain superseded that of the other fledgling nations of the western Arabian Gulf: In Bahrain, the colonialists became involved in the minutiae of everyday internal affairs, and in 1946, the Political Residency—the locus of the British Empire’s regional presence, moved from Bushire to

³² By 1915, the indigenous leaders officially ceded jurisdiction over foreigners to the British Political Agent (Zahlan 1989: 49).

³³ In describing the “indigenous” system of leadership, Khuri makes detailed note of the tribal councils (*majalis*) and the religious courts. These are not as hierarchical as western systems of management. In the *majalis* meetings, “tribal chiefs took counsel with close relatives, consultants, intimates, supporters, or guests. They discussed a wide variety of subjects: tribal history, religion, law and justice, treaties with foreign powers, marriages that might have political significance, boat construction, pearl production, palm cultivation, date crops, trade, markets, prices, wages, weather, and any news items of the day” (Khuri 1980: 37).

Bahrain. Air, land and sea forces were quartered on the island, and numerous British commercial firms located their regional headquarters in Bahrain (Franklin 1985: 86; Zahlan 1989: 49).

V. Petroleum and the Global Political Economy

In his comprehensive analysis of the Gulf region in the colonial era, Lorimer makes note of Bahrain's strategic importance to the British colonial interests in the region. He also spends some effort describing the pearl industry, and concludes by stating that should the pearl beds fail, "the Shaikhdом would shortly be reduced to comparative insignificance" (Lorimer 1908: 245). Some twenty-two years after this book was published the pearl market did collapse, but the veracity of the argument underlying Lorimer's prediction remains in question, for the international collapse of the pearl market coincided with the discovery of oil in Bahrain.

The British had already extracted a further promise from Shaikh Isa bin Ali in 1914 "not to embark on the exploitation of the oil in his country without consulting the Political Agent in Bahrain and without the approval of the High Government" (Jenner 1984: 29), a move that typified the growing force of Britain's indirect rule in Bahrain. While the British initially opposed the American presence on the island, the Crown's growing need for oil (spurred, initially, by the decision to convert the British flotilla from coal to oil power combined with the lack of capital to drive new discoveries), led to a change of tack: the British eventually encouraged the arrival of American capital, and work began in the nascent oilfields of Bahrain.

In October of 1931, Bahrain's first oil well was drilled at Jabal Dukhan, the sole mountain on the main island. Seven months later, the well began to produce 9,000 barrels of oil a day, and the region's petroleum era was underway (Zahlan 1989: 51). Larger discoveries would follow, but few of them were in Bahrain. Nonetheless, with a sufficient supply of petroleum, as well as the economic benefits of its stature as the epicenter of the British presence in the Gulf, Bahrain boomed in the decades that followed the discovery of oil. In fact, for much of the twentieth century, Bahrain paced modernization in the Arabian Gulf even as the coffers of nearby nations began to surpass its own.

The wealth generated by the petroleum was not under the direct control of the Al Khalifa family. The concession for oil production on the island was held originally by Gulf Oil, the American oil company that had recently rode the Spindletop boom in East Texas to its pinnacle and then beyond into the crash on the other side. However, when Gulf Oil became part of the American group in the Turkish Oil Company, it also became a signatory to the Red Line Agreement—a pact which precluded any of the oil companies active in the region, as signatories, from operating independently in areas specified on the agreement's map, of which Bahrain was one. Hence the Bahrain concession was passed to a Canadian subsidiary of SOCAL, or Standard Oil of California, which was not bound by the restriction, and it was SOCAL that established the Bahrain Petroleum Company, more frequently referred to in Bahrain as BAPCO (Yergin 1991: 282; Franklin 1985: 85).³⁴

³⁴ The fact that an American company came to control any portion of oil production in Bahrain was due to the particularities of this historical juncture. The British were quite wary of the American presence in the region, and they had established agreements with

The British, who by then were managing all external affairs of the small island nation (as well as a sizable portion of the internal affairs), granted one-third of the oil royalties to the Al-Khalifa leadership (Franklin 1985: 87). These monies, and the jobs produced by the growth of the oil industry, stimulated the local economy, and wrought fundamental changes in Bahraini society. The scope of these changes is difficult to encapsulate—the reader will find evidence to support this contention throughout the chapters that follow. To sketch a basic outline of the impact, however, one could point to the physical relocation of many families out of the central districts and into the newly constructed suburbs of Manama; one could certainly note the education of women as evidence, as well as their entry into the labor market; one could point to the government's construction of universities, hospitals, schools, roads, palaces, mosques, and other infrastructural components that, together, conditioned fundamental changes in the day-to-day activity of most Bahrainis, and, furthermore, changed the locations of that activity; one could also note that more frequent travel by Bahrainis, for both work and pleasure, increased contact between Bahrainis and non-Arabs.

At the same time, many Bahrainis had difficulty accessing the wealth generated by the industry: most of the jobs in the oil industry, particularly in the earliest decades of the industry, went to foreigners, and many to Indian nationals (Franklin 1985: 88).

Indians had been on the island in significant numbers for centuries. With the rapid development of the petroleum industry, and with the continuing expansion of the British-

local sheikhs that “oil development should be entrusted only to British concerns, and that the British government would be in charge of their foreign relations” (Yergin 1991: 283). In 1929, the British reconsidered their position, and in anticipation of the benefit of American capital to the development of oil in the region, capitulated. (Yergin 1991: 283).

managed government bureaucracy, the need for trained professionals and the assorted clerks, supervisors, and assistants who spoke English far surpassed the supply of educated and trained Bahrainis (Holden 1966: 176; Kapiszewski 2001: 4).³⁵ Moreover, those citizens that did gain a foothold in the industries on the island often departed for other pursuits. As Seccombe and Lawless (1986: 111-112) note, many of the Bahrainis who gained formal or informal training under the foreign-run industries on the island quickly found their way to other alternatives—establishing their own businesses, working in the private sector, or to themselves migrate to work as experienced artisans in nearby countries. As a result of this confluence of factors, the flow of foreign labor to the island increased steadily over the middle decades of the twentieth century, and the wealth of Bahrain's petroleum industry coexisted with significant periods of unemployment for citizens.

In 1971, in a split that was widely portrayed as beneficial to both parties, Bahrain declared its independence from Britain. Two years later, the OPEC embargo resulted in the overnight quadrupling of the income generated by petroleum (Zahlan 1989: 61-2). Independent and instantly wealthy, the pace of development quickened (if we take that term to mean the sort of things listed above—the construction of western-style hospitals, schools, universities, roads, desalination plants, and so forth). It was at this juncture in history that the flow of labor to the region reached unforeseen highs: between 1971 and 1981, the population of non-Bahrainis jumped from 37,885 to 112,378 (Directorate of

³⁵ As David Holden (1966: 176) describes in condescending fashion, “The Indian rupee is still Bahrain's official currency, and in the influx of Indians and Pakistanis that came in the British wake nearly every shop seems to have been opened by a Jamshid or a Jahshanmall, and every clerk seems to be a Singh, or maybe Mukerjee.”

Statistics 1999: 16).

Not only did the number of foreigners working in Bahrain grow: the sources of that labor also shifted rapidly in the 1970s. In particular, inter-Arab labor migration was rapidly eclipsed by the arrival of south Asian laborers from India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, the Philippines, Indonesia, and numerous other nations of the Indian Ocean. This shift in labor is frequently linked to the OPEC embargo, an event which multiplied the island nation's income practically overnight and hastened the establishment of large development projects, and hence fueled a demand for labor that the citizenry itself could not meet (Azhar 1999: 101; Weiner 1986). While the flow of laborers arriving from south Asia in the 1970s were certainly filling positions that Bahrainis were unwilling or unable to take, the simple correlation between this flow of transnational labor and demand in the Gulf labor markets has been unpacked by other scholars. Emile Nakleh (1976: 77), for example, notes that six years after its inception the Bahrain Petroleum Company began to extensively employ Indians and Iranians in response to the 1938 labor strike by citizen-employees. Other research suggests that the British colonial bureaucracy precariously balanced its interests in maintaining good relations with the royal family, minimizing or altogether excluding foreign interests from gaining a foothold on the island, and finding a productive and capable workforce for developing oil production and other related industries on the island (Seccombe and Lawless 1986: 94-96). Labor from the Indian subcontinent threaded the complexities of these demands: beyond providing a capable, trained, and inexpensive labor force, Indian and Pakistani laborers were already British subjects and, from the perspective of the island's Sunni leadership, less politically

volatile than Arab or Persian labor (Seccombe and Lawless 1986: 94-98). The idea that these new labor forces were politically docile and less culturally troublesome than non-Bahraini Arab laborers is a recurring theme in analyses of the historical context of transmigration to the Gulf (Nakleh 1976: 77; Weiner 1986: 53-54). In summary, the interests of the British were in fueling the development of the petroleum and related industries on the island via a trained and capable workforce, maintaining its grasp on the region.

While the reserves in Bahrain were, in the end, the smallest in the Gulf, Bahrain continues to rely upon oil for a substantial portion of its national income. Estimates put that figure at fifty percent (Seikaly 2001: 179), but this figure may not encapsulate the intricacy of this dependency, for many of the island nation's diversification projects, such as Bahrain's government-owned aluminum plant (commonly referred to as ALBA), which depends upon the island's supply of natural gas, or the government's desalination plants, also gas-fired, depend heavily upon petroleum and gas in their productive capacities. Furthermore, without significant petroleum reserves of its own, Bahrain now primarily refines Saudi petroleum, enmeshing the Kingdom in another stratum of regional dependency.

The Kingdom of Bahrain has arrived in the twenty-first century with a suite of economic strategies aimed at diversifying its economy. The nation's commercial and financial sectors, while increasingly eclipsed by the metropolis of Dubai to the south, continue to draw global corporate entities to the island. And its bureaucracy—itsself a complex negotiation of the island's colonial legacy and the vested interests of the ruling

Sunni sect—continues to pace change and reform in the Gulf. But the stellar wealth of nearby nations is absent in Bahrain, and the harsh reality of a diminishing resource base, the “golden bubble” that financed the rapid changes of the past century, is better known in Bahrain than in any of the petroleum nations of the Gulf littoral.

VI. A Modern State?

It has been frequently suggested that were it not for the discovery of oil in 1931, Bahrain would have followed the downward spiral of other resource-poor states under the duress of colonial rule (Khuri 1980: 117; Owen 1957). Certainly the rapid accrual of wealth buoyed its position in the global political economy and, simultaneously, reshaped the social and economic spheres of life on the small island. Yet the correlation between these two events—the discovery of oil and the restructuring of livelihoods in Bahrain—must be conceptually distinguished, for many of the changes wrought by the colonial regime were already underway at the time of the discovery of oil. The wealth that flowed from the petroleum reserves certainly forged new political and social structures on the island. For example, as Fuad Khuri has noted, the ruling Al Khalifa family consolidated power over the pearling industry’s other Sunni tribes by formalizing contract structures and subjecting pilots, merchants and divers to government supervision and court deliberation (1980: 436). As part of a larger bureaucratic proliferation, petroleum wealth destabilized the power of competing tribes while further affirming the legitimacy and authority of the Al Khalifa leadership and the British colonial apparatus that centralized power in new courts, policies, and procedures.

Where other subjects of British colonialism lay withered and abandoned by the middle of the century, Bahrain and the other petroleum states, with reserves that fed increasing global demand, emerged as central players in the global political economy of oil production. In the schemata presented in the social science literature emerging from the 1970s, states were typically categorized as members of either the core or periphery of the world system (Wallerstein 1974). Later revisions made room for movement between these categories (So 1990), and made further arguments about the development of bureaucracies typical to these particular places in the global political economy. Bahrain certainly fits the definition of a peripheral state, at least in the sense that once the pearl market collapsed, its principal export was crude oil.³⁶ But the scope of the wealth derived from the petroleum reserves, along with the small population on the island, forged a colonial relationship much different than in other parts of the British Empire. Despite the fact that Bahrain's petroleum reserves were, in the end, the smallest in the Gulf region, the wealth produced by these reserves accrued quickly, and the impact can be readily perceived in the twentieth century.

One aspect of this rapid modernization frequently cited in both the literature and in my discussions with citizens on the island consisted of the early development of a western-styled educational system. In general terms, Bahrain developed the first state bureaucracy in the region (Zahlan 1989: 83). This included the first schools—for boys as well as girls—and this feature remains something Bahrainis point to with pride (Zahlan

³⁶ In the previous century, Bahrain had also been known to export a particular breed of white ass and dates of poor quality (Franklin 1985: 57). According to Captain Stiffe, who visited Bahrain several times in the mid-1800s, these donkeys were, “remarkably fine asses” (Wheatcroft 1988: 1).

1989: 83; Nakhleh 1976: 16; Jenner 1984: 36). These schools were initiated by Christian missionaries working on the island—particularly by the Americans who arrived as part of the Dutch Reformed Church of North America, which used Bahrain as its hub for activity in the region (Anthony 1993: 63). These government sponsored primary schools began accepting male students in 1919 and female students in 1928. The first secondary schools opened in 1939 (Nakhleh 1976: 16).³⁷ By the 1950s, the government-sponsored education system was a model for the Gulf. In Bahrain, resistance to female education was transformed into active encouragement, and in the 1956 examinations when boys and girls sat together three of the four top students were girls (Jenner 1984: 40 – 41).

The legal system also underwent wholesale change in the decades before and after the discovery of oil. The legal bureaucracy, fostered in the model of the British colonies, grew to manage both civil and criminal offenses under the laws of British India (Jenner 1984: 29).³⁸ The colonial-style courts worked side by side with the traditional religious courts, now relegated to the purview of social and personal affairs. In essence, this legal structure preserved the particularities of a plural Arab state: each group, including the urban Hawala, the urban Najdis, the Arab Sunni, and the Arab Shi'a continued to follow their own legal tradition in a wide variety of more and less centralized courts (Khuri 1980: 68). However, the colonial courts—those that dealt with issues involving foreigners—emerged as the locus of power on the increasingly transnational island.³⁹

³⁷ Others report the date as 1941 (Jenner 1984: 36).

³⁸ This model was originally proposed in 1914 but its implementation was postponed until after the First World War.

³⁹ Carol Dalrymple Belgrave became the British Adviser to the Shaikh in 1926, and he took over the “budgetary and financial process, law and administration” (Wheatcroft

These developments were but one component of the bifurcated system forged in the colonial and petroleum era in which traditional structures and relations were segregated from the bureaucratic proliferation that accompanied Bahrain's increasing immersion in the global political economy. Only the Al Khalifa leadership's authority spanned this bifurcated system, a fact essential to their ongoing consolidation of power under the colonial and postcolonial modernization that accompanied the discovery of petroleum.

While the municipalities of Manama and Muharraq were formed in the two decades prior to the discovery of oil, a wide variety of changes followed the accrual of petroleum wealth which began in 1934 and 1935 (Jenner 1984: 32). Awali, a modern neighborhood near the southern oilfield specifically configured to house American and other oilfield workers and families, was constructed. Five steamships called upon the port, and work began on a British Navy Base in the neighborhood of Juffair. Construction crews began work on a bridge connecting Muharraq, once the geographical base of Al Khalifa power on the island, with the booming commercial center of Manama. The Kingdom's oil refinery was completed, and the first technical school was founded. Bahrain's first printing press was installed in 1937, the region's first cinema opened in the late 1930s, and the Chamber of Commerce emerged as the new regulatory body for the burgeoning business community (Zahlan 1989: 51; Jenner 1984: 32 – 33).

The rapid change wrought by Bahrain's colonial relations with Britain, as well as by the discovery of petroleum, is well characterized by the infrastructural projects and the bureaucratic expansion of structurally new forms of governance. As the British

1995: 68). He also notes that Belgrave came to trust Shaikh Salman so much that he allowed him to take his cases on the bench when he went on leave (Wheatcroft 1995: 68).

administrators increasingly aggrandized power in colonial bureaucracy, the balance of Shi'i and Sunni relations shifted. The disenfranchised Shi'i population, particularly through the Persian wing, appealed to the British for protection under consideration as non-subjects to the Sunni royalty. Periodic riots occurred, and the British successfully deposed an uncooperative Al-Khalifa King (Clarke 1981: 34-35). Moreover, many citizens found the doors to the new forms of employment closed, and once-powerful entrepreneurs found themselves left out of the new economy. As one British administrator noted in 1937,

The old powerful pearl merchants were, in many cases, self-made men who started life as divers, but their wealth made them important and, though most of them could neither read nor write, they were the people who mattered in Bahrain ... [T]oday, the men who used to be worth lacs of rupees are, in many cases almost bankrupt, and petty traders, shop-keepers, and men who happen to own property in Manama, are becoming the monied class. (quoted in Jenner 1984: 34).

The social changes that swept across Bahrain in the early 1900s certainly relate to the changing resource base. While the mode of production remained much the same, the shift in the resource underpinning that mode of production—the shift from pearls to petroleum—altered the tribal relations characteristic of the previous centuries. As Jenner notes above, the once-wealthy pearl merchants found themselves on the sidelines of the new economy. Or, as Franklin notes, “though traditional cleavages remained the primary bases of affiliation, the emergence of modern economic institutions led to the formation of relationships which cut across the plural distinctions in society” (Franklin 1985: 87).

In spite of the often-tenuous relationship between the Al Khalifa family and the British colonial administration, the legitimacy of the royal family's grasp on power, as well as the definition of the island as a distinct nation, owed much to the colonial

overlords.⁴⁰ If the nineteenth century led to the conceptual solidification of their power, the twentieth century solidified their economic grasp on the island and upon the bureaucracy to which this economy was bound. As Khuri notes, the new bureaucracies “altered tribal alliances and provided the regime with instruments of intervention that, while creating a single authority system, simultaneously consolidated power of the ruling family and led to their exclusiveness” (Khuri 1980: 5).⁴¹

While the island’s colonial legacy reinforced the Al Khalifa family’s control of the island, its role as the center of British colonialism in the Gulf also helped mollify the impact of its declining petroleum revenue. As the countries all around the Gulf began to make impressive petroleum discoveries, Bahrain’s fortunes came to depend more upon its position as a hub for colonial activity and the growing service industry tied to regional petroleum production. As Franklin notes,

Bahrain was at the center of British involvement in the Gulf. The Political Residency was moved to Bahrain; British air, sea and land forces were quartered there; and Bahrain became the headquarters of a number of British commercial firms. The extraction of oil in Eastern Arabia and Qatar preceded infrastructural development in these areas, and, as a result, Bahrain came to serve as an entrepot

⁴⁰ The authority of the Al-Khalifa family was increasingly associated with the British presence in the region (Fuccaro 2000: 53).

⁴¹ Khuri argues that colonial rule and the development of the oil industry are the “two major processes that modified the authority system in Bahrain; the first by creating a bureaucracy, and the second by transforming the economic order and the social organization associated with it” (Khuri 1980: 5). “Instituting bureaucracy changed the formal structure of authority and modified the mode of interaction among tribe, peasantry, and urban society. It altered tribal alliances and provided the regime with instruments of intervention that, while creating a new single authority system, simultaneously consolidated the power of the ruling family and led to their exclusiveness” (Khuri 1980: 5). Furthermore, the oil industry also reshaped the social landscape, introducing salaried labor, fostering Arab nationalism, and then ushering in foreign labor which discouraged the rise of organized labor (Khuri 1980: 5).

for the central Gulf as a whole.⁴² The growing British presence in Bahrain led to considerable economic expansion (Franklin 1985: 86).

As many have noted, the growth of the Bahraini state apparatus, from its roots in the colonial administration through its reinforcement during the halcyon days of the petroleum industry, resulted in structural configurations unique to the Gulf States. Beyond providing citizens with a wide range of services, including education, health, social services, and even entertainment, the state emerged as an extension of the royal family: the state became the “supreme employer and provider of benefits to this welfare system,” a power based upon its role in “creating and withholding opportunities” (Seikaly 2001: 180). This power mirrored more traditional forms of tribal leadership. While some suggest modernity in the Gulf region is a façade—one that masks the deep fault lines of tribal and sectarian arrangements (Seikaly 2001: 181), I interpret the fault lines of Gulf modernity as the manifestation of Bahraini agency. Under indirect colonial rule for much of the twentieth century, and enmeshed in the global political economy of oil production, the Bahraini leadership and citizenry have configured a *particular* modernity, itself the result of negotiations and power struggles whose roots stretch back for centuries. Beneath the façade of bureaucratic proliferation, the Al Khalifa tribe has consolidated power over once-powerful Sunni tribes and over the Shi’ite majority. The particular vision of modernity promoted by the state is at once tied to the island’s increasing role as a hub of transnational activity and, building upon the particular configuration of the Bahraini state, the distribution of benefits through the conduits of tribal relations now intertwined with

⁴² Bahrain was selected by the British as a center for commercial operations in the Gulf. Laws and bureaucracy were gradually implemented to facilitate this role (Khuri 1980: 85).

the bureaucracy of the state itself.

VII. Bahrain in a Regional Context

Much of the scholarship concerned with the petroleum states of the Arabian Gulf portrays them as a fairly homogeneous set of neighbors. Ample evidence supports this fact. The Sunni royal families of several of these modern states share an overlapping genealogy, and even the commonfolk of today's Gulf States trace familial connections across multiple national borders. All six nations of the GCC are Sunni-ruled, but only in Bahrain does that Sunni leadership rule over a Shi'i majority.⁴³ In her seminal attack against the Orientalist portrayal of the "Islamic" city as a conglomeration of particular morphological features, Janet Abu-Lughod (1987) also described the 'feel' of the cities of the Middle East—she describes the spatial and personal semiotics indicative of the divide between public and semi-private urban space (169); one might easily add to this the sounds of calls to prayer, the smell of *sheesha*, the tight winding streets of the older quarters, or the minarets that reach from low neighborhoods to the sky. The cities of the Gulf littoral also have a common feel to them, with long waterfront corniches, modern highways connecting the rhizome-like network of traffic circles, each with a monument at its center. And the cities themselves are a testament to these similarities: all of these neighboring nations are principally urban, with great majorities of the population

⁴³ While not a majority of the population, Oman contains a significant Shi'i population. The former Sunni powerholders in Iraq, while neither a member of the Gulf Cooperation Council nor a monarchy, until recently wielded power over a Shi'i majority. And while the Shi'i population are a minority in Saudi Arabia, they predominate in the eastern provinces of Saudi Arabia.

dwelling in and around the cities of the region.

And all of these cities are transnational. In all the nations of the GCC, foreigners comprise a majority of the workforce. In some, Kuwait, Qatar and UAE, they comprise an absolute majority of the population. Dubai, the cosmopolitan hub of the United Arab Emirates, is now 90% foreign. The cities of the Gulf are busy. The suburbs sprawl into the desert, and the airports hum with international traffic. Monumental architecture proliferates: in the Emirates, plans are underway to build the world's tallest building, and a newly-constructed luxury neighborhood in the shape of the palm tree is visible from outer space. In Bahrain, meanwhile, construction is about to begin on an indoor ski slope, as well as a floating resort community off the tip of Muharraq.⁴⁴ Throughout the Gulf, gleaming new buildings appear with great frequency, and the sound of construction is a constant backdrop to life in the cities of the GCC nations.

All of the Gulf States possess significant reserves of petroleum and, hence, significant sources of wealth. On the coasts of Saudi are cities of iron that reach out to the sea. Refineries dot the western shores of the Arabian Gulf, and for every stratotanker that rounds the Straits of Hormuz and passes into the open ocean, millions of dollars flow into the countries of the Gulf. Beginning with the discovery of oil on the Jebel Durkan, the “smoking mountain” south of Manama, and gaining momentum in the seventies, when the embargo quadrupled petroleum income overnight, the pace of change in the Gulf shaped similar societies into similar results. The Sunni leadership of these nations

⁴⁴ Note that these projects were announced, not all of them are in fact underway. Many of the large projects announced during my time in Bahrain remain in the planning stages to this day.

invested heavily in the public sector. While great portions of the private sector came to depend upon human capital from abroad, the hallways of the expanding government bureaucracy became the bastion of the citizenry. This particular relation to the state, described in depth in chapter six, is a bond shared by the citizens of all the petroleum-rich nations of the GCC.

To tighten the focus, there is also a connection between Gulf Arabs—some bounded, mutual identity shared by those who dwell in the oil-rich nations of the Gulf, a communal identity more localized than the often-noted bond of the *umma*, or Muslim world. The boundaries of that communality basically fit *al khaleej*, or the Gulf Arab states. The families that rule these countries, in many cases, come from interrelated sets of tribes whose history in the Gulf region is well established. Yet beyond the domain of lineage shared by some members of the Gulf society, there are also the results of the parallel economies of the region. The citizenry of these Gulf nations have, together, undergone massive transformations in the past decades. The wealth derived from the oil reserves forged large public sectors—educational opportunities expanded, housing programs were created, health systems to serve all citizens were constructed. While the diverse components of the Gulf States' citizenry have benefited unequally from these developments, the large public sectors and the entitlements they provide are widely recognized as essential components of the ruling families' ability to maintain their hegemony through the distribution of wealth via the conduits comprising the state (Champion 1999; Kapiszewski 2001: 5-9; Longva 1997:46-52). This set of relations—of tribal relations organized within the bureaucracy of the state—is one facet of the shared

experience of the citizenry of the Gulf States.

While the flow of foreign labor to the Gulf began during the colonial era, the wealth produced by rising oil prices in the 1970s expedited modernization plans, and in all the nations of the Gulf, foreigners arrived in huge numbers to go about the myriad tasks of building ‘modern’ nations. Another aspect of the shared experience of the Gulf nations, then, is the universal presence of large foreign workforces. Indigenes and nationalism, the strange bedfellows of the contemporary Gulf, exist in dialectic with the highly transnational demographics of the region. In the urban milieu of the Gulf, citizens are often minorities in their own land. In her ethnography of citizen-foreigner relations in contemporary Kuwait, one informant described his feelings to Longva as follows:

“Imagine seeing strangers everywhere around you, including in your own homes. We used to know all the Kuwaitis, and to trust each other. In the old days, when someone made a promise, you knew he would keep it. We are like a big family. Now, everyone is a stranger. You don't know whom to trust anymore” (Longva 1997: 124-125). This feeling of a culture besieged by rapid, external change is a condition shared by all the petroleum-rich GCC nations, and the sense of belonging to the state incorporates ethnic, racial, religious and tribal boundaries under the rubric of citizenship.

The similarities between Gulf nations are substantial, and the components I describe here are the basis for some mutuality in the identities purveyed by the inhabitants of the region. However, there are many noteworthy differences that also deserve mention. Perhaps most importantly, oil was discovered first in Bahrain. Hence, the benefits of that wealth—including a variety of social programs, job opportunities

within a large state bureaucracy, low-cost loans for houses, land grants, and much more—began to accrue in Bahrain first. The first schools in the Gulf region were created in Bahrain, and the citizenry has always prided itself on its position as a beacon of modernization in the Gulf. Its position in relation to the other Gulf States as the primary hub for colonial activity and transnational corporations facilitated its position at the forefront of the region's integration with the global political economy.

The island's declining oil reserves and hence declining wealth have in some ways undermined Bahrain's role as pacesetter for modernization in the region. In Dubai to the south, taller buildings rise by the month, more wealth courses through the economy, and unlike Bahrain and the other smaller urban conglomerations of the Gulf littoral, Dubai has emerged as a true global city in the region. Yet Bahrain's declining resources have forced the nation to cope with the difficult task of economic diversification, and in this sense the small island nation again sets the pace in the Gulf, for the Bahraini state today faces a set of conditions that all the nations of the GCC will sooner or later share. In terms of the policy environment forged by the colonial and post-colonial leadership, Bahrain again led the other Gulf nations in devising alternatives to petroleum dependency. These projects resulted in the refinery, the aluminum industry (ALBA), and other industrial production, as well as a booming financial sector. Despite the difficulties the nation has faced, it is these very difficulties that pushed the small island nation to deal with the challenges of declining oil production.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ May Seikaly sees Bahrain as the most problematic of the Gulf states ... as the poorest and least endowed, the general malaise that resulted from unemployment, social and political unrest, has resulted in "violent, sustained uprising" (Seikaly 2001: 180).

This attempt to turn away from direct dependence upon petroleum, while certainly not fully successful in the final accounting, depended heavily upon the island's experience as the colonial hub for British activity in the region.⁴⁶ The British constructed a military base in Juffair and multiple other projects; the construction of Awali, an "American" style compound on the island, only enhanced the island's position as expatriate-friendly. As Gulf-wide oil production increased, Bahrain emerged as a service center to the activities of the surrounding nations: the relative security and openness of Bahrain attracted a wide variety of financial, administrative, and service offices to the island.⁴⁷ In the parlance of *al khaleej*, the Bahrainis are the "beggars of the Gulf," but the lessons learned as both beggars and handmaidens to the British colonialists proved essential in developing its model as the service and financial hub to the more conservative surrounding nations.⁴⁸

In the twenty-first century, Bahrain retains its reputation as one of the most

⁴⁶ In the British sphere, as Britain attempted to impose its Pax Britannica upon the Gulf region, Bahrain emerged as the product of indirect rule ... "Bahrain was an outstanding example of a principality over which British authority was maintained indirectly" (Farah 1985: x). At the turn of the century, direct steamer service to Bahrain enhanced its status in the Gulf, as did the appointment of a British Political Agent in 1900 (Franklin 1985: 71).

⁴⁷ Bahrain serves as an offshore banking center to Saudi wealth, a position confirmed by important concessions from the Saudi Arabian Monetary Agency (Zahlan 1989: 63). Saudi has also helped Bahrain by maintaining high production on a shared oilfield, and by being instrumental in attracting OAPEC and GCC sponsored projects to Bahrain (Zahlan 1989: 63).

⁴⁸ "Bahrain does not have the great wealth of some of the other Gulf states; its petroleum resources are among the smallest in the region. The Al Khalifa are therefore not as fabulously wealthy as some of the counterparts elsewhere. But, along with the people of Bahrain, they are very conscious that theirs was the first Gulf country to embark on the process of modernization. The first state bureaucracy and the first schools (for girls as well as boys) are just two of the many features to which they point with pride" (Zahlan 1989: 83).

hospitable of the Gulf nations. The guestworkers with whom I spoke—many of whom had experience in the other nearby Arab countries—repeatedly noted that Bahrain was the easiest adjustment for foreigners: you can wear shorts in public without fear of the *mutaween* (the religious police of Saudi Arabia), one man noted; you can practice your religion at one of the handful of churches and temples discreetly tucked about the city, others noted; in general, my informants reported, the Bahrainis are particularly worldly and educated. Hindi music booms from the passing cars filled with Bahraini teenagers, noted a friend as we walked down a busy boulevard, and the audience of the Bollywood films I attended were evenly mixed—Indians and Bahrainis. And, as other expatriates noted, you can get a drink at one of the many bars on the island.

This liberalism is peculiar to Bahrain. On weekends, teenagers and families from nearby countries stream into Bahrain over the causeway that connects the island to the mainland. Bahrain is a weekend destination for those from more conservative environs: the hotel bars fill with European expatriates, Indians and Filipinos, Saudi men, Bahrainis, and individuals from all the other regions of the globe that comprise this transnational city-state. And because Bahrain most resembles the western centers of power, international businesses (many of which do business in Saudi Arabia) locate their regional headquarters in Bahrain. The island's liberalism, wrought by its long transnational history and its intricate connection to Britain, is the primary attraction. Yet it is an uneasy liberalism—both a lifeline to the nation's economy and a target for the conservative, disenfranchised Shi'i majority.

VIII. Conclusion

To the claim that Bahrain has a long history of hosting the processes now called transnationalism, the obvious line of reasoning would note that much of this history preceded the very existence of the nation-state. Like other regions of the globe, nations were something quickly constructed, and in many senses, something foreign and colonial imposed upon the more geographically fluid tribal structure characteristic of the Arabian Peninsula. There are good arguments to this end: that the lines drawn by the colonial powers were mostly a matter of convenience, part of the predilection of a bureaucratic empire that needed to organize the people and terrain it encountered, and to do so in a very particular fashion, before it could proceed and conquer. Or one could convolute the very terms of the argument, and instead note that the ebb and flow of peoples and powers across Bahrain's shores, from the Mesopotamian chapter lost to history, through the arrival of the Greeks, of Islam, of the Portuguese, of the Omanis, of the Ottomans, of the Persians, and of the maritime Arab tribes of the Gulf's western shores—one could take all of this as evidence enough that change, rather than stability, was the norm for islands between two seas. Instead, the arrival of the British, the legitimacy they conferred upon the Al Khalifa family, and the continuity of those very same provisions suggest that it was the constancy of change that came to an end with Britain's Treaty of Peace.

What has come to be called transnationalism in the contemporary *oeuvre* casts one eye to the role of the nation-state and the individuals who transcend them. The other eye—and this is the *métier* of the anthropologist—sifts through the contextual factors of these individuals in liminality, and in this context I find the basis for the argument

presented in this chapter: that the historic relations of production configured in the past provided a template for managing the dramatically large flows of foreign labor to the island. The shape of the Bahraini state, the expectations of the citizenry, and the experience of Indian guestworkers on the island today are products of the island's colonial history, the tribal legacy of its leadership, its role as a maritime mercantile hub, and the relations of production forged by the exploitation of the pearl beds surrounding the island.

The processes underlying the contemporary transnational movement of peoples around the globe are not new. Empires and long-distance trade have been built throughout history. They have pushed people out of their homelands and, alternatively, drawn others into the engines of empire. Bahrain was one of these nodes in regional trade, never a true empire, but often an important jewel in various crowns. At other junctures in history, Bahrain stood alone, or functioned as a mercantile city-state for the seafarers of the Gulf. Throughout this history, the mix of peoples that composed the population of the islands reflected the heterogeneity of these trade connections. For many millennia, people have drifted through Bahrain, arriving by sword, trade, or diplomacy. In the chapters that follow, my attention turns to the Indian diaspora—the largest of the foreign populations working on the island, one of the most historic of the foreign populations in the region, and also outsiders to the tribal relations of the Arab leadership. As their stories begin to surface in this text, the reader will do well to keep in mind the historical backdrop of their experience, as well as their host's, for the interactions between guest and host on the island has been shaped by this complex history, one in

which the agency of the Arab leadership, as well as the Shi'i population, forged a particular set of relations with the global political economy of oil production, with the colonial administration of the British, and with the nearby nations of the Gulf.

CHAPTER THREE

TRANSNATIONAL LIVELIHOODS, TRANSNATIONAL LIVES: THE INDIAN UNDERCLASS



Figure 3.1: Indian transmigrant laborers making bricks at a labor camp/worksite.

I. Arriving in Bahrain

My arrival in Bahrain in October of 2002 fell in the window of time between the attack on the Twin Towers in New York City and the second U.S. invasion of Iraq—the latter of which took place midway through my time on the island. Arrival stories figure prominently in anthropological writing, and in the long tradition of the discipline I have put much of the detail of those initial weeks in another essay (Gardner, In Press; see also Pratt 1986). For all of us in Bahrain at the time, the buildup to the war some 400 miles north was a worrisome issue: tensions were high and the future was uncertain.

Advertisements for gas masks (at a whopping \$200) appeared in the paper; a homemade bomb exploded in a dumpster across the street from the American Navy base, and an

Iraqi diplomat was arrested and jailed for his involvement (Al Jazeera October 20, 2003); the Indian social clubs—a topic I will discuss at length in Chapter Five—began fielding panicked calls from members concerned about the possibility of Saddam’s SCUDS reach the small island as they had in the previous conflict. The American Embassy issued numerous warnings about potentially unruly demonstrations and marches: during these periods of time, we Americans were warned to stay indoors if possible, and certainly avoid the particular districts in which the marches were to occur. At the same time, my acquaintances in the Indian community began to reach out to networks of friends and family abroad, and the American Embassy repeatedly suggested that those Americans associated with the Embassy would soon be evacuated.

All the while I was busy interviewing members of the Indian community. In the course of conducting interviews, making friends, visiting labor camps, and both sharing and gaining valuable information about methods and strategies for coping with the politically volatile situation, I began to perceive the strange form of participant observation in which I was engaged. Like my friend, interpreter, and field associate, S., I was a valuable source of information to the Indian community. In my case, the connections I had to the American Embassy via the Fulbright Program meant I was privy to various warnings and announcements that oftentimes failed to reach the local media, a situation to which many of my friends and acquaintances were privy. As a result, I was repeatedly questioned about my perceived insider’s perspective on President Bush’s planned start date for the oncoming war. Similarly, S.’s connections to a prominent social club, his active agenda in various outreach activities, and his networks amongst the labor

camps scattered about the island made him an invaluable contact for the isolated laborers we visited each weekend.

Simply stated, for anthropologists working in highly transnational milieux (and particularly so in the Gulf), the alienation and bewilderment that often precedes “entry” into the subject community is, in fact, a form of participant observation, rather than part of the difficult path to that same end. In a country where nearly half of the inhabitants are foreign-born guestworkers, the quintessential anthropological experience of arriving in the field (Pratt 1986) is closely aligned with the experience of the Indian transmigrant: hour after hour, day after day, transmigrants arrive at the international airport. Like me, most are ushered through the various checkpoints by an individual appointed by their sponsor (a relationship I will explore in detail), and then quickly conveyed to one’s quarters. In my case, my sponsor arranged for a flat in central Manama, in a district of the city that, for the most part, has been abandoned by nationals to the burgeoning expatriate labor force. Where anthropologists in the past—and many still today—found their way to bounded communities of a single culture,⁴⁹ ethnicity, and perhaps religion, in central Manama I found myself on a block of the city where, by simply stepping outside my door, I might quickly identify individuals from a dozen different nations and who, by the mechanics of the guestworker system, were mostly recent arrivals, like me, or soon to

⁴⁹ Hannerz states that “The idea of an organic relationship between a population, a territory, a form as well as a unit of political organization, and one of those organized packages of meanings and meaningful forms which we refer to as cultures has for a long time been an enormously successful one, spreading throughout the world even to fairly unlikely places, at least as a guiding principle” (Hannerz 1996: 20).

depart, as I would be. Manama, like all the cities of the Gulf littoral, is a city of strangers, and I was one of many.

Castles (2003) has argued that the efflorescence of anthropological work concerned with transnationalism and transnational processes is constructed upon faulty foundations—specifically, that the definition of transnational communities remains a foggy concept in the literature. He argues that, “It is vital to have clear definitions of transnational communities and related concepts, and to analyze the conditions under which migrants do or do not become members of transnational communities” (Castles 2003: 433). In this argument, one hears echoes of the decade-old debate over the definition of diaspora (Safran 1991; Clifford 1995).⁵⁰

In relation to this argument, the position I take in this chapter undermines Castle’s point. By describing the context of my own arrival on the island, I’m not only attempting to address the multitude of concerns erected around the production of ethnography and the postmodern demand for reflexivity in ethnography (Clifford 1986); I have also slipped in the premise that transnational communities—or at least the one I came to know well—are not static sets of relations. En suite, they fluctuate in response to political, economic and social conditions. As the U.S. president mounted a call to war in Iraq, my friends and acquaintances in the Indian community began to extend their transnational networks. Many formulated contingency plans for a return to India; others explored potential connections in New Zealand, Canada, the U.K., and the United States. Within

⁵⁰ And, for that matter, arguments over the definition of any of anthropology’s central concepts. See Eagleton’s discussion of *ideology*, for example (1991: 1 – 31), Vayda’s various pronouncements about what is and isn’t *political ecology* (Vayda 1997; Vayda and Walters 1999), or the ongoing debate over what is and isn’t *social capital*.

the Indian community in Bahrain, meetings were held, and the interconnections between different classes and groups increased. In other words, “temporary labor migrants who work abroad for a few years, send back remittances, communicate with their family at home, and visit them occasionally”—a definition that Castles uses for those lacking the “transnational consciousness,” and a definition that fits many in the Indian community in Bahrain—became “more” transnational in response to the insecurity rendered by the conflict in Iraq (Castles 2003: 435).

Essentially, and echoing one of Durkheim’s most fundamental precepts, the Indian diaspora in Bahrain is more than the sum of individual members. It is an historical social unit; members enter and leave over time, and they vary their relations to each other according to personal preference, occupation, political climate, policy environment, and countless other factors. The empiricists’ need for precise definitions categorizing members is antithetical to the diversity masked by the concept of *transnational community* or *diaspora*. More importantly, it leaves little room for diachronicity—for digesting the fact that change is often underfoot, and for the agency enacted by individuals who, together, are enmeshed in a process of constant renegotiation with other members of the diaspora.

