



Working the Night Shift: Gender and the Global Economy

Reena Patel¹

Department of Geography and the Environment,
University of Texas at Austin, Campus Mail Code A3100, Austin, TX 78712, USA
Email: reenap_70@hotmail.com

Abstract

The global mainstream media characterizes the IT sector, and transnational call centers in particular, as catalysts for social change in India. Yet, the emergence of this industry is not shifting patriarchal relations of power in a significant way due to social and spatial constraints on women's mobility in the urban nightscape. Specific to call center employment, mobility is important because it requires night shift workers. For a woman in India to be out at this hour is generally considered improper and unsafe. However, women are participating in this industry and corporate strategies, such as the use of private shuttle vans to transport women to and from work in the middle of the night, reflect the ways in which both the industry and its female employees negotiate a presence in the public sphere. Based on exploratory research conducted in Mumbai, India in January, 2005, I argue that the insertion of women into the urban nightscape, via the night shift requirements of the global economy, is met with covert resistance. Although there are no visible barriers such as "men only" signs written into public space, women's bodies continue to be marked as a site of transgression.

¹ © Reena Patel, 2006

Introduction

This paper is based on a larger project that examines the relationship between the physical, temporal, and socioeconomic mobility of Indian women working in transnational call centers. Although my research on this topic is ongoing, the findings I present draw from exploratory fieldwork conducted in January, 2005, at TYJ Corporation.² Located in Mumbai, TYJ Corp. is listed as one of the top ten call centers by National Association of Software and Service Companies (NASSCOM, 2005).

Initial findings, based on participant observation and semi-structured interviews with TYJ employees, as well as interviews conducted with call center employees residing in Bangalore, suggest two dynamics. First, working the night shift may serve as a time-trap that further marginalizes women from social and economic opportunities. Second, it may also create new opportunities and spaces for women upon which they re-invent their identity, both in the formal economy and the community at large. At the same time, from a spatial perspective, I argue that the physical spaces and the nightscapes traversed by female call center employees are relatively fixed and confined because their movement is based on a strict home-to-work journey and the spaces they occupy are closely monitored.

In this paper, I examine women's social and spatial practices, in relation to transnational call center employment, in a five-fold manner. First, I introduce the topic by briefly outlining the emergence of the transnational call center industry in relation to women's mobility and spatial access. Second, I discuss the reflexivity and positionality I bring to this project. Third, an overview of the transnational call center industry is provided. Thereafter, I outline how a conceptual framework based on globalization discourse, spatial theory and feminist geography is used to inform the direction of this project. Finally, I provide my findings and conclude by suggesting further areas of inquiry that need to be addressed.

Emergence of Transnational Call Center Industry

The global economy, in combination with the 1990's economic reform policies of India, all contributed to the hyper-growth of the Information Technology (IT) sector and the transnational call center³ industry. At the same

² Name changed to protect the identity of the company.

³ Transnational call centers are primarily labeled as *outsourcing*, or sometimes *offshoring*, by the mainstream media. However, the term outsourcing incorrectly describes this new phenomenon because U.S. companies have been outsourcing for decades in terms of payroll

time, an increase in the middle-class and women's employment in the formal economy can be linked to global technology and development. And specific to transnational call centers, the night shift requirement of this industry not only represents the emergence of a "second shift" within the global economy, but it also intersects with the spatial and temporal construction of gender.

The urban nightscape is primarily a male domain that often represents danger and spaces of exclusion for women. For instance, Article 66(b) of the Indian 1948 Factories Act states: no women shall be required or allowed to work in any factory except between the hours of 6 A.M. and 7 P.M. (Office of the Labour Commissioner, 2006). Only as of March, 2005, was this act amended to provide women the opportunity to work the night shift. Transnational call centers were able to avoid this provision because they fell under the governance of the Shops and Establishments Act.

Phrases such as "working the night shift" also bring forth gender, class, and caste connotations such as prostitution and lower-class/caste status. An infusion of educated, middle and upper-class women into the urban nightscape via the night shift requirement of transnational call center employment provides a new framework upon which to investigate women's mobility and spatial access. Mobility and access to public space in the urban domain is particularly important in regards to call center employment because it requires *physical* mobility in terms of transportation to and from work and *temporal* mobility in the form of working the night shift to coincide with the office hours of the U.S.-based customer. For a woman in India to be out and about in the middle of the night is generally considered improper and unsafe. In spite of this, women's participation in this industry is apparent and corporate strategies, such as the use of private shuttle vans to transport women to and from work in the middle of the night, reflect the ways in which both the industry and its female employees negotiate a presence in the public sphere.

