Department of Sociology
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Localizing the Global

A Minor Field Study about Globalization and Identity among Call-Center Employees in Northern India

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ABSTRACT

In our time it is widely argued that we are undergoing global transformations that influence the way we think about ourselves and how we interact and form ties with others. The intensified global integration of service sectors during the last five to ten years underscores such transformations. In recent research and among popular commentators the rise of transnational call-centers in India that provide foremost phone-based support services to customers in Western countries has been upheld as either global integration and development, or as Third world exploitation and/or commoditization of identity. With fascination call-center employees have also been upheld as marks of cosmopolitanism due to their transnational work field, whilst negative critics have pointed to this phenomenon as imposed Westernization and cultural homogenization. The aim of this study is to move beyond such dichotomous accounts, and to capture and demystify the experiences and perceptions of call-center employees and the meanings they ascribe to their work roles, identities and globalization in their everyday lives in India. A minor field study was conducted in the National Capital Region of Delhi, which included field observations and interviews with call-center employees that were working or had worked in the call-center hub towns Gurgaon and Noida. This study addresses previous research in this field, and demonstrates new findings that contradict previous research findings. While previous studies have demonstrated that call-center employees in India were conditioned to adapt to foremost US work shift regimes and cultural norms this study indicates that such homogenization processes are regressing and enabling more heterogenic interactions. The call-center employees in this study experienced increased global connectivity and a new proximity to localities across the globe, but they did not experience cosmopolitan identification as they reasoned in terms of "their-and-our" culture and negotiated between modern and traditional social positions. This study also concludes that in order to understand the social influences of globalization we need to conduct research on the local level if our aim is to understand how people construct meaning and navigate between traditional social positions and the variable modern influences of globalization.

Keywords: Call-Center; Globalization; Cosmopolitan; Identity; Culture; Habitus; Modernity; Development; Business Process Outsourcing; Off-shoring; India; National Capital Region of Delhi; New Delhi; Gurgaon; Noida; Minor Field Study.

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Fieldwork is a venture into the unfamiliar and unexpected. Often field work provides rewarding and challenging experiences, and sometimes field work also entails frustrating experiences. With a bit of persistence and a bit of luck, you also meet wonderful people that go beyond your expectations to help you by sacrificing their professional and/or free time to either facilitate your field entrance by securing vital contacts, and/or to participate in interviews. Fieldwork is a very personal and social experience, I have learnt. It is a social venture into a life world beyond your familiarities. The successful completion of a field study therefore cannot be a solitary achievement. While the findings and interpretations in this study are the sole responsibility of the researcher this study would not be conceivable without the help from numerous people. In India my three key field access contacts Rohit, Dev, and Plaban dedicatedly provided their help. Without their diligent assistance this study would not be conceivable. This study would also not be conceivable without the generosity of the people in the Delhi region that gave their consent to partake in this study as interview participants.

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ABREVIATIONS

BJP	Bharatiya Janata Party
BPO	Business Process Outsourcing
CC	Call-Center
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
ICT	Information and Communication Technologies
IMF	International Monetary Fund
ITES	IT-Enabled Services
JNU	Jawaharlal Nehru University
NCR	National Capital Region of Delhi
Rs	[Indian] Rupees