In the chapter that follows, I seek to address two distinct goals. First, I will present a wide variety of ethnographic portraits of Indian laborers, of the construction workers, janitors, welders, masons, drivers, and odd-job laborers who comprise the majority of the Indian diaspora in Bahrain. As one of the first ethnographic portraits of the Indian diaspora at work in the Gulf, it is meant to complement the sophisticated

ethnographic portraits of return laborers, particularly those from India (Kurien 2000, Osella and Osella 2000, 2002). Simultaneously, I will pursue the second goal of portraying the formidable structure of dominance that shapes their transnational existence on the island. For most of the laborers with whom I spent time, life in Bahrain is difficult—more difficult than they imagined. In the next chapter, I will do much the same for the middle and upper class of the diaspora, again providing a basic portrayal of them and their lives, and again charting different facets of the formidable structure of dominance in which they live.

I use this bifurcation of the Indian community with reticence, for as I have argued above, the diaspora itself, a group or community that includes both more and less transnational components, is a fluid and interconnected social whole. After describing the two poles of what is certainly a continuum, I use chapter five to describe the institutional framework by which members of diverse backgrounds, languages, ethnicities, religions, and economic class come together as a single social unit. The elision of difference in the Indian community—of religious and ethnic differences, of class and caste—is, I argue, not some inherent quality of Indian culture and society, but instead a product of this particular transnational milieu. The comprehensive duress of the structure of dominance put in place by the Bahraini citizenry and state unites the diverse elements of the Indian population, yielding a diasporic environment much different than that of the homeland.

II. One Transnational Life

I met Vijay near the end of my fieldwork in Bahrain. My associate in the field—S., who arranged many of my interviews at the labor camps and also translated when necessary—served as the outreach coordinator for one of the prominent social clubs on the island, and had been assisting Vijay in working through his relations with the Bahraini court system, the immigration office, and with the other related problems described below. The three of us sat in a squalid, cramped room in a central neighborhood which, over the previous decades, had been abandoned by the Bahrainis to the legion of foreign laborers that daily arrive to work on the island. My notes from the interview capture the central thread of Vijay's experience abroad:

Vijay told me that he had been a tailor in Pondicherry, India. Actually, he was a master tailor, he clarified—the supervisor of the showroom. It was a good job. But then some of his friends left for the Arabian Gulf, for places like Dubai, Bahrain, Kuwait, and Jeddah. Then some of them came back. They had lots of money. More than that, they were respected. People on the street, people at the tea shop—they looked upon these return-migrants in a particular way. Vijay wanted that respect.

His friends suggested he call a labor broker in Madras, and he did. After some discussion, he agreed to pay 45,000 rupees—that's about \$1000 U.S. dollars—for a visa and a job at a garment factory. He was going to Bahrain. It was a two year contract, and he'd earn 45 dinars a month. That's about \$120 U.S. dollars. He noted that he didn't really know what a Dinar was worth when he made the deal, but the figure was close to what his friends had reported from their own experiences. He would be out of debt in a year, and then he could start to make some real money.

Coming up with the 45,000 rupees wasn't easy. He had a little bit saved. He borrowed some with interest from a moneylender. He got a little bit from his father. To make up for what was left, the family hawked his mother's jewelry. Then he got on a plane—his first ever.

He realized something was wrong right away. He arrived at the airport in Bahrain at two in the afternoon, but no one was there to pick him up. So he

just sat and waited. The airport was air-conditioned, and he was cold. He had no food, no money. Someone from the company finally came for him at midnight, and they took Vijay straight to the garment factory. The rest of the workers were just getting off their shift, so he rode to the camp with them. He had a cot in a small bedroom, and there were six other men in the room. They gathered around him and asked why he came. They told him that the company was very bad, that they had to work until midnight, that the company didn't always pay their wages, and that they certainly didn't receive overtime pay.

He called his father, and his father told him to weather the difficulties. It wasn't a lifetime, he said—just two years. He couldn't understand a lot of what was going on around him, because he only spoke two South Indian languages. He tried to learn some Arabic and Hindi at night at the camp. He began to meet others in the camp, and he discovered the other men faced a similar set of dilemmas. When the plant manager would come around, they'd argue with him. The manager was also an Indian—a Gujarati, Vijay noted. None of the workers were allowed to talk directly to the boss, the Bahraini sponsor, and their arguments with the manager went nowhere.

So they decided to wait until they had paid off their debts. They worked long hours, well into the night, and they received no additional pay. A year went by, and most of the workers had paid off their visa-related debts. They began to slow down production on the floor. As a result, the Bahraini boss fired the Indian manager. On the day he was dismissed, the manager gathered all the workers together and told them that if they went on strike they might be able to get their overtime money and back pay. They walked out at midnight the next day, pooled their money, and rented a bus. There were 180 of them. The group from Andhra Pradesh decided to back out. Then there were 110. The next morning we went to the Ministry of Labor and stood outside.

A man finally came out and gave them a piece of paper. The writing was in Arabic, and none of the men could read it, but the man told them to bring it back to the company and they would get their salary and overtime. They showed it to the company man the next day, but he called the police. Although frightened by the arrival of the police, the men were told that the officers only wanted to arrest the manager. The manager escaped by flying back to India the next day. The company gave the men their back salary, but not their overtime, and they worked for five more months. Three weeks before the Ramadan holidays, the company man told them that there wouldn't be any holiday for them. He said they would have to work every day.

They struck again, and went back to the Ministry of Labor. The Ministry officials were upset, and they made them return to the camp. They waited at the camp for two days—then the company closed the canteen. They had no

food. The company turned off the electricity, so they had no air conditioning. Then the company turned off the water. A Ministry official came on the fourth day, and he told the men that this was a matter for the courts. Then a Bahraini lawyer came. She took 1200 dinars from them—that's \$3000, or ten dinars from each man.

The men were only allowed to go to the court in small groups. The judge asked them if they wanted to go on with the case. If they did, they had to keep working for the company. If they dropped the case, they could get papers to find another job. The company owner returned the passports to the men that dropped the case.

Vijay decided not to drop the case. The factory closed. He no longer had a job. He became an "illegal" worker. He has no ticket home, but he found a job installing air conditioning ducts. It's under the table, as we say in the United States. If he crosses paths with the police, however, he'll have to go to jail and pay a fine of 10 BD per month—that's about \$25 U.S. dollars. He's stuck. He heard rumors that a government-sponsored amnesty period might be granted next year. If he's able to save enough money, he'll buy a ticket home then.

In the sections below, I will begin to contextualize the experiences described by Vijay, for within the folds of the narrative presented here one can begin to see the complexities of the structural forces that shape transmigrant agency. In this chapter, I will deal explicitly with those laborers at the bottom of the workforce in Bahrain. This demographic includes the janitors, construction workers, drivers, masons, cooks, fabricators, and individuals in countless other occupations on the island. In chapter four, I will explore the lifeworlds of the merchants, accountants, executives, and professionals who comprise the middle and upper class of the Indian diaspora.

A final note before I proceed: as an anthropologist, I rely upon the data derived from observing and participating firsthand in the lives of the Indian community in Bahrain. While the portrait below will explore the dilemmas and struggles of many of the poorest Indian transmigrants, I was unable to contact or interview any of the housemaids

and servants working within Bahraini households. Valuable ethnographies of returned housemaids suggest the importance of future research in this vein (Gamburd 2000; Brochmann 1993).

III. The Chain of Migration from India to the Gulf

In the portion of Vijay's narrative presented here, we learn that Vijay hails from the Indian of Pondicherry, the former French colonial outpost on India's southeastern flank, and that in Pondicherry he worked as a master tailor—a decent job, by his account. In terms of the hundred or so laborers I interviewed and talked with during my time in Bahrain, his reasons for coming to the Gulf are typical, in that he sought to improve his economic position through work in the Gulf. Yet Vijay also mentions the other factors that guided his thinking on the matter, for in his interactions with return migrants he echoed the descriptions of anthropologists who have worked amongst the return migrants: he noted the degree of respect they seemingly command, and he noted that particular bravado of the 'Gulfie' that draws attention in respect in the villages, towns and cities of southern India (Osella and Osella 2000).⁵¹

As of 1997, there are an estimated 3,012,000 Indians in the Gulf (Kapiszewski 2001: 64-65). They represent the largest contingent of the foreign labor force—with

⁵¹ Osella and Osella also note that the conspicuous consumption of return-migrants is an essential component of their identity (Osella and Osella 2000: 136-137). As one transmigrant described, "I was very happy when I finally got the job in the Gulf. All the people that were coming back from the Gulf wore gold bracelets and chains, and I thought I would earn a lot of money there too. I was happy to see the men coming back, because I knew I would soon go too." His parents were illiterate, his father died when he was twelve, and he began working on construction sites shortly after that.

Egyptians and Pakistanis each comprising approximately half that number, and hence the second and third largest contingents in the Gulf. As I have demonstrated in the previous chapter, the diaspora's map upon the culture and workplace of the Gulf—and particularly Bahrain—is complex: some Indian families on the island have roots that trace back centuries; others arrived in the late nineteenth century and twentieth century as part of the British colonial administration. However, the trickle of migration from India to Bahrain in the early part of the twentieth century hardly compares to the flood that followed. As the labor market in the Gulf began to open in the 1960s and 1970s, millions of Indians—and mostly southern Indians—began to integrate a sojourn to the Gulf into their livelihood systems (Nair 1999: 209).⁵² Most of these men were, like Vijay, low-wage menial laborers seeking to escape the chronic poverty of postcolonial India.

The fact that Vijay comes from Pondicherry is somewhat unusual in the context of Gulf labor, as migration to the Gulf is not evenly distributed in the population of India: approximately half of the migrants come from the small southern state of Kerala (Premi and Mathur 1995: 637). In fact, while Kerala contains under four percent of India's population, it alone accounts for between 40 and 60 percent of the emigrant contract workers to the Gulf over the past quarter century (Nair 1999: 110).⁵³ Kerala's

⁵² I use the term livelihood system because it encompasses multiple valences of the individual. Her or his livelihood system may include multiple sources of income, activities focused upon gaining social and cultural capital as well as economic capital, and implies that the individual is enmeshed in a set of familial relations (often encompassed under the moniker *household livelihood system* (see Bebbington and Batterbury 2001).

⁵³ Kurien echoes Jared Diamond in correlating the high rate of migration from Kerala to issues of continental geography and topography. As she notes, the Western Ghat mountains effectively sealed the thin strip of Indian coastline from the influences of

predominance in migration to the Gulf is a general response to, “slump and famine and chronic unemployment” in the small state (Osella and Osella 2000: 119).⁵⁴ These sorts of factors are often referred to as “push” factors, for *en suite* they compel the poor and disenfranchised to begin looking beyond their communities and, in many cases, beyond the borders of their nation for the possibility of a better life (Ravenstein 1885; Eelens and Schampers 1992). Focus on these material factors aligns the argument with the structural and Marxist lineage in anthropology, and the men I spoke with clearly noted that their quest for better economic horizons underpinned their decisions to come to the Gulf. Yet as the voices presented here describe (Vijay, for example, described his decision as a quest for ‘respect’), those material factors intertwine with the social relations and circuits of meaning that play an equally important role in driving men from their homes to the Gulf.⁵⁵

states to the east. As a result, the populous lowlands have traditionally focused outward through mercantile connections spanning the Indian Ocean (Kurien 2000: 61; see also Diamond 1999). Nair, meanwhile, points to the high costs of labor in Kerala—buttressed by the strength of Keralite labor unions—along with land scarcity and a poor industrial policy enacted by the state (Nair 1999: 217 – 221).

⁵⁴ In fact, in the villages studied by the Osellas, they noted that in some neighborhoods twenty-seven percent of the working men of the village were abroad (Osella and Osella 2001: 119).

⁵⁵ This echoes Eric Wolf’s central theme of his ultimate work: that material relations and ideation are processes that are inextricably intertwined (Wolf 1999). For Appadurai, this same scenario yields conclusions about the expanding terrain of the imagination. The rural poor’s wish to improve their material circumstances or, in Osella and Osella’s terminology, to increase their social mobility (2000), are a product of the mediascapes and ideoscapes that posit labor abroad—and specifically in the Gulf—as one option in the domain of possibility (Appadurai 1997).

The largest proportion of Gulf transmigrants fall into the category of ‘unskilled’ workers (Premi and Mathur 1995: 641).⁵⁶ The term ‘unskilled’, while common in the literature, is also deceptive: an unskilled worker in the Gulf may possess a perfectly fine skill at home. On an earlier trip through Saudi Arabia, for example, a conversation with the Bangladeshi barber cutting my hair revealed that he had a Master’s degree in business. While not from the poorest segment of the Indian population (for the poorest are, generally, unable to accumulate the funds necessary to embark upon a sojourn to the Gulf), most of the migrants come from the lower echelons of Indian society (Nair 1999; Nambiar 1995: 213-216). As one young laborer from the southern state of Tamil Nadu described,

I come from a poor family ... and we don’t own any paddy land. We just work for daily wages. I wanted to be a farmer, but we don’t even own a house, much less land for farming. If I stay and work in India, we can eat well, but we will never save enough to build a house, and we will never afford land. I left India and came to the Gulf because if I work here, not only can I eat, I can save money and eventually buy these things—buy land, buy a house, buy something for my future.

Another South Indian described his situation:

My father is very old, and he can no longer work. My older brother is very lazy, and he’s not working either. He’s not smart, and he’s not taking care with his life. He only earns 1,500 rupees [about \$34] a month.... My family had some paddy land, but to come here we had to sell the land. There wasn’t enough water in the well anyway, and the harvests were smaller and smaller each year. So that’s why we decided to sell the land and come here.

⁵⁶ The same authors note that outmigration is higher in the Muslim districts of Kerala (Premi and Mathur 1995: 646). While the connection between religiously heterogeneous India and migration to the predominately Muslim Gulf would seem to be an obvious one, my evening trips to the labor camps did not confirm the predominance of Muslim Indians amongst the transnational labor force. While I was unable to gather quantitative data to support this conviction, the observations garnered over time in the camps suggested a fairly balanced mix of Hindu, Muslim and Christian laborers.

In general terms, the material factors that drive men from their homeland and to the Gulf are, themselves, variables that interconnect with the social milieu of Indian life. Numerous individuals I spoke with were supporting parents, brothers, wives, sisters, and children in India. This strategic planning includes goals familiar to those of us from the global north—purchasing land or a home, as the first laborer described above. But it also includes pressures which would be unfamiliar to those outside India. In particular, these pressures derive from the unique qualities of the joint family: paying for parent's retirement or, more frequently in the interviews I conducted, helping to foot the bill for sisters' marriages often drives young men to the Gulf. Even the reverse can be true, as one individual described the costs associated with his brother's marriage: "My family got a loan for my brother's marriage. The only way we could afford the marriage was to get a loan, and all the money we earned after that was going to interest for the loan. So we grew poor—that's why we sold our land and why I came here."⁵⁷

In conclusion, many Indian transnational laborers arrive in Bahrain as emissaries of a household-level strategy. While a sojourn in the Gulf is often an attempt to escape from the impoverished horizons many face in India, it is infrequently an escape from this particular web of obligation. While certainly undergoing change in the homeland, the tradition from which these workers come is one in which "early child care and socialization focused upon instilling in children a sense of interdependence—an understanding that they were one of many and that the well-being of the family should

⁵⁷ And another example: "My father was working here [in the Gulf], but we still had financial problems in India. I wanted to study – I wanted to go to college – but your financial situation wouldn't allow it. I couldn't stay in school. So my journey to the Gulf was unexpected. Unfortunately, I had to come."

always come before their individual interests” (Seymour 2002; see also Seymour 1999). The transnational social fields these laborers establish are bound to this familial debt; laborers that are married often have wives and children who are members of the joint household, and the money these men earn in Bahrain is often sent directly to their parents. In following the Indian tradition of subordinating “personal needs and desires in favor of the collective whole” (Seymour 2002), the needs of that collective whole provide one foothold for the structure of dominance they encounter in Bahrain, for the difficult working conditions and systemic abuse that accompany it must always be weighed against the needs of their families at home.

IV. Securing Employment in the Gulf

The desire to work abroad, as described above, can certainly be conceived as the first step in the journey that can carry men away to the Gulf for the better part of their lives. As portrayed here, this decision is rarely simple: as an individual begins to formulate his or her plans to work abroad, he or she becomes enmeshed in the cultural edifices already in place, for in many portions of South India, Gulf migration is an institution of particular note. Men and women are on their way to the Gulf, others have recently returned, and still others are absent altogether as their sojourn is underway. Moreover, the decision to work in the Gulf is frequently not an individual decision. Most of the individuals I spoke with described their decision in terms of their families’ welfare and livelihood. The communality of these decisions is apparent not just in the explicit discussion of the strategies utilized in securing employment in the Gulf; in many of the

quotes presented here, the reader will also note that the subject is often the first person plural (i.e. “We got a loan on our land—we pledged it”).⁵⁸

Once the decision to work in the Gulf is undertaken, the potential transmigrant enters into a complex structure of agents and subagents that connect individuals in India with jobs in the Gulf. While no single formula describes the multiple paths individuals follow to the Gulf, the ethnographic data I gathered point to three distinct processes individuals utilize in locating employment abroad. The first of those—and the process to which the most attention to date has been devoted—begins with the labor agency in India.⁵⁹ Potential laborers contact an agent or one of his subagents, the costs of the venture are laid out, and a contract, typically for two years’ work, is signed. As Vijay described in the narrative that began this chapter, the costs incurred in order to secure a job in Bahrain are extraordinary. As he noted:

I had good qualifications and experience, and I got a visa through an agent in Madras. As per the agreement, they said they would pay 45 dinars [approximately \$120] a month in salary. I had to pay 45,000 rupees [approximately \$975] for the visa, and that was for a two year contract. I didn’t know what a Dinar was worth at the time, so I agreed to come here for that salary ... I got the 45,000 rupees from various places. I saved 10,000 rupees, I borrowed 10,000 from a moneylender, with interest. I got 10,000 from my father’s bank account, and I got the last 15,000 from a loan on my mother’s jewelry.

⁵⁸ Studies of these return migrants often focus upon the economic impact of the remittances sent home; a few recent studies point more directly at the cultural impact of these transnational flows of human capital (Osella and Osella 2000a; Sekhar 1996).

⁵⁹ Michelle Gamburd describes the evolution of this process in her analysis of return-migrants in Sri Lanka: “Although from 1976 until 1985 the employer paid the laborer’s airfare, passport, and medical costs, by 1994 migrants footed most of these charges as well as job agents’ commissions; fees increased more rapidly than inflation” (Gamburd 2000: 64).

Many of the other men I spoke with noted that their family had mortgaged farmland, borrowed heavily, or some way or another ended up deeply in debt. In the interests of making these scenarios explicable to the reader, I have converted the amounts given to me in Indian rupees and Bahraini dinars to U.S. dollars. At the same time, Vijay describes his own ignorance regarding the exchange rates and value of the Bahraini Dinar. As the potential transmigrant enters the world of the labor broker, he (or she) enters into a world where accurate information about the conditions of work, the integrity of the contract, and even current exchange rates is difficult to obtain.⁶⁰ The power of the labor broker rests in his (or her) connection to the Gulf, connection to particular employers, but also in the control of this information. The brokerage process is far from transparent: as another transmigrant described: “To get here to Bahrain, it cost me 50,000 rupees, which is nearly 450 dinars [approximately \$1200]. We don’t know if this money went to the sponsor or the agent. We don’t know where it goes.”⁶¹

While labor brokers handle much of the human traffic between India and Bahrain, many of the laborers I spoke with circumvented the Indian-based labor brokers through interpersonal connections with individuals already working in the Gulf. An uncle, father,

⁶⁰ See Fuglerud (1999: 43) for a detailed explication of these arrangements.

⁶¹ While the mechanics of this process are often hidden to those searching for work in the Gulf, ethnographers and other scholars working on both ends of the migration flows have begun to accumulate data describing the brokerage process. Gamburd’s significant review of Sri Lankan housemaids and their transmigration to the Gulf explores the relationship between the iconic Muslim agents, portrayed through stories told and retold as wicked and exploitative, and the lived experience of the housemaids while abroad (Gamburd 2000: 57). She also describes the relationship between subagents, agents, and Gulf-based manpower agencies (Gamburd 2000).

brother, or acquaintance in Bahrain often arranged the visa directly with a citizen-sponsor, as was the case with Bhavesh:

I came here under a loan—I had to borrow money to come here, and my first goal was to pay back that loan. I had to get out of that debt. I paid 350 dinars [approximately \$930] to my uncle, and he paid it to the sponsor to get the work visa ... My uncle had borrowed the money from someone here, and I paid him back month by month.

Another laborer who arrived with a contract as a welder described his experience:

I found my job in Bahrain through my father's brother. I paid him 65,000 rupees [approximately \$1,500] in India, at my cousin's house, and he found the job for me. That money went straight to my sponsor in Bahrain. That didn't include the plane ticket, which was another 10,500 rupees [approximately \$230].

As a young mason from Tamil Nadu adds,

My father works here in Bahrain, and he arranged the visa. He works as a mason as well, but he works for a different company. My father arranged the visa—he paid 300 dinars [approximately \$800]. I get paid 50 dinars [approximately \$130] a month. I have that money to spend on food and other expenditures, and I had to pay back the loan, as well as the interest on the loan. It took me two years to pay it all back.”

Even transmigrants who find steady and reliable work are often unable to accumulate the substantial sums necessary to finance the migration of additional family members. When asked about where they come up with the hundreds and hundreds of dinars required by Bahraini sponsors, several of the men I interviewed described an arrangement called “the sequence,” a rotating savings scheme in which a number of laborers contribute a set sum every month and, eventually, receive an entire month's contributions in a lump sum. While several of the men I talked with had heard stories about problems with the sequence, none of the participants I met had encountered any problems with the arrangement.

Interpersonal connections form the basis for localized migration patterns, through which individuals from a particular village or family find and exploit particular avenues to the Gulf. This process, referred to as “chain migration” in the literature (Shah and Menon 1999), suggests the importance of interpersonal connections in securing work abroad. It also helps explain the demography of the labor camps: for example, in many of the labor camps I found numerous individuals from the same region, a result of the fact that they were all siphoned to the Gulf through the same labor broker or through the snowball effect of particular chains of migration. Other analyses have extrapolated this process to even greater levels, noting that chain migration helps explain why particular regions—Kerala, for example—are overrepresented in the pool of Gulf labor (Shah and Menon 1999; Gulati 1986)

The two processes I describe here—migration through an Indian-based labor broker, and migration via interpersonal connections with family, friends, or acquaintances in the Gulf—comprise the basis for most laborers’ path to employment in the Gulf. Moreover, even those who circumvent the labor broker system pay approximately the same amount. Some large companies, however, avoid recruitment through either of these paths, and instead directly recruit labor in India. Company emissaries are sent directly to India to interview and select men for work in Bahrain.⁶²

Most of the laborers I encountered followed some variant of the first two paths described here, and in doing so incurred significant debts. This debt represents the

⁶² Although men represent the vast majority of the transmigrant population at this economic stratum, I did encounter a few women working in the cafeteria at the Bahrain Training Institute. There are also numerous women from India and countless other countries working as housemaids in the homes of Bahraini citizens.

keystone in the system of structural dominance into which the Indian transmigrant is cast. Arriving at the international airport on the satellite island of Muharraq, the laborers are quickly conveyed to their labor camps, and already they carry with them the burden of debt that, more often than not, reaches beyond them into the livelihood of their extended family. As the men portrayed here suggest, their trip to the Gulf commonly requires their families to mortgage productive land, borrow from moneylenders, and sell or pawn their savings (often held in the form of gold jewelry). Their success at their venture abroad, vested in the contract signed at the broker's office in India or, less frequently, negotiated through personal connections in the Gulf, encompasses more than their personal fate, for oftentimes the well-being of their extended family hangs in the balance. Because real and productive assets are typically pawned or mortgaged, the inability to derive profit from the guestworker system—again, a very real possibility—means that families in India lose their homes, farmland, and in the most fundamental sense, their means of survival.⁶³ The pressures of this burden loom over the transmigrant laborers: As one man described his life in Bahrain: “I came to Bahrain, and the job was very hard, very rough, but I was only thinking about clearing my debt. So I didn’t think about how difficult the job was—I just thought about the debt. I didn’t feel anything. I just worked.”

⁶³ This system differs significantly from the indentured servitude characteristic of the transnational migration that brought many Europeans to the New World. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, individuals typically embarked on the journey to North America via a contract that ensured that payment for the journey itself would be paid by the contract holder. Indentured servants did not typically enter into debt for these journeys, unlike the typical guestworker in Bahrain. Moreover, the promise of citizenship underpinned the transmigration from Europe to North America.

V. Transmigrants and the *Kafala* system

The movement of labor beyond the boundaries of the nation is a hallmark of contemporary capitalism.⁶⁴ The petroleum-rich nations of the Gulf, while an important node in this flow of labor, are but one destination of many around the globe. In the United States, an estimated 4,280 new immigrants arrive every day, and like the Indian diaspora in Bahrain, most fill the positions viewed as least desirable in the contemporary workforce.⁶⁵ Unlike most other parts of the world, however, transmigrants arriving in the Gulf enter into a unique institution of personal sponsorship, known throughout the Gulf as the *kafala*. While often omitted from analyses of Gulf transmigration, recent scholarship has noted the importance of understanding the particularities of this relationship and, more importantly, how the *kafala* system configures both class and ethnic stratification in the heterogeneous social context of the contemporary Gulf (Longva 1997: 77-111; Kapiszewski 2001: 25).

The roots of the *kafala* can be traced to the British management of the migration system, for it was in those procedures and bureaucracies that the practice was codified. However, some have noted the parallels between the modern *kafala* system and the system of indentured servitude and debt bondage characteristic of the region's pre-oil

⁶⁴ And while the long history of people on the move should not be forgotten—a point well argued by Eric Wolf (1982) in his seminal *Europe and the People Without History*, I join Appadurai and many others in noting that advances in systems of transportation and communication have ushered in an era in which this movement now fuels processes of unparalleled historical magnitude (Appadurai 1997; Smith 2001: 166).

⁶⁵ This figure uses the most recent data on legal migration to the United States (1,063,732 legal immigrants in 2002) combined with the estimated number of undocumented immigrants (500,000 per year). These data were drawn from the Migration Policy Institute web page.

organization of labor (Longva 1997: 107). In Bahrain, specifically, the economic organization of the pearl industry, in which captains held pearl divers (typically foreign or Shi'ite) in “virtual bondage through debts which extended from generation to generation,” provides a rough parallel to the contemporary structure of labor on the island (Wheatcroft 1988: 56). The relations of production characteristic of the pearl industry were customary—rather than codified in law—and in that sense parallel the *kafala* by helping explain the absence of specific, articulated legal doctrines amidst the comprehensive public practice of the *kafala* system and, more importantly, the perception of that system as ‘normal’ (Longva 1997: 107).

To work on the island, transmigrants must obtain a work visa which, in turn, is associated with a Bahraini citizen (*kafeel*) or a Bahraini business or corporation. This work visa entitles the transmigrant to work at a particular job for a particular company—in essence, he (or she) is bound to the *kafeel*. Transmigrants who arrived prior to the 1970s described this process as a formality, but by the 1980s individuals and companies were beginning to derive profit from this scenario. While some of the laborers and clerks I came to know paid only for the plane ticket to Bahrain, the great majority paid significant fees for the right to work on the island.⁶⁶ While this common practice contradicts Bahraini labor laws and the terms of the labor contracts Indian transmigrants typically sign in their homeland, there is no enforcement of the law. Transmigrants who arrived prior to the mid-1980s report this shift as a gradual occurrence, fueled by the

⁶⁶ A recent study noted that Indian contract workers in the United Arab Emirates also face widespread abuse of the terms specified in the labor contract and reinforced in the Emirati immigration rules (Zachariah et al., 2003).

established transnational conduits that made cheap labor available and, certainly, by the orchestration of the relations of production under the *kafala* system—a system of power relations that make this particular form of exploitation possible. By the late 1990s, the average price of the work visa passed \$1000, and at the time of my fieldwork laborers reported prices of nearly \$3000 as the norm.

Profiteering derived from transmigration also forged a new form of work visa, commonly referred to as the “free visa.”⁶⁷ In this scenario, transmigrants pay the going rate for a standard work visa (as a gardener, laborer, driver, or whatever). Just before the turn of the millennium, Fakhro estimated the costs of the ‘free visa’ to be \$1250 (Fakhro 1997: 177); several of the ‘free visa’ laborers I encountered reported costs as high as \$3000. Unlike transmigrants with standard work visas, there is no actual job waiting in Bahrain for free visa holders. Instead, they come to the island under the guise of this particular employment, and then begin to search for another “real” job. This process can take years, and in the interim they depend on friends, family members, acquaintances and the income from odd jobs to survive. If and when they are able to locate an actual job, they then seek a “letter of release” from the original *kafeel*, which then allows them to contractually agree to the job they’ve located. Through this system, the original “free visa” sponsor captures thousands of dollars in profit. While these practices faced occasional scrutiny in the media, rumors persist that powerfully placed members of the

⁶⁷ In terms of the state, work visas and ‘free’ visas are one and the same. With the ‘free’ visa, however, the job indicated on the paperwork is a mirage—or perhaps temporary—and the transmigrant must locate work and instigate the transfer process upon arrival. Because the issuance of ‘free’ visas has become so widespread, however, transmigrants in all the communities at work on the island clearly differentiate between these two forms of what is essentially the same visa.

ruling elite continue to profit from the flow of transmigrant laborers under ‘free’ visas (Fakhro 1997: 177).⁶⁸

From the perspective of the Gulf citizen, sponsorship incurs particular financial responsibilities. The *kafeel*, or individual sponsor, is primarily obligated to pay the transportation costs from the home country to and from Bahrain (although this was rarely the case for the poorest laborers); similarly, the *kafeel* is contractually obliged to pay wages for the period of the contract, typically two years. In general terms, the sponsor-employer in the Gulf is conceived as, “assuming full economic and legal responsibility for the employee” (Longva 1999: 20). In my discussions with Bahraini citizens, this notion of economic and legal responsibility was often buttressed by arguments concerning a more general notion of responsibility, in that by sponsoring a particular individual the citizen assumed responsibility for that individual and any potential transgressions against the cultural norms in Bahrain. In her work in Kuwait, Longva is quite clear on this subject: she pays attention to the perspectives of the powerful in her study, and she notes that the Kuwaitis considered the control yielded by the *kafala* system to be inadequate. In fact, from the Kuwaiti perspective detailed by Longva, sponsorship is a burden: “to bring from abroad a totally unknown stranger entrusted with a job in one’s company, one’s shop, or even worse, one’s own home, was always a problematic and worrisome decision” (Longva 1997: 103). Citizen-sponsors worry about the quality of the

⁶⁸ Writing eight years ago, Fakhro estimated the average cost of the free visa at \$1250, and noted that “This system is run and controlled by some senior bureaucrats and the elite who amass large fortunes from it” (1997: 177). In her ethnography of transmigrants in Kuwait, Longva also made note of the sale of “free” visas. Unlike Bahrain, however, the profiteering from the sale of free visas was “most actively used by the lower-middle-class, unskilled Kuwaitis” (Longva 1997: 107).

employee, their powerlessness over the masses of foreigners in their midst, and the “practical entailments” of mediating between the state and transmigrant (Longva 1997: 103).

As Longva concludes in her chapter on the subject, an objective analysis of the relationship between sponsor and employee reveals that power squarely resides on the side of the citizen. The data I collected affirm this analysis: although citizen-sponsors may worry about the implications of sponsoring foreigners, the material and procedural factors together form a system in which the transmigrant laborer is generally powerless to respond to abuses, both real and perceived. All of the transmigrant Indian laborers with whom I spoke arrived on the island with significant debt, and all had yielded their passports to their sponsor. The latter of these two factors severely limits the potential responses of laborers to the injustices rendered by the system: In many cases described to me by the various outreach groups working with the expatriate population, sponsors amidst disagreements with transmigrants often require payments before passports are returned. In the case described by Vijay, the sponsor eventually returned passports to those employees who promised not to move forward with the court case.

The powerlessness of the transmigrant laborer is further reinforced by the policies and procedures that situate the sponsor as “mediator between the state and individual migrant” (Longva 1997: 103). As Vijay described, transmigrants often lack direct access to their official sponsor, and instead must deal with proxies—often other expatriate laborers in managerial positions—in contesting their working conditions, pay, and hours. The power of the sponsor is buttressed by the inability of Indian laborers to directly

interface with the state and its multiple bureaucracies: visa renewals or switching sponsors require the intervention and approval of the original *Kafeel*, an arrangement that opens the transmigrant to exploitation. As one laborer described,

“Twice over my ten years here my sponsor got 550 Dinars [\$1460] from me for visa renewal. Both times he didn’t even regularize my visa. So I paid 1300 Dinars [\$3450] to come to Bahrain, I paid 1100 [\$2920] and then 450 [\$1195] recently. So that’s ... 2950 ... nearly 3000 Dinars [\$7960] for six years. Did I even earn this much? I don’t know!”

Beyond the fact that most of these government ministries operate in Arabic, my informants noted that many of the immigration bureaucracies in the government by policy now only serve Bahrainis, and that expatriates can no longer bring their issues directly to the Ministries but must instead rely upon intermediaries.⁶⁹ The fact that the labor camps are often located in distant, out-of-the-way semi-industrial zones, and that the only free time they typically have is on Friday, a day in which none of the government ministries are open, only enhances their marginalization, and reinforces the singular power of the *kafeel*-sponsor over them.

What emerges from these various ethnographic scenarios is a glimpse of the contours of the structure of dominance—a form of structural power, to use Eric Wolf’s terminology, that orchestrates relations between guestworker and citizen. The linguistic shift from workplace to the hallways of the state bureaucracies, the spatial distribution of labor in the marginal interstices of the island’s urban agglomeration, the multiple proxies

⁶⁹ Several of the ‘illegal’ laborers who I interviewed noted that lawyers, manpower agency representatives, and other citizens had exploited their status by promising to regularize their visas for various fees. Many of these individuals merely disappeared, while others returned regularly with reports of incremental progress and demands for more money. None of the men I spoke with had successfully resolved their status situation through these means.

between guestworker and sponsor, as well as the guestworker and the state, all serve to channel the transmigrants' collective and individual resistance away from the venues and interaction in which they might find traction.

VI. The Economics of Transnational Life in Bahrain

While other concerns often joined economic ones in facilitating individuals' decisions to work in the Gulf, no realm of inquiry in my ethnographic interviews generated more cohesive responses than those concerned with the personal finances of transmigration. The laboring class of the Indian diaspora, by-in-large, lives in a world where expenditures and income are calculated over the period of a year or more, and the sophistication of the strategies developed to cope with the calculus of these matters overlap with decisions concerning their visa, the welfare of their family, and whether to risk their welfare in a challenge in the courts.

Perhaps the most important factor shaping the economic strategies of the transmigrants abroad is the debt they bring to Bahrain upon arrival. In order to secure employment on the island, laborers typically pay between \$900 and \$3300 dollars. Significant portions of these fees go directly to the Bahraini state (\$665 to the Ministry of Labor, \$133 to Immigration); the remainder is split between Indian-based labor brokers, Bahraini manpower agencies, and, oftentimes, the Bahraini sponsor. These prices have increased dramatically in the last decade. Furthermore, many of these fees are paid through a combination of personal or familial savings and loans from moneylenders, the latter of which incur interest.

Wage rates fluctuate rapidly in Bahrain. At the time of my research (2002 to 2003), the typical pay for a common laborer was somewhere between 60 and 90 BD per month [approximately \$160 to \$240]. At the same time, my informants with experience in the labor camps noted a recent wave of transmigrants who arrived at an entirely different wage level, for as we made the rounds to the labor camps on the island, I was introduced to more and more laborers working for 30 dinars or less (\$80).

With labor contracts typically two years in length, we can now sketch a rough portrait of the monthly finances of an Indian transmigrant. Arriving with a debt of \$1200 dollars, and earning \$200 a month—both figures well within the norm of the laborers I met—he (theoretically) ends the second year of his contract with \$3600 in pocket. From this amount, however, we must deduct his expenses for food and incidentals. Many of the labor camps pass along the costs of air conditioners and other essentials to the laborers; many of the men I spoke with also reported spending as much as 20 BD a month on phone calls home. After two years, a new residence permit must be secured for the transmigrant, and while the largest (and most formal) of the companies often pay this charge, smaller companies typically pass these costs along to the laborer, thereby incurring a biennial charge of 200 BD (\$530).

Below are five short vignettes drawn from my notes about the economics of labor in Bahrain:

- Sagat comes from a family of farmers in Tamil Nadu. He followed his father to Bahrain, and the arrangements were made by his father. He paid \$798 for a visa, and he earns \$133 a month as a mason. In addition to the costs of food and incidentals, he spends \$53 a month on phone calls home. He's able to send \$54 rupees home every month. Although he wishes to get married, he's merely trying to clear his accounts now. As he noted, he earned nearly this much in India.

- Shani arrived nearly two years ago after paying \$1081 rupees for the visa. He's unmarried, but that was his primary reason for coming to Bahrain—to earn money for a proper marriage. He earns \$80 per month. He hasn't been able to save anything, as he's simply paying off his debts. He sends a little bit home here and there. He tries hard to limit his phone calls, but every month or two he does call home.
- Sagar lives in a fairly decent camp in a peripheral area on the northwest tip of the island, just a stone's throw from the Dilmun archaeological site. He's married and has two children in southern India. In 1992, he paid \$798 to get the visa, and he earns \$160 a month. He's able to save \$130 a month. His principal goal in coming to Bahrain is building a house back home. He's also helped two of his friends come to Bahrain for work.
- Lokanadhan paid \$1405 for the visa and another \$227 for the plane ticket in 1998. By trade he is a welder, a vocation he took up so that he might work in the Gulf. His first employer didn't pay him for 4 and ½ months, so he quit and became an illegal worker, and he has a case in the court system. He's been working odd jobs since then. His Bahraini advocates haven't made any headway with the case, although they require money all the time—\$160 here, \$93 there. During the last amnesty period, a Bahraini advocate promised that for \$213 he would negotiate with the original sponsor and arrange either a work visa or an exit, but the office was empty when he went back. On average, he's been able to save \$216 per month.
- Madhu paid \$931 in 1995 for a visa. He is paid \$160 a month. They also charge him \$266 every two years in order to renew his visa. He's been able to save \$130 a month. He's been home once, in 2000, and he was married then, and he has a daughter. He had to pay for his own return ticket.

As these examples make clear, there is no single formula by which the economic forces of transmigrant laborers might be summarized. Moreover, while contracts might stipulate a particular pay rate, and labor laws in Bahrain might ensure that sponsors pay for the costs of travel to and from India, these practices are rarely enacted at this level of the labor force, and any calculus based on the contract itself is risky to the laborer, for the *actual* conditions and remuneration for his or her labor abroad depend upon a slew of variables imperceptible from India. The ability of the laborer to emerge from the debt

typically incurred in securing work in the Gulf is highly variable, a fact which helps explain why many of the men I met, while arriving with the intention of staying only two years, were now in their eighth or tenth year of work on the island.

VII. Life in the Labor Camps

For the great majority of the transnational laborers that arrive each year in Bahrain, lodging is, initially, not a matter of great concern. The companies that handle large labor contingents frequently provide accommodation as part of the contract, as was the case for Vijay, whose vignette began this chapter. As the reader will remember, after a long wait at the airport Vijay was swiftly conveyed to his workplace, and then to his new home. These arrival stories were a recurrent theme in the interviews I conducted—men frequently described their dismay at first sight of their new homes. Here I would like to consider three different living arrangements that, together, typically comprise the accommodation for transmigrant laborers on the island.

The term *labor camp*, while commonly used in Bahrain, refers to a wide variety of living arrangements in and around the urban core of Manama. Certainly the most common, or at least most conspicuous, example of the labor camp are those much like Vijay described. These are large (and often decrepit) dormitory-like buildings, often organized around one or several central kitchen areas. The men sleep in rooms roughly equivalent to American-size bedrooms, perhaps 150 or 200 square feet. The men are provided with a cot, although they must often purchase their own bedding materials. Bedrooms typically hold six or more cots; in smaller rooms, the men often configure

ways of stacking the beds, bunk-style, in order to accommodate the numbers of men crammed into these small spaces.

Camps typically house laborers working under a single sponsor, often (officially) a particular individual operating under a particular corporation. These men may be

employed at a single location, such as the garment factory described by Vijay, which may be located on the same premises as the



Figure 3.2: Indian laborers boarding transport to work.

camp itself. Alternatively, individuals at a single camp may work at a variety of locations, as was the case at the custodial contractor's camp I visited in which the laborers worked at five or six different locations around the island. The food at the camp canteen—if such premises exist—is provided by the sponsor company and prepared by designated members of the camp. Similarly, most camps have small fleets of trucks or buses to convey labor to various work locations around the island. Drivers for these vehicles typically are culled from the camps' laborers.