Spatial issues such as mobility and access to public space are indicators of the status, power, and socioeconomic opportunities afforded to different groups in society (Massey, 1994, 2005; Hanson and Pratt, 1995; Drucker and Gumpert, 1997; McDowell, 1999). The emergence of an IT revolution (Castells 2000), in combination with disparities such as gender inequity and the digital divide, expands the range of feminist geography to areas such as global technology and development. However, despite the globalizing aspects of transnational call center operations – as demonstrated by a Delta Airlines customer in Chicago talking to a

processing, human resources, etc. "Transnational" is used in this paper to account for the geographic scale of this industry, which is based on cartographies of cultural circulation, identification, and action beyond nation-state borders (Crang et al., 2003, 439).

Delta travel agent in India about flight reservations to London – there is no attention given to its impact on geographical concerns in relation to gender issues.

Such research is important because women's participation in transnational call center operations inform larger issues such as globalization, economic development, and gender equity. In addition, Tuan (2004, 730) contends that "cultural geography remains almost wholly daylight geography." Therefore, the nightscapes which serve as the basis for this research not only expand the nine-to-five landscape of geography, but also contribute to feminist research by analyzing how an infusion of educated women into the urban nightscape may reshape gendered norms of mobility and spatial access.

Reflexivity and Positionality

Feminists argue that researchers need to consider the reflexivity and positionality they bring to their projects. Although much of the literature focuses on anthropological research methods, such as ethnography (Kirschner, 1987; Behar, 1996; Stacey, 1996; Foley, 2002), feminist geographers have also begun integrating reflexivity and positionality into their work (Wright, 1997; Acharya and Lund, 2002; Katz, 2004; Pratt, 2004). Building on this discourse, I will provide a brief overview of my background and the experiences that contribute to my research interest.

Born and raised in the United States and being of Indian descent places me in the position of an "in-between entity" in terms of being identified as American and Indian at the same time. This dual identity brings forth multiple positionalities and associations. As an American, I am positioned as being from a country that benefits from India's lower-wage labor pool. At the individual level, I represent the customer that call center employees interact with on a daily basis, and at some level, I embody a segment of our society that is losing their job to the group I seek to research. On the other hand, as a non-resident Indian (NRI), I am sometimes referred to as an "American-Born Confused Desi" (ABCD). The acronym ABCD is used to characterize Indians born in the United States and notions of their "confusion" because of an underlying assumption that if Indians are born outside of India they must have a disconnected sense of identity and belonging.

Interestingly, one of my first jobs was as a call center employee for a bank in Massachusetts. Although I was not required to change my identity, "neutralize" my accent, or work the night shift to service the daytime hours of my customers, I distinctly remember how an infusion of management information systems (MIS) brought forth new forms of surveillance and subsequent scrutiny of phone calls. For instance, upon review of the weekly phone log, a supervisor advised that my

average call time was 23 seconds over their targeted goal and I needed to work to bring that down.

Overview of Transnational Call Centers

Since the late 1990's, advances in telecommunications technology combined with the globalization of IT services directly contribute to the growth of transnational call center operations. Fortune 500 companies, from IBM to American Express, are reliant on call centers and over the past five years various data processing functions such as inputting medical transcripts and credit card applications/billing have transferred to India (Patel, 2002; Stitt, 2002; Economist, 2004). NASSCOM (2002, 2005) estimates that 336 call centers have emerged throughout India and as of 2005, approximately 348,000 women and men are working in this industry.

In contrast to India's engineering field, in which women lack equitable participation (Parikh and Sukhatme, 1992, 2002; Patel and Parmentier, 2005), Kelkar et al (2002) contend that call centers in India prefer hiring young, educated women because they are viewed to be more loyal and compliant in comparison to their male counterparts. Yet the majority of executive positions are held by men, suggesting the existence of occupational segregation. Singh and Pandey's (2005) research on call centers found that women often plateau at mid-level positions while men tend to progress further. This disparity is linked to men's lack of participation, and responsibility, in household labor and childcare.

One gets a glimpse of such occupational segregation in an *India Today* article (Chengappa and Goyal, 2002). The cover story, labeled "Housekeepers to the World," focused on call centers in India. In terms of visual presentation, the image on the front cover and photo-ops of customer service workers consisted primarily of young women, whereas photo-ops involving high level positions, such as Chairman or President, showed older men. Within the content of this article, it was only men who were presented as leaders of the industry and experts in terms of discussing future growth and challenges. In contrast, the women interviewed were primarily entry-level workers. The one exception was a female vice-president. However, she worked for a company that trains women how to be effective customer service representatives. She was not in a direct position of power in terms of owning a call center or influencing policy surrounding the development of this industry. From reading this *India Today* article one gets the sense that women are to be seen and *heard*, but not serve as active participants in corporate decision-making.