1 BACKGROUND

Globalization typically denotes accelerated worldwide interdependence and interaction, compression of time and space, and a "shrinking world" characterized by detracting borders and diminishing geographical barriers (Held & McGrew, 2003: 3). Many scholars uphold globalization as transformative as it is said to influence almost all aspects of everyday life – politics, technology, culture, and economies (Giddens, 2002: 6, 10). When consumers in New York request support services by telephone regarding for example malfunctioning dishwashers or unpaid credit card bills often their call is directly connected to New Delhi where a young college-educated call-center employee/agent with an "Americanized accent" provides assistance (Tharoor, 2006: 78). This transnational call-center phenomenon, whereby call-center agents in foremost India provide telephone based voice-to-voice services to customers across the globe, typically to US-American consumers, is widely upheld as a paradigmatic example of globalization (Sonntag, 2009: 5-6). The rise of transnational call-centers in India has, as sociologist Tina Basi (2009: 28) notes, rushed India into conversations about globalization and its accelerations and consequences. At the same time scholars have primarily studied call-center industries in the USA, Europe, and Japan, whereas our understanding about call-centers in developing countries that cater to Western customers has only been initiated (Poster, 2007a: 275). While the intensified integration between service sectors in Western countries and developing countries widely is perceived through polarizing lenses that either uphold such global integration processes as evidence of progress and development or as new forms of transnational exploitation and/or commoditization of identity such claims are often normative and rarely grounded in empirical research. Sociologists and anthropologists have only recently started to study the dynamics and implications of this transnational phenomenon (Skipper, 2006: 9). This minor field study thereby seeks to expand the empirically grounded knowledge horizon about this arguably concrete example of globalization.

1.1 Previous Research

Sociologist Anthony Giddens (2002: 51) argues that we are undergoing a global transformation that impacts the way we think about ourselves and how we interact and form ties with others. In recent empirical research it has been argued that call-center agents in India are able to bypass local cultural resources by drawing directly from global discursive resources (Pal & Buzzanell, 2008: 54). From this perspective transnational call-centers are interpreted as open spaces that enable employees to construct identities from multiple and diverse cultural resources – i.e. so called "cultural cosmopolitanism". According to globalization researcher David Held (2003: 525) cultural cosmopolitanism signifies the ability to mediate between national traditions, communities of fate, and alternative styles of life to

expand the horizons of individual meaning and prejudice. The transnational call-centers in India have also progressively been identified as sites of opportunity and empowerment. Historically the urban youth in India has not been an employable group, but today the well-educated urban youth predominantly make up the workforce in this industry (Pal & Buzzanell, 2008: 55). The call-center industry provides employment for India's youth, offers work in comfortable multinational company office environments, and provides call-center employees with salaries that correspond to or are much higher than middle class incomes in India (Poster, 2007a: 293; Pal & Buzzanell, 2008: 48). By tradition the mobility and spending power of women in India is controlled by men, but as demonstrated in previous interview studies the relatively high salaries and work opportunities in this industry have provided young women in India with a new-found freedom and autonomy (Ng & Mitter, 2005: 228). Previous research however also demonstrates that gender stereotypes are as well reproduced in this industry. While recruiters look to employ sociable individuals with good communication skills they also specifically target women for call-center work due to traditional gender perceptions of women as more conversational and caring than men (Basi, 2009: 46).

In order to cater to North American time zones call-center employees in India work during local night hours. Among researchers and popular commentators in particular the rise of call-centers in India has fostered new fascinations that point to the transformative influences of globalization. This fascination is rooted in call-center agent citation examples such as: "Every evening we go through a strange transformation. During the day we are Indians and at night we are Americans…" (Bayart, 2007: 165). In an ethnographic study psychologist Kiran Mirchandani (2004: 364-365) however found that call-center agents in New Delhi are not comfortable with living in multiple time zones as they often feel cut off from their friends and family due to the varying nighttime work shifts. Call-center work in India alters everyday routines as employees in this industry adjust their life to primarily follow North American daytime hours – which are about twelve hours behind Indian time (Poster, 2007a: 294). While previous studies report somatic symptoms such as fatigue, stiff neck, sore eyes, back- and headaches among call-center employees in Europe call-center employees in India not only share the same symptoms but show a wider range of symptoms – such as fever, nausea, dizziness, rashes, kidney stones, and ulcers – most likely due to the night shifts and disturbed biorhythms (Poster, 2007a: 294). The monotonous and repetitive work regimes in this industry have lead critics to refer to call-centers as "electronic sweatshops", and due to the sophisticated technology that enables – arguably "Orwellian" – precise monitoring and measuring of staff work performances a participant in an Australian call-center manager attitude study provocatively described some call-centers as the "slave galleons of the twenty first century" (Robinson & Morley, 2007: 259; Greenspan, 2004: 100).