In the great majority of the camps I visited, laborers self-segregate by nationality. Bangladeshis, Pakistanis, and Indians typically bunked in different rooms, wings, floors,

or buildings, often by spatial divisions of their own design. Even in the tight quarters of a large, single-building camp, bedrooms and multiple kitchens would be divided by nationality. While one might think that language provided the best explanation for this division, the commonplace linguistic divisions within the Indian community (say, between a Malayalam-speaking Keralite and a Tamil-speaking Tamilite) didn't articulate into the same sorts of spatial divisions. Nor did religious, caste, or state-based affiliation guide the spatial organization of most Indians I encountered in the labor camps. Rather, as I will explore in detail later, these parameters of difference were consciously disregarded and downplayed in the close quarters of the camps.⁷⁰

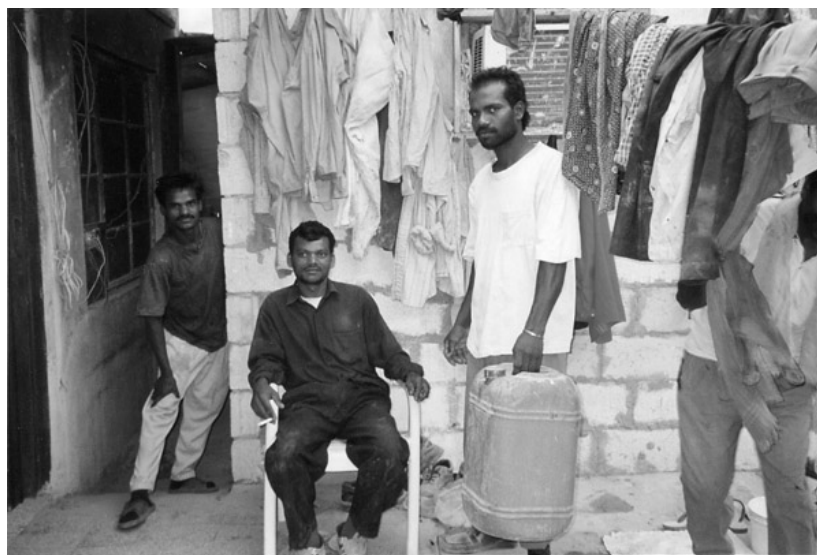


Figure 3.3: Evening at a labor camp.

Daily life in the camps commonly begins at an early hour. Men typically rise at 4am or 5am to prepare food for the day. Their 'duty,' as it is commonly called, typically begins at 6am, and they work until noon with a fifteen minute break somewhere in that time. During the half-hour break, many eat the lunch they've prepared for themselves; those without kitchen facilities at their camp (or those who don't prepare their own lunch)

⁷⁰ The men typically roomed with others who spoke their primary language, a fact which often resulted in spatial division by nationality or region.

purchase their meal from the ‘chiapati cars’ that make the rounds of larger worksites during the lunch hour. After their short lunch break, they continue working until 4:30 or 5:00 in the afternoon, at which time they are transported back to the camp. In the congested streets of urban Manama, transportation to and from the worksite can occupy thirty minutes or more. Arriving at the camp sometime around 6pm, the men cook, eat, wash and relax. They are often asleep by 10pm. While these ‘normal’ schedules typify the days of countless men on the island, many are forced to work much longer hours, as Vijay noted regarding his own experience in the garment factory.

Men typically work six days a week on such schedules. Friday, the second day of the weekend in the Middle East, is usually a day off. Many of the laborers I spoke with had the entire day off; others worked a partial day, sometimes for overtime pay, sometimes as part of their regular duties. During their free day, the men typically prepare for the coming week, wash their clothing, write letters or record cassettes for loved ones at home, and watch VCR or DVD recordings of Indian movies. Others journey to the *souq*, the central market area where, on Fridays, the streets fill with laborers from around the globe. An afternoon in the *souq* provides a chance to visit with friends and relatives, to share a leisurely stroll with co-workers, and to purchase inexpensive necessities for the coming weeks.

Many of the camps I visited were far from the center of the city, in light industrial neighborhoods with few services—such as grocery stores, hardware stores, and so forth—making life all the more difficult for the laborers. Some were unable to make the long journey to town on their day off, and many others curtailed their movements around

the neighborhoods outside their compounds for fear of conflict with the predominately Shi'i, disenfranchised populations that share these undesirable neighborhoods. In general terms, the laborers often lived in a climate of vague but constant fear, and across the board they had little contact with the non-Indian world outside the labor camp and workplace. Their isolation in the urban hinterlands of the city is one factor that prevents them from connecting with the diasporic social institutions I describe in chapter five.

Finally, I should note that the portrait of life at the labor camps presented here is an amalgamation of a wide array of realities on the ground. One of the first camps I visited, for example, consisted of nothing more than a ramshackle cinderblock garage of the sponsor. Two bedrooms had been constructed inside, and carpet remnants had been thrown over the dirt floor to keep the vermin at bay. Thirteen men slept six and seven to a room, and the kitchen area included piles of rusted junk the sponsor wished to keep. Rats scurried on the rafters above our head as men heated water in plastic five gallon buckets using the electric wands used to fire charcoal briquettes. Larger camps often faced the same difficult conditions, and some were no more hygienic.

VIII. Legal and Illegal Workers

Bahrain faces significant unemployment rates in its citizenry, and with so many foreign faces on the street and behind the counters of the businesses along those streets, the presence of foreigners is a high profile topic in the news—much more so than in the United States. Throughout the Gulf, in all those countries where foreigners comprise a majority of the workforce, newspapers closely track the policy efforts to move citizens

into positions now held by foreigners. Such policies in Bahrain are collectively known as ‘Bahrainization.’⁷¹ As I describe in the later chapters of this dissertation, Bahrainization is a complex suite of policies, and both reporting and discussion of the matter often skirt the underlying issues encompassing the educational systems of the small Gulf countries, an undertrained or unwilling domestic workforce, and the powerful classes that profit from the transmigration of human capital. Conversely, the public discourse often focuses on the presence of ‘illegal’ laborers, for it seemingly provides an issue around which public opinion more readily coalesces.

The portrait of an illegal worker one receives from the public discourse in Bahrain is strikingly similar to those here in the United States: an individual somehow finds his way across the discrete borders of the nation and now works in the country, avoiding the visa fees and purview of the state, and taking employment from an able, underemployed citizenry. Moreover, as someone outside the *kafala* system, the ‘illegal’ laborer is seen as outside the purview of cultural responsibility, and hence a liability to the cultural fabric of Bahraini society. While the latter issue is of much interest and debate, the former issue—that of the path transmigrants follow to an illegal status—is entirely incorrect. In part, it certainly represents a projection of the European and American norms of the migration discourse. It also reflects the situation of neighboring Saudi Arabia, where countless individuals arrive on a Haj visa (for religious pilgrimage to Mecca) and illegally stay to work. Both of these explanations, however inappropriate, elide the actual circumstances that produce ‘illegal’ workers: the path to illegality, for most transmigrant

⁷¹ Each country utilizes its own moniker, such as Omanization or Saudiization; *en suite* these sets of policy directives are referred to as Arabization.

laborers, is a strategic response to the systemic abuse enabled, if not codified, by the *kafala* and contingent on the passivity of the state in enforcing its labor laws.

In Bahrain, all of the ‘illegal’ Indian laborers I interviewed described a set of almost identical circumstances. As a south Indian mason described his own migration history:

I came here as a mason, but the company that took my visa, they didn’t pay me. The other workers approached the labor department ... and they complained about the company, but by that point they hadn’t received any salary for five months. Me and him [pointing to another laborer] didn’t wait that long—we left the company and found work here. The other workers never did get their money. Since we left early, we were illegal, and now we’re afraid to approach the Labor Ministry.

Several weeks later I journeyed with S. to the back of the *souq*. Here, in the narrow streets of central Manama, crowds of Indian men move through the streets, in and out of the doorways and small alleys that lead to apartments out of view. The neighborhood is widely known as the hub of the illegal migrants, and again I heard a similar story:

I came to Bahrain as a welder in a car carriage repair shop. For four and a half months, I received no salary, so I filed a case. Then I finally left the company. My case is now in the courts—I filed a case against my sponsor. The case states that he did not pay me 4 ½ months salary. I filed the case in the beginning of 1998, and there has been no progress [as of July 2003] ... As an illegal worker, I do have worries. I have a paper that I received from the court, and now I am afraid to go to the police about this paper. I don’t want to have to go to jail for being an illegal worker, and that is why I can’t go to the courts anymore or ask the police for help. I will wait for amnesty. If the amnesty came tomorrow, I would go.

Or consider this Tamilian, an ‘illegal’ worker who, over seven years, worked for some twenty different companies:

Some of the standard companies would employ me regularly for some period of time. With those standard companies, there was no problem with the payment—

they never withheld my salary. Some companies hired me for a week, some hired me for six months. Others hired me for two months. The standard companies hire for the longest period, and they pay regularly. Some of the other companies pay during the early stages, but then they stop. They pay for the first four months or so, then for the last two months they stop. They cheat us. Of all twenty companies, only five were good to the workers the entire time. The other fifteen cheated me, cheated us.

Each of these stories, while distinct in detail, echo the situation described previously by Vijay. As the reader will remember, Vijay arrived at his garment factory to discover that wages and overtime pay were often withheld, and their protests eventually led them to the Bahraini court system. Nearly all of the ‘illegal’ workers I spoke with faced similar dilemmas: after three or four months without pay, they faced two options: either immediately seek work in an occupation other than that designated on their work visa, or carry their case to the courts. From the half dozen cases I encountered of the latter, none were resolved in favor of the laborers, and in the process many of them became ‘illegal’ workers (in terms of their official status) nonetheless.⁷²

IX. Housemaids in Bahrain

In presenting the ethnographic data I collected from the working class of the Indian diaspora in Bahrain, I would be remiss if I did not briefly discuss the status of housemaids on the island. Of the quarter million foreign workers on the island, some 40,000 fall under the category of housemaids.⁷³ Typically, these individuals are female,

⁷² Another group of ‘illegal’ workers included the adult children of transmigrants who, against the proscriptions of their status on the ‘family visa’ sought employment in the private sector.

⁷³ U.S. Department of State Country Report on Human Rights Practices 2003. Released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor. February 25, 2004.

although drivers, gardeners, and other household laborers may be male. Also, many individuals arrive on the island with a work permit for household labor but are actually free visa workers in search of other employment, a fact which obfuscates the actual number of workers in the

households of Bahrain.

Many Muslim countries

that send male workers

forbid the transmigration of

female housemaids to the

Gulf countries (e.g.

Pakistan, Bangladesh);

other countries, like Nepal,

have curtailed or stopped

the transmigration of

housemaids due to the frequency of abuse these women face once abroad.



Figure 3.4: A housemaid, likely Indonesian, in central Manama.

Housemaids in Bahrain typically earn under 100 BD [\$265] per month—and often much less. Unlike workers in other economic (or ‘public’) sectors, they are unprotected by the labor laws on the island. Moreover, access to these women (and men, occasionally) is difficult, largely due to the Bahraini household’s position on the latter side of the public/private sphere. Many of the women are forbidden from entering the public sphere at all, and while I would often see them out at the trash cans or in the yards

of Bahraini houses, their movement and time is closely monitored by their sponsor, and arranging interviews with them proved impossible.

The precarious status of housemaids on the island fueled activity by the Bahrain Commission on Human Rights (BCHR), and in particular by the Commission's Subcommittee on Migrants that formed during my stay on the island. In the months following a highly publicized attempted escape by an Indonesian housemaid in which, after tying bed sheets together, she attempted to rappel from the third story of her employers' villa only to fall to her death, the subcommittee attempted to build a "safe house" for housemaids. Eventually the BCHR was closed down by the government; the current status of the safe house is unclear.⁷⁴

During my research I had only fleeting contact with housemaids. In several of the Bahraini households I visited I was able to briefly meet housemaids; more often they were only behind the scenes, in the private portions of the house into which outsiders are never invited. Several of the Bahrainis I interviewed were unable to recall the names or nationalities of the housemaids they hired; other times they focused on how wealthy and lucky these housemaids were. Granted, women working as housemaids in Bahrain have many different experiences. The public discourse about housemaids, moreover, is a mix of truth and tall tales, a point well articulated by Gamburd (2000). Nonetheless, descriptions of the housemaids' situation by Bahrainis often contradicted the sorts of

⁷⁴ The executive director of the BCHR, Abdul Hadi al-Khawaja, issued a personal attack on the Prime Minister and voiced strong criticism of the government's policies in regards to human rights. He was subsequently arrested and the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs ordered the Centre's closure. The Migrants Subcommittee has reformed separate from the BCHR.

stories that appeared weekly in the newspapers about rapes, sexual liaisons, accusations of theft, repatriation, and a host of other infractions for which the citizen-sponsor was rarely rebuked.

In the end, the housemaids are a constituency that is particularly cloistered from ethnographic inquiry, a fact compounded by my gender and nationality. In terms of the spatial and temporal control of migrants in Bahrain, however, none face a more formidable structure of dominance than the housemaids.

X. Disciplining Time and Space

In the final weeks of my time in Bahrain, I visited a labor camp in the distant reaches of outer Muharraq, beyond the airport and just a short walk from the waters of the Gulf. Here amidst the dirt streets and walled compounds of the lower and middle class Bahrainis was a masonry tile factory; the men lived and worked on the job site, preparing large flat bricks for the myriad construction projects going on around the island. Upon our arrival, we knocked on the large metal gate, and were quickly ushered inside while the men furtively glanced out the gate, up and down the street. As our interview progressed, the men eventually described their problems with the Bahraini neighbors. Over the last two years, they had curtailed their trips to the small cold store, a five minute walk from the compound, as they had been repeatedly attacked by teenagers in the neighborhood. Their descriptions of these violent encounters resonated with descriptions I received at other camps, where men described roving gangs of local youth burgling their camps, stealing air conditioners and other valuables, and threatening the

men with violence. A recent article in the *Gulf Daily News*, Bahrain's expatriate daily, reported another incident:

Fire damaged part of a labour camp, in Naim, after three Bahraini teenagers burst in and set fire to the workers' clothes. It was the third time that they had raided the same building in one night. When the youths broke in the first time they beat up one of the workers, who required hospital treatment for his injuries. They returned half-an-hour later and stole the labourers' safety shoes. However, when they went back the third time they piled up the workers' clothes, doused the pile in kerosene and set it on fire. The labourers managed to put out the blaze, but only after it had destroyed their air-conditioner, refrigerator and carpets.

"It all started when the Bahrainis barged in the labourers' residence at 10 pm," said Bangladeshi mechanic Mubarak Muslim Mia, 27, who lives in the building. "They entered one of the rooms exclaiming that they are Bahrainis and have a right to be anywhere they want to be. One of the residents asked them what they wanted, barging in so late at night, but the Bahrainis shouted at him and beat him up really bad. We rushed him off to the hospital to get treatment for cuts in his hand."

Almost 100 Indian and Bangladeshi workers live in the building. They work for various companies, but split the cost of the rent between themselves. However, they did not immediately report the matter to the police to avoid a confrontation with nearby residents. They even kept quiet when the teenagers came back 30 minutes later and stole their safety shoes. "Each shoe costs around BD7 or BD8—this might not be much, but it is a fortune for people like us," said Mr. Mia. "We did not want to go to the police right then because we thought that it would stop there. We did not want to get in trouble with the people from the neighborhood."

However, half-an-hour later the culprits re-entered the building and took workers' clothes out of a cupboard before soaking them with kerosene normally used for cooking. They then set the pile on fire. "We fought to extinguish the fire, but our clothes were fully charred," said Mr. Mia. "The air-conditioner, refrigerator and carpets were all lost to the flames and we immediately went to the police."

The incident happened last Tuesday, but the workers are still without air-conditioning and a refrigerator while summer temperatures hit 40C. It is understood that three youths were arrested, but have since been released from custody. "We are poor people, it is not easy for us to gather enough money to buy new equipment," said Mr. Mia. "The air conditioner costs BD120, fridge BD70 and our clothes almost the same amount. We are at the end of the month and are left with no money at all. We do not know why these people treat us like this. We

never harmed them, why would they harm us?” (*Gulf Daily News*, August 29, 2004)

In crossing the Indian Ocean in search of a small improvement to their life, the poorest classes of Indian laborers enter in to a system comprehensive in its management of their time, spatial movement, and body. Violence against them, always possible, is premised the inability of the transmigrant to respond in meaningful ways. In the later chapters of this work I directly analyze the confrontations and violence between citizen and non-citizen; here, however, I want to consider these episodes as one component of the systemic forces that keep the poorest laborers into their difficult position. Eric Wolf, in his final work, described power in a series of four valences, beginning with the capability of power vested in the individual and extending outward to that “structural power ... manifest in relationships that not only operates within settings and domains but also organizes and orchestrates the settings themselves (1999: 5). In this chapter, I have used the ethnographic data I collected in the labor camps and downtrodden apartments of central Manama to provide a multifaceted portrait of the Indian transmigrant laborer. In doing so, I have used the descriptions of their lives and strategies to delineate the structure of dominance in which they live.

The foundations of this structure of dominance are in place even before the transmigrant departs his homeland. The cost of obtaining work in the Gulf—typically surpassing \$1000—means that the laborer enters into debt servitude upon arrival. By the rough calculations of the laborers I encountered, the first years of work in Bahrain are simply to pay back these debts. And because these debts are almost always accrued at a household level, the welfare of those on the other side of the transnational divide rest

upon the abilities of the transmigrant to successfully navigate the difficulties of life and work in Bahrain. Other important, practical aspects of this structure of dominance include the widespread practice of confiscating the passports of transmigrants upon arrival. Much of this structural power rests in the *kafala* system itself. Labor contracts tie transmigrants to particular jobs and particular sponsors; in their first moments on the island they are separated from their passport, and hence unable to flee whatever circumstances lie in store for them. Those that do leave their sponsored position work illegally in the burgeoning black market for labor; their original sponsor retains their passport. Moreover, as the narrative of Vijay's experience in Bahrain portrayed, the transmigrants often lack direct access to their sponsor who, legally, represents their contact with the state and the legal system.

In addition to these very real institutional aspects of this structure of dominance, there are additional temporal and spatial factors that limit laborers' agency in combating the systemic injustices they face. Most of them work long hours on the job; weeks pass in a haze of work and sleep, and many receive only a half-day off, which they typically use to wash clothes, shop for necessities, and prepare for the coming week. These rigid schedules prevent them from finding time to address the problems they face. Their labor camps are often located in distant locations, away from the center of the city, beyond the reach of public transportation which is often too expensive anyway, and as a result they cannot visit the various Indian clubs and restaurants, the Indian Embassy, and the other spatial nodes important to the Indian diaspora.

Another key aspect to consider is the vagaries of the structural power itself, for the behavior of the transmigrant laborers is shaped as much by possibilities of its implementation as in its actual implementation. Again, Eric Wolf's description of structural power focused upon the capability of organizing and orchestrating the settings of power-laden interactions, and it is in this sense that the notion of structural power becomes particularly applicable in this case study, for the actual interactions between transmigrants and citizens only partially account for the system in which they dwell. Equally important is the governance of those interactions—the interactions that cannot and will not occur under the discipline of the state and its citizenry.

CHAPTER FOUR

STRATEGIC TRANSNATIONALISM: THE DIASPORIC ELITE IN CONTEMPORARY BAHRAIN



Figure 4.1: Members of the Indian Ladies Association, along with the author and two representatives from the Indian Embassy, are seated in front of a group of laborers who completed a free eight-week English course.

I. Deterritorialization and the Transnational Indian Elite in Bahrain

In the previous chapter I described the lifeworlds of the poorest segments of the Indian diasporic community in Bahrain. Their lives, while each a narrative of its own, fall into similar patterns: they come from the lower echelons of Indian society, and they come to Bahrain alone. “Behind them,” as the Indian transmigrants say, are wives, children, family and debt. In boarding a plane bound for the Arabian Gulf, the laborers gaze to an uncertain horizon where goals like marriage, a house, an agricultural field, or a small business are perhaps within grasp. Their tenure in the Gulf is short, or at least it begins

with the idea of a two or four year contract followed by a return home to build upon the savings collected during their time in the Gulf. Countless factors can derail these plans; upon their arrival in Bahrain, laborers enter a system in which their ability to shape their own horizon is strictly limited. Plans for a two or four year sojourn in the Gulf frequently give way to stays of eight or ten years, often under illegal status. The luckiest of them pass their time under the duress of constant work, against the backdrop of a state that is at once powerful and vague in its manifestation in their lives.

In constructing a theoretical lens by which the social sciences might begin to unpack the complex social fields wrought by the mobility of labor under the forces of contemporary capitalism, social scientists have focused almost to exclusion upon transmigrant populations spread across particular geographical polarities. Like the Indian laborers described in the previous chapter—most of whom, even while abroad, remain fixed upon their home communities in South India—the case studies that inform transnational theory typically examine lives spread across two nations. Basch, Schiller and Szanton Blanc (1994), for example, look at the institutions constructed by various groups of Caribbean and Filipino transmigrants in the United States, mostly within the greater New York City area; Smith and Guarnizo's collection (1998), while geographically diverse, nonetheless relies almost exclusively upon case studies of populations with a transmigratory endpoint in the United States; Goldring (1998) examines the social fields that encompass Las Animas, Mexico, and the transmigrant community in the Bay Area; Smith (1998) describes the formidable conduits between Ticuani, Mexico and the burgeoning Ticuanense community in Brooklyn, New York;

Matthei and Smith (1998) chart the transfer of Los Angeles gang structures through the transnational conduits binding south central Los Angeles to the Garifuna communities of the Belizean coast. Ongoing contributions to this empirical foundation arrive in ever-greater numbers (D'Alisera 2004, Laliotou 2004, Miles 2004, Sagás and Molina 2004). From this springboard, social scientists have hypothesized processes that erode the foundations of the nation-state (Appadurai 1996; Kearney 1991; Hobsbawm 1990: 182-183), explored the social fields that cross national boundaries (Basch et al. 1994; Goldring 1998), delineated a “cultural bifocality” endemic to contemporary transmigrants (Rouse 1992: 41), and periodically assessed the viability of anthropology’s territorialized notion of culture (Hannerz 1996: 19-22; King 1991: 6).

In ascertaining how the case presented here fits in this larger literature on the transnational movement of people through the circuits of global capitalism, one can certainly delineate parallels between the case of the Indian laboring class described in the previous chapter and the case studies underpinning much of this theoretical production. In the previous chapter, I described a structure of dominance, rooted in the state and manifest in the habitus of everyday interactions between transmigrant and citizen-host. My analysis concludes that, as a system, this structure binds and confines transmigrant agency in very particular ways: their movement back and forth across the transnational divide, for example, is fettered by the systemic controls exerted by a sponsorship system that ties transmigrants to an individual sponsor; their ability to move about, meet, organize, and communicate with other transmigrants is strictly monitored and controlled; their status on the island holds no promise of permanency or assimilation, and their

inability to engage the Bahraini legal system hampers recourse in the many dilemmas they encounter. An accounting of these differences points to a principal pattern in the transnational literature: while most of the case studies fit the polar model of home and away, most also focus upon migration from the global south to the global north (or from periphery to core), and therefore to particular types of states—wealthy, democratic, and nominally open societies, some of which (like the United States and Canada) have articulated an identity ostensibly based upon the assimilation and incorporation of difference.

A handful of ethnographers have begun to explore the transmigration experiences of those moving outside the west. Leichtman, for example, presents the case of the Lebanese diaspora in Senegal, arguing that the transnational canon fails to appropriately gauge the “important role colonialism has played in influencing transnational processes in other parts of the world,” an influence she describes as shaping the destinations of transmigrants, promoting particular economic hierarchies, encouraging racism, and offering or withdrawing the protections implicit in citizenship (Leichtman 2005: 666, 681).⁷⁵ Longva’s recent work examines the conception and deployment of citizenship in Kuwait, revealing the ethnocracy into which transmigrants enter (Longva 2000, 2005), while Ong describes the flexible positions negotiated by transnational Chinese in both America and Asia (Ong 1998). Gamburd’s ethnography of Sri Lankan housemaids and their time in the Gulf details the panoptic control exerted by host families over the

⁷⁵ Leichtman focuses on the fact that the US scholars largely ignore the impact of colonialism. I would add to that that they don’t consider the potential implications of non-democratic environments and alternative structures of control.

women they hire, as well as the fleeting and contingent avenues by which these women communicate with one another and with home (2000). As ethnographers have begun to examine transnational populations moving outside the global north, analysis has charted alternative forms of the state, other regimes of repression and control, and new configurations of dominance over the trans-status subjects moving between nations. These works suggest the ability to forge transnational lives can, under particular configurations of state and culture, be significantly more constrained than the models emanating from analyses of transnational flows with an endpoint in the global north. In this sense, then, the case study presented here is meant to join those looking at transnational movements outside the West (Leichtman 2005, Ong 1999, Sarker and De 2002).⁷⁶

In this chapter, I begin with Sarah Mahler's call to disaggregate transnational communities in an effort to discern the differential access and participation in transnational social fields (1998: 81-82; see also George 2000: 148-149). Using the basic bifurcation between the working and professional class described by Karen Leonard in her work with the Indian diaspora in the United Arab Emirates (2002: 214), I explore the lifeworlds and perspectives of the Indian diasporic elite in Bahrain. While both this chapter and the last are meant to complement the literature concerned with transmigration to endpoints outside the global north, I use the data here to address the fundamental geographical polarity underlying much of transnational theory. Unlike the transmigrants

⁷⁶ Here I'm building upon the ideas presented in an American Anthropological Association session that I co-chaired with Heather Hindman entitled "Movements Outside 'the West': Contemporary Issues and Current Dilemmas in Transnational Anthropology," November 2003.

portrayed in the vast majority of the literature, and unlike the Indian laborers described in the previous chapter, the Indian diasporic elite in Bahrain are, generally speaking, not caught between two places: their struggle has little to do with the dilemmas of maintaining a social field spanning Bahrain and India. Rather, the diasporic elite build and maintain social networks and social fields that are rhizomic, stretching from Bahrain back to India, but also to countless other points around the globe. Through an analysis of these networks, I suggest that we can perceive a cultural deterritorialization of a significantly different character than that represented in the literature.

As a distinct class of the Indian diaspora in Bahrain, the diasporic elite maintain social relations and an identity unmoored from particular places. Certainly part of this can be explained by the particular configurations of policy, state, and social relations in the Gulf States themselves, for even the elite are discouraged from setting down roots in the region. But there's more to it than that. Building on Falzon's notion of the imagined, deterritorialized diasporic homeland (2003), I argue that this segment of the Indian diaspora maintains an allegiance to a non-territorial transnation (Appadurai 1996: 173). In this allegiance I read the cadences of contemporary capitalism—where the diasporic imagination (in Appadurai's sense of the word) has apprehended the financescape at its pinnacle, and configured a community to mesh with its demands.

II. Lure of the Gulf

On a warm spring day in 2003, I found myself lost in the traffic circles of Saar, one of Manama's many burgeoning suburbs. I had arranged a five o'clock appointment

with George, a busy manager at a dairy plant and a fellow member of the Manama Toastmasters; after passing the nondescript factory several times, I noticed the small sign on the side of the building, and passing through the security gate, I arrived ten minutes late for the interview. George's office was piled high with the paperwork and files from his daily responsibilities, and after a long discussion about the impact of Gulf migration upon his home state of Kerala, George described his own motivations for coming to Bahrain:

I'd been working in India, in different parts of India, for about three years. And I'd been working with one of the best companies, one of the best paying companies in all of India. In spite of all my hard work and struggle when I was younger, I could only make ... not more than 100 dinars. 100 dinars, that used to be my salary, and I would work 16 hours sometimes, 20 hours, whatever it is. I was in sales, moving to different places, traveling and touring. It's a big, vast country. In sales, you have to get from one place to another, so there's a lot of travel. So my salary over that period, take the average, was about 100 dinars. Now when you come here to Bahrain, if you're lucky you can make two, three times that.

Six weeks later, at a manufacturing warehouse on the opposite side of town, I spoke with Deepali, a young professional, about her experience working in India.

So I started working in American Express in Delhi, and it was quite good, an international company and all that. But the money was so bad!... The pay there was equivalent to 50 dinars, and I was like, "what is this?" So I realized that I was living, but I was not happy. I would be sulking the whole day. I had to get up at 5:30, and change two buses to be in the office by 8:00. I'd finish at 5:00, again two buses, and reach home by 8:30, 9:00.

As George and Deepali make clear, the petroleum-rich nations of the Arabian Gulf continue to provide economic opportunities that surpass readily available positions in India. The relative pay scales of Gulf-based and Indian-based jobs are common knowledge in professional circles and figure prominently in the long term career

strategies of many of the individuals with whom I spoke. Furthermore, the lure of the Gulf draws individuals at many different points of their career—for every young professional recently arrived on the island, I met others near the end of their career: As a former officer of the Indian Navy described his strategy as he and his wife, a radiologist, approached retirement, “in two years, we could save what would take us seven or eight years in India.” Another Indian who originally left India for Oman on the eve of the 1991 Gulf War noted, at that time “for every dollar you earned in India you could earn six here in the Middle East.”

Karen Leonard has recently concluded that “[m]arket forces rather than individual agency are driving the expatriate workers in the Gulf” (2003: 156). As Deepali and George suggest, market forces *do* play a key role in many decisions to come to the Gulf. Yet in the interviews I conducted with professionals and other members of the diasporic elite, other justifications for the move abroad also figured prominently in the decision process. In general, many are seeking jobs more connected to the global finance, insurance, business, and other related arenas, all of which comprise some portion of what Appadurai calls the global financescape (Appadurai 1996). The oil wealth of the Gulf has fostered the growth of these sectors, and work in Bahrain, as the regional hub for significant portions of the Gulf’s financial and service industry, is one avenue into the world of transnational business. The economic gain associated with occupations in the sectors above is complemented by the possibility of even greater opportunities, many of which might carry the professional men and women of India beyond the Gulf. In this

sense, Gulf destinations serve as a catalyst for even greater diasporic displacements (Leonard 2003: 131).

Other reasons cited by the professionals and skilled laborers I interviewed were striking. Take the case of Shahzeb, an administrator in a higher education institution on the island. The son of a Pakistani (and Muslim) diplomat, Shahzeb grew up in India. After a controversial marriage to a Hindu Indian woman, the young couple began to look beyond the borders of either Pakistan or India for a place to begin anew. The difficulties of life in any of those places, with all the incumbent pressures of a cross-national and cross-religious marriage, were too formidable in their estimation. As they described to me, Bahrain “represented a sort of neutral ground for us. With the difficulties between Indian and Pakistan, neither place seemed ideal for settling down. Bahrain represented such a place—a neutral ground where we could begin our life anew.”

Another successful Indian administrator, Mariam, echoed this sentiment: “I came to Bahrain in 1981. I came not because I wanted to work—I just needed a change of scene. This is my second marriage. My first husband died in India. In India, when you get married ... a widow is never looked on in the same fashion as a normal person.” For Mariam, Bahrain represented a new start beyond the pressures and confines of the socially constructed role of the Indian widow.

Along these same lines, the recent rise of the Hindu/fundamentalist BJP, a political party intertwined with the increasingly polemical relations between the Muslim and Hindu populations in India, has also pushed Muslim Indians out of India. As a wealthy Indian corporate executive described, “Hyderabad ... no, India in general is no

longer a safe place for Muslims. Every year things are changing, and for Muslims it is getting worse.” Like many Indian transnationals in his economic stratum, he is looking westward for his future: he had established residency in Chicago, and at the time of my research was making preparations to move his family in the coming year. Moreover, he was no longer maintaining a household in India.

Finally, it should be noted that many members of the professional class have no reasons at all for coming to Bahrain—they were born there. Many of these second and third generation Indian transnationals are part of the historic subcommunities of the Indian diaspora. The largest and most influential are the Bhatias, the Hindu portion of the Sindh community. They were cast from their homeland in Karachi after the partition, and building upon mercantile linkages already established in the Gulf, eventually moved families and resources to Bahrain, Dubai, and the other urban ports of the region. Other groups include the Gujarati businessmen whose enterprises typically revolve around the sale of gold; the Bohri community, an Indian Muslim sect devoted to business; and the Dhobi community of laundrymen. Over the last two decades, these historic components of the diasporic community have been joined by the sons and daughters of the generation of engineers and professionals that arrived in the 1960’s and 1970’s. Together, as I described later in the chapter, they are children caught between nations. As one young woman, the daughter of a construction manager, answered my questions about her “home”: “Where am I from? It’s a very tough question. Sometimes I felt as if I was a kite, blowing between countries, from nowhere.”

III. Encounters with Power: Habitus and Informal Manifestations of Power

Walking down the street, if I see five or six Bahraini guys coming towards me, I take the other road. I just don't want to go through them—it's to that point here. If you see five or six of them coming in a group, you go around the corner and come back later ... things have happened to me once or twice. I've gotten into physical fights. One time I was parking my car, and this guy wanted to park in the same spot. He tells me to move my car, and this led to an altercation. He hit me, I hit him back. And all of the sudden his friends come, and there are ten of them. And then I thought, if I keep hitting this guy back, then ten guys are going to hit me. So I just left, and he hit me a couple of more times as I was getting away. When I got home, I realized that this was the stupidest thing I did, because I was in an alley, and these guys have no respect for—I hate to say this—but they have no respect for their lives.

Another time, I used to have an office downstairs here. And this road, it's all expat store owners—Indians, Filipinos. And what happens is this: we double park, and everybody knows everybody, they just come and ask us, and we just move the cars. So this Bahraini guy comes for the first time to the road, and my car was blocking the street. Normally a guy would come in and ask me to move it. He comes into my office, storms right past my secretary, and bangs his hand on my desk telling me to move my car. And I just lost it—I told him not to bang the table. And the next thing you know, it's a big thing, and he's called the cops. The first thing the cop asks me is this: what nationality are you? I asked him what that had to do with anything. Finally I said that I was Indian, and he took my license. Then it became another big thing. I had to get my license back, and I had to pay fines for double parking my car, which under normal circumstances in Bahrain isn't anything. I was technically wrong, but it's a law that's never enforced in Bahrain.

Incidents like this reinforce to me that the less interaction you have with Bahrainis the better.

In describing the structure of dominance in which all transmigrants dwell, I begin with an analysis of the sorts of everyday interactions between transmigrant and citizen-host described here by Anhil, a third generation merchant at the apex of the Indian diaspora in contemporary Bahrain. In laying out a strategy for transnational anthropology, Aihwa Ong argues that, “the anthropology of the present should analyze people's everyday actions as a form of cultural politics embedded in specific power

contexts” (Ong 1999: 4); my concern here is with the connection between these everyday interactions and the “specific power contexts” encountered by the diaspora as they move about the island. The character of these interactions, where violence is always possible and recourse by the transmigrant to legal and institutional frameworks are few, comprise part of what Franklin called the “informal nature of domination” transmigrants face in Bahrain (Franklin 1985: 104). Informal as it may be, the particular subjectification of the transmigrant wrought by these interactions comprises another facet of the structure of dominance I seek to describe.

Elite members of the Indian diaspora, whether recent arrivals or the children of transmigrants, envision themselves as components of a transnational financescape, a term articulated by Appadurai to describe the mysterious and rapid disposition of global capital in the contemporary world (1996: 34). As highly trained human capital, elite members of the Indian diaspora contribute to key sectors in Bahrain as engineers, doctors, managers, financiers, advertising executives, and countless other positions that the undertrained citizenry are incapable of filling (Khalaf and Al Kobaisi 1999: 284). In doing so, they find themselves in cadence with the version of nationalism widely purveyed by the Bahraini state and its citizenry, a blueprint that envisions Bahrain as the progressive hub of finance and service industries in the Gulf, a beacon of modernity in the region, and a tourist attraction constructed around the city as a site of consumption. Yet the hierarchical logic of this global financescape—the logic by which, in many cases, drew the diasporic elite from their homeland to Bahrain—coexists with a contradictory set of power relations codified in the state and manifest in the everyday interactions

between guestworker and citizen-host. In everyday interactions, even the lowliest citizen holds power over the educated and successful transmigrant. While I explore the contradictory coexistence of these two systems at length in chapter six, here my interests are in exploring the diasporic elite's experience of that contradiction. The friction of these two competing visions is evident in a continuation of the interview with Ahhil, the merchant quoted above. In exasperation, he appeals to the neoliberal logic edified in Bahrain's national vision: "I mean, I have a business. I run things! I import things into this country! I pay taxes, I export things! And there are very few Bahrainis who actually do that—I actually purchase things made in Bahrain and export them to other countries, and earn an income for Bahrain!"

Bourdieu uses the concept of *habitus* to describe the learned dispositions individuals bring to bear in social interactions. In describing the interactions between citizens and non-citizens in the petroleum-rich states of the contemporary Gulf, scholars have connected the public discourse to a "master-servant mentality" (Leonard 2003: 144), often stretching back to the particular configuration of the pearling industry's indentured servitude or to the tribal structure of the Bedouin peoples (Beaugé 1986 quoted in Longva 78). Others have connected the *habitus* of citizen/non-citizen interactions to the explosive period of modernization wrought by the discovery of oil, a particular configuration that Champion argues has resulted in a "mudir syndrome," using the Arabic word for "boss," where every citizen sees him or herself as entitled to a position of authority and command over the legions of non-citizen workers (1999: 5). In the penultimate chapter I provide an explanation for the sources, or reasons, for this particular *habitus*—an analysis that hinges

on how this habitus, and the structure of dominance as a whole—serves the citizenry. In this chapter, my interests are in explicating how transmigrants experience this habitus, in positing it as an active component of the structure of dominance in which all transmigrants live, and in demonstrating how interactions with citizens shape both individual experiences and the social topography of the diasporic community.

On an individual level, transmigrants encounter these particular forms of governance as a daily matter of course: at traffic stops and accidents—alarmingly common on the island—police commonly request the nationality of those involved as the first matter of business. Several of my informants noted that altercations often devolved into citizens shouting, “I’m a Bahraini!” Newspaper articles ubiquitously list the nationality of individuals in the course of reporting: “A Pakistani barber was reportedly deported last night after stabbing a former employer” (GDN 5/29/03); “A Bahraini was stabbed in the back in a clash between two groups of men” (GDN 7/11/03); “A Moroccan woman was attacked after accepting an offer of a lift home to Juffair from a Manama hotel... [T]he men offered her money for sex and tried to rape her when she refused. Part of her ear was bitten off in the struggle and her clothing torn, said sources” (GDN 5/18/03). In everyday interactions and in the discursive terrain of the media, individuals are described in terms that locate their relationship to the state, thereby reinforcing the bonds between what Longva describes as the ethnocratic hierarchy of state-based power and the conceptual underpinnings of modern citizenship in Bahrain (Longva 2005).

As the “informal” aspect of the governance exerted over transmigrants, the habitus of daily interactions does more than subjectify non-citizens as servants to the

state and citizenry—it also shapes the diaspora as a whole, both in spatial terms (where they live and how they use the space of the city) and in a hierarchical terms (concerning how that service relates to the vision of modernity promoted by the state). The governance of the transmigrant, in the Foucauldian sense of both direct governmental control and, more obliquely, via regimes of order, discipline, and organization, is constantly reinforced in these daily interactions. While poor and middle class members of the diaspora often live in urban enclaves—in particular neighborhoods, once Bahraini, and now abandoned to the foreign underclass—the upper segments of the diaspora often dwell in the upscale mixed neighborhoods peripheral to the city. In these locations, most of my informants noted that they had little to no interaction with Bahraini neighbors. As an Indian construction manager with an older villa in the suburb of Riffa noted, “We have never made any Bahraini friends. I’ve lived in Bahrain for so many years—23, 24 years—but I haven’t made any Bahraini friends. I don’t visit their families, and I don’t go to their festivals.” Their social activities are largely confined to the Indian restaurants, the many clubs and voluntary organizations dominated by the Indian diaspora, and the temples, mosques and churches of the diaspora.

IV: Encounters with Power: Formal

The habitus brought by citizens to their everyday interactions with non-citizen transmigrants represents a key force in the subjectification of members of the Indian diaspora—both working class and elite—as servants of the Bahraini state and its citizenry. In Wolf’s multivalenced notion of power, this roughly corresponds to

interactional power, manifest in relations between individuals, and *embodied* power, in the Nietzschean sense, that draws “attention to how persons enter into a play of power” (1999: 5). Through the deployment of this power, as an expression of habitus, the achieved differences and hierarchies wrought by the logic of global capitalism are eclipsed by the citizen/non-citizen dichotomy: while the lowly workers described in the previous chapter are pelted with stones in their short journey to the cold store, men of significant worth and accomplishment avoid Bahrainis on the street, endure constant ethnic slurs, and avoid any public or direct confrontation with citizens.