Mirchandani's (2004) and Poster's (2004) research on call centers in New Delhi suggests a possible shift in the gendered aspects of call center employment.

In the United States, particularly in rural areas, women are the majority of call center employees (Bonds, 2006) and this industry is considered to be a “pink collar” field. In contrast, Poster’s and Mirchandani’s study of call centers in New Delhi found that 50%-70% of the employees are men. This coincides with the call center I visited in Mumbai in which 60% of the employees were also men. Such initial findings contradict the media representation of call center employment in India as being primarily female (Chengappa and Goyal, 2002). Unlike maquiladora labor in garment production, which was predominantly female in the United States and remained the same upon transfer to countries such as Mexico and Bangladesh, it is unclear if call center employment will follow a similar path. The idea of a modern-day labor force that goes from female to male is rare in comparison to the integration of women into historically male-dominated positions such as clerical work (Boyer, 1998; Elias and Carney, 2005) and pharmacy (Tanner and Cockerill, 1996).

Specific to women already employed in transnational call centers, Kelkar et al. (2002) and Pande (2005) argue that women have not experienced significant changes in their social status within the household due to the secondary status given to call center employment. Expanding upon their research, I argue that although the presence of middle-class women in the urban nightscape represents a break in traditional norms, their mobility and spatial access is based on regimes of control and surveillance. For instance, women do not control when they leave their home or job because their mobility is based on a strict home-to-work journey that is determined by their company’s transport provider. Also, the spaces women occupy in the call centers themselves are closely monitored via identity cards, surveillance cameras, and MIS systems that track women when women are “online” and “offline.” Despite such restrictions, changes in mobility via the night shift requirement of this industry may impact community norms surrounding the presence of women in urban nightscapes and subsequently re-shape, for better or worse, women’s social status in the larger community.

Conceptual Context

A conceptual framework based on globalization discourse, spatial theory, and feminist geography is used in this paper. A local U.S. workforce gone global now operates on a 24-hour timeframe that is shifting the work space and time of customer service employees worldwide.⁴ Twenty-five years ago, who would have

⁴ Although transnational call centers have a high concentration in India, they also have a presence in Kenya (Lacey, 2005), Philippines (Balfour, 2003; Wahlgren, 2004), Ireland (Patel, 2002) and other countries.

expected that on any given afternoon an American residing in Idaho would dial a 1-800 number that is instantly re-routed to the suburb of a major Indian city, and at 3a.m. India time, an employee with a “neutral” accent would answer “Good Afternoon. American Express, this is Julie speaking”? Adam (2002, 21, cited in Mirchandani, 2003) would label this dynamic a “colonization of time,” whereby the western clock is commoditized, set as the standard, and exported throughout the world.

This transformation of time into a global resource is based on reorganizing an employee’s identity, neutralizing accents, and temporally adjusting the normative nine-to-five work schedule. Indeed, the night shift labor force represents a new level of social and spatial interaction between industrialized and developing nations. Such overlap and interaction between the global and national, in combination with technological advances in telecommunications and satellite technology, is reshaping the global economy.

Specific to shifts in the spatiotemporal landscape of globalization, Sassen argues that “economic globalization itself can already be seen to contain dynamics of both mobility and fixity” (Sassen, 2000, 217). For instance, the mobility afforded to multi-national corporations (MNC), seeking to offshore their customer service labor force, is contingent on fixed structures at the national level such as material and technological infrastructure. Specific to transnational call centers, I argue that India’s labor force is also a fixed structure because in contrast to the global hyper-mobility of MNC’s, the physical mobility of the majority of call center employees remains within the nation-state. In fact, the emergence of call centers in developing nations is dependent on the fixity and availability of a low-wage, English-speaking labor pool.

Global processes are also embedded in national policy (Sassen, 2000). The restructuring of U.S. immigration policy in terms of reducing the number of H1-B visas, along with the economic downturn of the United States IT sector, serves as an impetus for companies to offshore what were previously U.S.-based positions (Rudrappa, 2005). Essentially, because the Indian worker cannot migrate to the U.S., the work migrates to India. The tightening U.S. economy has led companies to offshore not only high wage engineering positions, but also low wage call center positions. In this instance, the protectionist policy of limiting immigration in order to bring economic security to the American worker has created the opposite effect, as more and more jobs are transferred overseas. However, this trend should not be exaggerated because, as Pandit (2005) finds, the actual number of U.S. jobs that have moved overseas thus far is not significant.