In previous research it has also been argued that the stress that arises from living in multiple time zones and geographies not only causes emotional toll but also leads to transnational identity crises (Shome, 2006: 114). Communications

researcher Raka Shome (2006: 109) for example notes that call-center training regimes often portray Indian English as incorrect or inadequate compared to "global English" as spoken by "Western" native English speakers. In call-centers employees are as well encouraged to indulge themselves in US-American culture by for example watching US TV-programs in order to facilitate interaction with talkative US-customers that feel the need to engage in casual conversations (Bayart, 2007: 166). Such interpretations however are rooted in another set of contrasting perspectives about the impact of globalization and ICT as either the worldwide homogenization of culture and identity or as a new opportunity for cultural diversification and renegotiation of global identity (Poster, 2007a: 273). While ICT has profoundly changed business and social practices critics at the same time argue that these global changes rather constitute worldwide promotion of a standardized "Western culture" – so called "McDonaldization" (Yilmaz, 2006: 200). Based on her comprehensive call-center research in Northern India sociologist Winifred Poster (2007a) has identified a new managerial regime that she refers to as "national identity management" whereby call-center agents are instructed to adopt different national identities in their work. As a composite example Poster (2007a: 272) illustrates the characteristics of national identity management through a call-center agent called "Anil":

> "Anil has a job that involves posing as an American. For eight hours a day, he talks, thinks, and positions his body as an American while he is on the phone with U.S. customers. …At home, he has become unaccustomed to hearing Hindi from his parents and siblings, and has asked them to speak English. …He has learned American diction, voice modulation, rhythm (including number of beats per second), and grammar training. …Second, Anil needs an "alias" to announce his American identity to the customers. The U.S. client gave him the name "Arnold." He must use this name with his own colleagues, and speak to them in English. Third, he practices American conversational skills. Anil is expected to use small talk to suggest indirectly that he is in the U.S. …Everyday when he enters the call center, he reads current events, sports, and weather for the zone he's calling. …In order to get a sense of how to put the whole package of American-ness together, he has been watching Friends and Baywatch in his training sessions. Finally, Anil has practiced a script, to be used for the looming question from customers: "Where are you calling from?" …"First, we say we are calling from an 'outbound call center.' If they ask again, then we say we are 'in Asia.' If they ask again, then we change the subject." Under the worst scenario, if the customer becomes hostile very early in the call, then he has a fallback strategy: to say he is an Indian immigrant living in the United States".

While call-center agents in India do not share the same physical and geographical space with their Western clients their training arguably enables them to establish an illusionary form of proximity to pass themselves off as so called "part-time

Americans" (Bayart, 2007: 165). Poster (2007: 273) however at the same time found that most call-center agents respond to national identity management regimes with variable levels of opposition "from reluctant accommodation, to ethical or political objection, to active resistance". In a recent study communications researchers Mahuya Pal and Patrice Buzzanell (2008: 44) explored identities and workplace experiences among call-center agents in Kolkata, and found that call-center agents do not maintain their "Americanized" workplace identities outside the call-centers, which is illustrated by the following citation from this study: "We are just talking in an American accent, we are not becoming Americans". In another study, which was published after my field work period, Tina Basi (2009) has explored the experiences of young women working in call-centers in the Delhi region. She found that globalization in this work field does not necessarily exemplify cultural homogenization. Globalization from the experiences of call-center employees rather encompasses heterogeneous cultural negotiation processes that simultaneously include contradictions and complicity, as well as empowerment and disempowerment (Basi, 2009: 160).