In his analysis of the state, Foucault noted that,

[R]elations of power, and hence the analysis that must be made of them, necessarily extend beyond the limits of the state. In two senses: first of all because the state, for all the omnipotence of its apparatuses, is far from being able to occupy the whole field of actual power relations, and further because the state can only operate on the basis of other, already existing power relations. The state is superstructural in relation to a whole series of power networks that invest the body, sexuality, the family, kinship, knowledge, technology and so forth (Foucault 1985, p. 64).

Without denying the certain, interlocking relationship between everyday practice and the relations of power codified in the state, in the case of Bahrain we can also delineate the opposite of Foucault’s point: the habitus deployed by citizens in their everyday interactions with transmigrant foreigners depends upon a state apparatus configured to maintain the hegemony of citizen over non-citizen, a habitus that is part of a structural rebuke against the neoliberal logic of the global financescape. In other words, the habitus that citizens bring to their everyday interactions with non-citizens, and in that sense, the governance exercised over the diaspora as a whole, is premised upon a series of structural arrangements that formally reinforce the power of the state and its citizenry over the

transmigrants on the island. Before turning to the agency transmigrants strategically deploy to minimize risk in this uncertain environment, I will first review the multiple facets of the institutional, bureaucratic and legal frameworks that, together, comprise this structure of dominance.

As described in the previous chapter, the risks and uncertainties of life in Bahrain often coalesce around the sponsorship, or *kafala* system. Unlike the working class, most members of the diasporic elite retain control of their passport. However, their *kafeel*, whether an individual or a corporate entity, still mediates their relationship to the state. The power of the *kafeel* is invested in a series of procedures and documents, including the work contract, which specifies a particular period of time (typically two or three years) at a particular salary; a no-objection certificate (NOC) which clears the transmigrant to enter the country and take a job; and a residence permit (RP), which is associated with a particular employer and a particular job. The following letter to the editor illustrates some of the practical and bureaucratic dilemmas faced by the professional and elite members of the Indian diaspora:

I have been working at a local further education institute as a senior lecturer in travel and tourism for almost fifteen years. During this period I am happy and proud to state that I played a pivotal role in training hundreds of Bahrainis sponsored by the Labour Ministry to take up jobs in various airlines and travel agencies. On December 30, 2003, I was asked by the owner to sign a document stating that I received all my dues from the institute since my date of joining in February 1989. Since I refused, my salary for December 2003 was not paid. I threatened to take the matter to court. This type of tactic has been tried several times on me but I never succumbed to the owner's coercion.

On December 30, 2003 at 6pm the owner convened a meeting where he verbally and in writing promised to pay BD 2,000 (\$5306) immediately and BD 1,000 (\$2656) by mid-2004. This amount, being only one-tenth of what I should receive, was turned down. On December 31, 2003, I lodged a complaint at the

Labour Ministry and since no settlement was reached, they passed the dispute on to the courts. On January 6, 2004 the owner sent me two invoices to the tune of BD 16,800 (\$44,576) being sponsorship charges. A grave violation. All these matters were brought to the attention of the Indian Embassy.

The act was merely to intimidate me to sign the document. Six months have passed and I am without a job. My family is here and my daughter goes to school. I am living by begging and borrowing. Many institutes have come forward to hire my services. They all do have valid work permits and are willing to change my sponsorship. The major impediment, I need permission to work. When I approach the Labour Ministry with this request, they have directed me to the Ministry of Justice and on approaching the Ministry of Justice, I am directed to the Labour Ministry. So between these ministries I am being sandwiched for no fault of mine. I will be more than happy to leave the island if my dues are settled in full according to the labour laws for the private sector.

I strongly feel that only the press can play a role in bringing my plight to the attention of concerned authorities. Signed, Jacob Samuel” (*Gulf Daily News*, September 10, 2004)

Jacob’s dilemma points to the vulnerabilities even well-placed individuals face in the difficult working environment of contemporary Bahrain. If we take his calculations at face value, his employer had accumulated a debt to Jacob of nearly \$80,000. After resisting his employer’s attempts to erase this debt, he appealed to the institutional powers on the island. My informants on the island were clear about the Indian Embassy’s inability and/or unwillingness to negotiate these sorts of dilemmas with the Bahraini government, and Jacob found himself “sandwiched” between the Ministry of Labor and the Ministry of Justice. While a handful of my informants had carried cases through the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs to the courts, none had found success in this venture.⁷⁷ As one Indian individual told me, “nobody I know has ever received a good

⁷⁷ One wealthy merchant described a successful case waged against an Emirati business partner who attempted to take over the business. Although the Indian merchant received a successful verdict in his case, he noted that they still hadn’t collected a single dirham (the

judgment from the court.” Another, summing up the situation, noted that, “there aren’t really any laws” in Bahrain, part of a larger point he made regarding the lack of enforcement of existing statutes. Longva, who spent many hours of her fieldwork in the courthouses of Kuwait, concluded that nearly all of the “Non-Kuwaitis, finally, had no absolute legal autonomy. They were all subordinate to their Kuwait employers/sponsors in what was to them one of the most important aspects of their lives, namely, work” (Longva 1997: 129). This matches the perception of the Indian community I encountered, and it is this perception—as much as the reality of the situation—that keeps non-citizens from engaging the legal framework on the island.

Also of note is the relationship between the *kafala* system and the labor market. Jacob notes that, “many other institutes have come forward to hire my services.” Because transmigrants are bound to particular jobs, and because their ability to switch jobs depends upon the goodwill and acquiescence of their *kafeel*, the market for labor is far from free. As bonded labor, the state-based structure of dominance fetters their ability to act as free agents on the labor market.

The state-based structure of dominance also finds traction along gender lines. Many of the professionals arrive alone—in the parlance of the diaspora, they are “in front” of families that await the necessary paperwork and visas in order to join them in Bahrain. Individuals seeking a “family visa” must, again, work through their *kafeel* to obtain such permissions, and several of my informants reported this as another fulcrum of

Emirati currency) as a result of the judgment. Another merchant noted that he has had some success collecting on the numerous bad checks he receives from Bahrainis, but the process typically takes five years.

abuse. They must also prove that they earn over 250BD per month, the state-mandated minimum for those wishing to bring their families to Bahrain, and a figure barely large enough to cover the expenses of maintaining a family in Bahrain, including the cost of the diasporic communities' private schools (which follow the Indian curriculum). Wives, sons and daughters also face numerous difficulties in obtaining employment on the island. As another letter to the GDN described:

My wife has both an NOC from my sponsor as well as a job offer from a company who is providing sponsorship. We do not have any children. But unfortunately after dozens of visits to Immigration by the company's PRO the transfer from my family visa to my wife's potential employer's visa is rejected. The reason specified was "Transfer from family to work is only possible if position in work permit is teacher, executive secretary or nurse." My wife's occupation does not fall in either of these categories. I would like to have GDNPR [General Directorate of Nationality, Passports and Residence] opinion on above as this is a crucial phase of life for my wife. She has excellent qualifications and experience and the law saying she cannot work even if she gets a job and sponsorship will shatter her dreams. I would like to know if this is really a law?

And here is the reply from the GDNPR spokesperson:

We thank the reader for his complimentary comments. We would like to confirm that transfers from a family visa to a work visa are only possible through GDNPR if the job category is teacher, nurse or executive secretary. The only possible alternative for the reader's wife is for her prospective employer to approach the Ministry of Labour for a Local Transfer as it may be possible for her to transfer directly from one sponsor to another on a local transfer. (*Gulf Daily News*, November 19, 2004)

While the risks associated with the *kafala* system parallel those of the Indian underclass, merchants and business owners face a distinct set of risks unique to their economic position. Bahraini law requires that all business ventures have at least one Bahraini owner. This rule has resulted in the formation of a class of "silent" or "sleeping" partners amongst the Bahraini citizenry who lend their name to the business registrations

of foreign-born entrepreneurs. Leonard, working with the Indian population in Kuwait and the Emirates, notes that “these working relationships are typically quite nominal, with sponsors taking commissions from many foreigners annually but not participating in the business” (Leonard 2003: 138). In my discussions with the professional and entrepreneurial community, the established rate for this relationship was 100 BD [\$265] per month. However, unlike the conditions reported by Leonard in the United Arab Emirates, in Bahrain these relationships are prone to abuse, and many of the professionals and entrepreneurs I met in the Indian diaspora related stories of financial disaster encountered in the silent partner relationship. Ahmed, an Indian Muslim, briefly described his own experience with a Bahraini partner: “I started a business here a few years back, but it collapsed. Once it became successful, the sleeping partner stole it out from under me. Once he saw that the money was being made through my efforts, he took it from me.” Conversely, information about good silent partners travels quickly within the diaspora. Nonetheless, the relationship is inherently fraught with complications wrought by the citizen/non-citizen polarity, and reinforced by the difficulty non-citizens encounter in accessing the court system.

A small number of individuals in the diaspora escape some portion of these vulnerabilities through gaining citizenship or residence permits, making Bahrain an unusual exception to the norm of the Gulf, where it is generally stated that transmigrants can never become citizens (Falzon 2003: 675, Leonard 2003: 139).⁷⁸ Bahrain has recently

⁷⁸ Anh Longva, in her ethnography of guestworkers and citizens in Kuwait, does make note of the periodic loopholes in naturalization policy through which foreigners have become citizens (Longva 2000: 185).

opened channels for applications for citizenship; a small number of prominent businessmen with longstanding ties in the Kingdom have successfully applied for citizenship. The explicit requirements include twenty five years of residence (fifteen for those of Arab descent), although many of my contacts in the Indian community noted that some of the prominent businessmen who had achieved citizenship did not meet this requirement.⁷⁹ The application itself is followed by a series of interviews where applicants are expected to demonstrate a facility with Arabic. Individuals also reported that large fees are involved, although the amounts described to me varied from 20,000 BD to upwards of 70,000 BD. Long delays are also the norm. As one individual noted, “I began the application process three years ago. They called me for interviews—they’ve interviewed me twice. The last one was a year ago, and they said they’d call me again. They haven’t called since, so I’m just waiting.”

Another prosperous merchant described his experience: after beginning the application process, they requested his passport. With a business that required constant travel back and forth to India, he rescinded his application after three months as he needed his passport to travel. Although Bahraini citizenship provides some security against the uncertainties of the future business climate on the island, it is a path only available to the wealthy. Moreover, it does little to address the ethnocentric underpinnings of the concept of citizenship prevalent in the Gulf region. As one Indian merchant noted,

For the Muslims, maybe citizenship is a possibility, but for the rest of us, it’s a different ballgame.... If I go to the market, to the *souq* and I see you, I know you’re a westerner. If somebody sees me, he says, okay, an Indian. If I take a

⁷⁹ These requirements are spelled out in the Bahraini Nationality Law of September 16, 1963.

Bahraini passport, my face says that I'm an Indian. The people will still not take me as a Bahraini. They will treat me as an Indian.

My well-placed informants amongst the Indian community reported that the number of Indian nationals who successfully obtained citizenship could be counted on one hand. Although the number of citizens of Indian origin is very small, many of the older families on the island possess a "CR," or certificate of residence, in their own name. Obtained before the 1950s, these permanent residence permits allow members of the Indian diaspora to be "self-sponsored," and thereby escape the power-laden relationship with a citizen-*kafeel*. For the remaining great majority, however, negotiating the complexities of residence permits, work permits, permits for family members, and contract renewals is a constant struggle.

In this section I have charted the formal manifestations of the structure of dominance in the lives of the Indian diaspora. Like the laboring diasporic class, the habitus of the diasporic elite's everyday interactions with the citizenry (as informal manifestations of this structure of dominance) are premised upon a formal and institutionalized set of laws, procedures, and practices. I have focused specifically on the visa regulations and the associated permits, all of which channel power through the citizen-*kafeel*. Unlike the working class Indians described in the previous chapter, professionals and merchants face less comprehensive risks in coming to Bahrain. While the amounts of money involved may be much larger than those described by the workers in the previous chapter, few professionals incur debts of the relative magnitude of the working class. Nonetheless, they are susceptible to the powers and inequities of a foreign system, a fact directly tied to their trans-status. And while they may bring a variety of

strategies to the table, none overcome the habitus of everyday interactions with citizens in which the dominance of citizen over non-citizen is constantly reiterated. The fettered agency they demonstrate in dealing with these issues is often insufficient, and insecurity about the future in Bahrain is a common trope in their conversations. As a result, the diasporic elite forge contingency plans as a response to the uncertain future. In the next section, I explore this strategic transnationalism in depth.

V. Strategic Transnationalism

The powers of the state form a structure under which all foreign non-nationals must exist. In large part, this power manifests itself as a chronic uncertainty about the future. For the professional class of the diaspora, the structural of dominance in which they live their lives, and the uncertainty therein produced, rests upon the policy environment constructed by the Kingdom, through which the flow of transmigrants is managed. The keystone to this policy environment is the denial of citizenship to the transmigrants, a policy common to all the Gulf states. For the great majority of the Indian diaspora in Bahrain, citizenship and assimilation are out of the question. At the same time—and unlike the other petroleum-rich nations of the Gulf Cooperation Council—Bahrain has established a small window through which foreigners can apply (and occasionally receive) citizenship. While I describe this process in the sections that follow, few of the Indian transmigrants have the desire, financial resources, and/or personal connections to enter into the process by which citizenship is obtained. As non-citizens, then, the great majority of the professional class live by the whims of the state: their tenure on the island is always under threat of revocation; the positions they hold are

subject to their individual sponsors and to the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs which can, as its purview, revoke or fail to renew residence and work permits.

This vulnerability takes form in the general directive of ‘Bahrainization.’ In its simplest reading, Bahrainization is the nomenclature of the Kingdom’s efforts to replace foreign workers with citizens. The rudiments of this suite of policies were in place in the early 1970s. At the same time, Bahrainization comprises an ever-evolving set of policies and directives, often contradictory, that mandate particular ratios of citizen employees to transmigrants, often in particular sectors of the economy. For example, in the mid 1990s the state mandated that all taxi drivers on the island must be Bahraini nationals. During my fieldwork on the island, business owners reported that in many sectors one must hire one citizen for every transmigrant employed; hotels track their citizen-to-non-citizen ratios, and those with the largest portion of citizens receive awards from the government. New Bahrainization policies are frequently announced in the newspapers of the island, and while infrequently codified in law or comprehensively enforced, they nonetheless destabilize the livelihoods of the foreign workers on the island. Foreign entrepreneurs and businessmen are never sure if the laws will allow them to continue working on the island; capital reinvested in the business is always a risk, for a single edict can close the door on particular sectors of the economy. During my time on the island (2002-2003), for example, the new Minister of Labor and Social Affairs announced a directive of 100% Bahrainization for the Ministry itself, which included the Bahrain Training Institute, my sponsor institution and home to a large staff of expatriate instructors on multi-year contracts. Similarly, a year after my departure, the Kingdom announced the plans to fully

Bahrainise “car sales showrooms, supermarkets, travel agents and furniture stores” by 2006 (GDN May 16, 2004).

With the future of the transnational presence in the Bahraini workforce always uncertain, the active transnational connections established and maintained by members of the Indian diaspora are more than an attempt to keep in touch with the culture of their homeland—these connections are essential components of their livelihood strategies, active networks meant to balance the uncertainties of life outside the Indian state and, more specifically, the vulnerabilities unique to the nations of the Arabian Gulf. While many of the families I spoke with maintain a presence in India, most have also extended their networks westward. Frequently these networks are an extension of historic transnational familial and social networks established in the colonial and postcolonial era—rebuilding, for example, connections with portions of the family that found their way to colonial Africa under British rule or, alternatively, to England itself, where many of the former Indian colonial bureaucrats obtained citizenship.

In the two sections below, I present two vignettes describing the particular circumstances and histories of two different members of the diasporic elite.

Mariam's Story

Mariam's family hails from Goa, the former Portuguese colony on India's western coast. Her father worked for the British colonial administration, a post which eventually carried him to colonial Uganda, where Mariam and three of her siblings were born. Her father retired from that position and moved back to India, but was unable to secure

sufficient employment to feed the family, so he returned to Africa. The three youngest children, including Mariam, remained in Goa with their mother to finish their schooling. When Idi Amin came to power in Uganda, her siblings, sensing trouble, began to move their money to Canada—at that time, Mariam noted, “Canada was still raw—they wanted people.” One brother stayed behind in Africa and lost everything, and later went to Canada as a refugee.

Mariam married in Goa and planned a life in India. She and her husband moved about India in search of better work, but after the untimely death of her husband she returned to Goa to work as a teacher. Goa is a conservative city, she noted, and the life of a widow is not an easy one: “A widow is never looked on in the same fashion as a normal person,” she noted. With her family spread around the globe, Mariam began to consider other options. Her sister suggested she come to Bahrain. Although she had never been to Bahrain, it was like a homecoming: “we’re a big family,” she described, “and we’re all separated. We’re all out, some in Canada, wherever else, in Africa. My sister was here [in Bahrain], so coming to Bahrain, I felt like I was returning to my family, you know?” Her sister helped arrange employment for Mariam at one of the large embassies on the island.

After some years in Bahrain, Mariam remarried a Goan transmigrant she met on the island. They are uncertain about how long they’ll remain in Bahrain. Her daughter is in school at the American University in Dubai, but intends to continue her studies in the U.S. Her parents and siblings are also naturalized British citizens. Three of her siblings are “out” – a term she used to describe their presence in Canada, and the remainder are “here,” meaning in Bahrain or India. When I noted that she used “here” to refer to both

Bahrain and India, she replied, “I know, I know! It’s because we’re so close to Bahrain—Bahrain is so close to India, we feel we are there. It’s just like India here!” Her brothers in Canada have children now, most of whom have married Canadians. They still maintain a house in Goa—“we have our own place—you have to have one! In case you’re thrown out of Bahrain, you have to have a roof over your head,” a common enough practice, but not one shared by all members of the diasporic elite.

For Mariam, Bahrain represents one juncture in her family’s long transnational history. Through her familial relations, she maintains contacts with her home city in India, with the United Kingdom, fleetingly with Africa, and most strongly with Canada. Her daughter, while currently in the United Arab Emirates, plans on relocating to the United States, thereby establishing a new beachhead in the extended family’s geographical distribution. Mariam’s job in Bahrain is a good one—her position at a western embassy provides an additional buffer against the tides of Bahrainization. At the same time, her husband’s position in an advertising firm is more precarious, for it’s the very sort of position that the government is seeking to ‘Bahrainize.’ The network of family and friends, established over the course of a lifetime, provide them with the opportunity to weigh infractions of the Bahraini state against the costs of relocating to one of these other destinations.

Farid’s Story

In the final decade of the nineteenth century, Farid’s great grandfather, a Bohri Muslim from the westernmost Indian state of Gujarat, embarked on a pilgrimage, or Haj,

to Mecca. The journey by ship and land took the better part of three months each way, and including the two months he intended to stay in Mecca, his sojourn lasted nearly eight months. After a stop at Muscat at the entrance to the Gulf and passage through the straits of Hormuz, the ship anchored in the shallow bay between Muharraq and Manama, the two principal islands of Bahrain. There, before journeying onward to Mecca, Farid's great-grandfather found a busy port and market, and a British/Indian colonial bureaucracy actively seeking merchants and traders from points east.

Returning from his pilgrimage, Farid's great-grandfather began to plan for the move to Bahrain, and after ten years of preparation, he arrived in 1902. His brother eventually joined him, and the two—shuttling back and forth between Bombay and Bahrain—profited as merchant traders of various necessities. The brothers' three sons eventually took over the business. Like the first generation of transmigrant merchants, the three brothers shuttled back and forth between Bombay and Bahrain every two or three years. One brother managed the business, the second, either in transit or in Bahrain, was brought up to speed, and the third cared for the families and properties in Bombay. One of the three brothers, a reckless spendthrift who, when alone in Bahrain, would inevitably purchase the latest model Mercedes or an American-made Harley Davidson motorcycle, was eventually pushed out of the business and permanently relocated to Bombay where he was given a small piece of property to manage.

The two brothers now controlled the business in Bahrain. In the years that followed, one brother's son fell in love with the other brother's daughter, and subsequently married against the wishes of their parents. Farid was the new couple's

firstborn son, and within a year of his birth in 1966 the couple moved to Bahrain. Initially they lived with their parents in the “joint family” tradition of India, in a flat in the historic central *souq* of downtown Manama. Farid’s father opened a haberdashery on one of the narrow thoroughfares of the *souq*, all under a business license acquired before regulations required a Bahraini partner. This means he and his family are “self-sponsored.” Today, Farid and his wife run the same store his father built decades ago, and he has several warehouses and a small office, all of which are located near the original business.

The business is profitable, but Farid remains insecure in Bahrain. Additional businesses that he’s opened over the years require a Bahraini “sleeping partner,” and while the initial agreement is often for 100 BD a month, the partners often increase their demands once a business shows a profit. As Farid noted, “He [the sleeping partner] comes and tells you he wants 500 BD, and you have no choice. You have to give it to him. Otherwise he’ll just pack you off. Your whole existence in Bahrain depends on him.” It’s a constant threat, and he’s avoided attempted takeovers by loading threatened businesses with debt. And while he has the license for the haberdashery, he is not a permanent resident. He still has to renew his residence permit every two years.

Farid considered getting a Bahraini passport. Through a well-placed local contact, he weighed the option of paying 20,000 BD for a Bahraini passport, calculating that he would then be able to save hundreds of dinars per month on the businesses with sleeping partners. Instead, however, he began moving his resources to Canada. As he described, “it wasn’t easy. I had to do a lot of running around, but I got my [Canadian] passport. So if I get kicked out of here—and that could happen, because there really aren’t any laws

here—if they did revoke my residence permit, there are no courts I could go to or anything like that. It would just be done ... but now I know I can go to Canada, and I'm relatively comfortable there. I could start a business, do something, get a job.... It's a safety net. At least in the back of my mind, that part is safe. I mean, it was a big thing for me. You might not understand."

As a third-generation Indian transmigrant, Farid's connection to Bahrain is significant. His businesses represent a significant financial resource built over several generations. Moreover, the business license he inherited provides his cornerstone business—the haberdashery—with a degree of insulation against the vulnerability wrought by the *kafeel* and sleeping partner system. Nonetheless, the tenuousness of his existence in Bahrain, illustrated by his inability to use the state-based legal system and his distrust of the mercurial Central Population Register (which issues the residence permits), led him to procure citizenship in Canada.⁸⁰

Aihwa Ong uses the term flexible citizenship "to refer especially to 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). While both Farid and

⁸⁰ As he described the process of procuring citizenship, "That just means money – it only means money. They don't care who you are. They just want money. Show us this much money, you get it. Don't have the money? You don't get it. Let's face it. Getting a visa to America or Europe, in the end of the day, at the end of the whole thing, the criteria is money. They are looking to see if this person is going to come back or not. So the criteria they use is – does he have a business here? Does he have money? Does he have a bank account? Does he have the ties to bring him back? And most of those ties are money."

Mariam generally fit this model, I have used the term strategic transnationalism as a means of downplaying the importance of citizenship to their strategic geographical calculations. Although citizenship remains one important variable in their strategic planning, only a small handful of the Indian diaspora actually have citizenship in Bahrain. Instead, like Farid, with citizenship in Canada, or Mariam, with citizenship in the U.K. and India, the diasporic elite build transnational networks to mitigate the vulnerability of non-citizens to the structure of dominance imposed by the Bahraini state. In this calculus, the diasporic elite seek to benefit from the opportunities in Bahrain: as a primary locus in the global financescape, Bahrain is dotted with transnational corporations that serve the more conservative surrounding nations. These opportunities, combined with the generally higher remuneration than similar positions in India, make work in the Gulf a lucrative, if risky, venture for the Indian diasporic elite. In responding to the dominance exerted in the local milieu, they build upon historic networks forged in the colonial and postcolonial era—transnational networks that connect them to multiple continents. They also forge new networks that engage global capitalism in multiple territories and venues.

VI. Perspectives on the Homeland

Unlike the social fields of the working class—most of which are spatially polar—the diasporic elite bring more complex and extended social networks to bear on the transnational realm. In the previous section, I argued that this fundamental fact can largely be attributed to the insecurities wrought by the structure of dominance into which

transmigrants arrive. Through both formal and informal mechanisms, the Bahraini state and its citizenry maintains its hegemony over the large transnational populations through structural arrangements that promote vulnerability and through a discursive terrain that asserts and affirms the dominance of citizens over the non-citizens in their midst.

Members of the diasporic working class, described in the previous chapter, have relatively fewer resources to work within this structure of dominance. Their social fields, stretching between Bahrain and India, are heavily focused on returning remittances to their respective homelands and building a better life there. Members of the diasporic elite, however, have more resources at their disposal: through historic social and familial networks wrought in the colonial and early post-colonial period, they counter their vulnerability to the state-based structure of dominance in Bahrain with a strategic transnationalism that transcends the India/Gulf dichotomy. Family members, acquaintances, and the corporations for which they work connect them with multiple spaces around the globe. Their physical presence in Bahrain obscures the fact that the island is but one node in a network of social fields that stretch well beyond both the small island and India itself.

In this section, I explore the diasporic elite's perceptions and experiences in the homeland.⁸¹ In the diasporic literature, the homeland traditionally plays a paramount role

⁸¹ It is difficult to gauge the size of the Indian diasporic elite, particularly as the Bahraini census aggregates all Asian transmigrants. The 2001 census reported a total of 205,626 Asian transmigrants on the island. It is generally agreed that the Indian population is the largest component of the Asian community. The same census reports that 32,662 individuals of Asian descent reported their reason of residence on the island as "with family." This number, doubled to include spouses, serves as a basic proxy for the total size of the Asian diasporic elite, for only those with substantial incomes can afford to

as both a source of identity and a geographical tether for communities dispersed from their territory of origin (Safran 1991). Configured around the model of the Jewish population, and later building upon the experiences of the Armenian, Greek, and African populations separated from their homeland, the concept of diaspora existed in dialectic with that of the homeland which, inevitably, played a central role in the articulation of diasporic culture (Safran 1991; Elazar 1986; Diaspora 2002: 2; Butler 2001: 202). As Butler states, “the homeland anchors diasporan identity” (Butler 2001: 205), and diasporas maintain “strong sentimental and material links with their countries of origin—the homelands” (Sheffer 1986: 3; see also Safran 1991: 83).⁸²

The original prominence of the homeland in diaspora studies lies in stark contrast to more recent scholarship. Clifford, for example, has argued that the centrality of the homeland in the definition of diaspora is suspect:

I have already stressed, for example, that the transnational connections linking diasporas need not be articulated primarily through a real or symbolic homeland—at least not to the degree that Safran implies. Decentered, lateral connections may be as important as those formed around a teleology of origin/return (Clifford 1995: 306).

Falzon, in his analysis of the Sindhi diaspora, argues that dispersal is “the single most determinant element of their collective identity” (Falzon 2003: 679), and that the importance of lateral connections exceeds that of the connection to the homeland (Falzon

bring spouses and children to the island. Keeping in mind that this total (approximately 64,000) includes Indians, Pakistanis, Filipinos, Bangladeshis, and smaller communities from other South Asian nations, we can roughly estimate the size of the Indian diasporic elite to be in the tens of thousands.

⁸² Basch et al. (1994) focus on transnational social fields and argue that their creation and maintenance is due to the need for family reproduction in the face of insecurity, social exclusion in the countries of origin, and racialized exclusion in the U.S. (see also Goldring 1998: 168).

2003: 665). Both Falzon and Appadurai focus on the homeland as an imagined bond or connection, part of a larger identity project (Appadurai 1996: 38, 49; Falzon 2003). In the four brief sections that follow I examine the experiential aspects of the diasporic elite and its connection to the homeland.

Reproducing India

In his study of the West Indian diaspora in New York City, Milton Vickerman argues that the replication of the West Indian homeland in the enclaves of the boroughs has been so effective—reaching a “critical mass”—that members of the diaspora effectively learn and immerse themselves in the homeland culture without ever returning home (Vickerman 2002: 351). In Bahrain, many individuals of the diasporic elite made similar arguments about their experience in Bahrain. As an Indian-born English instructor at one of the training facilities on the island noted, “I would never want to leave India for a strange land. And Bahrain doesn't feel like a strange country. First of all, it's pretty close to India, so it's easy to go there when you have to or you want to. And [whispering] there's so many Indians here!" Or, as a Tamilian business manager of a large electronics store noted,

I feel as if I'm living in my own home country, my own home town.... And there are so many Indian families around you. There are weekly gatherings, parties, club activities. You're never in isolation. You're always with your own people. You don't feel any different. I get my vegetables. I get my magazines. I get my satellite TV channels from India.

In some sense, fundamental class issues underpin the ability of the diasporic elite's ability to replicate Indian culture in the context of Bahrain. Because they are not in an enclave, but instead distributed throughout the various neighborhoods comprising Manama and its

suburbs, their ability to get Indian vegetables from the market, to join and drive to and from the social clubs and parties, to drive to the small number of churches, mosques, and temples on the island, or to pay for the satellite television—are all contingent upon their income level and, also, upon a work schedule that includes time off in the evenings and on the weekends.

At the same time, their interests in establishing and maintaining some modicum of Indian culture on the island are more intense. Unlike the laborers described in the last chapter, the diasporic elite do not typically come to Bahrain for a few short years. Nor do they come alone. With families in tow, their interests in having some modicum of Indian culture on the island are one component of their desire to impart a cultural identity to their children. Although this issue remains a dilemma for many of the diasporic elite, they generally agree that the Indian schools (which follow the Indian curriculum) and other social activities allow their children to ‘feel’ Indian. As a Bohri Muslim and father of two described:

I don't have to work too hard to inform my children that they are Indian, because they already know—they go to the Indian school. They are studying in the Asian school, which is the Indian curriculum. They are exposed to the Indian way of teaching, and they are taught about India right from the beginning. Of course, I also tell them that we are Indians. We are still Indians anyway. They are attached to India—they look forward to going to India for holidays and all that. My son was born in India, but I brought him here when he was a month old. And then my second child, my daughter, she was born here. But still, even if I ask them today, would you like to go to India? Oh yes, very much, because they look forward to meeting their aunties and all that, their uncles and their children. But if I ask them if they want to stay there, they say no. They like the lifestyle here.

Through these comments, we can see the outline of Vickerman’s argument—that some form of “critical mass” has been attained. For recent arrivals, this critical mass yields

some semblance of the India they left, and fosters the notion of Manama as a diasporic satellite of Indian culture. At the same time, however, many of the individuals I interviewed expressed concerns about the rendition of Indian culture predominant in Bahrain. As the children described above noted, they prefer the lifestyle in Bahrain, suggesting that the diasporic culture in Bahrain is more than a copy of that in the homeland. The replication of Indian culture in Bahrain, while bearing superficial resemblance to that of the homeland, nonetheless occurs over a set of social and economic relations that result in a much different experience for the diasporic subject. In the following sections I analyze the contradictions nested in this singular notion of Indian culture, arguing that the social relations of production and the structure of dominance in place in Bahrain yields significant differences in the structure of diasporic Indian society and the cultural experience of diasporic transmigrants.

Other Perspectives on the Homeland

Although many members of the diasporic elite pointed to the strong parallels between the culture they left and the culture they encountered in the Indian community in Bahrain, trips back and forth often clarified in them the differences between the context of their diasporic existence and that of the homeland. Businessmen and merchants, while often critical of the insecurities of doing business in Bahrain, were also quite clear about the difficulties of conducting business in India. As one merchant described,

If today you told me to go back and settle in India, I wouldn't want to do it. One reason is that I'm not crooked. I don't know the dirty business. Fortunately I've been brought up in a very stable merchant environment [in Bahrain]. We like to do straightforward business.... In Bombay, there's too much taxation, too many

loopholes and legalities. One job, it takes days and days. You go to the telephone company, and the guy is not there, or something like that. The whole system is tedious. And like I said, we've been living here, doing business here for a long time in a straightforward manner. And there, in India, life is very hectic. You have to run from here to there, everywhere. It all takes a lot of time, whereas here in Bahrain it doesn't.

Or, as another noted,

If you know about how things are there, you have many problems there that are not existent here, like problems with water, electricity. The water there keeps coming off and on. There is a lot of pollution, which creates diseases. So people think ... the quality of life here is much better. So the impression they have is good, and that's all they want to talk about—how is life there, what is your life like? They are fascinated by us. For us, we don't find this extraordinary, but for them, they do.”

The quality of diasporic life in Bahrain often exceeds that of life in India, and occurs against a backdrop of a city that is modern, relatively clean, and efficient. Moreover, the abject poverty of India has no corollary in Bahrain. For the second and third generation of the diaspora, the return to the homeland can often be an eye-opening experience. As Sunil, a young urban professional, described:

In '84 when I went, it shocked me. It really shocked me. You come down in the airplane, and there are people bathing in the road. Entire generations living there. I remember women and families taking a bath on the road through the hydrant. I asked my friends, I remember, “what is this?” And they said, “it's okay, you'll get used to it.” And I said, “I don't want to get used to it!” This is not something you want to get used to. This is not a rule. This is an exception. But they used to find this quite weird about me, that I was getting educated about these issues. So that's one aspect that really bothered me.

For individuals who have spent most or all of their life in diaspora, even the basics of an urban life in India can be confounding. As Deepa, a young professional woman, described her trip back to Delhi: “I didn't even know how to sit in a rickshaw, I didn't even want to talk because he would know I wasn't from there, and he would just

take me anywhere, so I used to just give him a piece of paper with the name of the place I wanted to go.”

Although the diasporic community in Bahrain have constructed a socio-cultural context that is, in many ways, similar to that of the homeland, the experiences of the elite—and particularly the second and third generation of the diasporic elite—reveals that fundamental differences underpin the superficial similarities between diasporic and homeland culture. For merchants and businessmen, these differences were commonly described in terms of the efficiency of the business climate. For others, returning home for vacation, education, or vocation, their experiences on return trips home clarified how different their conception of being Indian really was. In the next section, I consider these experiences in detail.

Identities and the diasporic return

In much of the literature on transnationalism and diaspora, the return trips to the homeland are portrayed as important episodes for individuals to reconnect with the culture and lifeways of the place from which they come. For those Indians in Bahrain who have spent the better portion of their life away from India, however, these return trips often reinforce just how different they are.

Anhil's story

Anhil was born in the Indian state of Maharashtra in 1965. His father departed for a job in Bahrain just before he was born, and after a four year absence he returned for his family in 1969. They traveled separately back to Bahrain—the family boarded a ship in the port of Bombay for the week long journey to the upper reaches of the Arabian Gulf. His father met them at the port and led them to the small flat he had obtained in the center of Manama, in the same building that at the time housed the Indian school. Of his childhood, Anhil recalls that, “for us, we were just Indians. It didn’t make much

difference if you were Maharati or Malayalee, for example ... it didn't bother us. At school we just had English and Hindi." As teenagers, they used to hang out at the British Council building where they had a coffee shop, video games and free movies every week.

After completing the 12th grade at the Indian School in Bahrain, Anhil decided to return to India for higher studies. Like many of the students from elsewhere, he bunked in a hostel. "There were two others from Bahrain, a couple of others from Africa—Indians from Africa, Dubai, Kuwait, some Mauritians, and a few Arabs and Bahrainis.... We hardly interacted with the day scholars because we just couldn't connect with them. And most of our girlfriends were from the same hostels—we could understand their problems." His encounters with India-born students became more difficult with the passage of time. In 1984, he recalls, a right-wing political group chafed at the multi-cultural and multi-ethnic character of Bombay, asserting that the city was for Maharatis only. Maharati by origin but raised in Bahrain, Anhil found himself uncomfortably enmeshed in these local politics:

"For me, being an expat all my life, I just couldn't connect with that. I couldn't see the logic of it. They would try and convince me that I should try to take their side of it, but even if I agreed with it, I would be a hypocrite, because in Bahrain we have Bahrainization, and suddenly I'm supposed to support a cause like that? It just doesn't make any sense. And besides that, I just couldn't connect with most of those people. Here in Bahrain, we're recognized as Indians. I was just an Indian. I didn't realize that there were other aspects of my Indianness. For example, do I need to be a Maharati? I'm a Maharati Indian. I'm a Christian Indian. Then I'm an English-speaking Indian. There are different layers of Indianness, and in Indian I was supposed to draw on these.... So I closed myself out. I didn't want to get involved, and I even stopped speaking Maharati to anyone there, because when I did people would ask me what caste I was. And that always came as a big shock! In the history books we had always learned of caste as something historical, something which is dead and gone. Suddenly people are asking me my caste! It would jolt me. And there were lots of these issues."

In the final months of his undergraduate work, his longing for "home"—meaning Bahrain—was overwhelming. He remembers watching the film "The Mummy," and despite its pulpyness, it stirred his longing to return to the deserts of the Middle East. And that same semester, as Iraq invaded Kuwait, politically radical students at the school found intellectual pathways to support Saddam's battle against the monarchies of the Gulf and the American hegemon lurking behind them. For Anhil, however, his people—conceived as both citizens and foreigners in Bahrain—were under direct threat. Weary of his time in India, he quickly returned to the island upon completing his degree.

After a long sojourn in Bahrain, Anhil again tried his luck in India, this time in the booming technological hub of Bangalore. He found work as a copy editor in an advertising agency. Over several months on the job he began to perceive the fundamentalism of the Hindu senior management at the firm, and as a Christian Maharati,

he felt increasingly out of place. His supervisors viewed him with suspicion, and over time he began to map the inequalities of the workplace, finally discovering that the Hindu messenger boy made more than him. The poverty and bureaucratic corruption of the city began to grate on him. “I thought the sooner I get out of this place, the better. I know I don’t sound very patriotic saying this. And while I might not sound so patriotic, I found myself to be much more Indian than the Indians I came across there, because for me India has always been “India.” I’m not a Maharati, I’m not a Christian, but I’m an Indian. That’s what I grew up with, and I thought that I had to find a way to preserve that outlook. I mean, it’s easier to consider myself a Maharati Indian or a Christian Indian, but I’ve always wanted to think of myself as just an Indian. But that’s not what’s happening there. I mean, I’ve found myself able to defend India more passionately while here in Bahrain than while there!”

Again Anhil returned to Bahrain where he found employment at the University of Bahrain. Summarizing the experience of returning to India, he noted that, “for me, India has always been something else, like a mirage, an idea.”

Anhil’s experience clearly suggests that, for many, the diasporic experience constructs identities much different than those in the homeland. In the context of Bahrain, the structure of dominance in which all transmigrants exist posits a singular identity for all members of the Indian community—as Asian non-citizen transmigrants. Their particular identities and heritages are elided in their interactions with both the formal and informal aspects of this structure of dominance. And while all Indian transmigrants face these homogenizing forces in interactions with Bahraini citizens and state, some institutions of the diasporic elite also elide the particularistic identities of Indian subcommunities. The various Indian schools on the island, for example, teach in Hindi and English, thereby reinforcing the singular national Indian identity over the plethora of regional, ethnic and religious constituencies that make their home in Bahrain. In India, the nationalizing force at work in the educational structure is complemented by the power of local communities to retain local languages and particularistic culture. In the plural and transnational context of Bahrain, however, parents struggle to convey these local and

particularistic identities to their children in diaspora: in school, on the street, and in relation to the Bahraini state, these particularistic identities are elided.

For Anhil and many others like him, the return from diaspora to homeland clarifies these differences. In India, Anhil discovered that these particularistic identities—regional affiliation, religious heritage, and language group—were important components in the day to day life of citizenship and belonging in India. Without those wellsprings of identity upon which to draw, Anhil felt out of place in the homeland; his identity as an Indian—and Indian first—was a diasporic construction.

Diasporic Disjuncture: Bahrain as a Cultural Time Capsule

In this section, I explore some of the temporal aspects of the migration flow from India to Bahrain. Many of the diasporic elite arrived in the late 1960's and early 1970's, at that key juncture in Bahrain's history when the wealth from the OPEC embargo fueled a rapid period of modernization and required heavy investment in human capital. The fact that many of the powerful and entrenched members of the diasporic elite departed India decades ago is not a point to be taken lightly. From the perspective of their children—and particularly their female children—their long time away from the homeland has allowed them to preserve an “old” version of Indian culture in diaspora.

For women of the second and third generation of the diaspora, these issues are particularly concerning:

The parents here in Bahrain, they didn't try to grow with the time, or come out of it. Even living in different surroundings, like here, they remain the same. If I had grown up in India, I can say that I would be much more modern, and much further along, because people living here, like my father, he doesn't know what's happening in India. He still thinks it's just the same as when he left 25 years ago.