Geographers have focused primarily on the political economy of globalization (Rankin, 2003). Traditionally, the focus has been on how macro/global processes conflict with and/or impact local communities (Cox, 1997; Herod, 1997, 2001; Harvey, 2000; Jackson, 2004). In cases where gender is

discussed in macro-level globalization discourse, sweeping generalizations are sometimes made. For instance, Agnew (2005:4-5) links globalization to American hegemony and states:

American hegemony can also liberate people from the hold of traditions that disempower various groups, not the least women, whose independent subjectivity (as citizens and consumers rather than solely as mothers or potential mothers) and parallel participation in society as individual persons have tended to increase with its spread.

In contrast to this focus, feminist geographers are researching the globalization process from the perspective of how the production of local and global space is not only relational, but also constructed upon social, political, and economic interactions that remain inherently gendered (Oza, 2001; Samarasinghe, 2005; Dirsuweit, 2005; Elias and Carney, 2005)

Feminist geographers are also actively engaged in examining the social construction of gender vis-à-vis spatial theory. In some cases their findings are counterintuitive to mainstream assumptions. For instance, based on research of clerical workers in Columbus, Ohio, England (1993) refutes the widely accepted spatial entrapment theory. This theory serves as a basis for arguing that married women with children are spatially entrapped into shorter home-to-work journeys, which thereby limit their opportunities to low-wage employment in comparison to single women who have never been married and have no children. Instead, England found the opposite: married women in her study actually had longer commutes compared to single, unmarried women with no children. Her research demonstrates that the link between women's mobility and spatial entrapment must be considered in the context of other competing issues.

Regardless of the actual travel distance, McDowell (1999) argues that changes in mobility represent a renegotiation of prescribed gender roles. At the same time, a *perceived* increase in mobility and socio-economic status, in the form of women from Asia migrating to the United States for marriage, can result in a further re-enforcement of traditional gender roles. Constable (2005) explains that while some women seek to marry abroad based on the perception of marrying a "modern" and therefore more egalitarian spouse, their spouses are seeking transnational unions under the premise of marrying someone who will take on a more traditional and subservient role. Women occupying professional positions and a relatively high level of class status in their own country arrive in a presumably "modern" society and find that their class status not only drops, but that they are also expected to re-create an identity based on a spouse's ideal of domesticity and traditional family values. In such cases, the intersection between mobility and transnational border crossing from developing to industrialized countries does not correlate with increased levels of gender equality because the social space

embedded within such movement is based on a continuum of traditional gender roles.

Transnational call centers offer an interesting contrast to transnational border crossing because, in the case of call center employment, a woman's spatial mobility remains relatively fixed (i.e. within borders of India). However, the spaces in which their identity and labor is embedded is global and mimics the physical space that is sometimes assumed to be had by women involved in transnational marriages. For example, on a macro-level TYJ Corporation is physically located in Mumbai. Yet on a micro-level, the physical space within TYJ Corp. is American, as illustrated by an entire office area decorated with Disney materials, artwork imported from an American artist, and the transnational identity and western clothing worn by its employees. In this instance, TYJ Corp. may constitute what Soja (2000) terms a "deterritorialized space"⁵ because the American and European processes embedded in call centers also require employees to shift their spatial and temporal identity in the form of not disclosing where they are located and pretending to be in the "good morning/afternoon" timescape.

Findings

During fieldwork conducted in January, 2005, I gained entry to TYJ Corp., a 90,000 square foot facility (equivalent in size to a Wal-Mart SuperCenter) with a little over 2,000 employees. On any given shift the company had up to 1,000 employees working the phone lines. Employees are primarily in their early 20's and approximately 40% are women. The starting salary for a full-time employee is 10,000 rupees per month (approximately 225USD⁶). Located in a rapidly expanding suburb⁷ of Mumbai proper, this 100% Indian-owned company services both American and British companies. Below, I present an overview of my findings, based on participant observation and semi-structured interviews conducted at TYJ Corp. Thereafter, I apply my findings to a research validation strategy that is based on spatial access, social and economic embodiment, and a concept I've termed "temporal entrapment."

⁵ Soja's (2000) definition of deterritorialization includes, but is not limited to, the breakdown of "established patterns of real-and-imagined cultural and spatial identity at every scale from the local to the global" (Soja, 2000, 212).

⁶ Based on the April 16, 2005 currency exchange of 1USD = 43.775INR.

⁷ I conceal the exact location to protect the identity of the company.

The facility has strict security for both employees and non-employees. Outside the call center the contents of my bag were subject to scrutiny. The security guard asked if I was carrying any cd-roms. I replied no, but informed him that I had a memory stick in my personal digital assistant (PDA). He proceeded to examine the PDA and asked if there was a camera inside. I answered “no” and any thoughts I had of tape recording interviews inside the facility went out the window. Within the call center, I was escorted at all times by a senior-level executive. I was allowed limited entry into areas that serviced American accounts because U.S. companies have strict contractual agreements with TYJ Corp. that forbid entry to outsiders. In addition, the employees who worked within the company, but not for the U.S. accounts, were also forbidden entry into such areas. I was allowed to conduct participant observation in the areas where British companies were being serviced.