1.2 Research Aim

In recent research and in popular commentary the rise of transnational call-centers in India has foremost been upheld as either a process of global integration and development, or as another example of Third world exploitation and/or commoditization of identity. The cultural identities of call-center employees/agents have also been upheld as cosmopolitan due to the nature of their transnational work, but at the same time previous research has demonstrated that call-center agents are closely linked to their localities and tradition, and feel discontented about the negative impacts of nighttime shifts towards their social lives. Conceptually identities are definitional categories that we adopt to clarify to ourselves and others who we are for example by the way we dress, walk, speak, or maybe what social groups we choose to interact with or even where we decide to live (Newman, 2006: 33). Sometimes people may ascribe identities to us – with or without our consent. Previous research in this field has primarily been conducted within the walls of transnational call-centers where some call-center employees have made proclamations such as "being Indian by day" and "being American by night" (Shome, 2006: 114). To further the research in this field we as well need to explore how or if globalization influences identity among call-center agents by stepping outside the multinational company office settings. If we uphold globalization as transformative processes that impact most personal aspects in our lives (Giddens, 2002: 12), we as well need to address identity outside the call-center fields to be able to provide an overall account and understanding of globalization and its alleged influence in identity construction. The primary purpose of this study therefore is to capture and demystify the experiences and perceptions of call-center employees/agents and the meanings they ascribe to their

work roles, identities and globalization in their everyday lives in India. As a secondary purpose this study also seeks to provide a research grounded commentary about globalization as such. The following main research questions guide this study:

– How and/or why does working in transnational call-centers influence identity? Are identities renegotiated through global cultural resources, are identities distanced from local contexts, or do global and local identities coexist?

– How do call-center employees in India perceive and problematize globalization, and its alleged transformative influence in everyday life?

1.3 Delimitations

This study is not about specific call-centers or companies. Previous research has provided elaborate accounts about the call-center workplace environment and so called "national identity management" regimes. This study in contrast addresses the overall experiences and identities of call-center employees in their everyday lives. As such the focus is turned towards the actors and their identifications as local community members and global actors, but as well towards social structures and cultural value arrangements that may or may not influence identity formation in this social field.

1.4 Disposition

In the following chapter the theoretical foundations of this study are presented. Hereafter the methodological framework is introduced. In the method chapter the research design and the benefits and constraints of the selected methodological approach are considered. The fourth chapter outlines the call-center field in India and its actors based on primarily the empirical material collection. In the subsequent chapter the research findings in this study are interpretatively analyzed and compared to previous research findings. In the final chapter the study is concluded with a critical discussion.

2 THEORY

Globalization is conceptualized variably within the social sciences, and it is often tied to modernity and development. The theoretical chapter introduces the facets of globalization, modernity, and development, the links between complex connectivity, deterritorialization, and culture, and finally this chapter addresses identity and identification.

2.1 The Facets of Globalization, Modernity & Development

Globalization researchers David Held and Anthony McGrew (2003: 4) conceptualize globalization as "the expanding scale, growing magnitude, speeding up and deepening impact of interregional flows and patterns of social interaction". Anthony Giddens (1990) more specifically views globalization as intrinsic to modernity. Tradition maintains social practices and reflexivity as continuous and tied to the past, present, and future. Modernity in contrast is not intrinsically tied to the past, but the reflexivity of modern social life, as Giddens (1990: 30) notes, appears by the fact that "social practices are constantly examined and reformed in the light of incoming information about those very practices, thus constitutively altering their character". Tradition serves to secure frameworks for action that can continue unquestioned and be maintained through rituals and repetitions (Giddens, 2002: 41). While tradition plays a role in modern society through habit system reproduction modernity thus does not depend on the past. As Giddens (1990: 39) moreover notes modernity does not simply embrace the new for its own sake, but rather "the presumption of wholesale reflexivity – which of course includes reflection upon the nature of reflection itself". Globalization can also be perceived as a battleground between cosmopolitan tolerance that embraces cultural complexities and fundamentalists that find such changes dangerous and seek refuge in renewed and purified traditions (Giddens, 2002: 4-5). Giddens (2003: 60) underscores that in the modern period "the level of time-space distinction is much higher than in any previous period, and the relations between local and distant social forms and events become correspondingly 'stretched'. Globalization refers essentially to that stretching process, in so far, as the modes of connection between different social contexts or regions become networked across the earth's surface as a whole".