He doesn't realize that it's changed so much! We do things here that people in India no longer do. I had a sister-in-law that just got married two years back in India. The things she does—parking, dressing, socializing—here she would automatically be shunned. All the girls are like that in India.

Another young professional woman suggested that the notion of the Gulf as a time capsule of Indian culture is widely recognized by the diaspora—so much so that parents looking for a conservative wife for their son often prefer women from the diasporas of the Middle East:

Believe me, families that have settled in Canada or the U.S. who are looking for a prospective daughter in law, they don't look in India or Bombay. They look in the Middle East. They feel—and they say—that the girls that are brought up in the Middle East have more family values and more India tradition than the girls back at home. And this is quite true! If you go to Delhi now—and I'm not saying all, 100%, but the majority of the females have become more American than the American, more Brit than the Brit, in the sense of drinking, smoking, dressing ... My parents would get the shock of their lives if they went back.

While many of the diasporic women focused upon marriage in the transnational realm as a locus for the clash of “traditional” and “modern” Indian culture, others noted that the opportunities and horizons presented to them in Bahrain—occupations in modern corporations, a professional and transnational life—often contradict the expectations of their parents. As another young professional woman noted,

The thing about parents here in Bahrain is that they don't change! They want us to be traditional, they want us to grow up the way they grew up. At the same time, I cannot, because I lived here, and I worked very hard, and I've lived outside. I've lived other places. I became a professional, and my goals became different. I was not the same anymore. But they don't see that. They could not accept those changes in me for a long time. It was very hard. It's really hard, you know? They don't see the changes, and they won't let you grow. It's suffocating.

VII. Imagination and the Deterritorialized Homeland

At the outset of this chapter, I contended that the diasporic elite in Bahrain have a collective identity detached from any particular place. As the sections above describe, the diasporic elite's connection to the Indian homeland is a tenuous one. For those who have spent the better part of their lives away from India, return trips can be a confounding experience: the abject poverty of India, the nuances of the business climate, and the localized ethnic and regional identities called forth during visits and extended stays are alienating experiences for those with a long tenure in Bahrain. Conversely, the differences perceived by the elite diasporic transmigrants challenge the notion that the diasporic community in Bahrain is a cultural satellite to the homeland; rather, the version of Indian culture present in Bahrain is only a vague correlate to that of the homeland, and the similarities, while quite visible, mask significant differences.

At the same time, the diasporic elite's connection to Bahrain is also tenuous. Through the structure of dominance in place in Bahrain—one I describe in both formal and informal terms—transmigrants of all classes are well aware that they are never fully welcome. In Bahrain, they live as second class citizens; their stay is contingent upon the articulation of the *kafala* system, upon the ever-changing visa regulations, and upon the state's Bahrainization program. The contingency of their existence in Bahrain is one force behind the process of deterritorialization faced by the Indian diasporic elite.

The question then becomes this: is the state-based structure of dominance, in both its formal and informal forms, a sufficient explanation for the deterritorialized existence of the diasporic elite in Bahrain? Or, conversely, can we pin this deterritorialized

existence to the forces of global capitalism, to what Harvey describes as the periodic revolutionization of the international and territorial division of labor, itself a “vital geographical dimension to the insecurity” wrought by global capitalism (Harvey 1989: 106)? The answer, I suggest, is closer to the latter: The diasporic imagination of the Indian elite in Bahrain, as a staging ground for action, is an adaptation to the cadences of the deterritorializing forces of the capitalist forces described by Harvey.

In arguing that the “imagination today is a staging ground for action,” Appadurai builds upon Anderson’s analysis of the imagined bonds of nationhood (Appadurai 1996: 7; Anderson 1983). Appadurai sees imagination as a new venue of agency: “there has been a shift in recent decades, building on technological changes over the past century or so, in which the imagination has become a collective, social fact” (Appadurai 1996: 5). “More people than ever before seem to imagine routinely the possibility that they or their children will live and work in places other than where they were born,” one example of how the imagination has broken out of the “special expressive space of art, myth, and ritual” (Appadurai 1996: 5). This imagination, in its collective forms, “creates ideas of neighborhood and nationhood, of moral economies and unjust rule, of higher wages and foreign labor prospects. The imagination today is a staging ground for action” (Appadurai 1996: 7).

Through a brief analysis of three arenas of the Indian diasporic elite’s life in Bahrain (marriage and family, religion, and education), I seek to demonstrate how the bonds they imagine are at once deterritorialized, a staging ground for action, and a form of adaptation to the deterritorialized circuits of the global financescape. For the diasporic

elite in Bahrain, the connection (or territorialization) of a homeland is of relatively little strategic importance. Instead, the construction and maintenance of strategic transnational social fields allow them to move through global circuits seeking advantages where they lay. Their imagination—and allegiance—is to a global financescape that is itself deterritorialized.

Marriage Practices and Family

Marriage practices and, in a more fundamental sense, the very shape of the Indian family, have been restructured by the close allegiance with the global financescape in which the diasporic elite participate. Although many marriages are still arranged, the geographies of arranged marriages amongst the contemporary diasporic elite commonly draw upon global social networks. This process has been buttressed by the emergence of a wide variety of internet matchmaking services based in India. Young Indian men and women in Bahrain use these global matchmaking services to locate potential partners. While religious, ethnic, and caste-based criteria still play an important role in this process, most of the young men and women I interviewed described their search in terms of occupations and interests of potential partners—for partners with similar professional career arcs, and for individuals enmeshed within the folds of the same contemporary global financescape.

These marriage practices are symptomatic of the diasporic erosion of the “joint family,” or co-residence of three or four generations of patrilineally-related generations. Although some early diasporic arrivals established the joint family residences in the

central *souq*, this form of familial organization is almost entirely gone today. Visa regulations allow only temporary visits from non-working relatives other than children; at the same time, the erosion of this practice predated the establishment of visa regulations preventing the transmigration of parents and grandparents to the island, as Farid described above. Instead, co-residence has given way to social relations that bridge the transnational divide, all components of a strategic transnationalism configured to address the insecurities of both life in Bahrain and, in a larger sense, the insecurities of the global system. Finally, their connection to the “homeland” is increasingly cast in terms of the family, as it is the location at which parents or, more commonly, grandparents reside.

Religion and Deterritorialization

The practice of religion on the island—and particularly amongst the diasporic communities—has also been shaped by the pluralistic character of contemporary society in Bahrain. In some cases, the religious practices that have flourished are those already well configured to the disparate social networks characteristic of the transnationalism of diasporic populations; in other cases, those that have flourished are new configurations drawn from the increasing contact of once disparate cultures. I focus briefly upon the practice of religion (rather than the religion itself) as a means of incorporating the diversity of experiences that now accompany the practice of traditional religions (Islam, Christianity, Hindu). Many of the diasporic elite with whom I had contact were also engaged in quasi-religious practices that incorporated elements of the social clubs present on the island, elements of the New Age discourse popular in the United States, and

elements of the self-help narrative characteristic of those books that seemingly dominate the nonfiction bestseller lists in the United States.⁸³

Of those Indian religious practices and sects already configured to the disparate networks of a diasporic people, perhaps none is more emblematic than the Muslim Bohra sect. The Bohra community were, like the Hindu Sindhi, an early arrival on the island, and today their numbers have grown significantly. While based in India, the Bohra clergy has reconfigured its religion to adjust and encourage the transnational and diasporic movement of its subjects; in his analysis, Jonas Blank suggests that the clergy have established a communal and global identity “not by rejecting modern or Western ideas and technologies, but by embracing them: the Bohras have used modernity as a tool to reinvigorate their core traditions” (2001: 1). He continues: they “proudly send their children to Britain or the United States for education, exhibit greater gender equality than most communities of the subcontinent, and have become Internet pioneers uniting members of their far-flung denomination into a worldwide cybercongregation” (Blank 2001: 1-2). Or, as Farid, the Bohri Muslim whose family history was presented earlier in this chapter noted:

[For us], success wasn't based just on money, but also on business prowess. Not necessarily taking advantage of a person, but seeing an opportunity and going for it, and working hard. Academics aren't a big thing for the Bohra, although things are changing a little now. But still, it's like, 'Wow, this guy opened his own

⁸³ Although my ethnographic data provide no opportunity for a comprehensive analysis of these religious practices, examples of the active groups on the island during my fieldwork included a group called The Art of Living, a Non-Governmental Organization that mixes community service with breathing exercises and other methods for relieving stress. For many of the diasporic elite I encountered, these sorts of religious practices merge seamlessly with FranklinCovey and other motivational toolkits for increasing productivity and efficiency in the modern workplace.

business!’ When I was young—and I think it’s still this way—the top was always business. All our family meetings, everything is about what this person is doing and how he did it, how he made this much money or whatever it is, he opened this business from scratch, and so on.

Like the Hindu and Christian populations in Bahrain, the Bohri Muslims use religion as more than a means for deriving meaning for their existence: the pilgrimages, rituals, and practices frequently serve as a basis for arranging marriages, communicating with other members, and building social resources necessary for the strategic transnationalism described in this chapter. In ideological terms, these religions also frequently promote ideologies conducive to success in the global financescapes in which many of the constituents are now employed.

Education in Diaspora

One can also read the articulation of this particular stratum of the global financescape into the structure of diasporic education. The children of the diasporic elite in Bahrain are schooled at one of a handful of schools on the island. The largest of these is the Indian School; over the last decade, several other schools have also opened. All follow the Indian curriculum, thereby allowing students to seamlessly move between India and Bahrain for their education. Courses are taught in English and Hindi. Like many aspects of diasporic life, the Indian-curriculum schools provide few opportunities for developing regional identities; as many parents noted, those aspects of identity are largely confined to the social clubs and homes for families in diaspora.

From Bahrain, many students elect to pursue their higher education in the west. As one parent described,

As far as their education goes, primary school here is good, and secondary school is good. But after high school, where do they go? The university here is no good. I would not send my children there. The place I send them will have to be in India, the U.K., or U.S. I've been telling this to my son, who still has two years left in high school.

As she notes, other parents elect to send their children to India for further education. Few choose to pursue higher education in Bahrain itself, although a number of students I spoke with mentioned friends and family members at the various American-managed universities in the Emirates. Electing to pursue higher education outside of Bahrain and, more specifically, in the West, is both a reflection of the cosmopolitan and transnational character of this segment of the diaspora and, simultaneously, one component of the strategic transnationalism those families build and maintain. A son or daughter in an American university, for example, may provide the family as a whole with another set of options should their tenure in Bahrain become too difficult.

VIII. Conclusion: Transnationals Unbound

The great majority of case studies in transnationalism focus on migration to the West, and particularly to the United States. At both a formal and informal level, the structure of dominance Indian transmigrants face in Bahrain comprises a significantly different set of circumstances than those typically portrayed in these case studies. In this chapter I focus explicitly upon the diasporic Indian elite, and through my analysis I challenge the fundamental bipolarity not only of these typical transnational models (in the sense of people with social fields spanning two nation-states), but also of diasporic models (in the sense of people with a particular relationship to a territorial homeland).

Instead, I describe the elite's diasporic imagination as deterritorialized, as untethered from both the local milieu (Bahrain) and the diasporic homeland (India)—their allegiance is to what Appadurai called a “nonterritorial transnation” (1996: 173). While the particular conditions of Bahrain, and specifically the structure of dominance in which all classes of the diaspora find themselves enmeshed, provide a partial explanation for this deterritorialized imagination, it is not a sufficient explanation in-and-of-itself. Rather, the strategic transnationalism exemplified by the diasporic elite in Bahrain is an adaptation to the highest echelons of the global financescape—to the mobile processes of late capitalism.

CHAPTER FIVE

SOCIAL CLUBS, VOLUNTARY ASSOCIATIONS AND THE INSTITUTIONS OF DIASPORA



Figure 5.1: Indian laborers cheer the performers from their home state. These men were bussed from labor camps to the India Club for a “Workers Day” celebration.

I. Introduction

The Bab Al Bahrain, or door to Bahrain, is a colonial-era edifice on the maritime front of the old market, or *souq*, in central Manama. Although infill and construction have pushed the actual shoreline well inland from the former wharf and customs house described by the oldest individuals with whom I spoke, the Bab Al Bahrain remains an important reference point in the contemporary city. From that central hub, the narrow roads crowded with pedestrians and slow moving vehicles reach back into the heart of the *souq*. Small hotels, mosques, countless stores and restaurants line the close-quartered streets. By following these streets back from the waterfront one eventually emerges in a

dense residential neighborhood where residual members of the citizenry's most impoverished classes live side by side with the burgeoning population of transnational laborers.⁸⁴ Unlike their more fortunate brethren in labor camps or company-arranged apartment buildings, the transnational laborers in this beleaguered neighborhood are, for the most part, illegal workers.⁸⁵ Through the confluence of circumstances—perhaps they arrived on a free visa, perhaps they abandoned a contracted position after months without pay—the men in this neighborhood largely work on the black market, selling their labor to whomever they can find for a few dinars a day. In buildings rented from Bahraini owners, transmigrant laborers crowd into the small rooms, oftentimes sleeping in shifts to save money.

On a hot summer night in 2003 one of these buildings caught fire. Sanjay, a south Indian laborer, had returned home some two hours earlier from a party at the company for which he currently works. He fell fast asleep, but shortly before midnight he was abruptly awakened by the Pakistani men who roomed down the hall. Smoke had already filled the building. Together the men made their way to the roof, and finding a small ladder in the debris scattered on the rooftop, they laid it across the span between buildings and slowly crossed. Thinking that the building next door might also be on fire, they made a second crossing and were finally able to descend to the street. Outside their former home they gathered with the other workers, most of who wore nothing more than their

⁸⁴ Generally speaking, the disenfranchised citizens of which I speak here are principally Shi'i, often referred to as Al Baharna. I describe this population at more length in chapters two and six.

⁸⁵ I explore the pathways to illegality at length in the section entitled "Legal and Illegal Workers" in chapter three.

undergarments, and watched the building burn. Miraculously, all of the building's occupants survived. Sanjay lamented his own personal loss—80 dinars in savings, the air conditioner that he and his roommates had recently purchased, and the DVD player and television that he himself had purchased. Sanjay had been away from India for over ten years, and these last two items were his and his alone—the product of those many years of hard work, items of significant symbolic as well as monetary value. Unlike many of his flatmates, his CPR (residence) card and passport were with his current employer—part of his effort to again legalize his status on the island—and were hence spared from the flames.

For several nights the men slept on the sidewalk or in the beds of pickup trucks parked on the street. The owner of the building initially refused to provide any assistance, and few of the men had responsible *kafeels* to which they might turn.⁸⁶ Within a few days, several groups materialized to provide assistance. The Pakistani Club provided air conditioners and assorted items to the Pakistani men in the building. A group called Helping Hands and another called the Art of Living contributed essentials to the building's inhabitants regardless of nationality. Six days after the fire I received a call from S., my good friend who amidst his busy schedule found time to also work as my field assistant. He invited me to come down to TASCA, the principal social club for the Tamilian contingent of the Indian community, and assist with the allocation of essentials

⁸⁶ Three weeks later, and to much public fanfare, the Baharini landlord offered to pay one month's rent for the workers displaced by the fire (GDN June 26, 2003).

to the men displaced by the fire.⁸⁷ Twenty or thirty of the Indian now homeless laborers waited in front of the club, and over the course of several hours we distributed bananas, rice, fruit drinks, work boots, lunch boxes, small cooking stoves (or “cookers” in the Indian iteration), and a

variety of other items.

Some of the men were from Tamil Nadu, but many came from other Indian states. Later,

Sanjay and his former roommate came to my flat for a light dinner,

after which we talked about the fire, their experiences in Bahrain, and the role that the various institutions of the Indian community had played in assisting them with their ongoing plight.

Over the course of a year in Bahrain I spent many of my evenings at TASCA, the Indian Club, and many of the other voluntary associations in the diasporic community. The constellation of diasporic social institutions in Bahrain is unparalleled elsewhere in the Gulf, and it is around dramatic events like the one described here that many of them spring to action. In this chapter I seek to explore these social clubs and other institutions



Figure 5.2: Indian laborers gathered in front of TASCA after the building fire to receive donated essentials.

⁸⁷ As I describe in earlier chapters, the laboring class is largely comprised of transmigrant men. While a small number of women arrive to work under similar contracts, and even larger numbers arrive to work as housemaids, few of these women find their way to the central neighborhood described here.

on the island in some depth. Against the backdrop of a transnational literature that largely focuses upon the role institutions play in bridging two or more national contexts (Goldring 1999, Basch et al. 1994), my analysis of the social clubs and other voluntary organizations in Bahrain focuses on their internal importance to a community in diaspora. In the largest sense, I seek to portray how the Indian community goes about establishing a basic social fabric against the backdrop of the structure of domination described in previous chapters, and how that social fabric comes into play in dealing with the periodic crises—both communal and individual—that the Indian community faces.

I begin with an analysis of the instrumental value of these social clubs and other voluntary associations. Building upon a significant sociological literature that explores transnational and diasporic associations through the lens of social capital (Portes 1996, 1998; Portes and Landolt 1996; Waldinger 1995), I arrive at a conclusion opposite of Franklin's earlier work in Bahrain. Franklin suggests that "only to a very limited degree do associations articulate what may be called material interests; they are more "expressive" than "instrumental" in function" (Franklin 1985: 266). I argue, first, that the social clubs and other voluntary associations function as key nodes for the articulation of social capital, and hence have great instrumental value to individual transmigrants (see Franklin 1985: 266). For a transnational and diasporic community like the Indian one in Bahrain, and particularly one in which members arrive and depart daily as work contracts are established or expire, the clubs provide a stable and fixed set of institutions in which individuals can connect with others, build alliances, share information, and assist one another with the travails of life in Bahrain. The diasporic elite, for example, choose from

the various Lion's Clubs on the island, including the predominantly Muslim chapter I joined. They also join the Rotary Club, Toastmasters, the Indian Club, the Indian Ladies' Association, and the smattering of other clubs that serve the diasporic elite. At the other end of the spectrum, many of the regional clubs (the Karnataka Club, TASCA, the Kerala Samjam, The Konkan Singer's Club, and so forth) provide a venue in which the diasporic middle and lower classes, along with their elite brethren, build affiliation and profit from those relations. By following Bourdieu's line of analysis (Bourdieu 1986; Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992), I separate the construction and maintenance of social capital from its transformation into economic capital, the latter of which is a process at once fraught with complexity and, simultaneously, a window to another facet of the state-based structure of dominance described in previous chapters. In todo, this analysis entails a critique of the popularized conception of social capital, for it is only within the constellation of other forms of capital—cultural, economic, and symbolic—that the role of social capital can be evaluated.

In the second portion of this chapter I focus on these institutions as venues for the performance of identity in diaspora, and hence carry the analysis of the social clubs and other voluntary associations beyond their instrumental value. As an elderly Maharati transmigrant noted in one of our long evening discussions, politics are a luxury that few in the Indian community can afford. As a diasporic community of non-citizens, the Indian diaspora in Bahrain is largely excluded from everyday political participation in their homeland (through distance) and from political participation in the host country (through structural exclusion). The social clubs and voluntary associations on the island, while

certainly important nodes in the networks of social capital formed by the diaspora, are nonetheless more than the sum of these essentially economic activities: clubs and associations as social spaces are the sites at which ethnic, regional, linguistic, religious, and class-based particularities within the overarching notion of ‘being’ Indian are expressed, performed, negotiated, or even rejected. They are venues in which politics—and much more—are performed. Against the backdrop of a state-based structure of domination that elides the particularistic identities of transmigrants on the island, the social spaces afforded by clubs and voluntary associations provide a venue for embracing or, alternatively, rejecting the traditions of the homeland. For many in the Indian community, they are the principal spaces for articulating relations between one another, and hence wellsprings of meaning for the diaspora as a whole.

In the final accounting, this chapter is about diasporic institutions and the diasporic imagination, for these social clubs and related associations comprise the productive ground from which notions of community—and the individual’s relationship to that community—spring. In that sense, my analysis is less focused upon the institutions and associations that span the transnational divide, and more upon those constructed in diaspora to serve the fundamental human need for meaning and expression (see Mintz and DuBois 2002: 109).

II. Diasporic Clubs and Associations

The panoply of social clubs and related institutions on the island of Bahrain is unparalleled in the Gulf. In several of the other Gulf states—Oman, for example—the state allows only a single umbrella organization. In Bahrain, however, the Ministry of

Labor and Social Affairs has allowed the efflorescence of these clubs to proceed without significant hindrance. As Fuad Khuri notes, Bahraini social and political clubs have a long and important history in the political landscape of the island as the principal site of the citizenry's political activity under the authoritarian regime (Khuri 1980). The diasporic social clubs certainly build upon this legacy. They also mark Bahrain as more liberal and open than its neighbors, an identity that remains key to the state's vision of its ongoing role as a service hub to the conservative neighboring nations. Many of the transmigrants with whom I spoke noted that the existence of the social clubs comprises one of the particular attractions of diasporic life in Bahrain—a social luxury unavailable across the causeway in Saudi Arabia, for example. At the same time, the analysis presented here demonstrates that these social clubs package diasporic culture behind villa walls—effectively moving the practice of foreign culture out of the public sphere and, in many cases, beyond the direct concern of a citizenry that continues to struggle with the dilemmas of the transnational presence on the island.

In the section below I present brief snapshots of six different associations, yielding a fairly representative cross section of the institutions that together make up much of the social fabric of diasporic life on the island.

The India Club

My first visit to the India Club occurred on one of the few rainy nights of my stay in Bahrain. A few weeks after my arrival on the island a professor and colleague at BTI suggested we meet at the India Club for a drink and discussion. My gracious host found himself on the tail end of a long career in academia, and with a few years to amass

enough of a savings to retire comfortably, he and his wife relocated from India to Bahrain for the opportunities it provided. The professor arrived at the club shortly after I did, and meeting at the entrance we moved from the densely urban streets of central Manama, bustling with Indians and Pakistanis guestworkers, through the security checkpoint that checks arrivals for membership or, in my case, for guest status, and onto the grounds of the Club. Children played cricket on the twin tennis courts, shouting to each other in English as their parents sat around the tables between the courts and the bar.

The India Club is the oldest of all clubs in the Indian expatriate community. It has the largest membership and, perhaps more importantly, the largest premises of the Indian social clubs. The India Club was founded in 1915 and of the many expatriate clubs on the island it is the oldest (Franklin 1985: 488). Membership is ethnically, regionally and religiously mixed; one is tempted to add language to this categorical variation, but nearly all the individuals I met at the club spoke fluent English. Although a handful of Bahrainis and other non-Indians hold memberships, Indians—and particularly South Indians—predominate. The club relocated to its current premises in the mid-1940s, and those premises, including tennis courts, meeting halls and other open spaces, are the largest amongst the expatriate clubs, and along with the large auditorium at the Indian School often serve the Indian community's need for large meetings, celebrations, and other activities. The India Club's reading room contains a wide variety newspapers and periodicals from India. Two bars serve as meeting points for the diverse membership, and in the smaller adjoining meeting rooms I observed various performances and activities during my occasional visits.

The India Club principally serves the diasporic elite. In his close examination of the India Club two decades ago, Franklin noted that long waiting lists for membership, combined with a vetting process that focuses on “prestige, occupation, and influence,” maintains a membership that, while varied in categorical terms, is fairly homogenous in terms of social class (Franklin 1985: 490). Add to this the membership dues that prevent many of the more impoverished members of the Indian community from joining and the membership of the India Club remains much as Franklin describes—a venue for the diasporic elite and their families. One of the former presidents of the club reported that current membership exceeds 1200 families, making it one of the largest clubs in terms of membership on the island.

While members may come from the middle and upper class of the Indian diaspora, it nonetheless includes individuals from across the categorical divisions—be they ethnic, regional, or religious—of the Indian community. As Suresh, one of the former presidents of the Club, noted, in many ways the trans-Indian identity fostered by the club is a vestige of social relations constructed in decades past:

In 1915...it wasn't called the India Club, for there were very few Indians here [in Bahrain]...at the time it was the only club, and the population here were Indians. Not Keralite, not Karnataka, but *Indians*. So there was no need for these other clubs. It was only in recent years that they started forming these other clubs.

In contrast to the efflorescence of regionally and religiously specific clubs, the India Club continues to represent itself as a venue specifically aligned with a particular vision of India—one aligned with both the India School and the Indian Embassy, all of which are seen as representative of the whole of India. Beneath the surface, however, regional

fractures and other lines of tension continue to be exerted and performed in the context of the club. Suresh, continuing his comments from above, added that,

The Indian Club now has become very political. You have the north and the south—you have different groups.... These are ethnic divisions that are played out in the context of the club, and geographical too, because you have the South Indian group, the Malayalee group, and the north Indian group. And I guess at the India Club, there is the Sindhi group and the Malayalee group.

While the Indian Club, like Indian School and a handful of other institutions on the island, is configured around the idea of a singular national Indian identity, these venues nonetheless provide space for the articulation of regional, ethnic, religious and class-based identities within the larger domain of a single Indian national identity. Unlike the smaller regional clubs which, individually, can be conceived of as locations for transmigrants to reconnect with particularistic Indian identities, the India Club serves as a domain for the iteration or performance of those identities in relation to one another. It is a venue for the diasporic elite to challenge, or support, the idea of a singular national identity that transcends the regional, ethnic, linguistic, and religious differences that characterize the Indian homeland.

Tamil Social and Cultural Association (TASCA)

For nearly twenty years transmigrants from the state of Tamil Nadu met unofficially. The once-small diasporic constituency organized meetings in one another's flats or borrowed larger spaces from existing clubs for events and shows they planned together. At the turn of the millennium, the group finally secured premises in central Manama and registered with the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs. The formalization of the Tamil Social and Cultural Association (TASCA) coincided with two decades of

demographic expansion of the transmigrant networks between Tamil Nadu and Bahrain: Although the official numbers are not released by the Bahraini government, the Tamilian community now claims to be second in size only to Kerala amongst the Indian constituencies on the island. Like many of the other regional social clubs, TASCA's membership comprises a cross-section of the Tamilian population that extends lower into the economic strata of the transmigrant population than the India Club: lower membership fees ensure that even the diasporic lower middle class can join, and while the poorest transmigrant laborers are still unable to participate in the routine club activities, much of the club's programming includes outreach activities to the labor camps and apartment buildings in which the poorest Tamilian laborers dwell.

Like many of the Indian social clubs, TASCA occupies a villa in one of the city's central neighborhoods. A short wall separates the premises from the street, and the front porch typically contained various pieces of furniture or boxed items either on their way in or out of the club. The former residence has been converted to a busy and crowded social club. The *majlis*, or greeting room where visitors were once entertained by the former residents, now comprises one of the main meeting rooms for the members. Upstairs is a small bar—the principal source of income for the club—a game room, and offices. Like all the regional clubs, foot traffic in the club surges in the evening hours as men and women finish their workday.

Like most of the Indian social clubs, TASCA plans a wide variety of events for its membership. Committees plan for celebrations of Chithirai Thirunaal, or the Tamil New Year, as well as for Diwali (the Pan-Indian/Hindu festival of lights) and Pongal (a four-

day celebration, originally linked to bountiful crop production, and particularly popular amongst the Tamilians). Like most of the Indian social clubs on the island, TASCA also plans a celebration for the Bahraini Eid holiday. A Ladies Wing demonstrates cooking techniques and spreads beauty tips amongst the interested members. There are dance classes for children and the club maintains a library stocked with a variety of Tamilian periodicals and literature. The club fields sports teams in intramural competitions on the island. The Social Service sub-committee of TASCA was particularly active during my research period. Through their efforts, the club provided food and free clothes to some of the impoverished Tamilian labor camps. They also conducted medical training and health education seminars in the camps, including various programs concerning health, hygiene, and the benefits of both yoga and meditation to the physiological well-being of day laborers.

TASCA is representative of the vast majority of the diasporic clubs in Bahrain. There are a handful of other clubs—Pakistan Club, the India Club and the now-defunct Indian Association—that explicitly address their diasporic constituents at a national level. Conversely, there are numerous clubs that are even more specific in their constituencies than the example of TASCA: the Kerala Catholic Club, for example, draws individuals through the categories of both region and religion. TASCA, based on regional (and, in some senses, linguistic) affiliation, occupies the crowded middle ground between more specific and more general venues of affiliation on the island. The current president of the club is a Tamilian Muslim; the executive committee includes Hindu, Muslim and Christian individuals.

Toastmasters

The Toastmasters Club was an invention of a Californian by the name of Dr. Ralph C. Smedley, a moniker that was seemingly repeated in the introductory remarks of nearly every Toastmaster meeting I attended in Bahrain. Pioneered in 1924, the clubs expanded in number over the twentieth century and now include 195,000 members worldwide. Their introduction to the Gulf occurred through a direct American connection. In the 1950s, Bahrain constructed a small enclave by the name of Awali for American workers, most of whom were associated with the oil industry. The Bahrain chapter of the Toastmasters formed in Awali in 1964, and although the initial members were for the most part American, a few Indian engineers and technicians also participated. As the active American members departed the island, Indian participants continued to fuel the club's activity. Through the perseverance and dedication of this original diasporic cohort, the Toastmasters persevered and, eventually, flourished on the island. Today there are twenty active chapters in greater Manama, and other chapters have formed in the rest of the Gulf States.⁸⁸ The chapter I joined was the current manifestation of that original chapter from Awali, and my first meeting was the group's 1,900th gathering.

⁸⁸ According to one of my informants, there are over 2000 members in the Gulf region. The Toastmasters website reports nine chapters in Kuwait, thirty-seven in Saudi Arabia, thirteen in Qatar, twenty-eight in the UAE, and fourteen in Oman.

Originally designed as a forum to “afford practice and training in the art of public speaking and in presiding over meetings, and to promote sociability and good fellowship among its members,” the chapters in Bahrain serve that purpose and more. For the diasporic elite, the Toastmaster meetings provide an opportunity to practice and engage the discursive terrain of the global financescape—to, as the Toastmasters website suggests, give better sales presentations, hone management skills, effectively develop and present ideas, and offer constructive criticism. The Manama chapter and several others on the island even replicate the multiethnic, religious and national context of the transnational financescape’s manifestation in Bahrain. In other clubs, however, the activities of a typical meeting serve a much more practical purpose: the speeches and presentations provide an ideal opportunity to practice English, the *lingua franca* of the higher echelons of the global economy that brought many of the men and women to Bahrain.

Membership dues ensure that only the elite can join in the club. Meetings are held weekly at one of the nicest hotels on the island; men and women are expected to wear business attire. While the majority of the members of this particular club were of the Indian diaspora, the Manama Toastmasters also included members from Bahrain, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, the Philippines, and Bangladesh. Other chapters are regionally specific: TASCA, for example, has its own chapter of Toastmasters that draws from its Tamilian membership, as do the chapters at many of the other regionally, linguistically, or ethnically homogeneous social clubs on the island. In all three of the chapter meetings I attended women are well represented in both the membership and the leadership. Unlike

the chapter at TASCA, the Manama Toastmasters (with which I had the most contact) had an informal policy of omitting politically-oriented topics (such as the policies of the Bahraini state, the Indian-Pakistani conflict, or the American incursion in Iraq) from the presentations, perhaps due to the heterogeneous membership of that particular chapter.

The Lions Club

The original Lion's Club in Bahrain formed some twenty years ago and was the first of its kind in the Gulf. The Bahrain chapter grew rapidly, and the Lion's Club of Riffa formed in 1995 as an offshoot of the oversized original club. The Riffa chapter also met with success: It had seventy-five members at its high point in the late 1990s, but Bahrainization and the subsequent departures depleted membership to approximately forty members. Although all are welcome, the Lion's Club of Riffa is predominately Muslim, and includes successful merchants, businessmen and professionals from both the Indian and Pakistani communities. Many of these individuals are also leaders or former leaders of other social clubs and associations on the island. Like the Manama Toastmasters, the Lions Club of Riffa has no premises of its own, but instead gathers regularly in the meeting rooms of upscale hotels. Attendees are expected to wear business attire, and meetings typically comprise a dozen or so individuals. Three women also regularly participated during my interaction with the club.

The Riffa chapter's activities are largely oriented toward outreach. As the president noted, "we engage in social service regardless of caste, creed and color." Over a single year (2002), the club provided food to the needy during Ramadan, donated sewing machines and computers to the needy, funded a life-saving operation for a Bahraini child,

took blind children on a beach picnic, took mentally disabled Bahraini children to a dolphin marine park, cleaned beaches, greeted sick children during the Eid holiday, sponsored a Bahraini youth's trip to a leadership training program in the United States, led a drug awareness campaign, conducted an essay contest for children, organized a free dental hygiene and checkup for mentally disabled Bahraini children, and conducted a wide variety of other service and outreach activities. In pulling these activities together, members draw upon the significant resources they command through their businesses and contacts: money, food, and a variety of other items are donated from their businesses to these ends.

Unlike many of the other diasporic associations on the island, the Lions Club of Riffa's outreach efforts are primarily directed to Bahrainis and Bahraini citizens rather than toward the transmigrant underclass. In my discussions with the members of the Club, several pointed to the history of British colonialism on the island, whose legacy is now remembered by many as one of a group who "never gave anything back to the local community." The Lion's Club of Riffa certainly won't suffer the same fate: their coordinated efforts reach the most impoverished of the Bahraini community, and the members are careful to always call photographers from the island's newspapers to document these events. They also host several fancy dinners and events during the year in which luminaries from the Bahraini government, the business community, and the various embassies serve as guest-speakers or honorable attendees. These activities not only reinforce their status amongst the diasporic classes, but also counteract the popular perception of the diasporic communities as parasites on the Bahraini economy. Careful

not to articulate a message critical of the system inequities within the Bahraini social structure, the elite members of the Riffa Lion's Club envision their activities as returning something to the society from which they've profited.

Ecumenical Conference of Charity

Bahrain is somewhat unique in the context of the Gulf in terms of the efflorescence of non-Muslim religious spaces on the island. Certainly noteworthy is the large Hindu temple located in the center of the city's old market district. Invisible from the busy *souq*, a long passageway departs from a street crowded with Indian-owned businesses, and through the walls one finds a large open area that is the basis of the temple. This particular venue was established and is still controlled by the Bhatia segment of the Indian diaspora and mainly serves Hindus from Gujarat, Maharati, and Punjab;⁸⁹ two other temples in other locations (both in large villas) serve other Hindu constituencies.

The Christian community in Bahrain uses the large Catholic Church (with a school), the historic Anglican Church, and several other compounds scattered in the central districts of the city. The Anglican Church grounds include the church itself along with several wings; those spaces are loaned to a number of denominations. After several months on the island, I began attending meetings of the Ecumenical Conference of Charity (ECC), held monthly in one of the rooms on the Anglican compound. The ECC is a non-denominational Christian voluntary organization specifically configured to reach out to individuals in crisis. Monthly meetings are informal, and begin with a prayer. The

⁸⁹ Unusually, they actually own the property upon which the temple stands.

remainder of the meeting consists of reporting on outreach activities currently underway and planning future efforts.

In the several meetings that I attended, discussion largely focused upon the hospital visits conducted by a team of ECC members. While their primary goal was to console individuals amidst difficulties—and to pray for those individuals—the hospital visits also allowed the ECC to identify particular scenarios in which they might provide monetary or other forms of assistance to individuals in need. Examples from one of those meetings included:

- A Sri Lankan housemaid recently diagnosed with breast cancer: Her sponsor refused to release her passport until she pays him 300 dinars [\$850]. She is languishing in the hospital and doesn't have the money to pay for her own release. The committee decided to contribute 100 dinars [\$265] to this end.
- A 38 year old Indian male injured by an automobile while riding his bicycle: He had a heart attack and suffered brain damage. They need to repatriate him to India, and while the sponsor is willing to pay for three seats (so he can lie down), two more seats need to be purchased for a nurse and an assistant. The committee decided to refer this case to the Indian Embassy and to the Indian Community Relief Fund, as they have monies dedicated to this end.
- An Indian laborer suffered a heart attack on a construction site: he was now languishing in the hospital and his sponsor was proving to be of little help. The ECC had successfully contacted his family to let them know that he was now in the hospital in Bahrain. Plans to repatriate him were underway, but details remained scarce at this point.

Overall, the ECC's efforts typically focus upon contacting other agencies and institutions, thereby engaging the disparate diasporic networks that take responsibility for transmigrant constituencies. Oftentimes this task is as simple as contacting the various embassies on the island. In many situations, however, the ECC also provides monetary support, particularly when injured, ill or dead transmigrant laborers have unresponsive

kafeels. This assistance, while often described in terms of a Christian ethos, is provided to individuals regardless of religion, ethnicity, or nationality.

Indian Ladies Association (ILA)

As the former president and longtime member of the Indian Ladies Club noted, “we are a high profile organization.” Formed in 1956 by a group of wealthy women from Bahrain’s Indian diaspora, the Indian Ladies Association draws its membership from the Indian diasporic elite. Originally a forum for women to “hold a monthly tea and meet weekly to sew, make handicrafts, and socialize” (Franklin 1985: 487), in the intervening years the ILA has taken on a variety of more ambitious projects and goals, many of which are directly aimed at serving both the diasporic and indigenous population on the island. The Kitchen Craft Committee and the Beauty and Fashion Committee have been joined by a Community Service Committee and its Worker’s Subcommittee. Membership in the ILA has fluctuated between 150 and 200 members over the past decade, and while the membership includes both professional women and the wives of businessmen and merchants, together they represent the apex of the Indian diasporic elite. They also have a structural arrangement with the Indian embassy; the wife of the Indian Ambassador is the honorary president of the association.

Over the years 2002 and 2003, much of the ILA’s energies were devoted to the ongoing support and maintenance of SNEHA, a center for mentally disabled youth from the diasporic communities on the island.⁹⁰ The seed for this project was planted by a

⁹⁰ While SNEHA is always capitalized in print, it is not an acronym. Rather, as one of the members noted, the word is a play on the Sanskrit for “loving care.”

former ILA member. She and her husband brought their mentally disabled child on their professional sojourn to the Gulf, and because the government-organized centers for such children on the island were for citizens only, they found no institutional support for the care of their child. Together the women of the ILA founded the SNEHA center, now located in a large office building in central Manama. The center is fully funded and partially staffed by the members of the association. In granting a charter for the center, the Bahraini government imposed a limit of twenty children, and the center now operates at full capacity. The current budget for the Center is approximately 10,000 dinars (\$26,500), derived through a combination of donations and fundraising. The SNEHA premises are also used for other purposes, including a low-cost English course aimed at the transmigrant working class.⁹¹

The Indian Ladies Association also conducts a wide variety of outreach programs to the men in the labor camps scattered about the island. Once a month the women, working closely with a set of labor camp supervisors, arrange for a home-cooked Indian meal to be delivered to a particular camp on Friday, typically the day of rest for most laborers. These same sets of contacts prove useful for planning the annual Worker's Talent Show, held on the grounds of the India Club in 2003. This large event drew 1,600 laborers (along with a variety of luminaries from the diasporic community, all of whom sat in the reserved section in front of the stage). Laborers performed skits and songs for a variety of prizes, including a round-trip ticket to India on Air India; performers from the

⁹¹ The Indian Ladies Association asked me to co-teach the English course in 2003. I met weekly with a group of approximately forty men and women who sought to improve their English conversational skills.

Indian diasporic community and a few imported from India sang songs and/or danced; food was provided freely to all the men. As the chairwoman of the worker's subcommittee noted:

[The workers] are talented, and they have the capacity, but unfortunately the way they live ... they have no chance to show these talents. You see, you have to become a member of a club to show these kinds of talents, but where will they get the kind of money to become a member? So we do this for them. They sing, they enjoy, they are quite happy."

Amongst its many other activities, the Indian Ladies Association also arranges a show for the former Bahraini Emir's wife and a variety of her female relatives and friends. As many of the women in the royal family have no public presence, the event is relished by both parties.⁹² The ILA arranges for the event to be held in a five-star hotel, and, as a former president of the ILA described, "we put on a colorful dance or fashion show for them, arrange raffle prizes for them—it's an evening just for them. It's only ladies—about 400 or 500." The ILA's interaction with the royal family also includes visits to the Emir's wife's *majlis*, where, oftentimes, the association receives substantial donations that fund their projects. The interaction between the ILA and the royal family is highly unusual in comparison to the other social clubs and associations on the island, and is a symbol of the status maintained by the members of the ILA.