The company provides a cafeteria, gym, and smoke area for its employees. Due to its remote location, there are no restaurants in the area. In addition, the company has a medical unit within the facility in case an employee becomes ill during the shift. From a temporal perspective, the lighting of the facility mimics the dayscape. Despite the fact that it was 9 p.m. when I was in the facility, it felt as if it were the afternoon.

Disney decorated offices and western attire that marks employees bodies, lead me to integrate the feminist discourse of embodiment into my research. Feminist geographers argue that the body, as a scale of analysis, provides a powerful understanding of how space and place are conceived based on gender, race, and class categories (Longhurst, 1995; McDowell, 1999; Pratt, 2000, 2004; Moss, 2002; Silvey, 2005). This discourse is linked, directly and indirectly, to Butler’s (1993) argument that gender is an act of performativity. By “performing” gender, notions of womanhood are inscribed on the body and marked as a biological site of difference.

As illustrated in Figure 1, my investigation of transnational call center employment is based on a framework of social and economic embodiment, spatial access, and temporal entrapment. Although the physical location of a call center remains fixed, the meaning embedded in the urban space it occupies shifts based on the time of day. The nightscape is primarily a male domain. For educated, middle and upper-class women, the nightscape brings forth gender and class connotations that mark their bodies as sites of transgression (Cresswell, 1996; Domosh, 1998). Such dynamics evoke new questions about the spatial construction of social identities.

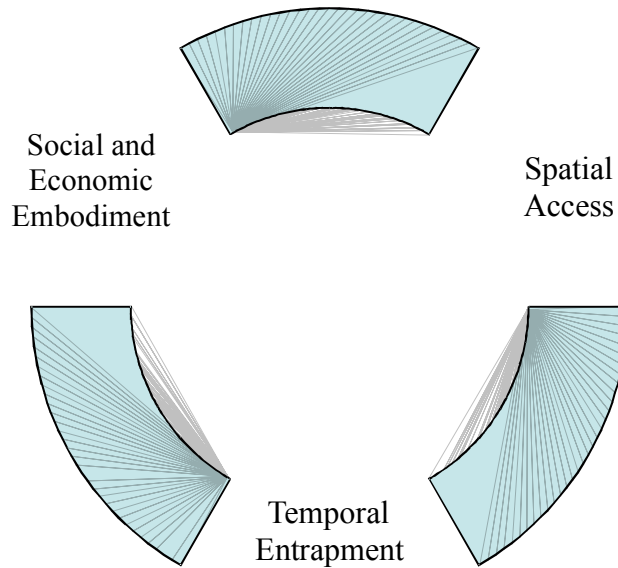


Figure 1. Research Validation Framework

In addition, the meaning that is embodied in dayshift versus night shift employment intersects with the social construction of gender and class. In contrast to their male counterparts, the presence of women in India’s urban nightscape is often linked to prostitution and questionable moral values. Ashini,⁸ a 23 year old employee, explains that her father’s response to call center employment was: “call center job equals call girl job.” Ashini’s co-worker Kavita goes on to argue that family concern for young women working the night shift is less about physical safety and more about how a woman’s presence in the urban nightscape will negatively impact a family’s reputation. “What will people think?” is a common response women received from family members expressing hesitancy about night shift employment. Such remarks can be linked to notions of middle-class morality, which mark women’s bodies as the site of family purity and honor. In this instance, changes in women’s temporal mobility are viewed as potentially having a negative impact on the social status of both the worker and her family.

In regards to spatial issues, shuttle transport at TYJ Corp. consists of vehicles carrying 6-8 employees and can take up to two hours each way, depending on where the employee resides. If all the employees are female, then, in addition to the driver, a security guard is on board. If one of the employees is a male, then a

⁸ All participant names have been changed to protect the identity of the individual.

security guard is not required. However, the male employee is always the last one dropped off. This measure is necessary due to reports of the Mumbai police stopping the vans and accusing the female passengers of prostitution. Employees carry identity cards as proof of employment, but it is not considered enough by police. In order for a woman to justify her existence in the urban nightscape she requires the presence of a male escort. Although traversing the nightscape may represent new levels of spatial access for women, it is based on a continuum of protection and surveillance of women's bodies.

Temporal entrapment is based on two dynamics. First, night shift labor may serve as a time-trap that marginalizes women. By working the night shift, and inevitably sleeping thru the day, it is possible that women become further excluded from social and economic opportunities within the larger community. Shubhika and Sonia complain that since taking a call center job their social life has diminished because they have lost touch with close friends and hardly have time for their families.