Globalization is also broadly tied to development conceptualizations. Typically development refers to progress and improved living standards, but often development is also specifically tied to economic and social modernization processes that emerged during the Enlightenment period in Europe and eventually expanded to the rest of the world (Schech & Haggis, 2000: 15). Modernist scholars such as Max Weber and Karl Marx both argued that the origins of capitalism were innately linked to the history and culture of Europe and America (Greenspan, 2004: 14). Proponents of development modernization theory view

globalization as the spreading of Western lifestyles, consumption patterns, and political and social values as signs of emerging prosperity and progress (Schech & Haggis, 2000: 60). Modernity is essentially multicultural as modern states are comprised by a multitude of ethnicities, languages, and religious affiliations, but development has been uneven and the impact of global cultural exchange has been asymmetrical (Griffin, 2000: 192-194). Critics from foremost dependency schools of thought rather perceive the forces of globalization as consequences of the hegemonic dominance of Western capitalism. This process, as mentioned in the first chapter, has for example been described as "McDonaldization" and "Americanization" (Schech & Haggis, 2000: 60). Unlike modernization development theorists the dependency school questions the linearity or the symmetrical progress of development (Schech & Haggis, 2000: 15). From another perspective for example Giddens (2002: 4) notes that while globalization is heavily influenced by the West the impact of globalization reversely as well influences Western countries. This includes "reversed colonization" examples such as the rise of the globally oriented high-tech sector in India (Giddens, 2002: 16-17).

While we may tie globalization to modernity and development no singular globalization perspective has, however, achieved orthodoxy within the social sciences (Held & McGrew, 2003: 2). Although there are no definitive or fixed lines of contestation about globalization it is nevertheless possible to illustrate three clusters of arguments that signify the globalization debate: hyperglobalist, skeptic, and transformalist perspectives (Held, McGrew, Goldblatt, Perraton, 1999: 2). According to the so called "hyperglobalist" thesis globalization constitutes a new era of global economic interaction and competition, whilst the sovereignty and autonomy of the modern state is considered to be eroding (Held et al, 1999: 3). Hyperglobalists hold that the state will be replaced by emerging institutions of global governance. Globalization is hence upheld as an evolutionary process and a new historic era which is forming a new borderless world whereby economies progressively – through transnational networks of production, trade, and finance – are becoming integrated in the global marketplace (Held et al, 1999: 3). From this set of predominantly economic globalization driven perspectives most hyperglobalists hold that globalization is forming new forms of social organization that will replace nation-states. Globalization "sceptics" on the other hand denounce the hyperglobalist notion and refer to the evolutionary characteristics of globalization as a naive myth (Held et al, 1999: 5). Skeptics maintain that the global economy is not much different compared to previous periods, and that the world carries on as it has for a long time (Giddens, 2002: 8). States are also considered to be one of the primary "containers" of distinctive institutions and practices, whereby a less state-centric world is not deemed realistic (Held et al, 1999: 5). In fact skeptics point to evidence that the international economy has become increasingly regionalized, and thus less global than in previous historic periods. According to the third thesis globalization is conceptualized as long-term historical processes, comprised of contradictions as well as new patterns, which transform societies, economies, institutions of

governance, and the international system. In the words of Held et al (1999: 7) the transformalist force of globalization drive the "rapid social, political, and economic changes that are reshaping modern societies and the world order". Transformalists do not attend to normative accounts about presupposed end-results of globalization, and the state is not regarded as an obsolete entity. The state is however considered to have less control over internal matters, as the divisions between the international and the domestic, and external and internal affairs are becoming less clear. The authority of national governments however are interpreted to be reconstituted and adapted due to expanding international governance and obligations from international law (Held et al, 1999: 8-9). Unlike the hyperglobalist and skeptical thesis, as mentioned, the transformative thesis does not include claims about the end-state of globalization. Transformative socio-historic approaches uphold globalization as open-ended, and thus look beyond the orthodox linear models of social change (Held et al, 1999: 11).