As the patronistic tenor of the chairwoman's comments about the worker's talent show indicate, the act of reaching out to the poorest members of the transmigrant class is a move that provides a welcome and rare break from the difficult conditions the laborers face in the camp and, at the same time, an affirmation of the class distinctions within the

⁹² The current Emir's wife, in a break with tradition, is quite outgoing and maintains a significant public profile on the island.

diasporic community. The activities of the ILA—from their outreach activities with the labor camps to the private meetings with the women of the royal family—mark the complexities of accruing social and cultural capital amidst the heterogeneous and plural society of contemporary Bahrain.

III. Social and Voluntary Clubs in Context

While the social clubs and voluntary associations on the island take many forms, they all share a set of challenges specific to the transnational milieu of contemporary Bahrain. Perhaps the foremost of these challenges revolves around the cyclical and itinerant nature of the transmigrants' stay in the Gulf. The very nature of the transnational environment—where individuals are moving back and forth between India or moving onward from Bahrain to other locations—make the retention of a core set of members difficult. Those with ample free time to organize, manage and lead clubs or committees within clubs are, typically, individuals with well-paid positions that observe typical work hours, either seven to three or nine to five. It is these very positions, however, that the suite of government policies known as Bahrainization seek to replace with citizen-workers.⁹³ Hence many of these social clubs are forced to constantly deal with the loss of membership—and particularly the members most capable of devoting the time and energy to the club or association's activities. As the president of the Riffa Chapter of the Lions Club described:

We started with 75 members, and eventually came down to less than 40 members. The main reason for the loss of members is departures related to the Bahrainization scheme. I don't blame the Bahrainis—this is their home, their

⁹³ I provide a more sustained analysis of Bahrainization in chapters four and six.

place. But that's certainly the biggest cause. Like my brother—he left the island and is in the States, and he's started a new Lion's Club in Chicago. But yes, departure is a problem. Last year we lost ten members. The year before that we lost even more.

By the end of my fieldwork in Bahrain, the president of the Riffa chapter had finalized his own plans for emigration to Chicago. Vaishali, a longtime member of the Indian Ladies Association, painted a similar portrait:

Our membership fluctuates. This year, for example, I'll have a set of members that withdraw, but I'll have other new members that come.... Over the last few years, many have either retired and gone back—gone on to Canada or gone back to India because their husbands have lost their jobs. But the association is steady—we do the work! There are at least twenty members like me who've been constantly active since 1985. But with the others, you cannot say from year to year.”

While clear about the challenges presented by the transnational milieu, Vaishali is also clear on the important role played by the social clubs and voluntary associations.

Together, these social institutions comprise the basic social fabric of diasporic culture and society in Bahrain—the only diasporic institutions with some degree of permanence in the transnational milieu. For Durkheim, institutions such as these were the basis of society in that they transcend the individual's temporal existence; in the transnational milieu of contemporary Bahrain, it is not just the lifespan of the men and women that pale next to the permanence of these institutions—it is the transmigrants' temporary existence in the conduits of transnational migration that makes the relative permanence of these institutions so important.

The social clubs and other voluntary organizations face additional challenges in the context of contemporary Bahrain. The Bahraini Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs licenses and registers all social clubs. As one former club president noted:

The Ministry of Labor must approve all these new clubs, and to get a license for a fresh club is not very easy. There are already more than 200 clubs here in Bahrain, and it's difficult to regulate. They want everybody to merge and form larger clubs. There are sports clubs, professional clubs, social clubs ... and the government thinks this is a problem."

In recent years, the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs has closely monitored, disciplined, and closed several active clubs on the island. Oftentimes these events are in response to complaints from citizens about drinking and "mixing," the term generally used for open and public interaction between genders.⁹⁴ Vaishali also reported that the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs curtailed the transnational movement of monies collected by clubs:

Initially, and even through 1991, we [the ILA] used to send money to India. We collect money, and we have a fund, so our members used to bring all kinds of applications. Suppose in my village there is a fund, an orphanage that needs a little money. So I can probably suggest my center, and maybe the name of somebody involved, but anyway, in 1991 the Ministry of Bahrain stopped that. There is no need to send it to India, they said—why don't you spend it here?"

Relations between the diasporic social clubs and the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs comprise another aspect of the structure of domination erected by the Bahraini state and citizenry. The social clubs, while providing an important venue for sharing information and participating in the diasporic culture, nonetheless do not comprise the basis for challenging the hegemony of the state or, more specifically, for asserting some semblance of basic rights for non-citizens. In the section that follows, I begin to explore the instrumental value of these institutions to members of the transnational labor flows

⁹⁴ For a good example, see the letter to the editor entitled "Segregation 'helps avert moral decay'," GDN Vol XXVII #158, Wednesday, August 25, 2004.

that bond Bahrain to India. After that, I turn to the role these clubs and associations play in forging identities amongst those far away from home.⁹⁵

IV. Social Capital and Power

The concept of social capital emerged over the last two decades as a key concept in the analysis of voluntary associations, ethnic communities, and other social institutions of the type described in this chapter. Through the combined efforts of Pierre Bourdieu and James Coleman, the concept moved rapidly through academia and, in the waning years of the millennium, into public and policy realms (Coleman 1988, 1990; Bourdieu 1986, 1992; Putnam 1993, 1995a, 1995b, 2000). Coleman uses the concept of social capital to explain the value of social relations. In particular, he focuses on the economic benefits of the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from dense social networks. In the often-cited example, Coleman describes Hasidic diamond traders in New York City, a group who periodically meets and exchanges stones worth tens of thousands of dollars, if not more, without insurance or legal paperwork (1988). The close social relations of the Hasidic community compel cooperation and virtue; individuals who transgress the norms of exchange—in other words, cheat—find themselves quickly excluded from the community and out of business. Conceived as social capital, these social bonds confer economic benefits upon members of this social group, as transaction costs are lowered through the properties of these dense social networks.

⁹⁵ The Indian community did form the Co-ordination Committee of Indian Associations (CCIA) in the 1990s as an overarching body meant to represent the interests of all the social clubs on the island. My informants reported the mixed success of this venture—most noted that the committee itself has become mired on the politics of the Indian community.

Combining the notion of social relations to the concept of capital implies that the value of these relations is something that can be accumulated, and Coleman and many of the sociologists that followed in his footsteps thought of this capital in the form of quantifiable ‘credit slips.’ From the foundation developed by Coleman, numerous social scientists began to carry the seed of this idea forward. Robert Putnam, for example, issued a stream of articles in which he argued that the erosion of social capital in America—hinging largely on the argument that American men (and, to some degree, women) were less inclined to join the sort of fraternal clubs popular in the early and middle periods of the twentieth century—comprised perhaps the most significant challenge to the future of the nation (Putnam 2000, 1995a, 1995b, 1993). Francis Fukuyama, meanwhile, claimed that the United States’ predominance in the global political economy largely rested on its deep reservoir of social capital and, like Putnam, argued that the maintenance of these dense social relations represented a key juncture in the global security of the country’s future (Fukuyama 1995). Meanwhile, the concept gained traction in international development. A host of projects and directives aimed to foster and reinforce social capital in less developed countries, the prominence of which is perhaps best symbolized by the elaboration of a World Bank initiative (see Woolcock 1998; Grootaert and Bastalaer 2001).

A significant portion of the social capital literature has focused specifically upon the dense social relations of ethnic enclaves and transnational communities (Portes 1996). Most agree that ethnic enclaves in the United States tend to be particularly rich in the

relations that comprise social capital,⁹⁶ but there is general disagreement about the value (or “social good”) of these ethnic networks. Putnam, in particular, uses the notions of bridging and bonding capital to differentiate between the positive and negative aspects of social capital in general. He argues that these ethnic enclaves are rich in bonding capital, the social links between individuals of similar background, ethnicity, or class. This form of capital is less valuable than the forms of capital that bring individuals from different backgrounds together, referred to as bridging capital. Like Putnam, Fukuyama sees social capital as something possessed by nations, and he uses a notion akin to Banfield’s “amoral familism” to differentiate the familial social capital of less developed nations and transmigrant enclaves from the valuable bridging capital that predominated in the middle of the twentieth century in the United States (Fukuyama 1995; Banfield 1958). As Portes has noted, there is a fundamental tautology at the root of much of this work: through the conflation of the networks comprising social capital with the economic resources those networks potentially confer, the tautological premise emerges that communities (or, for Putnam and Fukuyama, nations) with strong social capital are, undeniably, those rich in social capital (see Portes 1996).

The panoply of social clubs and other associations on the island of Bahrain provide an interesting set of examples through which the various concepts associated with social capital might be examined. First, however, it should be noted that the efflorescence of social clubs and other voluntary associations in Bahrain includes numerous clubs of the very type lauded by Putnam: the Lions Club, Toastmasters, and

⁹⁶ Social capital is an enigmatic enough term that it often represents both the relations themselves and the content of those relations.

Rotary Club, all active in Bahrain, are the very same clubs that Putnam deals with at length in his work. These clubs, and a handful of others described above, are at least nominally venues for the deployment and maintenance of the bridging capital lauded by Putnam.⁹⁷ Members of the Manama Toastmasters, for example, come from all three of the principal religions of the Indian diaspora, from numerous different nationalities and from both genders. The Riffa Chapter of the Lions Club, alternatively, is less diverse: although membership included individuals from India, Pakistan, and Bahrain, the club is predominately Muslim. Of the Indian social clubs, the historic India Social Club is perhaps the most diverse: membership is open to all those of Indian descent (and an occasional Bahraini). Other social clubs are regionally, religiously, and linguistically specific: the Kerala Catholic Association, for example, generally includes only Catholic Malayalam speakers from the state of Kerala, and by Putnam's logic is closer to an association based on bonding than on bridging capital.

Thinking of these clubs as venues for the construction of social capital, then, the various clubs and associations provide an invaluable instrumental value to transnational migrants. In crossing the Indian Ocean to work in Bahrain, Indian transmigrants enter a sociocultural environment in which the shape of the state is unfamiliar, in which the language is often alien, and in which they possess only a minimum of rights. Outside the protection (and hegemony) of their own state, these social clubs and other associations provide a significant resource: members can meet others of their own linguistic group, discover the locations for worship, learn the process for coping with the difficulties of life

⁹⁷ Although he frequently ignores the underpinning class dynamic of membership.

in Bahrain, and build the social networks by which the dilemmas and problems endemic to the guestworker system might be addressed. Some clubs focus their outreach activities on their constituent populations. TASCA, for example, orients its outreach activities toward Tamilian transmigrants. Others social clubs, like the Lions Club, reach out to the Bahraini society, and are part of the elite members' efforts to improve their own standing in the eyes of their hosts. For the diasporic elite and middle class, the island of Bahrain is laden with venues for the accumulation of social capital; although it is much more difficult for transmigrant laborers to access these venues and, hence, attempt to accumulate social capital, the diasporic social clubs nonetheless represent the principal, if not only, venue for the laboring class to engage in this process.

In terms of instrumental value the social clubs provide a venue for individual members of the Indian diaspora to meet others in the Indian community, to gain valuable knowledge about the mechanisms by which they might deal with the typical dilemmas of life under the state-based structure of dominance, and, in the final accounting, better secure the economic benefits of their sojourn in the Gulf. Oftentimes the capital formed in these clubs falls somewhere in between Putnam's notion of bridging and bonding capital. Social clubs such as TASCA and the Kerala Catholic Association, for example, fall more along the lines of Putnam's bonding capital, for these clubs bring individuals of similar linguistic and ethnic background together, while clubs like Toastmasters and the Indian Club convene individuals from different ethnic, regional, religious and linguistic groups, and hence fall more along the lines of Putnam's notion of bridging capital.

At the same time, the analysis of the power implicit in these capital-rich social institutions opens up other angles of analysis. As many have noted, the power implicit in these relations is built upon exclusion; Portes and Landolt, in explicating what they call ‘negative’ social capital, argue that “the same strong ties that help members of a group often enable it to exclude outsiders” (Portes and Landolt 1999; see also Portes 1998; Waldinger 1995; Gardner 2000). Like the Hasidic diamond traders described by Coleman, the power of social capital is derived from the exclusion of others: the social capital constructed by a Keralite Catholic within the Kerala Catholic Association is, in many senses, premised upon the exclusion of others from that institution—in this case, Indians who aren’t from Kerala, Indians who aren’t Catholic, and Indian Keralites who aren’t Catholic. Through this process of exclusion, the “same kinds of ties that sometimes yield public goods also produce “public bads”: mafia families, prostitution rings, and youth gangs, to cite a few” (Portes and Landolt 1996). And the working class of the Indian community can ill afford to join any of these clubs, a significant point which leads to the common tautology underlying much of the work on social capital: Winners win.

Yet even that critique is insufficient. Boudieu’s nuanced descriptions of social capital provide an even more insightful perspective on the interrelationship between the structure of dominance and the social clubs and voluntary organizations in which social capital is accumulated, and it is through his theory that one can grasp one portion of the disparate and significant reach of this structure of dominance. Bourdieu sees social capital as part of a triumvirate of capital (including cultural and economic capital); he avoids attempts at quantifying the value of social and cultural capital, argues for the

particular logics of each forms' accumulation, is attentive to the exclusionary aspects of these capita-rich social networks, and most importantly, argues that power rests at the junction through which one form of capital is converted to another (Bourdieu 1988; 1992). It is the last of these notions that is particularly applicable in the context of contemporary Bahrain.

For members of the Indian diaspora, the social clubs and voluntary associations provide a particularly rich set of venues for the construction and maintenance of social capital. Some of these clubs and associations are oriented toward what Robert Putnam called bridging capital. The Indian Club, for example, brings together individuals from the diasporic middle and upper classes. It convenes individuals from different Indian states, from the numerically dominant Keralites to the historically entrenched Gujarati and Sindhi merchants of Bahrain. And it brings together Muslims, Christians and Hindus. The bridging capital of other clubs such Toastmasters, Lions Club, and Rotary Club, reaches beyond nationality by bringing together individuals from a wide variety of locations.

Yet regardless of whether the club is of the type that fosters the bridging capital lauded by Putnam or, alternatively, is more focused upon the particularistic identities of its members and, hence, more focused upon the bonding capital maligned by Putnam, converting these social resources into economic capital is a difficult task in this transnational environment. The labor market, for example, is not a free one. For an Indian clerk to capitalize upon the networks he forms in these social clubs, to move upward in the economic hierarchy of contemporary Bahrain, is a difficult task to accomplish. Even

with the interventions and guidance of those social resources he has constructed, switching jobs entails switching sponsors. A trail of paperwork precedes that process; the Bahraini sponsor, or *kafeel*, must be consulted and, potentially, paid; citizen intermediaries must be contracted to deal directly with the government bureaucracies involved. Should one of these links in this chain fail, or should the new sponsor not be as contractually trustworthy as the last, even the well-placed transmigrant finds himself alone against the complexities of the law and state to which he does not belong.

This systemic condition is only exacerbated in those clubs and associations internally oriented around what Robert Putnam calls bonding capital. For clubs like TASCA or the Keralite Catholic Association, the added categorical boundaries provide a smaller total set of social resources. Valuable as those social resources are in the instrumental sense, it is the transmodification of that capital to its economic form that proves even more difficult. Members of the smaller, more categorically specific clubs have fewer connections to the powerful companies on the island, fewer connections to the Indian Embassy and the minimal blanket of security it provides, and so forth. And no matter what the strength of the social resources, individuals face the same system as their more cosmopolitan brethren described above.

In conclusion, then, the voluntary associations and social clubs of the Indian diaspora are certainly a rich environment for the construction and maintenance of social capital. En suite, these institutions provide a variety of options for the Indian transmigrant. Some are more oriented toward bridging the categorical differences between individuals on the island. Others tend to the other extreme by building upon

these differences. The great majority, if not all, of the social clubs and voluntary associations of the Indian diaspora comprise some amalgamation of purposes oriented toward both bridging and bonding, placing them somewhere along the continuum posited by Putnam's two extremes. The instrumental power conferred by membership in these clubs and associations must certainly be understood as one built upon both inclusion and exclusion. At the same time, the most significant aspect of power present in this scenario is best described by the theoretical framework of Bourdieu's nuanced analysis of social capital: while these venues certainly comprise important arenas for the construction and maintenance of social capital on the island, converting that social capital to economic capital is a process fraught with difficulty. The structure of dominance into which all transmigrants arrive prevents individuals from easily converting social capital into economic capital, and as Bourdieu suggests, it is the control of that juncture at which power rests. In the final accounting, it is this valence of power that best encapsulates the complex social order on the island, and it is another aspect of the state and citizenry's hegemony over the transmigrants that live and work on the island.

V. Performance and Identity

The instrumental value of the social clubs and other voluntary associations comprises one significant facet of their role to the diasporic community as a whole and, alternatively, to the individual transmigrants seeking to cope with the dilemmas of life as a non-citizen on the island. Yet the role of these social clubs is not fully encapsulated by this function. In addition to these clubs' role as venues for the development of social capital, they serve the twin purpose of sites for the production of meaning and identity for

a people in diaspora. The very same processes by which social capital is constructed and maintained are those that serve to differentiate one member of the diaspora from another; in forging these social relations, members of the social clubs and voluntary associations build hierarchical relations with one another, recasting their individual identities in a context much removed from that of the homeland.

In this section, then, I depart from the considerations of the instrumental value of these social clubs and voluntary associations, and turn instead to the value they have as spaces and places for transmigrants to find meaning and identity during their sometimes-permanent migration away from their homeland. First, I explore the relationship between these processes of identity construction and the structure of dominance that shapes the lives of all transmigrants in this transnational milieu; next, I analyze how class divisions articulate in the context of these clubs and associations; I then turn to the fissures of ethnicity and religion and their articulation in the transnational milieu. I conclude with a section that portrays the circumscribed practice of politics within the context of these clubs and associations. All of these waypoints contribute to a more holistic and nuanced conception of power on the island. Through the fundamental and systemic qualities of the structure of dominance in place, control is exerted not only over the instrumental value of the social clubs on the island—principally, I have argued, through control of the junction by which social capital might be converted to economic capital—but also over the production of meaning and identity amongst the diasporic Indian community.

VI. Diasporic Identity and the Structure of Dominance

The power that the Indians bring to Bahrain—conceived in terms of their capacity to perform functions that are at once necessary to Bahrain's role in the regional and global political economy and, at the same time, intricately linked to the citizenry's own national vision of modernity—is cast against a structure of dominance that undermines that power. As I have described in previous chapters, this structure of dominance is, in one sense, rooted in the state. As non-citizens, Indian transmigrants share few of the rights conferred upon citizens, and their ability to claim those few rights is routed through their *kafeel*, a system that structures abuse. I have also argued that this structure of dominance takes discursive form in the everyday interactions between citizen and guestworker—arguing that the habitus expressed in everyday interactions reinforces the powerlessness of the foreigner in the state-based system.

In terms of the identities forged by transmigrants under this structure of dominance, I have focuses specifically upon the uniformity conferred upon the Indian transmigrant. Amongst my Bahraini friends and acquaintances, *hind*, or Indian, was used as a derogatory term, often in jest. Newspapers refer to the nationality of guestworkers, reporting them as Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, and so forth. Even those who were born and raised on the island in diaspora note that having a Bahraini passport would do little to change the nature of their interactions with the citizenry—they are Indians, and foreign to the genealogical conceptions of citizenship that shape relations between individuals and the state. Faced with a system that reinforces their singular identity, social clubs and voluntary organizations provide a key venue for reinvesting in the specificities lurking

beneath the transcendent Indian identity. It is in those venues that one can perform being a Keralite, or a Christian, or a Tamilian Catholic. It is there that individuals reconnect with the particularistic identities that make them Indian, something more than just labor.

As the former president of one of the largest social clubs on the island described,

[For Indians] away from those clubs, their life in the general world of Bahrain is a second class life. They have to obey someone, they have to do unpleasurable things to please someone. There's a kind of humiliation, frustration in their work. When they come from that world to the club, or to the Indian Embassy, which is their own world, then there they remember that I'm an Indian citizen, and I have a right to complain about the table being dirty, or the bathroom stinking. They write a letter. It's the action of a person that's not satisfied with life in the outside world of Bahrain. He goes to his own, he's got no family here, he can't shout at his wife that his tea isn't ready. So such people, they take it out on someone somewhere. And the only people that will listen to them are their own people at the Indian school, Indian embassy, or Indian club. If they did the same thing at their job, they would say pack up and leave the country. They can't do it.

For the transmigrant, social clubs and other voluntary organizations provide a space once removed from the purview of the structure of dominance. Sheba George (2000), in her analysis of the husbands of Keralite nurses in a community in the United States, noted that the men that accompany them are disenfranchised and disempowered in the workforce. Voluntary associations—and particularly churches—offer “a unique setting for men to restore their lost identity and their self esteem. To compensate for demotion in the labor market and family, they use the church in three significant ways: to assert their leadership, to develop a sense of belonging, and to secure their exclusiveness” (George 2000: 163). Voluntary associations in Bahrain serve a similar function: as spaces beyond the direct purview of the structure of dominance, social clubs and voluntary organizations provide key venues for the performance of Indianness and, at the same time, for the articulation of differences in that identity.

VII. Building and Rejecting Class

Class is a difficult notion to articulate amidst the plural and heterogeneous milieu of contemporary Bahrain. On the one hand, the island's increasing immersion in the global political economy has wrought a fundamental stratification amongst both the citizenry and the guestworkers on the island. Those who derive the most benefits from this system—the Sunni minority and the diasporic businessmen and professionals amongst the various transnational communities on the island—certainly comprise the upper and middle classes wrought by essentially capitalist relations. On the other hand, citizenship confers its own set of benefits and attitudes upon this heterogeneous milieu, and this sense of belonging to the state (and the benefits therein derived) crosscut class consciousness on the island. Even the poorest of the Shi'i citizens have no bond with the wealthy or poor transmigrants that toil in their midst: nationality and racially-conceived notions of citizenship trump any class consciousness that might arise from the disenfranchisement shared by Shi'ite citizens and the diasporic underclasses.

For the Indian diaspora, social clubs and voluntary associations provide one of the principal venues for the articulation and, alternatively, the rejection of class. At one level, Indian social clubs provide a closed system, outside the purview of the habitus of everyday interactions between citizen and guest, spaces where the status of the homeland can be deployed and utilized. Alternatively, some of the voluntary clubs provide venues in which citizens and non-citizens mix, and, occasionally, locations where the class logic of the global capitalist system can be affirmed. At one Toastmasters meeting, for example, I noted that a club secretary of Indian descent browbeat a Bahraini member for

his suggestion on the format for an upcoming award ceremony. His loud and angry tone was unusual to say the least—I never observed any interaction like this outside the context of these social clubs and other voluntary organizations. Clubs like the Toastmasters, designed for cosmopolitan English speakers from all the various communities on the island, are not only venues in which middle class and elite diasporic community members practice English. They also provide venues in which the discourse of the professional class is practiced and, simultaneously, in which statuses achieved under the logic of the global capitalist system are deployed and affirmed.

In a third sense, voluntary associations and social clubs also provide a venue for rejecting class hierarchies of the global, capitalist political economy and those woven into the fabric of the local structure of dominance, for these social clubs also provide a venue for reaffirming the statuses and identities of the homeland. In many of these clubs—and particularly those that are regionally and linguistically specific—caste, status, and other identity categories important in the homeland can trump the calculus of class in the global political economy. While an individual's caste or status in India may have little sway with his or her sponsor or, alternatively, in the larger context of Bahraini culture, those categories nonetheless may find traction in the arena of the social club.

VIII: Conclusion: Politics and Power in Diaspora

In this chapter I have attempted to portray the diversity of social clubs and voluntary associations constructed by the diasporic Indian community in Bahrain. Although the similarities between Gulf nations are often striking, the efflorescence of social clubs and voluntary organizations is a phenomenon unique to Bahrain. Although

these clubs are, in the final accounting, couched in the same structure of dominance that shapes all expatriate existence on the island, they nonetheless provide a unique venue outside the workspace and beyond the confines of the labor camps or Manama apartments in which Indian transnationals perform and articulate their particular relationship to the homeland, to Bahrain, and to the global ecumene at large.

In many senses these organizations are not truly transnational in nature. The activities of the clubs and organizations graze at the periphery of transnationalism: the Lion's Club, for example, adopts its mission goals from those promoted by the Lions Club headquarters in the United States, while the Toastmasters is a global club that readily adopts transnational members on the move. However, few of the regional and social clubs actually span the transnational divide. Some of the social clubs may import performers from the homeland, but the governmental purview of their actions and existence—as one facet of the structure of dominance exerted over foreigners in Bahrain—actively prevents them from sending money or providing assistance to the homeland.

Yet while they may not be transnational organizations, their existence and scope is wholly shaped by the transnational milieu, a fact that is perhaps most apparent in the instrumental value they provide to transmigrants of all classes on the island. Together the various social clubs on the island provide a quasi-governmental institutional framework that assists non-national transmigrants with the many problems they face in Bahrain: the repatriation of bodies, assistance with the sick, provision of a safehouse for maids on the run; all of these activities and much more are part of the institutional response to the

inactivity of the Bahraini government on behalf of the non-national transmigrant. In addition to these direct services, the social clubs also provide an important venue for individuals to meet others and build funds of knowledge about how to deal with problems.

In the course of this chapter, I have used the lens of social capital to examine the instrumental value of these social clubs and voluntary associations to the transmigrants that comprise them. In the theoretical modicum derived from the work of Coleman and Putnam, the value of these associations is directly related to the social relations constructed and reinforced within these clubs. By turning to Bourdieu and Portes, however, I argue that in terms of social capital, their value is directly related to the social boundaries that exclude individuals from participation. Moreover, as Bourdieu has argued, it is the junction at which the forms of capital are transmodified at which power rests. In this particular transnational realm, the ability of the individual from the Indian community to turn the social capital generated in these folds into economic capital is not a direct one; because of the nature of the sponsorship system, this exchange is wrought with difficulty. Hence this is another aspect of the structure of dominance exerted by the state over both individuals and groups in diaspora.

Yet the power of these clubs is something more than the instrumental value they host for transnationals abroad. They are also important as wellsprings of identity, as key nodes in the universally human desire to find meaning and purpose in life and, for the Indian transmigrant, for choosing the meaning of Indianness. Certainly the clubs and voluntary associations provide one of the principal conduits through which information is

shared and strategies for dealing with the difficulties of life in Bahrain are configured. But the clubs also provide a rich and varied arena for the performance of Indian identity or, more properly, identities—for producing meaning. For those who can afford the time and money required to participate, the social clubs and other associations comprise one of the principal venues in which, as Lessinger (1999: 17) noted in her work with the Indian diaspora in the United States, “class, ethnicity and race interact as Indians position themselves within a multi-ethnic and national context.” For some, these venues provide an opportunity to reconnect as best they can with the components of identity of their home region and communities; for others, these venues are an opportunity to reject the baggage of those identities and affirm their role as cosmopolitan transnationals on the move.

CHAPTER SIX

INVIGORATING THE STATE: TRANSNATIONALISM AND THE CITIZEN-HOSTS



Figure 6.1: A Bahraini woman and child take in the sights at the carnivalesque gathering that occurs every winter on the southern portion of the island.

I. Introduction

In previous chapters I described a structure of dominance that pens and confines the agency of Indian transmigrants in diaspora. My analysis of this structure of dominance considered both its institutional aspects and the everyday, interactional aspects that characterize the public discourse between citizen and the transmigrants that work on the island. In doing so, I focused upon the systemic aspects of this dominance, but also upon the strategies these transmigrants devise to live meaningful and productive lives under this governance. Living under the strictures described, they struggle to forge a strategic transnationalism, to build a particular version of “Indian” culture on the island, and for the diasporic elite, to take advantage as best they can of the lucrative offerings of

the global financescape of contemporary capitalism. The danger in focusing so closely on this structure of dominance, however, rests in the portrayal of the Bahraini citizen as a mere structural dopes (Giddens 1979: 52)—as nothing more than a vessel for the habitus of governance exerted over the foreigners in their midst.

With the abundance of attention to transnational communities and their relationship to the states from whence they come, the impact upon host nations and the peoples who imagine them is often eclipsed—hence Mahler’s call to examine “the role transmigrants play in transforming those communities that they occupy which are not their communities of origin” (Mahler 1998: 93; see also Reitz 2003). In this chapter, I consider the role the large transmigrant communities have played in shaping the experience of the Bahraini people. Specifically, considering the unique characteristics of the contemporary Gulf, where, as Kapiszewski notes, indigenous groups are “dominant in power but not always in number” (Kapiszewski 2000: 20), I explore the interlinked relationship between three distinct arenas: the *state*, uniquely configured in the petroleum-rich Gulf as the conglomeration of apparatuses which distribute wealth and, simultaneously, to control and manage incursions of foreign bodies, ideas, and meanings; the *nation*, as an imagined community forged in a unique postcolonial environment; and *citizenship*, as both a “legal device to organize relations between individuals and the state” and a conceptual container for particular, historically contingent, and localized identities wrought by the transnational demographics of the contemporary Gulf (Longva 2000: 179).

Social theory's comprehension of citizenship took shape with Marshall's seminal work Citizenship and Social Class (1950). Marshall saw citizenship as a set of formal rights and responsibilities, an equalizing force to the inequities structured by capitalist relations of production, a universal institution "practiced in the same manner in all societies under all circumstances" (Longva 2000: 179; see also Calavita and Suarez-Navaz 2003: 102). More recent work has criticized this final aspect of Marshall's work. Yuval-Davis envisions citizenship as a collectivity whose boundaries, or lines of exclusion, as well as its internal structures are produced and reproduced through continuing negotiation and struggle (Calavita and Suarez-Navaz 2003: 102). More often than not the foundation for these ongoing negotiations and struggles are a result of the increasing transnationalism of people, culture and ideas. The flexible citizenship of the Chinese corporate elites described by Ong (1999) or the strategic transnationalism of the elite Indian diaspora described in previous chapters demonstrate a renegotiation of the relationship between individuals and the state (or states), as well as the efforts of states to reach out and subjectify people on the move (Ong 1999: 20; Smith 1998; Portes 2001: 190).

By exploring the particular circumstances of Bahraini citizens and their relation to the state, I approach these issues from a different direction. In the Gulf nations, the struggle and negotiation over the boundaries of citizenship certainly occur. But while the internal structures and the meaning of citizenship have been constantly renegotiated, the boundaries of citizenship have remained altogether impermeable and static. The process is certainly dynamic, as Yuval-Davis suggests (1990), and contingent, I argue, upon the

historical political economy of Bahrain and, more specifically, upon the presence of a large transnational population. The maintenance of rigid boundaries around citizenship is practiced in everyday interactions; it draws upon—and feeds—a particular imagination of a national community; and it does the same with the particular configuration of the state as the apparatus for controlling foreign populations, for mediating relations with the outside world, and for distributing benefits to the citizenry.

The argument at the foundation of this chapter can be summarized as follows: the structure of dominance described in previous chapters, rooted in both the institutions and policies of the state, comprises a form of agency when contextualized in the global arena of contemporary capitalism. Decades of dependence upon inexpensive, educated, and trained transnational laborers who, together, remain integral to the construction and maintenance of the Gulf-wide vision of modernity, has left the citizenry poorly positioned to compete in the private sector forged by increasing linkages to the global political economy. Instead, the state itself emerges as the locus of their power in the global system; the habitus of everyday interactions with foreigners and the institutional governance of transmigrants on the island become two facets of an increasingly invigorated state, a direct result of the transnational flow of people, capital, ideas, and culture. For Bahraini citizens, the state itself represents the principal entity for maintaining some form of control over the processes of global capitalism at work on the island. In essence, the citizenry's potential resistance to the inequalities codified in the state is trumped by the state's ongoing role as the nexus of their resistance to the neoliberal calculus of the global ecumene.

II. Imagining a nation

In his often-quoted Imagined Communities, Benedict Anderson suggests that the idea of nationhood, as a repository of ideas, continues to function as the “most universally legitimate value in the political life of our time” (Anderson 1983: 3). In the previous decade, Wallerstein, building on the work of Braudel and the Annales School, provided an influential theory of a world system in which the relations of production and exchange now assumed a global scope. Wolf’s revision, arriving a year before Anderson’s seminal work, argued that the impact of this world system went back much further in history, and found a place for anthropologists in articulating the local responses to the increasing reach of global capitalism (Wolf 1982). Anderson pitches his enquiry in similarly Marxist terms by questioning how nationalism, as shared belief and allegiance, crosscuts the global relations of production of the bourgeoisie (Anderson 1983: 4). In arriving at his conclusion on the durability of nationalism, he focuses on the role of print capitalism in forging a Eurocolonial template through which a “permanent traffic in ideas of peoplehood and selfhood” were articulated (Appadurai 1996: 28).

Yet while Anderson sees the nation as the most durable value of our era, Appadurai, writing some thirteen years later, concludes that, “I have come to be convinced that the nation-state, as a complex modern political form, is on its last legs” (Appadurai 1996: 19).⁹⁸ Appadurai focuses upon the process of imagination, coupling Anderson’s notion of imagined community with the French concept of *imaginaire*, as “a

⁹⁸ Or, as Michael Kearney noted, “members of transnational communities ... escape the power of the nation-state to inform their sense of collective identity” (1991: 59).

constructed landscape of collective aspirations” (Appadurai 1996: 31). For Appadurai, the question becomes how this particular notion of community will fare in the increasingly transnational sphere, comprised as it is of deterritorialized, rhizomic social networks that transcend the national boundaries constructed in the colonial relations of the nineteenth century.

In making this case, Appadurai’s attention is on the cosmopolitan transnationals and the cultural conduits that accompany them, the very sorts of individuals I described in my portrayal of the diasporic elite in Bahrain. In fact, there are striking parallels between the examples he utilizes and the commonplace experiences one encounters in Bahrain. Appadurai even briefly notes the extraordinarily transnational music of the Filipino community in an anecdote that resonates with my experiences on the island. I remember an evening stroll in the old *souq*, and upon hearing something familiar amidst the calls to prayer from the speakers atop distant minarets, I found my way to a small tea shop where a young Filipino man practiced—or was he performing?—Led Zeppelin’s Stairway to Heaven for an audience of two. Filipinos seem to have cornered the market in performance, and their tight renditions of American and British songs fit in Appadurai’s discussion of Iyer’s work (“an entire nation seems to have learned to mimic Kenny Rogers and the Lennon sisters [?], like a vast Asian Motown chorus”) (Appadurai 1996: 29). For Appadurai and others, these sorts of Baudrillardesque observations are symptomatic of a rupture or break, of a fundamental shift from a territorialized—and national—past to a deterritorialized and denationalized future, where both individuals and

the referential content of their collective identities are untethered from the nation (Appadurai 1996; Smith 2001: 166).

For an anthropologist like myself with an interest in the cultural dimensions of globalization, the flotsam of contemporary capitalism, removed from the context of its production, is a seemingly endless source of interest—the Filipino musicians rehearsing the songs of my childhood in a Middle Eastern café, the giant Bozo-the-clown carpets that covered the floor of one of the labor camps I frequently visited—these strange juxtapositions suggest that the things we make in the contemporary world, including both the material (in the sense of the carpets) and immaterial (in the sense of Zeppelin’s *Stairway to Heaven*) quickly come unmoored from the context of their own production. Objects, ideas, songs—fragments of cultures—come to mean new things to new people in new contexts. And alongside these cultural fragments flow money and, more importantly, people of all different sorts, from the impoverished Indian laborer seeking a slight improvement to his and his family’s future to the cosmopolitan merchants and businessmen with homes on three or more continents.

Yet as much as the portrait of the Indian elite presented in previous chapters fits the mold described by Appadurai, the presence of these cosmopolitan classes, as well as their impoverished (and less cosmopolitan) countrymen, has had an altogether different impact upon the Bahraini citizen-hosts, and the conclusions drawn from the analysis of the imagined bonds of the deterritorialized cosmopolitans in Bahrain and elsewhere have few parallels when it comes to the citizenry (see Gupta 2002: 102 for a similar critique of Appadurai). Bahrain is certainly a transnational space, a node in the regional and global

political economy, and an important destination or waypoint for transmigrants of all sorts. But that is not the end of the story; in fact, the very presence of these large populations of transmigrant foreigners has reinforced conceptions of nationhood in all the Gulf States (Longva 1997, 2000; Kapiszewski 2000).

Others have picked up this trail. In her detailed ethnography of the relations between citizen-host and guestworker in Kuwait, Anh Longva described the siege mentality of the Kuwaiti citizens. A Kuwaiti woman asked,

You have been to Abu Dhabi and Dubai, haven't you? How many local people did you meet in the streets there? One? Two? They are so few compared to the expatriates that they have surrendered the streets to them. Sometimes, I think we should do that too, withdraw to a ghetto where we would be only amongst ourselves ... [but] we want to retain our streets, to keep them Kuwaiti. We want to hear Kuwaiti spoken out there, see Kuwaiti people and Kuwaiti manners around us. This is our home. We don't want to lose it. (1997: 125)

In articulating the meaning of these sentiments, Longva and others suggest the combined forces of tribal identity, as an internal axis for exclusion, and the legion of transmigrant laborers, as a field against which the definition of this solidarity is cast, comprise the basis for a national identity (Longva 1997, 2000; Kapiszewski 2000: 23). As Longva clearly notes, “migrants are the foil in relation to which the Gulf nationals perceive and define themselves” (Longva 2000: 183). Like the Kuwaitis, the Bahrainis host the transnational peoples and processes that feed predictions of the eroding nation-state. But as *hosts* rather than participants the presence of these transnational peoples and processes foster the bonds of a communal, national identity: As Michael Smith has noted, it is one of the paradoxes of contemporary capitalism that “the expansion of transnational

migrant has resulted in outbursts of entrenched, essentialist nationalism in both sending and receiving locales” (Smith 2001: 173).

Much as Longva encountered Kuwaiti citizens wary of the vast contingents of foreign labor around them, the Bahraini citizens I encountered frequently expressed sentiments of a besieged mentality. However, these expressions were often more circumscribed than those presented above. In Bahrain, citizens often described these issues to me in terms of the neighborhoods of the city. On one sunny afternoon, for example, I accompanied Abdullah, an elderly Bahraini acquaintance on a walk through his childhood home. The now-abandoned building had for the previous decade functioned as a sort of dormitory for Asian laborers. Beneath the detritus of that decade he found the remnants of his own childhood—the room where, after his studies, he used to sit and listen to the Beatles, the stairs where he fell and injured his neck, the tree his father planted in the center of the courtyard. Standing on the sidewalk out front we fought for our place amidst the jostle of Asian laborers moving up and down the street. He pointed to the corner apartment, adjoining the main house but distinct and separate, where merchants and traders from India and other points abroad would stay as guests of his father. He recalled the names of the other families who had once lived on the street, and concluded,

Things have really changed. Most of the neighborhood is Asian now, and the families that used to live here have moved elsewhere. They’ve gone to the suburbs, to the garden districts outside the city. And you know what’s interesting? Lately they’ve started constructing houses just like this, around a central courtyard, just like the ones that we grew up in.

In another interview, a Bahraini merchant described the same neighborhood: “No one lives down there anymore.... It’s more crowded down there than ever with all the Filipinos and Hindus.”

The statement that the Filipinos and Hindus comprise “no one” is indicative of the fracture line between citizens and non-citizens. In conceiving of the shared bonds of nationhood, the codified sense of citizenship—historically located as those present before 1920 and only recently reconfigured to accommodate those of Persian descent—plays a paramount role. Previous analyses of the situation have congealed around Furnival’s concept of plural society (Furnival 1939, Franklin 1985, Longva 1997, Kapiszewski 2000). Furnival’s theory, constructed from an analysis of colonial Indonesia, provided an explanation for the minimal interaction between different, enclaved social groups. In describing the process by which Bahrainis imagine a nation from this particularly transnational and heterogenous social context of their island, I turn to the Bahraini conception of host. Think of the house Abdullah’s grandfather constructed, with a small apartment in which traveling merchants might stay—an apartment that was at once part of the house but distinct and separate. The citizenry’s relationship to the people and processes from beyond the shores of their island is construed in much the same manner. I argue that the circumscription of the besieged mentality described in other work is a product of the unique heritage of Bahrain as a transnational entrepôt and its particularly heterogeneous citizenry. For Bahrainis, the role of host helps citizens articulate their

particular relationship to the foreign communities toiling in their midst and even, in many cases, in their homes.⁹⁹

The conceptualization of the national identity and, specifically, the citizenry's conceptualization of their relationship to the global ecumene through the lens of hospitality takes practical form in the *kafala* system of sponsorship. As described in earlier chapters, transmigrants are tied to particular sponsors; adult Bahrainis often "host" numerous transmigrants, both in the workplace and in the home. The division between citizen and transmigrant is reified by the assuredly temporal existence of the transmigrant in Bahrain. While citizens have a permanent connection to the state and its territory, the transmigrant is typically present only for a contractually limited time: the historical continuity of the diasporic Indian community is undermined by the ever-changing cast of individuals, a fact which contributes to their omission from the collective history underpinning the imagination of the national bond.