Alternatively, working the night shift for a call center, albeit a position that is viewed as secondary and having limited prospects for upward mobility (Kelkar et al., 2002), may create new opportunities and spaces for women upon which they re-invent their identity both in the formal economy and within their households. Instead of constraining her social life, Drasti explains that call center employment allows her to befriend people from various walks of life that she otherwise would not have access to. And perhaps shifting the dynamic of arranged marriage, Nazia exclaimed that "the call center becomes our marriage pool!" during an interview about how call center employment has impacted her family and social life.

In response to the high cost of housing in Mumbai (downtown Mumbai has equivalent rents to New York City), TYJ Corp. now offers dormitory-style housing as an incentive to employees. The corporation provides this housing by renting an existing apartment style building and segregating each floor by sex, with a recreational area in the basement for all employees. The company pays the security deposit, the first month of rent, and provides employees with start-up provisions such as a bucket for bathing. On the one hand, this situation could be viewed as expanding a woman's domestic space because social norms and economic factors traditionally limit a woman's household space to that of her parents and thereafter her husband. On the other hand, dormitory housing may represent a way in which companies confine their employees (Boyer, 1998; Cope, 1996): eat in the company cafeteria, live in the company dorm, and depend of the company doctor for medical care.

Second, temporal entrapment refers to how social and family norms limit women's employment to a 9-5 landscape. Such norms exclude some women from pursuing night shift employment, or they place women in positions of having to beg more to gain permission to work such jobs. For instance, Asha, a call center

manager in Bangalore, explains that when her company wants to hire a female employee and the family forbids it or is hesitant, she will go to the family's home and explain that the working conditions and transport are safe and professional in hopes of convincing the family to allow the daughter or wife to work the night shift. In such cases, the temporal mobility of urban, educated women remains contingent upon a larger structural framework that provides surveillance and protection to its female employees during their home-to-work journey and within the call center itself.

Conclusion

Transnational call center employment provides women with relatively high paying jobs that were previously unavailable. Yet, it is unclear whether working the night shift will impede or enhance a woman's mobility and spatial access to the larger community. On the surface, call centers represent a marked shift in women's access to employment. At the same time, call center positions have high attrition rates, are lower in salary compared to other IT positions, and are considered interim positions until better employment can be found (Kelkar et al., 2002).

Furthermore, in contrast to the hyper-mobility afforded to MNC's in the form of redistributing its workforce on a global scale, my findings suggest that women's mobility continues to reflect a patriarchal framework that is based on the surveillance and "protection" of women's bodies, as well as new forms of temporal entrapment that are linked to the global economy's demand for workers on a 24 x 7 basis. Priti, for instance, had to submit proof of employment to her community housing association because neighbors questioned why she was going out at night. The police were also sent to her house to question her mother and their watchman. Priti contends that her night shift wanderings would not be the subject of such scrutiny if she were a man.

At the macro-level, the emergence of this industry also represents a significant shift in globalization. Unlike silicon chip production in Taiwan, maquiladoras in Mexico, or McDonald's in France, transnational customer service employment represents a shift from exporting the *production* of material goods or culture to a full scale *reproduction* of identity and culture. In contrast to McDonalds selling french fries in Paris, but not requiring an American accent from its French employees, call center operations are based on the availability of workers trained to embody an American identity and cultural cues.

This local-global nexus of identity formation, which serves as the basis for this industry, has not existed in previous periods. Yet the long-term impact of this industry on its participants, both the workers in India and customers in the United States, is not well known. Further research is needed in order to understand how

community norms of women's mobility and spatial access intersect with the identity and night shift requirements of this expanding industry. Important research questions that emerged from this paper include: how do female call center employees perceive the multiple identities they embody? And how does entry into transnational spaces impact how women view and represent themselves within the family unit and the larger community?

Acknowledgements

I sincerely appreciate the comments and suggestions provided by Kate Boyer, Doreen Mattingly, and an anonymous reviewer. This research is funded by the David L. Boren Fellowship.