2.2 Complex Connectivity, Deterritorialization & Culture

While globalization lies at the heart of modern culture sociologist John Tomlinson (1999: 48) refutes that globalization is a mere expansion of modern society on a global scale. In Gidden's sociology modernity releases social relations from local face-to-face interactions in pre-modern societies and stretches relations across time and space, but, as Tomlinson (1999: 107) furthermore underscores, this diembedding does not cause people to stop living in their actual localities. Tomlinson (1999: 2) instead defines globalization as complex connectivity or in his words as the "rapidly developing and ever-densening network of interconnections and interdependences that characterize modern social life". Connectivity fundamentally refers to an increasing global-spatial proximity or a compression of time and space (Tomlinson, 1999: 3). The sense of shrinking distances can be manifested physically by for example air travel, through electronically mediated information and images, and through the stretching of social relations across distances. Complex connectivity, according to Tomlinson (1999: 9), however foremost refers to the transformative impact of globalization in local life and communities. After all, most people are not world travelers, and the majority of human time and space is found in local life. The frequently travelling international businessmen at the same time seldom interact with the localities in the societies that they visit. Due to the character of their work they rather expect globalized spaces with universal standards where cultural differences are minimized. These spaces are sometimes incorrectly, according to Tomlinson, interpreted as homogenization of the world into a single cultural setting. The cultures of localities where the majority of people interact are not revealed in five star hotels, but rather in the streets, houses, workplaces and shops that lie beyond business and tourist centers (Tomlinson, 1999: 7). Complex connectivity thus reaches beyond communication technologies and long-distance

transport opportunities. As Tomlinson (1999: 9) critically underlines "connectivity means changing the nature of localities and not just occasionally lifting some people out of them". It is in the localities where connectivity and the implied proximity is experienced and integrated with human social life. Through complex connectivity globalization can impact the context of meaning construction, people's identities, the experience of place and of the self in relation to place, and influence shared understandings, values, desires, myths, hopes and fears (Tomlinson, 1999: 20). From this perspective globalization can be interpreted as a cultural process which potentially impacts and (re)constructs meaning. Tomlinson (1999: 20) consequently defines culture as the routines and everyday practices that contribute to people's life narratives by which we interpret our existence. The traditional notion of culture as bound to certain localities is thereby highly challenged by globalization. Complex connectivity thus, according to Tomlinson (1999: 29), springs deterritorialization. From this perspective distant forces impact local worlds and weaken the ties of culture of place. In Tomlinson's eloquent words deterritorialization is "the dislodging of everyday meanings from their 'anchors' in the local environment" (1999: 29). As our minds are opened to a wider world the sense of local security – literally and metaphorically – is threatened. In the attempt to find new meaning – or reterritorialize – people tend to expand their cultural spectrum in order to find a secure home in a world of global modernity (Tomlinson, 1999: 148-149). This process is double-edged, as not only costs are included but there is also space for benefits. Globalization through complex connectivity also brings opportunity for the construction of cultural awareness with global dimensions. Globalization, Tomlinson (1999: 30) argues, dissolves the securities of the locality and expands the human experience into new wider understandings whereby new narratives and identities are created. Tomlinson (1999: 115) argues that the awareness and internalization of distant processes and events changes routines and life planning as the broadening of the cultural horizon then is not only confined to the local physical reality or the politically defined territory. At the same time it should be underlined that all people are embodied and physically located, which also ties culture to a locality and does not mean that deterritorialization is the end to locality.