An argument can also be made that Bahrainis maintain a host relationship with the very processes of global capitalism at work on the island. Appadurai's notion of financescapes is enigmatic—he seeks something short of a "sophisticated account of the very complex fiscal and investment flows that link" economies, something more general, mysterious, and disjunctive (Appadurai 1996: 34-35). Stepping around the issue of the essential singularity of the stratum for which Appadurai uses a plural, the construction of a Bahraini national identity is tied to the processes of global capitalism, to this global financescape, and specifically, to the small island's role as an entrepôt between the forces

⁹⁹ And hence my use of the term citizen-host is not an empty one.

of global capitalism and the more conservative regimes of the Gulf. As Abdullah described:

Bahrain—of all the Gulf countries—had the first schools. And we were the most important place in the Gulf. All the big companies had offices here. Now we’ve fallen behind Dubai in the economic race, but that is a place for gangsters and money laundering. The law here is much stricter, and it’s a good place to do business. This, I think, is the most important quality for our future as a financial center in the Gulf.

The contours of the imagined Bahraini nation are closely allied to the global financescape, and make up much of what is reported in the island’s newspapers. Consider these headlines from November of 2005: *New Trade Centre ‘will boost image globally’* (GDN 11/30/04), announcing the construction of a Bahrain World Trade Centre that will “help put



Figure 6.2: Bahrain’s leaders hope the financial harbor, planned for land reclaimed from the sea, will help the small island nation retain its role as the hub of

the country on the map, connecting it to a network of over 750,000 companies in over 300 WTCs in 100 countries”; *High-profile delegation visits financial harbour* (GDN 11/28/04), regarding Bahrain’s construction of a \$1 billion dollar financial harbor to house the conduits of the financial and insurance industries that, along with tourism, represent the island’s vision of its diversification from oil dependency (see also *Boom*

Days Ahead, GDN 11/20/04). Along these same lines, during my fieldwork in Bahrain construction began on the Gulf's first Formula One racetrack, and plans were announced for a massive shopping mall with an indoor ski slope. These monumental projects, along with seemingly daily announcements of large-scale road improvements, housing projects, industrial complexes, hospitals, schools and desalination plants, are emblematic of a particular and largely uncontested vision of modernity, spurred by petroleum wealth, and articulated by the Sunni leadership as a roadmap to a prosperous and diversified future (see also Nagy 2000).

The metaphor of host helps explain the seeming disjuncture between the almost daily announcements of new manifestations of the global financescape on the island and the public consternation over the cultural baggage—principally part of what Appadurai calls *mediascapes* and *ideoscapes*—that accompany it (Appadurai 1996: 34-36). For example, in the same months that the projects described above were announced, officials announced a crackdown on street advertising featuring scantily-clad women or other “indecent” imagery (GDN Saturday December 2, 2004), while the Muharraq Municipal Council issued a ban on “Scantily-clad mannequins” in lingerie shop windows, arguing that “Modern mannequins look too real and are exciting young men, who crowd around the shop windows” (GDN Thursday, November 18, 2004). Ten days later, a group of students at the University of Bahrain organized a march to demand the implementation of a stricter dress code on campus. The code, argued a Student Council member, ought to stipulate a manner of dress for women that “covered the breasts and thighs and was not tight or transparent.” Continuing, the student leader noted that, “Empty values passed on

to us from the West will certainly disappear while our cultural and Islamic customs and traditions will always stay strong against any wave” (GDN Sunday, November 28, 2004).

The project of constructing and maintaining a communal national identity must constantly negotiate the fissures and disjunctures wrought by Bahrain’s increasing immersion in the global ecumene. Appadurai’s distinction between the various dimensions of these global flows—his *financescapes*, *ideoscapes*, *ethnoscapes*, and so forth—allow us to peer inside the typically portrayal of globalization as a purely homogenizing force.¹⁰⁰ Where the presence of the global financescape, along with the jobs and wealth it is envisioned to create, meets almost no public resistance, the mediascapes and ideoscapes that accompany it are a source of almost constant strife. These disjunctures often highlight sectarian and ethnic fissures within the national identity. Sectarian strife between the powerful Sunni constituency and the disenfranchised Shi’i constituency has recently erupted: in the mid-1990s, Shi’i youth engaged in protracted riots, burning electric substations, ransacking public schools and demanding democratic reforms. The Sunni leadership, using the state apparatuses of direct control as well as contingents of foreign mercenaries, jailed hundreds of youth, barred media coverage of the strife, and only later quelled strife through the formation of an elected Shura Council (Waldman 1995). Although events were quiet for several years, in the first hours of 2003 a throng of predominately Shi’i teenagers rampaged down the boulevard in the neighborhood of Hoorā, flipping automobiles and setting them afire,

¹⁰⁰ Appadurai sees the analytic tension between globalization as a homogenizing force and as a heterogenizing force as a central dilemma in the study of global interactions (1990). See Gezon (2004: 135) for a concise description of this ongoing analytic tension.

destroying hotel windows and attacking hapless passerbys. Both the sustained riots of 1995 and the episode on New Years Day 2003 fell largely upon sectarian lines and served as evidence of a deep fissure within the citizenry. These internal fissures complicate and challenge the construction of a national sodality.

Similarly, countervailing forces of a scope larger than the national identity also challenge the maintenance of nationhood. Pan-Arab and pan-Islamic sentiments are again surging in the region, partly as a result of the ongoing conflict in Iraq. These notions portray national boundaries as an immaterial and foreign division of an essentially unified people (Hopkins and Ibrahim 1985: 12-14). Likewise, the shared history and heritage of Al Khaleej, or the people of the Gulf, represent another set of allegiances that transcend the national identity.

In my discussions, citizens often described their identity in terms of valences. More often than not these descriptions began with something along the lines of what Ahmed, a young Bahraini of Persian descent, related over coffee in a posh sheesha café:

More than anything else, I am a Bahraini first. Other things come after that. To me, being a Bahraini means being more liberal, cosmopolitan, more open-minded. We have a long tradition of this here in Bahrain, not only from the Persian population, but the Indian population that's been here for hundreds of years, as well as the Jews and others.¹⁰¹

Like many of the other Bahrainis with whom I spoke, Ahmed's sense of nationalism is configured around Bahrain's particular history as the entrepôt to the surrounding regions

¹⁰¹ See Anh Longva (2000: 191) for a strikingly similar description of identity in Kuwait. Munira al-Fadhel, in a personal essay about gender ethics in Bahrain, also notes that the "totalising nature of nationalist discourse [in Bahrain] asks for the submergence or silencing of gender, sexuality or any other ideological stance or identity position which is not subsumed under pure or authentic Islam or Arabism" (1999: 58).

of the Arabian Peninsula. Whereas the wealthier nations of the Gulf littoral often refer to the Bahrainis as the beggars of the Gulf, it is Bahrain's relative cosmopolitanism and open-mindedness that comprise their particular embrace of the global ecumene and underpin their own nationalistic vision. I have unpacked that relationship by exploring the concept of *host*, arguing that this concept, with some historical precedent, provides a basis for negotiating their relationship to the various forces of global capitalism. It is this notion that allows them to accommodate the disjunctures of global capitalism—to imagine the nation as a hub for global finance and consumption while rejecting aspects of the culture that accompanies that financescape; to disdain foreign influences while wholly dependent upon the labor and skills of those foreigners. Like the home constructed by Abdullah's grandfather, the concept of *host* provides a metaphor for this relationship, for interaction with the foreign without integrating the foreign.

III. Divisions Amongst the Citizenry

The idea of a nation in the imagination of the Bahraini citizen occurs against a backdrop of countervailing forces, many of which stem from strata that transcend the national identity—from the allegiance forged from overlapping kinship and history in *al khaleej*, or the citizenry of the Gulf nations, through the pan-Arab sentiments that draw individuals from around the Middle East into the folds of community, to the *ummah*, the notion of a single people bound by the religion of Islam, stretching now to all corners of the globe. These strata of identity compete with the nation as an imagined and communal bond: the shared history and similar economic circumstances of the petroleum-rich nations of *Al Khaleej*, for example, become the basis for a communal identity that

transcends the shores of the small island nation, while the discursive terrain of the global culture war, resurrected by Samuel Huntington and with much support in the current American administration, fuels communal bonds based on religion alone (see Huntington 1996).

In this section, however, I focus upon the lines of fissure internal to the citizenry of Bahrain, and thereby upon the communal bonds within the citizenry that challenge the authority and hegemony of the nation as an imagined collectivity. In following this line of enquiry, the analysis begins to move from the nation, as the imagined bond between citizens, to the state, as the apparatus by which the inequity amongst the citizenry is structured and reinforced. Emerging from the colonial era, the Bahraini state faces a heterogeneous citizenry—in many ways, more heterogeneous than its neighbors. The linguistic, religious (and more specifically sectarian), ethnic and class differences between these various constituencies comprise the basis for a wide-ranging set of challenges to the integrity of the nation. As Roseberry notes, the hegemony of the state is rarely uncontested or complete (1993: 359), and the fissures within the citizenry help explain, on the one hand, the contested and contingent nature of the hegemony of the state and, on the other hand, the inequities structured by the state itself.¹⁰²

¹⁰² In this section I want to describe some of the countervailing forces to the national community in more depth. In the next sections I'm going to explain the role of the state, and this section provides a key to understanding the contingencies of that state as well—that while the state provides a vision of unity that congeals around a particular vision of modernity, the hegemony of this vision is not complete, and that the subaltern groups, including those of the citizenry, are not a homogenous and unified group (Roseberry 1993: 359).

In several discussions with different Bahrainis, the citizenry was described to me in terms of a matrix (see Figure 6.1). Along one axis lays the sectarian division between Sunni and Shi'a; along the other lays the murky ethnic division between Arab and Persian. Although these axes and the matrix were recurring descriptors in my discussions on the island, the latter of these two axes is, as I shall explain, incomplete.¹⁰³

	Arab	Persian
Sunni	The Ruling Family (Al Khalifa) And Associated Families	<i>Holis</i> , including wealthy merchant families
Shi'a	<i>Al Baharna</i> , or the Shi'a majority	

Table 6.1: The Bahraini citizenry by quadrants

The most significant quadrant in terms of power on the contemporary island is that on the upper left: those who are both Sunni and Arab. This includes the ruling family and their relatives—the Al Khalifa—along with descendents of the tribes that arrived shortly after the Al Khalifa in 1782, generally referred to as the *Najdi*. Members of this demographic speak Gulf Arabic, or Khaliji; many of the individuals I met also spoke fluent English and considered themselves members of the upper economic class of Bahrain. Many are educated in Europe or the West and hold a variety of important

¹⁰³ See Bahry 2000 for information about the Biduns, the fourth quadrant.

positions on the island, many of which are in the public sector. From the perspective of the indigenous Shi'i majority, whose tenure on the island predates the arrival of the Al Khalifa, they are referred to as newcomers (Fuccaro 2000: 61).

In the second quadrant are those Sunnis of Persian descent. Referred to by some as *Holis* or *Hawala*, they consider themselves of Arab descent and posit a history that originates in the tribal homeland of the eastern Gulf, includes a sojourn on the eastern or Persian side of the Gulf, and then carried them back to the island of Bahrain. The Sunni Persians include many wealthy merchant families. Fuad Khuri describes the history of this segment well:

The Hawala trace origin to different localities in southern Iran but link themselves genealogically to different ancient tribes in the Gulf and Arabia.... Well-known family names such as Kanu, Fakhru, Bastaki, and Khunji among the Hawala are all place names in southern Iran.... Many came to Bahrain after shifts of trade routes from the eastern to the western coast of the Gulf, the increase of pearl production in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and, recently, the development of oil. Some of them have only lately settled in Bahrain; their fathers or grandfathers still speak Persian. (1980: 3-4)

The third and fourth quadrants represent the largest demographic component of the citizenry. These Shi'a of Arabian descent consider themselves the "indigenous" population of the island in that they trace their heritage to the populations already present upon the arrival of the Al Khalifa tribe in 1782. Alternatively referred to as Bahraanis or Al Baharna (Fuccaro 2000: 61), they speak a dialect called Baharna (Ethnologue 2005). Their history on the island is largely an agrarian one based upon providing agricultural produce and labor to urban-based industries of pearling, transshipment, and oil production. Much of their productive land was confiscated in the decades following the arrival of the Al Khalifa, and their economic disenfranchisement from the boom economy

of the island continues to this day. The Shi'i disenfranchisement is exacerbated by ongoing sectarian debates: as Hansen described his experience living in a Shi'i village in the 1950s, "Among the Shi'ites the world of the adults was influenced by a religious devotion and a cult of martyrs completely unknown to the Sunnites" (Hansen 1963: 150).

Writing some hundred years ago, Lorimer described the Shi'a as a class rather than a tribe (Fuccaro 2000: 61). Rather than a genealogical (as tribal) form of solidarity, the originally agrarian Shi'i population has a "community-based form of organization" (Khuri 1985: 433). Their emergence as a class ties to the edification of the Bahraini state, the confiscation of their agricultural lands, and their ongoing disenfranchisement from the conduits of power on the island. In relation to the nationalist vision promoted by the state and those who control it, the meaning associated with the social category of Shi'a has been constructed as a sociological and behavioral category antithetical to this vision: as Ilsa Schumacher noted, "Shi'i is defined as a villager, farmer or labourer, illiterate, emotional and revolutionary in contrast to the Sunni who is thought to be peace-loving, urban, wealthy and educated" (Schumacher 1987: 53; quoted in Fuccaro 2000: 63).

Amongst the Sunni population, the division between those of Persian or Arab heritage, although seemingly an ethnic or geographical line of fission, is in its final accounting a genealogical one. The Sunni, and particularly the Al Khalifa, "manipulate kinship principles to regulate marriage, social interaction, and the redistribution of power" through adjustments to the tribalism of their heritage (Khuri 1985: 432). This sense of genealogical belonging to particular families with particular histories is in stark contrast to the indigenous Shi'i population—and hence the principal reason for the

omission of that ethno-geographical division from the lower portion of the diagram above.

As Gellner notes, by the Marxist account the state represents a “kind of executive committee for the bourgeoisie” (Gellner 1994: 179). Indeed, even if the simple calculus of this statement is called into question by the complexities of that bourgeoisie in Bahrain, as an authoritarian and sectarian regime with certain tribal structures, it is nonetheless true that the state itself has been the principal mechanism for structuring the inequalities amongst citizens. The confiscation of key Shi’i landholdings, the centralization of governance under the Sunni-controlled bureaucracies, and the expansion of the private sector through loans and contracts channeled through sectarian relations have, in effect, forged a proletariat from the Shi’i population, once scattered in peripheral villages and now municipally incorporated into the periphery of the city of Manama.

Unlike the other Gulf States, in Bahrain these inequities have periodically erupted into sectarian violence. Most recently, the riots of 1994 and 1995 were followed by arrests and continuing disturbances; 30 people were killed, and 3,000 to 5,000 were arrested (Fakhro 1997: 181). The formation of a consultative Shura Council is considered part of the Royal family’s attempt to quell ongoing violence, or, as Doumato described the role of the parallel *ulama* religious council in Saudi Arabia, “as ventilation for conservative frustrations” (Doumato 1999: 579). During my fieldwork in Bahrain, most of the public protests by the Shi’i majority focused upon employment issues, as well as general protest against the perceived confederacy of Israel, the United States, and the latter’s incursion into Iraq.

Whether the Shura Council is part of the slow transition to representative democracy, as the leadership would suggest, or merely a benign system of ventilating the conservative tendencies of the Shi'i majority, the ongoing friction between sects are ample evidence of Roseberry's notion of the incomplete and partial nature of the state's hegemony. Incomplete and partial as it may be, the hegemony of the Bahraini state over its citizenry succeeds through the twin processes described in the sections that follow. First, as the principal node through which the wealth of the petroleum nation is delivered to citizens, the state masks its role in structuring inequity through its role as patron to the citizenry. That state, not the market, is the principal source of wealth for both Shi'i and Sunni alike. Second, with an economy and national vision tied to the global (and neoliberal) market economy, and with nearly half the population on the island foreign-born non-citizens, the state has emerged as the collective entity for negotiating the citizenry's relationship to the global ecumene. Both of these processes fuel the legitimacy of the current order and channel dissent away from the state as the principal source of the inequities experienced amidst the citizenry.

IV. The shape of the state: A welfare state

In late spring 2003 a group of unemployed citizens announced plans to form a "union" of the unemployed (GDN 4/8/03). Quixotic as it may seem—for the institution of the union typically implies a particular relationship between employees and employer—

the events culminating on May 4, 2003 clearly revealed the topography of the relationship between citizen and state in Bahrain.¹⁰⁴

Road haulage and construction companies organized to stage a formal protest against the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs. In 2001, the Ministry passed a ban on expatriate drivers, another component of a suite of policies that fit under the moniker of Bahrainization, all of which aim at increasing the employment of citizens in both the public and private sector. Complaints from the companies were specific: the new citizen-drivers were inexperienced and damaged the trucks; they drive at high speeds and endanger others on the road; they frequently call in sick, to the point where one business owner contended that half of his workforce is often absent; the citizen-drivers typically move on to other jobs within a few months, particularly to positions in the government. As a result, insurance rates charged to the companies have gone up, Saudi transportation companies—who utilize inexpensive expatriate drivers—are beginning to compete for business on the island, and the Bahraini companies are unable to meet their delivery obligations. Although the Ministry of Labor lifted its ban on expatriate drivers in March of 2003 for situations where “suitable Bahrainis” could not be found, permits for foreign workers are still not forthcoming. As the Ministry argued, suitable Bahrainis *are* available.

The haulage and construction companies scheduled a rally at the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs for the morning of May 4, 2003. At the last minute, however, the rally was indefinitely postponed in lieu of a second rally, planned for the same morning. A sit-in of unemployed workers, co-organized by the Al Wefaq National Islamic Society, the National Democratic Action Society, the National Grouping Democratic Society, and the Islamic Action Society, asked all of Bahrain’s “unemployed and those without benefits to join this peaceful sit-in along with their families, to bring attention to their plight.” The road haulage and construction companies issued a statement indicating their solidarity with the unemployed workers. As the spokesman for the haulage and construction companies noted, “Attention should be given to the unemployed and the step to temporarily suspend our protest is part of our support for 100 per cent Bahrainization and the demand that the Labour and Social Affairs Ministry take more active steps to ensure a real solution for the problem.”

That morning, some 200 jobless gathered in front of the Prime Minister’s office. Many in the crowd waved flatbread above their heads, symbolizing their inability to feed their families. One protester spread his numerous diplomas about on the sidewalk, arguing that his state-approved education as a computing trainee rendered him unable to find a job.

¹⁰⁴ These events are well documented in a series of three articles in the *Gulf Daily News*: Bahrain firms hit by shortage of drivers (GDN May 1, 2004, page 13, by Mazen Mahdi); Jobless to stage peaceful protest (GDN May 4, 2004, by Mazen Mahdi); and Jobs demand by protesters (GDN May 5, 2004, by Mazen Mahdi).

Another sat with his small child, and describing his situation, noted that he had been unemployed for a year. Ironically, his last job had been as a driver. Along with 60 other workers, he had signed a petition demanding 150 BD per month, a raise of 30 BD. The company countered with an offer of 10 additional BD per month, and he quit in protest.

The irony, of course, rests in coincidence of these two planned events, the first of which comprised a set of companies protesting their inability to fill positions for drivers, and the second, planned for exactly the same morning, at which the former truck driver, along with hundreds of others, protested his inability to find a job. One imagines that if both rallies had occurred as planned, many of the unemployed men might have found jobs with the trucking companies, and unemployment on the island—estimated at approximately fifteen percent over the past decade—would have dropped a few percentage points. Yet the logic of this imagined scenario depends upon a particular suite of neoliberal ideas, upon the idea of a free and open labor market, as well as the primacy of competitiveness, and upon the notion of a government constructed to facilitate a thriving private sector (see Farmer 2003: 5-6). In Bahrain, however, the logic of these ideas has little traction amongst the disenfranchised citizenry.

In all the states of the GCC, the bonanza of petroleum wealth yielded states in which the Sunni leadership distributed some portion of the wealth to its citizenry-subjects. The content and quantity of this support varied over time and region; analysis typically focuses upon free or low-cost utilities, free or low-cost housing, free education, and free health care (Kapiszewski 2001; Azzam 1988).¹⁰⁵ In Bahrain, widely recognized as the poorest of the Gulf nations, these benefits diminished over time. At present, the

¹⁰⁵ Four percent of Bahrain's annual budget is devoted to the provision of housing to the citizenry (Bahrain Brief, Volume 1, Issue 7, August 2000).

government absorbs eighty percent of the costs of water and twenty-five percent of the costs of electricity (GDN 1/14/03 page 13). Education remains free for citizens, as does health care.¹⁰⁶ Low-cost housing is also provided by the government, although the long delays involved in the distribution of housing are a source of strife for the disenfranchised class of the citizenry.

Perhaps the most significant component of the redistribution of petroleum wealth, however, rests in public sector employment. Although consolidated data about the public sector is not available (WTO: October 13, 2000), an undersecretary at the Labour and Social Affairs Ministry recently noted that ninety-two percent of the national (as opposed to foreign) workforce is employed in the public sector—“the highest percentage in the world” (Horton 2004).¹⁰⁷ The high variation in reported scope of public sector employment certainly has to do with the difficulties of defining a concrete boundary between the public and private sector. In Bahrain, the public sector continues to dominate many activities in the economy, the largest of which are the petroleum industry, the aluminum industry, and telecommunications (WTO 10/13/04); hence the employment in those sectors—and many others—is also distributed by the Sunni-controlled government.

¹⁰⁶ From AllRefer, Bahrain, Society and Education, <http://reference.allrefer.com/country-guide-study/bahrain/bahrain30.html>, December 14, 2004).

¹⁰⁷ Other sources report different numbers. Hammouya (1999: 17) reports that 28.3% of the total workforce is employed in the public sector. Optimus (2005) reports that the Civil Services Bureau employs 35,000 individuals. As Hammouya notes (1999: 8), the significant differences in the reported size of the public sector relate directly to the difficulty of defining the boundaries of the public sector. In Bahrain, many citizens are directly employed by government offices; others, however, are employed by state-owned industries, or by the police force or national guard, for example.

Citizenship, of course, represents a status that legitimizes the state apparatus, subjectifying the individual to the state in exchange for a suite of benefits, many of which are described above. It is important, however, to distinguish between those benefits available to all citizens equally, such as free health care, government-subsidized utilities, and free education, and those that are unequally distributed to the citizenry—particularly, the jobs in the public sector. In the latter case, the inequalities of this disbursement are a direct mechanism for structuring sectarian differences, and forging economic classes along that very fissure. It was the Shi'i citizen-participants in this study that pointed the realities of the situation out to me. As they noted, many of the government ministries are dominantly—if not exclusively—Sunni, particularly the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Defense, both at the center of the state's repressive apparatus. The unequal disbursement of benefits in the form of employment reinforces conceptions of the welfare state, certainly, but it does so in very particular ways; the process reinforces sectarian and tribal differences, and forges a conception of the state as a patron, embodied in the ruling family. The Royal Majlis, particularly popular with the formal ruler, provided a spatial venue for these personal appeals. One of my informants recalled his experience at the Royal Majlis:

I went the Emir's court—this was during the current King's father's rule—and back then they gave away all kinds of money. The government here—no secret—it was corrupt. And at the court, people were there asking for money for all kinds of reasons. All kinds of people. I was there to ask for money to help me with my education in the states, because my dad couldn't help me for the entire stay. So I was there to ask for some money and do the paperwork. Next to me was this fatcat royal family member, and I knew his son, so I asked him if he was Ahmed's dad. He looked at me, but didn't say anything. He looked like he didn't want to be there...and then I overheard his conversation at the desk, and it ends up he was there to get money for his whole family's tour around Europe that summer. He

was getting the royal court to pay for it! He was an Al Khalifa, and he didn't want to pay for it out of pocket, and he wanted himself and his wives to have a free ride around Europe that summer. And then there was this old Shi'i man, with a long white beard, and he had holes all over his *thobe* [the long-sleeved ankle length garment typically worn by Arab men in the Gulf], and he was walking around with his son who was on a crutch, and he was trying to get money for his son's medication. He was anguished, walking from office to office. I was just trying to get money for college. I could have gone to the University of Bahrain, but if the royal family can help me, great. But I felt guilty—I felt it was such a shady society, a shady government that doesn't really care. And I just wanted to get up and leave the country right there. I can remember both their faces. And yeah, the Shi'ites are really on the bottom of the pile.”

With the new leadership, these forms of distribution more commonly take the form of royal decrees or orders, such as new housing complexes for poor families or the forgiving of loans citizens obtained from the state. This patron-client model, overlaid upon the relationship between citizen and the state, can also be seen in the democratic reforms recently taken on in the form of a Shura Council, a consultative body that advises the King. Through these decrees and personal connections, we can see that the state remains an extension of the tribal tradition (Nakleh 1976: 176), or at least the sort of vestige mentalities and ideologies of subaltern groups described by Gramsci (Roseberry 1993: 360). From the descriptions here, we can see that the state, in both its embodied, personal form and as a standard, structural bureaucracy is a mechanism for forging inequities and divisions amongst its subaltern subjects.

It is against these forces that the promotion of a singular national identity must compete. This task is aided by the presence of the large expatriate workforce, non-citizens against which the gains and benefits must always be measured. More importantly, though, the state derives its unity and cohesion with the national identity—

and hence its legitimacy—as the principal source of employment for the citizenry.¹⁰⁸ The rallies and marches that were an almost weekly occurrence during my fieldwork in Bahrain were rarely focused upon the idea of the state controlling industry and jobs; instead, invectives focused upon the inequities of the distribution of those jobs, or the inability to provide enough jobs for the burgeoning population of unemployed and underemployed. Through this process the more fundamental question of the state’s legitimacy is masked.

V. The Shape of the State: Bahrainization and the Management of the Foreign

In the previous section, I described conceptions of the state as a patron to the citizens, as the principal node for the distribution of wealth controlled by the ruling elite. In large part, my analysis focused upon the public sector and the distribution of the jobs contained therein. In this section, I turn to a second conception of the state, one focused more upon its role as an intermediary between the foreign and the indigenous. I begin with a description of Bahrainization, the suite of policies that aim to reconfigure the workplace in both the public and private sector to increase Bahraini participation. Using an expanded definition of Bahrainization—including policies that directly mandate ratios of citizens to foreigners in the workplace, but also adding those policies that discourage long-term participation of foreigners in the workplace and therefore indirectly shape the

¹⁰⁸ Champion (1999 note 23), describing Saudi Arabia, calls the social contract the “legitimacy of largesse,” where the welfare state is forged in return for political quiescence. He also argues that “more realistic socioeconomic expectations appear to be gradually gaining prevalence” (Champion 1999:4). This form of authority also resembles what Weber called “patrimonial administration” (Weber 1947:351-354).

workplace—I describe a conception of the state as a mediator or interlocutor between the citizenry and the world beyond their island. The idea of a state as a tool for managing the foreign is, I suggest, more comprehensive than it might first appear. By ending with a set of examples drawn from the period of time in which this study was conducted, I point to the role the state plays in not only managing foreign labor, but also in managing foreign culture.

The suite of policies and directives known as ‘Bahrainization’ are a complex and ever-evolving mixture of components, all of which are central to the conceptions of the state and to the daily experiences of both citizens and non-citizens on the island. In their most distilled form, they are best represented by those policies that require a certain percentage of citizen-employees in a particular company. These edicts are often issued by “sector,” although the sectors utilized often shift scale (where one edict might be aimed at the private sector as a whole, another might address specific “sectors,” such as the hospitality sector, the travel sector, and so forth). Edicts pertaining to sectors are complemented by an ever-changing system of monetary incentives that encourage companies to meet or exceed particular ratios of citizens to non-citizens in the sectoral workforces. As one of the most active arenas of state activity, updates and alterations to the policies that together comprise Bahrainization are a constant source of news in the local and international media. For example:

Firms are requested to increase employment of nationals by 5 percent a year until one-half of the labor force is Bahraini. New establishments employing 10 or more workers are required to have 20 percent Bahrainis in their workforce, with further annual increase of 5 percent until 50 percent is reached. Firms of less than 10 employees must employ at least one Bahraini other than the owner. (Fasano and Goyal, *Emerging Strains in GCC Labor Markets*)

Particular policies, like the one described here, are singular components of the suite of policies called Bahrainization. These are constantly evolving and changing. While many of these policies—like the one above—are aimed at the private sector in general, the micro-sectoral approach is particularly active. The “taxi sector” was fully localized in the 1990s; unlike most of the other nations of the Gulf, taxi drivers on the island must be Bahraini citizens. Similar results have been achieved in other sectors: my informants on the island noted that the petrol stations are now manned by citizens—something that predated my arrival on the island by only a few years. Others noted that the guards at the various shopping malls are now all Bahraini. As one man noted, “My wife and I had a broken washing machine in our flat, and we called for someone to pick it up and repair it. When the repairmen arrived to take the machine away, they were all Bahraini. This too you would not have seen four years ago.” And shortly after my departure, the government announced plans to “Bahrainize” the travel sector, much to the consternation of the legion of foreign travel agents who serve the various transmigrant communities on the island.

Sectoral edicts and mandates governing the ratio of citizens to non-citizens in the workforce certainly comprise the most visible facet of Bahrainization on the island. However, if we define Bahrainization as those policies and practices that discourage foreign labor from finding and keeping employment on the island, we can also include many of the policies and practices described in the earlier chapters—those that indirectly achieve this same end by preventing or dissuading foreign labor from successfully competing with citizens in the job market. Recently, for example, the government

announced its intentions to impose a five year limit on residence permits, thereby effectively limiting transmigrants' ability to derive profit from a sojourn on the island. Similarly, policies that prevent individuals from interacting directly with the government, visa regulations that make it difficult to move back and forth between India and Bahrain, a sponsorship system that locks transmigrants into a structured relationship with a citizen—all of these policies structure foreign participation in the job market and thereby encourage the hiring of Bahraini citizens. Bahrainization, as one of the principal functions of the contemporary Bahraini state, includes all those policies, directives, and forces that discourage transmigrant laborers from profiting from the workplace on the island.

Put another way, then, Bahrainization comprises the sorts of edicts, policies and practices that forge structural differences and impediments between citizens and non-citizens in the workplace. From the perspective of the citizen, this role of the state can be seen as an extension of the “state-as-patron” described in the previous section: not only is the state expected to directly deliver wealth (in the form of low cost utilities, free education, and public sector employment); it is also expected to intervene in the private sector, to structure that sector in ways that are beneficial to citizens and detrimental to non-citizens, and to provide employment for citizens. Yet through these interventions against the neoliberal calculus of global capitalism, conceptions of the state transcend the patron-client model. In actively structuring inequities in the private sector, the state has also emerged as the principal nexus for managing the foreign—not just labor, but also foreign culture. In other words, the legitimacy of the state in the eyes of the citizenry is

tied not only to its ability to distribute wealth, but also to its role in removing foreign influences from the island.

In the examples described in previous sections, I noted the government's expanding role in safeguarding the island against indecency, citing the two examples of the recent move against scantily clad mannequins and against provocative advertisements. This state function has been increasing recently: citizens have demanded a clampdown on pork served in many of the Filipino restaurants on the island (GDN Vol XXVII #168 Saturday September 4, 2004), while others have recently clamored for policies to direct foreign women foreign women to wear scarves. Oftentimes the social clubs become targets. A Manama Municipal Council member recently declared the intent of the Segaiya neighborhood's Bahraini population to burn down a building occupied by Asian laborers. Issues of sewage and overcrowding gave way to what Councilor Ibrahim Hassan Ismail called the "moral aspect" of the problem: "The tenants, who are usually Asian, roam around in their underwear with disregard to the social and Islamic laws of the country" (GDN November 9, 2004).¹⁰⁹

These moral issues also come to bear on the relations between the state and the Indian social clubs described in the previous chapter. The Young Goan's Club, one of the oldest of the Indian community's social clubs, formed in 1952 and recently boasted over 600 members. After reports of complaints from neighbors, largely centered around a nearby Iranian school and complaints about children seeing men and women mixing along with loud noise and music, the club relocated from its central location near the

¹⁰⁹ These "social and Islamic laws of the country" are not centrally codified, but instead distributed amongst various bodies of law.

souq, its home for 50 years, to the busy-with-nightlife neighborhood of Hoorā. Again, however, the club faced complaints from neighbors, and those complaints eventually percolated from the municipality to the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, the arm of the government that issues permits and oversees the diasporic social clubs. At this juncture, complaints focused upon its location near a mosque and the presence of a bar on the premises. The Ministry first banned the bar (the club's principal source of income) and, unable to make rent, the Club faced legal action from the landlord and the Ministry ordered it closed (GDN Vol XXVII # July 19, 2004). Numerous other social clubs have faced similar issues.

As this example suggests, the citizenry's expectations of the state surpass the simple disbursement of wealth. Building upon its principal practice of managing and controlling the foreign population, expectations of the state have evolved in recent decades. The state is now expected to act as a cultural intermediary or filter to the processes wrought by the increasingly dense connections with global capitalism and, specifically, the transmigrant laborers that toil in the citizens' midst. And it is here that the contradictions wrought by global capitalism are apparent: while the financescape of the global system is fostered on the island and finds prominence in the national vision promoted by the state, the baggage that accompanies it (in Appadurai's terms, the ideoscapes and mediascapes) are less welcome. As the state structures inequities between citizen and foreigner and acts to staunch the spread of particular foreign practices, customs, and behavior, it simultaneously shores up its relationship with its citizenry,

reifying its role as the principal tool by which individual citizens mitigate their relationship to the culturally heterogeneous flows that continue to arrive on their shores.

VI. Citizenship, the *Mudir* Syndrome and Resistance in the workplace

In the previous sections, I have portrayed the state using two metaphors to explain the legitimacy of the contemporary Bahraini state. First, the state functions as a patron, doling out benefits (albeit unequally) to its citizens. Second, the state functions as an intermediary between the citizenry on the island and the world outside; in other words, the state represents a key juncture in articulating the relationship between the citizenry and the world at large. In this section, I begin to examine how those functions of the state articulate in the workplace, one of the principal sites where the global and local meet and conflict. Specifically, I demonstrate how the concept of citizenship, or belonging to the nation, engenders a fractious line through the heart of the global capitalist system now embraced by the nation, its citizenry, and by the idea of nation. I argue that these individual forms of resistance are best understood as a resistance to the logic of global capitalism.

On the island of Bahrain, many, if not most, of the small and medium sized businesses are actively managed—and often partially owned—by Indian expatriates. Ask one of these Indian merchants what happens when a young, unemployed Bahraini drops in to apply for a job, and they will tell some version of the same story: the Bahraini will demand to work a single shift, ending his day at 2:00 or thereabouts. This is often the first point of negotiation. Should the Bahraini yield to the employer's demand to work the regular two shifts, with a midday break, or should the employer find a way to

accommodate the request for a single shift, they will move on to a brief discussion of pay, set somewhere at or above the government-mandated minimum for nationals, nearly twice that of the going market rate for labor. If an agreement is reached, more problems are likely to ensue. The Bahraini will drift into work late. He will stand about, talking with the other Bahraini workers, and rarely help out unless under direct supervision. Even if extra pay is offered, he is unlikely to show up on weekends or holidays to assist with, say, an urgent shipment. And in the end, he won't stay at the job long--perhaps a year, perhaps less.

While there are certainly exceptions to the scenario presented above, the basic thread of the story was repeated in numerous interviews I conducted with Indian business owners on the island. When asked about the reasons for this problem, business owners pointed to a culturally-inherent trait of laziness or lethargy amongst the indigenous citizenry. As one business owner described the frustrations he and other business owners face in the requirements to hire Bahrainis, he noted that because of the incentives and directives comprising the government's Bahrainization policy, Indian-owned businesses are desperate to hire Bahrainis. However, Indian business owners and managers are,

[G]oing to be so restricted with what they've got, in terms of the kind of people, how qualified they are. The effort that they [Bahrainis] would normally put in is half as much as an expatriate. When you think about wanting to put a Bahraini in, well, they're so lazy. They just don't do as much.

Another merchant who employs dozens of Bahraini citizens noted, "I think the basic problem is with their attitude. They're just not used to working—especially hard work. They've taken it very easy all these years, and that has passed on to the younger

generation. And that's one of the basic reasons that you can't rely on them." Or, as a Bahraini acquaintance related:

The things people say about the Bahraini work ethic—well, I agree with it in general. They feel like they're entitled to more than what they're getting, and they feel like they shouldn't be doing as much as they are for it. A lot of people criticize Bahrainis for not performing as well as Indian workers.... You can see it firsthand. Just go into any place. Go to Jasmis [a fast-food restaurant that has begun to employ Bahrainis] or any retail place. See how the Bahraini man or lady behind the counter treats you. They'll be talking to a coworker or on the mobile, or they'll yell to the person behind you.

While the popular apprehension of Bahrainis in the workforce focuses on an inherent laziness and the proclivity to leisure, even the respondents described here contextualize these behaviors in the historical contingencies of Bahrain. In noting that, "they've taken it easy all these years," or in arguing that Bahrainis "feel like they're entitled to more than what they're getting," the respondents quoted here unknowingly follow scholarly analyses of the structural issues at work in the petroleum states' workforces, particularly those concerned with citizens performing the menial tasks currently performed by expatriates. In his analysis of Saudi Arabia, Champion (1999) calls the pervasive reticence to work the *mudir* syndrome, utilizing the Arabic word for "director" as a gloss for the common attitude that "nothing less than a position of authority, status, and respect is honorable" (Champion 1999: 5; see also Al-Moosa and McLachlan 1985). In general, these analyses focus upon the great wealth derived from petroleum reserves and the small indigenous populations, a combination of historical coincidences yielding a scenario where states forge a social contract based upon the "legitimacy of largesse," largely through public sector employment (Champion 1999: 16). Others have traced the *mudir* syndrome to the 'traditional' Bedouin contempt for

agrarian work (see Champion 1999, note 34; Detzner 2003: 48) or to the legacy of slavery in the region (Wilson and Graham: 256). All of these explanations see the citizenry's contemporary contempt of the workplace and, particularly, of menial labor as a vestige of former social, political, and economic configurations on the island.

The details presented in this chapter allow us to be even more specific. First, the large public sector, as the principal form of employment for Bahrainis in recent history, continues to exert influence upon the private sector. In the scenario described by the Indian business owners, for example, the ubiquitous wish to end the workday at 2:00 pm reflects the hours typical of the public sector, where the workweek is 34, rather than 48 hours, and ends at 2:00 pm. Similarly, the extremely high rates of turnover in private sector jobs reflect the robust public sector, for many of the individuals that seeking jobs as menial laborers are merely biding their time awaiting an opening in the public sector. Menial and other entry level positions in the private sector typically lack benefit packages, unlike their counterparts in the public sector. And while the private sector workplaces function primarily in English, Malayalam, or other languages of the diasporas, government workplaces typically function in Arabic. The scope of public sector employment in Bahrain also tells us something about the practice of citizenship on the island. In Bahrain, citizenship confers a particular set of expectations by the citizen upon the state, and those include employment outside the market forces of capitalism, outside the competitive realm of a private sector configured to the global neoliberal model.

From the perspective of the expatriate business owners, the formidable role of the public sector in shaping the citizenry's expectations of the private sector has caused many problems, and they have configured unique solutions to the issue. Several of the business owners I spoke with were so frustrated by the situation that they simply paid Bahraini citizens to stay at home, thereby meeting the requirements of sectoral Bahrainization regulations without the problems of dealing with citizens in the workplace. As another Indian merchant noted, "Maybe out of ten Bahrainis, you can find two or three that work. But first of all, why should you go to the trouble of weeding out two guys out of ten? You have to go through twenty guys before you get three that can work. It's too much hassle and trouble. It's just better to pay that guy and tell him not to come."

I encountered a related scenario at the Bahrain Training Institute (BTI). One of the faculty members there noted that an order had recently come down from somewhere up the chain of command that some proportion of the custodial staff must be Bahraini. Student-nationals were hired from the BTI trainee pool. The citizens were hired at a rate of 120 to 130 BD per month—twice the amount of the transmigrant custodial staff. The citizen-custodians, my informant noted, "would show up for work in street clothes, and would spend most of their time standing around talking to each other and the other trainees. As a result, the toilets were filthy, there was no soap, and there was no toilet paper in any of the bathrooms. Even the director noticed." A solution was subsequently devised: the Bahraini day crew was followed by an Indian night crew. The night crew had to do all the work left undone by the national day crew. In my interview with one of the members of this Indian work crew, he noted that the new schedule means that they—the

Indian crew—now have to do twice as much work.