References

- Acharya, Jyotirmayee and Ragnhild Lund. 2002. Gendered spaces: Socio-spatial relations of self-employed women in craft production, Orissa, India. *Norwegian Journal of Geography* 56(3), 207-218.
- Adam, Barbara. 2002. The gendered time politics of globalization: Of shadowlands and elusive justice. *Feminist Review* 3(70), 3-30.
- Agnew, John. 2005. *Hegemony: The New Shape of Global Power*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Balfour, Frederik. 3 February 2003, The way, way back office. *Business Week* 3818, 60.
- Behar, Ruth. 1996. The vulnerable observer. In, Ruth Behar (ed.), *The Vulnerable Observer: Anthropology that Breaks the Heart*. Boston: Beacon Press, pp. 1-33.
- Boyer, Kate. 1998. Place and the politics of virtue: Clerical work, corporate anxiety, and changing meanings of public womanhood in early twentieth-century Montreal. *Gender, Place & Culture: A Journal of Feminist Geography* 5(3), 261-276.
- Bonds, Anne. 2006. Calling on femininity? Gender, call Centers, and restructuring in the rural American West. *ACME: An International E-Journal for Critical Geographies* this issue.

- Butler, Judith. 1993. *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* New York: Routledge.
- Castells, Manuel. 2000. *End of Millennium*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Chengappa, Raj and Malini Goyal. 2002. Housekeepers to the world. *India Today* 27(46), 18 November, 36-49.
- Constable, Nicole. 2005. *Cross-Border Marriages: Gender and Mobility in Transnational Asia* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Cope, Meghan. 1996. Weaving the everyday: Identity, space and power in Lawrence, Massachusetts, 1920-1939. *Urban Geography* 17(2): 179-204.
- Cox, Kevin R. 1997. *Spaces of Globalization: Reasserting the Power of the Local*. New York: Guilford Press.
- Crang, Philip, Claire Dwyer, and Peter Jackson. 2003. Transnationalism and the spaces of commodity culture. *Progress in Human Geography* 27(4), 438-457.
- Cresswell, Tim. 1996. *In Place/Out of Place: Geography, Ideology, and Transgression*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Dirsuweit, Teresa. 2005. Bodies, state discipline, and the performance of gender in a South African women's prison. In, Lise Nelson & Joni Seager (eds.), *A Companion to Feminist Geography*. Malden, MA: Blackwell, pp. 350-362.
- Domosh, Mona 1998. Those 'gorgeous incongruities': Polite politics and public space on the streets of... *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 88(2), 209-227.
- Drucker, Susan J. and Gary Gumpert. 1997. *Voices in the Street: Gender, Media, and Public Space* Cresskill, N.J.: Hampton Press.
- Economist, 2004. *A world of opportunity* 373(8401), 19.
- Elias, Marlene and Judith Carney. 2005. Shea butter, globalization, and women of Burkina Faso. In, Lise Nelson & Joni Seager (eds.), *A Companion to Feminist Geography*. Malden, MA: Blackwell, pp. 93-108.
- England, Kim. 1993. Suburban pink collar ghettos: The spatial entrapment of women? *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 83(2), 225-238.
- Foley, Douglas E. 2002. Critical ethnography: The reflexive turn. *Qualitative Studies in Education* 15(5), 469-490.

- Hanson, Susan and Geraldine Pratt. 1995. *Gender, Work, and Space*. New York: Routledge.
- Harvey, David. 2000. *Spaces of Hope*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Herod, Andrew. 1997. Labor as an agent of globalization and as a global agent. In, Kevin R. Cox (ed.), *Spaces of Globalization: Reasserting the Power of the Local*. New York: Guilford Press, pp. 167-200.
- Herod, Andrew. 2001. *Labor Geographies: Workers and the Landscape of Capitalism* New York: The Guliford Press.
- Jackson, Peter. 2004. Local consumption cultures in a globalizing world. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 29(2), 165-179.
- Katz, Cindi. 2004. *Growing Up Global: Economic Restructuring and Children's Everyday Lives*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Kelkar, Govind, Girija Shrestha, and Veena Nagarjan. 2002. IT industry and women's agency: Explorations in Bangalore and Delhi, India. *Gender, Technology and Development* 6(1), 63-82.
- Kirschner, Suzanne R. 1987. "Then what have i to do with thee?": On identity, fieldwork, and ethnographic knowledge. *Cultural Anthropology* 2(2), 211-234.
- Lacey, Marc. 2005. Accents of Africa: A New Outsourcing Frontier. *New York Times* 154(53113), 2 February, C1.
- Longhurst, Robyn. 1995. The body and geography. *Gender, Place & Culture: A Journal of Feminist Geography* 2(1), 97-106.
- Massey, Doreen. 1994. *Space, Place, and Gender*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Massey, Doreen. 2005. *For Space*. London; Thousand Oaks; New Delhi: Sage Publications.
- McDowell, Linda. 1999. *Gender, Identity and Place: A Feminist Perspective*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.
- Mirchandani, Kiran. 2003. Gender eclipsed? Work relations in transnational call centers. Paper presented at the [Administrative Sciences Association of Canada](#) 2003 Conference, Halifax, Nova Scotia