2.3 Identity, Identification & Habitus

Since the 18th century national identity has been the main form of binding cultural-political belonging in the modern world, but the stability of this form of belonging, as mentioned above, is challenged by the dynamism of globalization (Tomlinson, 2003: 274). No matter how we decide to conceptualize globalization it can be argued that globalization has influenced identity by stretching our awareness from a local to a global context (Jenkins, 2008: 32). If we are to address the sociology of globalization we thus as well need to address identity.

As sociologist David Newman (2006: 33) underlines identities are definitional categories that we apply to specify to ourselves and to others as to who we are. Paradoxically identity however signifies sameness and difference at the same time (Lawler, 2008: 2). While identities are shared – such as women, men, Swedish, Indian – identity at the same time also signifies uniqueness and how people are different from one another. Typically most people differentiate people in variable groups – such as race, class, gender – and perceive such divisions as obvious and reflective of who people truly are. Such perspectives underline divisions as universal and inherent, and thereby as unambiguous essences that differentiate one group from another (Newman, 2006: 35). In contrast to such essentialist perspectives social constructivist perspectives underline that what we consider to be real and essential in reality is culturally and historically constructed. Categories such as gender, class or race are perceived as human constructs that are relationally influenced by our ideas and responses to them (Newman, 2006: 36). Sociologist Richard Jenkins (2008: 5) similarly approaches identity as a human capacity to map the world into multi-dimensional classifications and specify our role in this reality. Identity is not in turn deconstructed into a static category, but rather constitutes a process – so called identification – whereby our map of classifications positions us, but it does not determine our behavior. As sociologist Steph Lawler (2008: 2) notes an individual may identify with a group as a wider category, but can at the same time "dis-identify" from certain features that the individual finds unattractive or unpleasant. Identity thus is not fixed or a "thing", and thereby, as Jenkins (2008: 9) underscores, identity does not and cannot "make people do anything; it is, rather, people who make identity, for their own reasons and purposes". As such identity thereby is inherently a social phenomenon. Jenkins (2008: 17) moreover notes that our identity is always "multi-dimensional, singular and plural, and never a final or settled matter".

In the social sciences often so called collective and individual identities are approached as separate phenomena, but identity is never unilateral, as sociologist Erving Goffman underlined, because the presentation of self occurs during social interaction and negotiation (Jenkins, 2008: 37, 42). Sociologist and anthropologist Pierre Bourdieu (1990: 53) in his reflexive sociology maintained that the presentation of self is facilitated by our "habitus" or domain of habit that is neither deliberate nor automatic, neither conscious or unconscious, but rather simultaneously collective and individual. Our habitus is a product of history and it determines individual and collective practices, and ensures the active presence of past experiences (Bourdieu, 1990: 54). Habitus is learned and embodied through deep socialization, organizes our behavior by which we interpret the behavior of others, and generates social life. Our personal history and our social or collective history are synthesized by the habitus as we act within fields or social arenas (Lawler, 2008: 130). How we reason, act, and think about ourselves and others is conditioned, according to Bourdieu, by the simultaneous integration of our social reality into our being, whereby distinctions between individual identity and social identity are unnecessary.

3 METHOD

This chapter outlines the methodological approaches and considerations in this study – the research design, field and sampling procedures, empirical material collection approaches, analysis methods, and ethical considerations.