Notions of citizenship and the appropriateness of particular forms of employment also reveal how conceptions of citizenship mingle with ethnic and racial hierarchies in Bahrain. In one of my interviews, I spoke with an Indian restaurant owner about the problems he faced with his Bahraini employees. He noted that, recently, the young Bahraini men he had hired quickly informed him that they were unwilling to wait upon Indian customers, and that they would only wait upon Bahrainis. Of course situations like this cause all sorts of difficulties in the contemporary workplace in Bahrain; simultaneously, however, they are symptomatic of the underlying racial construction of citizenship and notions of propriety over the shared vision of a national community.

In the final accounting, anyone spending time on the island of Bahrain can easily encounter these different performances of work in the myriad businesses and workplaces. In this section, I have begun with the commonplace observation that the Bahrainis are, in the terms of the globalized workplace, inherently lazy (e.g. Azzam 1988: 17). After historically contextualizing those attitudes in the particular articulation of the political economy of the region and in the apparatuses of the state, I have ended with an argument that these attitudes comprise a form of resistance to the calculus of the global and neoliberal model. As Farmer notes, neoliberalism “admits to many meanings, some of them contradictory. Neoliberalism generally refers to the ideology that advocates the dominance of a competition-driven market model” (Farmer 2003: 5). From the perspective of the Indian business owners and managers, the labor force in Bahrain creates significant impediments to a competition-driven labor market. Businesses pay a

variety of fees to import foreign laborers. They're unable to fire them or easily hire others they encounter; they must also take on a government-mandated workforce of citizen-employees, many of whom are unwilling to perform the basic duties associated with the position.

To return to the example with which I began this section, the Bahraini laborer, forced by penury to enter the private sector, faces a losing proposition. He is often less educated than the foreign laborer with whom he competes. His English skills—vital to global commerce on the island—are less developed than the foreign laborers'. And his chances for advancement in the Indian-owned businesses of the island are negligible. The fact that he applied for the job at all means that he was unable to secure a position in the public sector, and the time spent moving boxes about the warehouse floor is time away from the activities that contribute and strengthen his social capital in the indigenous system—the reinforcement of social and familial connections, being seen with the right people in the right places, and all the other social activities that, under the western model, would fit under the moniker of “leisure.”

Conversely, I see the vast public sector of contemporary Bahrain as the structural bastion of a more traditional occupational system, and simultaneously as a form of resistance to a western-derived meritocracy in whose calculus the unskilled Bahraini will most certainly fail. The durability of this dual economy is certainly in doubt, for as the population grows and the petroleum revenues dwindle, the maintenance of the large public sector has become an impossible burden for the small country's leadership. Nonetheless, for the time being the cultural result of this dual system is here to stay –

notions of appropriate and inappropriate work, along with the *habitus* of relations between citizens and foreigners, reflects the structure of three decades in which foreigners have toiled under the sponsorship of Bahraini citizens.

VII. *Wasta* and Reconceiving Leisure

In the previous section I explored the contradictions of the contemporary workplace in Bahrain. Beginning with the popular comprehension of Bahraini laborer as lazy and unwilling to work, I moved to a discussion of how the behavior and attitudes of citizen-laborers link to the historical political economy of the island. Notions of entitlement remain prominent in the citizen-workforce: the historical coincidence of a small indigenous population and the significant wealth derived from petroleum and related industries yielded a labor market where citizens came to expect positions of authority and command over the non-citizens charged with constructing and maintaining the island nation's rendition of modernity. This bifurcation of the labor market largely—although not entirely—falls along the lines of the public and private sector. I ended the previous section by arguing that many of the problems endemic to the relations of production can be viewed as a form of resistance to the logic of the global financescape that pervades contemporary economic activity on the island.

In this section, I reinforce that argument through a closer examination of the conduits through which citizens obtain the security and wealth controlled by the state. I seek to move beyond the façade of citizenship as a basic guarantor of equal treatment and equal opportunity (Rosaldo 1994: 402), and toward an analysis of the processes that structure inequality amongst the citizenry. Not only do I seek to further describe what it

means to be a citizen in Bahrain; I also intend to delve deeper into the notion of local resistance to the wages (in the metaphorical sense) of global capitalism. These acts of resistance—conceived as leisure, laziness, and a lack of dedication to the job—are more than individual acts of resistance: in combination with the structural institution of the public sector, these acts of resistance to the structure of the private sector workplace comprise a systemic effort to preserve an essentially tribal system of relations reconfigured to counterbalance the neoliberal calculus of global capitalism.

In describing the foundational role of family and kinship in Jeddah—the cosmopolitan hub of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and, in that sense, perhaps the setting most similar to contemporary Bahrain—Soraya Altorki notes:

The family constitutes a person's reservoir of economic security, political influence, social support, and psychological succor ... kinship and friendship links combine the functions that in Western countries are divided between distinct reference groups outside a person's family, such as neighbors, colleagues, business partners, professional associations, and clubs. In Saudi Arabia these links entail an elaborate system of reciprocal right-duty relationships. Many of these relationships are activated in *casual contexts* and *informal visiting* and in sporadic exchanges of favors. They are ritually expressed and reinforced on special occasions such as life-crisis events like birth, naming ceremonies, marriage, divorce, sickness, and death, where the participation of network members is mandatory. A person's failure to participate in these occasions without an acceptable excuse implies a rejection of his/her role in that network." (Altorki 1985: 81 emphasis added)

Altorki describes the fundamental importance of casual and informal activity—glossed as leisure in the western nomenclature—to the social relations of the contemporary Saudi citizenry. Using this as a springboard for further analysis, I turn to the concept of *wasta* as the mechanism by which these social relations articulate in contemporary Bahraini society.

Wasta is a versatile notion with no immediate parallel in the English language. Generally, the term refers to mediation or intercession by a third party, although it can also refer to the influence possessed by an individual (Cunningham 1993; Cunningham and Sarayrah 1993; Detzner 2003). “*Wasta* refers to both the act and the person who mediates or intercedes,” notes Cunningham in the introduction of his book (1993: 1). Perhaps the closest analogy in English would be social capital, described by Bourdieu as “the sum of the resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance or recognition” (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 119). The versatility of the notion was well described by one of my informants:

“*Wasta* strictly translates into “intermediary” or “intermediary means.” *Wasta* is a way to get there. When I say that I have a *wasta* in the Traffic Directorate, it means that I’ve got somebody there who can help me cut through the red tape. They can take care of my problem. But that term really evolved new meanings—now you can say “oh, his dad is a real *wasta*,” meaning he can get stuff done for you. So it refers to a person. But you can also think of it as a process: “*wasta* does its worth.” You’re not talking about a specific person anymore. Or “with *wasta* you can do anything.” “You better get *wasta*” is a very common clause in speech. If you have *wasta*, you can get it done in a day. It means you can get it done if you have a way—an intermediary way, a way to get in, or someone inside the system. People even talk about Vitamin W—that’s *wasta*.”

Wasta remains an essential feature of the social landscape on the island. If the relationship between citizen and state is at least partly characterized by the patron-client relationship, it is *wasta* that helps us understand how that process works—how individuals connect with the resources provided by the government, largely through the public sector. For example, young men and women seeking placement at the University of Bahrain or one of the other institutions of higher learning on the island, *wasta* can play an influential role for those on the cusp. Similarly, for both men and women seeking

appointments in the public sector, familial, sectarian and tribal connections—all essential components of *wasta*—are key factors (Pirzada and Puri 1998), magnified, one of my informants noted, by the size of the city-state, where it is commonly noted that everyone knows everyone, at least in terms of their family and sect.

The influence and function of *wasta* link closely with the scope of the public sector. Unlike the private sector—comprising myriad businesses, but including both global concerns with formalized hiring policies and local concerns managed and/or run by expatriates, the public sector is a direct extension of the state, an extension of the ruling family and its hegemony over the island. While private businesses are concerned with profit, and thereby at least nominally interested in finding the most capable and least expensive employee for a particular position, the public sector provides ample room for ulterior motives to be exercised in the hiring process. Because of the desirability of these public sector jobs—both for the comforts of working in Arabic and the short working hours, but also because of the remuneration, and particularly the pensions, low-cost housing loans, and other programs—*wasta* functions as the mechanism for what Bordieu called the transformation of capital, in this case, from its social manifestation to its economic manifestation (Bourdieu 1986: see also Kilankiewicz 1996).

Building and maintaining *wasta* are activities whose logic is difficult to pinpoint. When asked directly about the mechanisms for forging and maintaining social capital, the citizens I spoke with often appealed to generalities about knowing the right people, being seen in the right places, and more particularly, the combination of the two. As one young Bahraini described:

There's no denying that Bahrainis believe knowing the right people is essential to getting ahead in life. They believe that if they hang out with the right people, one day they're going to get the right job—that the friend is going to do them a favor. Whether it works out or not, they're going to hang on to that person ... because those connections are so important. If you want to get your business registered, and you don't just want to sit on the list, you have to know someone. You have to have *wasta*.

The maintenance and deployment of *wasta* reinforces particular aspects of the contemporary social milieu: family, sect, and tribal affiliation. As Detzner described in her analysis of Saudi Arabia, “foreigners lack these important connections ... and are disconnected from the myriad family, tribal and regional allegiances in the country” (2003: 50). As a system, *wasta* comprises an exclusive and endogamous system focused on citizenship and genealogy; the ability to participate and make use of *wasta* is premised upon these particular senses of belonging. Systemically speaking, it provides an alternative map through the occupational sector, to the jobs and wealth for the most part provided by the government and directly controlled by the citizenry.

In systemic terms, *wasta* contradicts the logic of the global financescape and, in a larger sense, the market-based neoliberal ideas codified in the rhetoric of Bahrain's national vision. Where the international agencies and states with which Bahrain deals clamor for open markets, good governance, transparency, and equality under the law, *wasta* provides an alternative set of avenues that inherently favor citizens over non-citizens and Sunni (who maintain stronger tribal allegiances) over Shi'a. Franklin, in his analysis of the legal framework of Bahrain in the early 1980's, made a parallel point about the concept of justice: “A universal code of justice was—and is—antithetical to the categorical principle on which his authority and the plural order rested” (Franklin 1985:

72).¹¹⁰ That same plural order relies upon categorical principles to organize the workforce. Where the neoliberal model lauds open, free, and meritocratic labor markets, *wasta* comprises the basis of a system that favors those with localized tribal and familial connections over those without: in this system, citizens have more power than non-citizens, and Sunnis have more power than Shi'a.

Nakleh argues that urbanization in the Gulf States “has proven to be a long process, consisting essentially of one major component—the psychological transformation of a tribal culture into a twentieth century organization within which the Islamic principles of *shari'a* and *shura* find expression in the modern political techniques of political democracy” (Nakleh 1976: 167). The contemporary role of *wasta* in Bahrain helps illustrate the process of transition from this pre-modern tribal system to the current bureaucracy; *wasta* is one nexus at which tribe, or at least some essence of the notion of tribe and affiliation, has been reconfigured in the modern era to both accommodate and resist the logic of global capitalism and, particularly, neoliberalism. Specifically, it's a form of resistance codified in the public sector, and one that resists the universalizing aspects of neoliberal policies.

In conclusion, *wasta*, as a social force with both deep historical roots and a pervasive presence in the contemporary milieu, represents a key aspect of the citizenry's

¹¹⁰ “Saudis have never had a single unified legal code that is evenly applied or can be consulted.... They claim to operate according to Shar'ia law, but no lasting consensus about its make-up.... A consequence of the lack of a uniform, enforceable legal code is what would be perceived in the West as widespread corruption and nepotism. However, in Saudi society the family is so central that it is considered dishonorable not to use any means at ones' disposal, including, often, ones' bureaucratic position, to get a relative a job, or make sure an unfavorable legal decision is reversed so as to protect their interests” (Detzner 2003: 50).

resistance to the fundamental terms of the global financescape. Faced with a global ecumene that lauds open markets, a meritocratic labor force, and transparency in both public and private sectors, the individual acts of resistance charted in the previous sections are emblematic of a systemic rejection of the very terms of neoliberal arena: for the middle and lower classes of the citizenry, the chances for success in the English-speaking, foreign-dominated workforce are negligible. Rather than directly compete for positions with well-trained and linguistically versatile guestworkers, citizen-laborers focus their energies on investing and maintaining the social capital, or *wasta*, that potentially leads to jobs in the public sector. The continuing predominance of *wasta* reinforces the relationship between state-based hegemony and genealogical conceptions of nationhood.

VIII. Conclusion

At the outset of this chapter I considered the debate over the future of the nation as an important, if not predominant, stratum of identity. Scholars such as Appadurai, whose focus is on the sorts of cosmopolitan peoples described in Chapter Four of this dissertation, argue that the increasing movement of people and culture beyond the ambit of the nation-state spells doom for that particular form of communal sentiment. Others, including Benedict Anderson and a host of anthropologists following the transnational underclass, argue that the nation-state remains a vital touchstone in the identity of peoples in the contemporary world. A significant portion of the literature concerns the processes by which nations have gone about subjectifying a citizenry that more than ever is on the move. I have used previous chapters to provide a portrait of both these processes. The

Indian community in Bahrain includes a cosmopolitan element that strategically moves resources and shifts locations in response to state-based stresses. It also includes a large transnational underclass caught between two states but free of neither.

In this chapter, however, I have considered an alternative arena that also addresses these questions. Rather than focus on the relationship between the homeland-state and its citizens in diaspora, I have focused upon the relationship between transnational people, transnational processes, and the state that hosts them. By exploring how the presence of a large transnational population has impacted Bahraini conceptions of the nation, the shape of their state, and the practice of citizenship in the host country, I have argued that transnational processes have invigorated the Bahraini state and its hegemony over both citizens and non-citizens alike.¹¹¹ Building upon the legacy of petroleum wealth and patron-client relations endemic to the tribal organization of the Sunni leadership, citizenship in Bahrain is laden with notions of entitlement. Similarly, the state is seen as the principal nexus for distributing the wealth controlled by the ruling family and their Sunni brethren.

I have also developed a second perspective of the state built around the notion of hospitality. With nearly half the population on the island foreign guestworkers, the state has emerged as the principal apparatus for managing the heterogeneous populations on the island. The notion of hospitality is deeply embedded in the culture of Bahrain; as I argue, the metaphor of hospitality can be extended from the corporeal aspects of the

¹¹¹ Appadurai notes that “the simplification of these many forces (and fears) of homogenization can also be exploited by nation-states in relation to their own minorities, by posing global commoditization (or capitalism, or some other external enemy) as more ‘real’ than the threat of its own hegemonic strategies” (Appadurai 1990: 296).

transmigrant population to the very processes that brought them to the island. In other words, the citizenry not only host the laborers and professionals integral to the national vision of modernity, but also they use the role of host to conceptualize and structure their relationship to the cultural aspects of the global ecumene. The role of host provides a mechanism for embracing the role of global capitalism in the shared national vision of modernity without accepting the underlying values of that neoliberal system.

Finally, I have argued that the Bahraini state comprises the basis for the indigenous population's resistance to the terms of the global financescape. Through the maintenance of a robust public sector, the state has been an integral component in the maintenance of kinship-based forms of affiliation and belonging. *Wasta*, or the social capital contained in those relations, is the mechanism by which the citizenry resists the calculus of a neoliberal global financescape that is integral to the citizenry's national vision, yet in whose competitive and market-based calculus the great majority of the citizenry can hardly succeed. The state—and the relations it codifies—comprise the basis of the citizenry's resistance to the terms of the global ecumene.

CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSION



Figure 7.1: Transmigrant Indian laborers take a lunch break on a construction site.

I. Contextualizing this Ethnography

In the preceding pages I have attempted to accomplish several tasks. Before revisiting the specific and interwoven lines of the argument constructed in the preceding chapters, however, I will briefly describe the overarching context of this ethnography and, therefore, how it fits in the larger framework of transnational ethnography. In the largest sense, then, this ethnography comprises:

- The presentation of a basic ethnographic portrait of the Indian transmigrant community in contemporary Bahrain.

This heterogeneous community, today numbering well over 100,000, has a long and historic presence on the island. Through a variety of factors—including the difficulties involved in successfully proposing and conducting research in the Gulf, the ongoing elision of the petroleum-rich Gulf States from the central discourse by which the cultures and peoples of the greater Middle East are apprehended, and the coincidental omission of guestworker populations from the comprehension and analysis of indigenous society and culture in the Gulf—the Indian community in Bahrain has rarely come under the scrutiny of the social sciences. It is the subject of a single ethnographic dissertation, now twenty years old (Franklin 1985), and occasional passing mention in other works (Nakleh 1976, Khuri 1980, 1985; Fuccaro 2000). In the most general sense, the preceding chapters describe the culture and social organization of the large and historic Indian community in Bahrain, and hence contribute to the collective knowledge of an understudied people and their relationship to the foreign state in which they live.

- The further description and analysis of this particular transnational flow.

The growing attention to transnational populations in the social sciences directly corresponds to the increasing movement of people, culture, ideas, and capital as part of the continuing articulation of a global world-system. As individuals and communities move—or are pushed—into the multiple geographies of contemporary transnational life, ethnographers have steered their methods towards increasingly multi-sited strategies. The study of one transnational community, in other words, often involves an array of

geographically diverse sites. While this ethnography includes no time on the ground in India, it complements the work of those ethnographers and social scientists studying the communities from which the Indian transmigrants come (Osella and Osella 2000a, 200b; Kurien 2002; Nambiar 1995; Nair 1999; Sekhar 1996).¹¹² These ethnographic portraits of migrants and migrant communities look at the impact of transnational migration upon the families and communities from which labor is drawn; in doing so, they gaze at the transmigrants' sojourn in the Gulf from afar. In the preceding chapters, I join the handful of other ethnographers (Longva 1997; Khalaf and Al Kobaisi 1999; Leonard 2002, 2003; Nagy 1998, 2000) working to better explicate and analyze the experiences of transmigrants during their time in the petroleum-rich countries of the Arabian Gulf.

- The application and reexamination of the canonical aspects of transnational theory in a context outside the Global North.

While this ethnography is meant to address the blind spot of the particular transnational migrant flow between India and the Arabian Gulf—the blind spot consisting of the time these individuals spend in the Gulf—it also addresses the larger omission of non-western migration flows in the transnational literature (Ong 1999, Leichtmann 2005; Schmitter-Heisler 2000). In other words, more than simply filling in the empty gap at one end of an

¹¹² While George Marcus advocates mobile and multi-sited ethnography as one approach to studying the increasingly global and connected world, he notes that “some ethnography may not move around literally but may nonetheless embed itself in a multi-sited context” (1995: 110). This ethnography, and contemporary Bahrain, is just that sort of context.

infrequently analyzed migration flow, this case study and the handful of others conducted in the petroleum-rich states of the Arabian Gulf provide an opportunity to reassess the emergent, if not newly canonical, premises of transnational theory for their universal applicability through analysis outside the migratory conduits with one endpoint in the global north. In the previous chapters, for example, I have described how the guestworkers' movement between Bahrain and India, as well as movement about the island, is fettered by the structure of dominance erected by the state and citizenry. I have explicated how transmigrants' political activity is confined to a set of social clubs and other voluntary organizations that dot the island. I have portrayed how the lines of difference between Indian transmigrants—whether religious, caste-based, regional, or linguistic—become an afterthought under the pressure of the structure of dominance. And I have demonstrated how the *kafala*, or sponsorship system, locks transmigrants into dependency upon the goodwill of their sponsors. Beyond the obvious fact that the proportion of citizens to transmigrants is much different than the proportions typical of transmigrant destinations in the west, and beyond the related fact that neither assimilation nor integration are idealized and practiced in the petroleum-rich states of the Gulf, the lived experiences of the Indian transmigrants differs significantly from that of the transmigrant populations commonly described in the burgeoning transnational literature. As an ethnography attentive to that difference, this study joins others in seeking a transnational theory attentive to non-western migration flows.

- To use the ethnography and experiences of the Indian guestworkers to analyze the Bahraini state.

Transnational ethnographies typically focus their analysis upon individuals and communities on the move. In doing so, these works focus upon the hardships and difficulties transmigrants face in building and maintaining social fields that transcend the boundaries of single nations (Smith and Guarnizo 1998; Basch et al. 1994). This body of work also includes ethnographies of a more celebratory strain—particularly those that fit under the moniker of cosmopolitanism—which envision the ability to escape the dominion of the nation-state as a new sort of freedom (Appadurai 1997; Hannerz 1996; Breckenridge 2002). Together, however, both strains pay scant attention to the impact of these transnational populations upon the shape of the host state. In part, this may be because the transmigrant populations often comprise small or exceptional minorities; in the petroleum-rich nations of the Arabian Gulf, however, the transnational populations are quite large, and those populations play a correspondingly larger role in the articulation of the state. In Bahrain, nearly half the population are guestworkers. These guestworkers are central to the day-to-day continuance of the modern city-state and, as described in chapter six, to the idea of nation embraced by state and citizen alike. The structure of dominance erected by the Bahraini state to control, manage, and orchestrate relations between citizenry and the guestworkers—explored at length in chapters three, four and five—is an analytical tool meant to do more than convey the context of Indian transmigrants' experiences in Bahrain. In mapping this structure of dominance, I argue

that the apparatuses erected to manage and control these large guestworker populations are keystones to understanding the Bahraini state, the hegemony it maintains over its citizenry, and the inequities it structures in the lives of citizens and foreigners.

Together, these four themes help contextualize this work and, in some sense, reveal how it fits in the larger literature. In the three short sections that follow, I will trace and evaluate some of the related threads woven into this ethnography.

II. Bahrain in the Gulf Context

Can the experience of Bahrain and its transmigrant communities described here serve a proxy for the experience of the other Gulf States? Without a strong empirical and ethnographic foundation upon which to build analysis, the study of transnationalism and labor migration in the Gulf has come to rely upon the small handful of works scattered between these countries—Longva (1997) in Kuwait, Leonard (2002, 2003) and Khalaf and Al Kobaisi (2000) in the Emirates, Nagy (1998) in Qatar, and Franklin (1985) in Bahrain. In the preceding chapters, I have relied upon these analyses, conducted in neighboring countries, as a foundation upon which my own analysis is constructed. The question as to the transferability of their conclusions to Bahrain, however, remains an important one, as does the corollary question regarding the transferability of the conclusions presented here to neighboring nations.

As I argued in chapter two, the nations of the GCC share a common set of historical experiences. The coastal regions of these countries have a long history as entrepôts in transregional maritime trade routes, a function which not only enmeshed them in the historical political economy of the greater Indian Ocean region, but in doing

so also brought a heterogeneous mix of peoples and cultures to their shores. As I have argued, the processes that today fit under the category of ‘transnational’ have a history in the region that dates back several millennia, predating the formation of the nation-states from the more fluid nomadic and urban-based mercantile populations of the Gulf littoral. In centuries past, the exploitation of pearls drew (or pulled) merchants, traders, laborers, slaves—as well as the apparatus of colonial India—to the island. The collapse of the pearl market, and the almost coincidental development of the regions petroleum resources, certainly altered the relations of production in Bahrain and the neighboring states. However, the vast amounts of wealth that flowed into the region as a result of petroleum, while fueling a period of infrastructural modernization unparalleled in the region’s history, nonetheless drew upon the past, forging historical continuities in the relations of production, the contours of the state, and the intricate relations between citizen and guestworker.

In the preceding chapters I have largely explored these relations of production through the fissure forged by the arrival of large contingents of transnational non-citizens. Bahrain, like all the states of the GCC, hosts a large and diverse transnational workforce. In all the Gulf States these relations are orchestrated by the *kafala*, a system of managing transnational labor that distributes responsibility—framed both bureaucratically and culturally—for the management and control of transmigrants to individual citizens. The great wealth generated by this extractive economy, combined with the importation of a foreign workforce, has led to the formation of dual or split labor markets in all the states of the GCC. The wealth generated by the petroleum economy is

channeled through the various states, and as I have argued in chapter six, the distribution of this wealth in the form of a welfare state and public sector employment comprises the basis by which the Sunni elite in Bahrain forge legitimacy and authority. The Bahraini state and the vision of modernity it has promoted over the preceding century codified a set of tribal relations that channel wealth unequally to its citizenry while simultaneously contribute to the leadership's hegemony over the citizenry. These processes are certainly common to all the states of the GCC.

Yet while the arrangement of citizens and non-citizens in Bahrain roughly resembles that of the other monarchies of the Gulf littoral, several unique aspects of Bahrain must be taken into account. First, it is with good reason that citizens of the other GCC nations refer to the people of Bahrain as the 'beggars of the Gulf.' Petroleum reserves on the small island were the first to be exploited in the GCC, but they were also the first to run out. As I argued in chapters two and six, Bahrain met the difficult erosion of their extractive economy with a suite of strategies: odes to economic diversification, now part of the vision of all the petroleum states of the Gulf, emerged as central to the vision of modernization articulated by the Bahraini leadership. Similarly, the small island nation parlayed its long experience as a transnational entrepôt and its role as the hub of British colonial activity in the region into a booming service economy. The island is now one of the preferred locations for the transnational corporations that serve the surrounding states. Furthermore, the Bahraini state's efforts at localizing the workforce—and hence shift the expectations of the citizenry away from public sector employment—are arguably the most sophisticated and successful in the Gulf. While some may suggest that this

marks the island as categorically different or exceptional, my analysis suggests that Bahrain provides a glimpse into the future of its neighbors, of those Gulf States still buoyed by significant petroleum reserves.¹¹³ In other words, the challenges Bahrain faces now are the same sorts of challenges other GCC states will face as their citizenry continues to grow and as the wealth derived from petroleum extraction diminishes.

At the same time, the articulation of these processes in Bahrain has occurred over a set of ethnic and sectarian relations unique to the Gulf. The guestworker population on the island roughly resembles that of its neighbors, but the citizenry itself is unique in that same comparative framework. Only in Bahrain does a Sunni leadership rule over a Shi'ite majority—a demographic and socioeconomic relationship that resembled pre-war Iraq more than any of its GCC neighbors.¹¹⁴ Unlike its neighbors, the population disenfranchised by the inequities of state-based distribution are not just non-citizen foreigners, nor the stateless *bidoons* described in those states that encompass the traditional territories of nomadic pastoralists (Longva 1997: 50-51). Rather, the disenfranchised Shi'i of Bahrain are an amalgamation of relatively recent arrivals of Persian heritage and a larger population of Shi'i whose tenure on the island predates that of the ruling family and their Sunni tribal brethren. While the articulation of a structure of dominance based on the differentiation between citizens and non-citizens remains central, as I have argued, to understanding the Bahraini state, the sectarian and ethnic fissures

¹¹³ Laurence Louer, whose research explores the matrix of relations between the Shi'i and Sunni populations on the island, shares this perspective with me (email to author, June 29, 2005).

¹¹⁴ Here I refer to the most recent conflict in Iraq (ongoing since 2003) in which the Sunni leadership was forcibly removed by American-led forces.

within the citizenry are significant enough to mark the experience of Bahrain as unique, in that the process by which the Sunni leadership constructs its legitimacy has been shaped by the particular balance of ethnic, sectarian, and transnational communities on the island. These differences must be taken into account when extrapolating the experiences of Bahrain to the Gulf at large.

III. Transnationalism and the Structure of Dominance

In providing a framework for understanding the commonalities and differences in the experiences of Indian transmigrants in Bahrain, I have borrowed the concept of *structure of dominance* from cultural anthropologist Anh Longva. In her ethnography of relations between citizens and guestworkers in Kuwait, she uses the concept of a structure of dominance, analogous in her estimation to the sponsorship system (or *kafala*), to analyze the orchestration of relations between citizens and guestworkers. I, too, see the *kafala* as the keystone in this structure of dominance. However, while rooted in the relations orchestrated by the *kafala*, the analysis presented in the preceding chapters suggests that the power implicit in this structure of dominance depends upon the transnational domain by which this labor arrives on the island. In other words, while the *kafala* is a traditional and historic social arrangement, its emergence as a contemporary mechanism for orchestrating and confirming the dominance of citizens over guestworkers depends upon the particular conditions of transnational conduits that bring labor to the island, and to the global political economy of which the movement of capital, labor, and culture is a part. Delineating and analyzing the scope of this structure of dominance has been a principal task of this document.

In chapter three, I used the experiences of the Indian transmigrant working class to examine the contours of this structure of dominance. Legions of transnational Indian laborers arrive on the island each year; in doing so, they enter a system of dominance that is oftentimes violent—in both a structural sense and in the outright forms of violence that structure of dominance enables. For the laborers, this systemic dominance begins with the debt incurred for the right to labor in Bahrain. This burden—of productive family land mortgaged, of high interest loans from moneylenders in India, of familial resources directed away from the education or marriage of other children to support the individual's sojourn in the Gulf—locks the individual laborer in place. Whatever the circumstances may be upon arrival, he or she must find a way to derive profit during the years abroad. Negotiating this task is often difficult, and the desperate need to repay these loans becomes the fulcrum for further abuse of the transmigrant laborers. To briefly review some of the aspects I described in chapter three: The terms of the contracts signed in India are frequently disregarded by sponsors, and regulations prevent them from freely switching jobs; Passports are typically confiscated upon arrival, thereby preventing the laborer from fleeing the island; The state bureaucracies and courtrooms that manage and regulate the large transmigrant populations operate in Arabic, and the transmigrant's sponsor—the very individual who profits from the transmigrants' labor—is the designated representative and guardian of his or her rights.

The systemic, or structural dominance of citizen over laborer is further reiterated in the everyday interactions between guestworker and citizen—reflected in the explicit racism of these interactions, and manifest in the sporadic violence directed at

transmigrants at work and at camp. The strategies the transmigrant laborers bring to bear against this structural dominance are weak. Strikes and slowdowns, while common mechanisms of resistance in India and particularly in Kerala, where the majority of Indian transmigrant laborers come from, are generally ineffective in Bahrain, as the case of Vijay presented in chapter three demonstrates. The laborers' principal option is to depart the legal relationship with their sponsor and enter the black market for labor, a move that puts them at great risk for further abuse from new sponsors, as well as for arrest and deportation. The transmigrant laborers also utilize an informal set of institutional resources centered upon the social clubs, religious organizations, and other voluntary associations that share and disseminate information about coping with the difficulties of work on the island—social resources that are, from one angle, a form of resistance to this structure of dominance.

In the fourth chapter, I analyze the contours of this structure of dominance from the perspective of the Indian diasporic elite. While it is certainly true that this elite brings a wide variety of additional strategies and resources to bear against the infractions of this relation of dominance, they also face a different array of vulnerabilities. For transmigrant entrepreneurs and businessmen, citizen 'sleeping partners' are required for all ventures, and the almost exclusive ability of citizens to access, negotiate, and utilize the venues of the state (regulatory agencies, courts, and other bureaucracies) make this a relationship prone to abuse. Furthermore, the jobs that the diasporic elite occupy on the island are the very jobs that Bahrainization policies seek to nationalize, adding another stratum of insecurity and vulnerability to their life on the island. The diasporic elite also typically

bring their family to Bahrain, opening them to a host of other concerns and vulnerabilities centered upon their ability to convey an identity to their children, to secure their education, to socially locate them amidst the plural and diasporic milieu of Bahrain, and to do so under the panoptic oversight of the Bahraini state and citizenry. In response to these challenges, the diasporic elite have configured a strategic transnationalism that generally transcends the India/Bahrain dichotomy. Global social networks reaching back to India but also to other Gulf States, to postcolonial Africa, and to Europe, North America, Australia and New Zealand provide an insurance policy against the vulnerabilities generated by this structure of dominance.

In the fifth chapter I examine the unique array of diasporic social clubs that dominate the social life of the diasporic elite on the island. I begin with an analysis of their instrumental value—conceived, first, as venues for the construction of social capital in diaspora, and second, as venues for the performance and reiteration of Indian identity/identities in the transnational milieu. Against the backdrop of a structure of dominance that homogenizes the Indian community as simply labor or, at times, as South Asian labor, the social clubs provide key arenas for establishing more particularistic identities—identities that are invaluable for those who eventually make the return to India. Using Bourdieu’s nuanced conception of social capital, my analysis suggests that while members of the transnational Indian community—like all guestworker communities in Bahrain—can and do establish rich networks of social capital, the transmodification of that social capital into economic capital is mitigated by the *kafala* system. In other words, converting that social capital into economic benefits is a process

tightly mitigated and controlled by the state through the structure of the *kafala*. I use this analysis to describe another facet of the structure of dominance, while at the same time critiquing theories of social capital that, unlike Bourdieu's schemata, fail to consider social capital as part of a constellation of other forms of accumulation.

The power implicit in this structure of dominance resembles what Eric Wolf described as structural power (Wolf 1999: 5; see also Mintz 1996: 28-32). The *kafala*, as the keystone in this structure of dominance, serves as a mechanism for orchestrating interactions between citizens and guestworkers, a process that often includes *preventing* interaction, as well as shaping it. At the same time, while the power of this system rests in the orchestration of relations between guestworkers and citizens, it is not an ideological or hegemonic form of dominance. The guestworkers' ongoing appeals to internationally-derived notions of basic rights, their appeals to the perceived meritocratic underpinnings of the neoliberal system or, put another way, to the logic of global capitalism, are evidence of this. That this structure of dominance is perceived as unjust, corrupt, and misguided by the transnational laborers indicates that the structure of dominance is a substitute for the sort of ideological hegemony described by Gramsci (1971) and others (see Longva 1997: 81).

While the bulk of the preceding chapters are concerned with describing the many facets of this structure of dominance, I use chapter six to examine the relationship between this structure, the state, and the Bahraini citizenry. Here I argue that this structure of dominance—as one of the principal components of the Bahraini state—represents a key juncture in the articulation of the citizenry's relationship to the global

political economy, a relationship I describe as one of resistance. The *kafala* system and the structure of dominance it underpins comprises the principal mechanism for managing the large foreign workforce on the island, a workforce that is at once integral to the vision of modernity central in the Bahraini national identity and, at the same time, to the maintenance of a traditional system for disbursing state-controlled wealth to the citizenry in exchange for legitimacy. Citizens are channeled to the public sector, where kin-based affiliation and tribal identity remain integral factors, while foreign laborers serve principally in the private sector, subjecting them to the vulnerabilities of global capitalism. I use the concept of hospitality—a concept with a long tradition and organizational role in the tribal history of the Sunni leadership—to characterize this dual economy: While both state and citizenry embrace the transnational and global, citizens remain insulated from its calculus. They are ‘hosts’ to these processes, and they seek to aggrandize profit from them. The public sector and, more specifically, the *kafala*, provides a mechanism for simultaneously accomplishing this task while allowing citizens to insulate themselves from the global neoliberal model in whose calculus they are—individually—poorly positioned to succeed.

IV. Transnationalism, Bahrain, and the Anthropology of Globalization

The anthropology of globalization, if the boundaries for such a body of work can even be delineated, is a sprawling and vast literature. Certainly that literature congeals around particular points: consumerism (Slater 1997, Waters 2001), historical political economy (Wolf 1982, Mintz 1985, Roseberry 1989), the environmental impact of globalization (Paulson and Gezon 2004; Diamond 1999)—these are just a handful of the

many nodes that, in some form or another, address the multiple facets of this diverse topic. The transnationalism literature, a subdivision of this literature on globalization concerned with the increasingly common distribution of capital, communities, and individuals' lives across national boundaries is itself vast, complex, and spread amongst numerous disciplines. In the preceding chapters, I've drawn upon numerous scholars and theoretical apparatuses that fit within this larger anthropology of globalization and, more specifically, within the literature on transnationalism. My reliance, however, upon the works of Arjun Appadurai, Ulf Hannerz, and their cohort of 'transnational' scholars opens me to the same criticisms often levied against them: that their attention to the cultural facets of globalization somehow romanticizes the process of globalization. In focusing upon the freedoms engendered by this movement, these scholars elide the harsh inequities endemic to the articulation of capitalism at a global level, or so their critics would suggest.

I have attempted to stave off this criticism through a sustained focus upon the structure of dominance that, from my vantage point, best describes the lived experiences of Indian transmigrants in Bahrain. I have used these experiences and, more specifically, the migration histories I gathered during my time in Bahrain, to describe a structure of dominance that systemically builds inequities between citizens and non-citizens while, perhaps less obviously, constructing and maintaining structural inequities amongst the citizenry. By using my analysis to expand this structure of dominance to include the arrangements implicit in the transnational conduits by which labor arrives in Bahrain, as well as the *kafala* itself, I have sustained my analytic focus upon the oftentimes brutal

and always systemic oppression of the transnational Indian laborers. In this sense, then, I have constructed my analysis of these ethnographic data to deal directly with the most unromantic aspects of the transnational processes at work on the small island.

Yet while the romanticization of the global is, arguably, to be avoided in establishing an analytic frame to unpack the complexities of this particular transnational milieu, one must not throw out the baby with the bathwater, for the romanticization of the global plays an integral role in the transnational power relations that shape the lives of guestworker and citizen alike. And it is here that Appadurai's notion of a 'break,' combined with his notion of new role of imagination, becomes particularly useful. In the poorest villages of southern India, men and, less frequently, women, *imagine* the potential horizons that a sojourn in the Gulf might open. Two years in the Gulf, perhaps meeting the right people, finding the right job, moving up in the company—these ideas draw individuals from India to the Gulf, and while a few years under the structure of dominance in place on the island is often sufficient to extinguish those aspirations, the transnational conduits between India and the Gulf contain enough success stories to fuel the departure of new laborers with fresh dreams and desperate for any opportunity. As Appadurai notes, "More people than ever before seem to imagine routinely the possibility that they or their children will live and work in places other than where they were born" (1996: 6), a statement which succinctly captures the role that the imagined (and romanticized) global horizons play in the everyday lives of transmigrants in the Gulf.

The romanticization of the global plays a similarly pervasive role in the Bahraini citizenry, albeit one of a different character. My analysis of the Bahraini state pointed to

the particular vision of modernity promoted by state and citizenry alike: the idea of a nation increasingly connected to the conduits of global capitalism, of more banks, corporations, industries, shopping malls, restaurants, and tourists is a largely uncontested one. That even the disenfranchised Shi'i spend evenings at the mall, spend too much money on credit, imagine an increasingly wealthy and global future for their children, and, in general terms, expect to benefit from the increasingly global economy of Bahrain is symptomatic of how the romanticization of globalization is an active component of their worldview as well. In my analysis of the impact of transnationalism upon the citizenry and state (chapter six), I pointed to the concept of hospitality (or 'hosting'), itself a historical continuation of tribal relations with merchants, transnational laborers, and slaves of earlier eras, as a key facet for unpacking this scenario. While the Indian transmigrant laborers envision themselves as producers in the neoliberal calculus of global capitalism, even the disenfranchised citizenry envision themselves as consumers of the global—a position fostered by the longstanding presence of a foreign underclass and by the particular configuration of the state as a nexus for the distribution of wealth.

In the final accounting, my analysis produces a morally complex portrait of contemporary Bahrain. Simple dichotomies between the state and the disenfranchised indigenous people, or between an indigenous people and the forces of global capitalism, both common frames for anthropological inquiry, are impossible to conjure from the complexities of peoples and relations on the island. The disenfranchised Shi'i, for example, have mounted no anti-global rhetoric, and calls to preserve 'traditional' ways of life are typically specific and of a cultural nature (for example, whether scantily clad

mannequins should be allowed in shop windows). The marches and rallies of the disenfranchised citizenry typically focus on the inequities of access to state-distributed wealth—simply put, they wish for better placement in the structure by which global forces are controlled and hosted, and through which wealth is aggrandized. The structure of dominance, described at length in the chapters above, is the mechanism by which citizens and the state articulate their relationship to the forces of production, to harness the calculus of a system in which they are poorly positioned to compete.

The true underclass on the island—the transmigrant laboring class—are emissaries of the global, transnational agents who arrive on the island with the hope that through luck, education, and hard work they might benefit in the neoliberal calculus of global capitalism. The structure of dominance in place in Bahrain mitigates these aspirations, and often bankrupts them. But it is not the logic of the system that brought them to the island that is indicted through their collective experiences. Rather, the transmigrants seek the further extension of this neoliberal calculus into Bahrain. They wish for regularized contracts, guaranteed rights, the freedom to move between jobs, and comprehensive enforcement of the policies stemming from these changes. In seeking to dismantle the structure of dominance, the interests of the transmigrant laborers run contrary to those of the citizenry, for the structure of dominance by which the citizenry and state control the vast contingents of foreign labor on the island is, at the same time, the principal framework by which the citizenry resists the neoliberal logic of global capitalism, a logic in which they are, at the current juncture, poorly positioned to succeed.

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