- Mirchandani, Kiran. 2004. Practices of global capital: Gaps, cracks, and ironies in transnational call centres in India. *Global Networks* 4(4), 255-373.
- Moss, Pamela J. 2002. *Feminist Geography in Practice: Research and Methods*. Oxford, UK; Malden, MA: Blackwell.
- NASSCOM. 2002. *Indian software and services exports*. Last accessed 20 June 2004. http://www.nasscom.org/artdisplay.asp?cat_id=408
- NASSCOM. 2005. *NASSCOM's ranking of third party players*. June. Last accessed 3 October 2005. http://www.nasscom.org/artdisplay.asp?Art_id=4400
- Office of the Labour Commissioner. *1948 Factories Act* Last accessed 13 April 2006. http://labour.delhigovt.nic.in/act/html_ifa/fa1948_index.html
- Oza, Rupal. 2001. Showcasing India: Gender, geography, and globalization. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture & Society* 26(4), 1067-1095.
- Pande, Rekha. 2005. Looking at information technology from a gender perspective: A look at call centers in India. *Asian Journal of Women's Studies* 11(1), 58-82.
- Pandit, Kavita. 2005. *Elite migration from 'body shopping' to 'reverse migration': The restructuring of the flows of Indian technology workers to the United States*. Geography and the Environment Colloquium. University of Texas at Austin. February 4.
- Parikh, Pravina and Suhas Sukhatme. 1992. *Women Engineers in India* Bombay, India: Indian Institute of Technology, Department of Mechanical Engineering.
- Parikh, Pravina and Suhas Sukhatme. 2002. *Women in the Engineering Profession in India: The Millennium Scenario*. Mumbai, India: Indian Institute of Technology, Department of Mechanical Engineering.
- Patel, Meenakshi Dhar. 2002. *The Economic Times IT Enabled Services 2002*. Mumbai: Bennett Coleman & Co.
- Patel, Reena and Mary Jane Parmetier. 2005. The persistence of traditional gender roles in the technology sector: A study of female engineers in India. *Information Technologies and International Development* 2(3), 29-46.
- Poster, Winifred R. 2004. *Who's on the line? Indian call center agents pose as Americans for U.S. outsourced firms*. Unpublished manuscript: University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

- Pratt, Geraldine. 2000. Geography and body. In, Ronald John Johnston, Derek Gregory, Geraldine Pratt & Michael Watts, fourth edition (eds.), *The Dictionary of Human Geography*. Oxford, UK: Blackwell, pp. 48-49.
- Pratt, Geraldine. 2004. *Working Feminism*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Rankin, Katharine N. 2003. Anthropologies and geographies of globalization. *Progress in Human Geography* 27(6), 708-735.
- Rudrappa, Sharmila. 2005. Working borders: Linking debates about insourcing and outsourcing of capital and labor – Proceedings of the inaugural conference of the Bernard and Audre Rapaport Center for Human Rights and Justice, February 10-11. *Texas International Law Journal*, 691-805.
- Samarasinghe, Vidyamali. 2005. Female labor in sex trafficking: A darker side of globalization. In, Lise Nelson & Joni Seager (eds.), *A Companion to Feminist Geography*. Malden, MA: Blackwell, pp. 166-178.
- Sassen, Saskia. 2000. Spatialities and temporalities of the global: Elements for a theorization. *Public Culture* 12(1), 215-232.
- Silvey, Rachel. 2005. Borders, embodiment, and mobility: Feminist migration studies in geography. In, Lise Nelson & Joni Seager (eds.), *A Companion to Feminist Geography*. Malden, MA: Blackwell, pp. 138-149.
- Singh, Preeti and Anu Pandey. 2005. Women in call centres. *Economic and Political Weekly* 12, February, 684-688.
- Soja, Edward W. 2000. *Postmetropolis: Critical Studies of Cities and Regions*. Malden, MA: Blackwell.
- Stacey, Judith. 1996. Can there be a feminist geography? In, Heidi Gottfried (ed.), *Feminism and Social Change: Bridging Theory and Practice*. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press pp. 88-104.
- Stitt, Greg. 2002. *Diverted to Delhi* Produced and directed by Greg Stitt. 55 min. Filmmakers Library. DVD.
- Tanner, Julian and Rhonda Cockerill. 1996. Gender, social change, and the professions: The case of pharmacy. *Sociological Forum* 11(4), 643-660.
- Tuan, Yi Fu. 2004. Cultural geography: Glances backward and forward. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 94(4), 729-734.
- Wahlgren, Eric. 2004. The outsourcing dilemma. *Inc.*, 26(4), April, 41.

Wright, Melissa W. 1997. *Third World Women and the Geography of Skill*. Ph.D. dissertation, The Johns Hopkins University.