3.1 Research Design

Detailed accounts usually demand interaction with people in for example their workplaces or homes, and entails allowing people to openly talk about their perspectives and experiences without the influence of what the researcher may have read in the literature or what he or she expects to find (Creswell, 2007: 40). As the intent of qualitative research is to explore and offer detailed and complex understandings of issues and dynamic processes a qualitative research approach is applied in this study (Gerson & Horowitz, 2002: 199; Creswell, 2007: 39). The research design is not only conditioned by our research method, but as well by our ontological and epistemological standpoints. In this study identity and globalization are not approached as fixed or essential categories, but foremost as social constructive phenomena. As Jenkins (2008: 17) notes all identities are by definition social as "identifying ourselves, or others, is a matter of meaning, and meaning always involves interaction; agreement and disagreement, convention and innovation, communication and negotiation". Research is rarely a linear process and the social world never comes in absolute compartments, whereby we also need to consider the dichotomy that separates structure (objective) from agency (subjective). As Bourdieu (1989) fundamentally argued, the tension between the objective and the constructed is regulated under a dialectical relationship. In his reflexive sociology Bourdieu argued for "constructive structuralism" or "structural constructivism" as a means to overcome such dualities (Bourdieu, 1989: 14). While identity depends on social processes and discursively produces agency identity thus as well depends on social structures (Basi, 2009: 23). Globalization is also a broad and variable concept whereby most judgments that we may pass on globalization often sparks ambivalence (Bayart, 2007: 5). In this study I did not decide to follow a hyperglobal, skeptic, or transformative globalization perspective, but I rather allowed the collected empirical material and the informant dispositions, meanings, and experiences guide the relevance of these cluster arguments. In social research we thus need to be reflexive about our theoretical, normative, and social positions as our habitus cannot be absolutely separated from the particular everyday social arenas and fields that we navigate within. Especially field research is a participatory learning experience whereby the researcher not only needs to understand the activities and social realities of the study participants, but as well his or her own actions, perceptions, and positions (Burgess, 2005: 13).

3.2 The Field, Procedures & Informants

This minor field study was conducted in the National Capital Region of Delhi (NCR), India, and included the business and call-center towns Gurgaon in the state of Haryana, and Noida in the state of Uttar Pradesh. Maps illustrate the NCR in the second Appendix section. During my time in India I resided in Gurgaon and New Delhi. Gurgaon has the largest concentration of call-centers, and this is where the whole industry was initiated (Poster, 2007a: 279). About five years ago I visited a friend who was working as a teacher at the Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) in South Delhi. I also travelled throughout India for three months, and also stayed at JNU where both students and faculty members occasionally discussed the rapid emergence of a call-center industry in the region. When I returned home I noticed that foremost the media in the US and the UK increasingly had started to take a keen interest towards this phenomenon. While I held enough previous experience to reside in India during another summer I was not prepared for the intricacies and complexities that characterize this highly inaccessible field.

Fieldwork broadly refers to primary research that "transpires" in the field – i.e. outside the controlled settings of libraries and laboratories (McCall, 2006: 3). Various attempts have been made to codify fieldwork practices, but each field work project usually is a unique undertaking (Shaffir, 2005: 22). Flexibility however needs to be underscored in any field-work study as natural settings cannot be controlled to tailor predetermined research criteria. As Burgess (1984: 143) underscores the hallmark of being a field researcher is flexibility. In the field researchers are consistently faced with reconsidering sampling criteria, time periods, and locations. This study was initiated with a "judgment sampling" approach whereby specific informant inclusion and exclusion criteria were selected. These criteria involved conducting in-depth interviews with CC-agents with at least one year of work experience within the CC-industry, CC-agents that primarily were providing support services over the phone to US-customers because the US is the largest client country in this industry, and an equal gender distribution. Before arriving in New Delhi my local contact person at JNU assured field access through his local contacts. Once the field study was initiated the obstacles started to mount. Despite being informed about my arrival months ahead of time the key field contact person had left India for the summer and had forgot to arrange the necessary contacts. While my contact person at JNU tried to find new contacts I also sought field access with assistance from the people I was staying with in Gurgaon. Before arriving in India I expected open field access, but I was instead introduced to an erratic and frustrating field access procedure. While flexibility is the main virtue in fieldwork, a second virtue, in my experience, should be persistence. My local contact person at JNU eventually secured new contacts within the CC-industry, and I was provided with lists of more than thirty names and phone numbers to call-center agents that were working in Gurgaon and Noida. In the next phase another set of problems materialized that specifically characterize this field. Most call-center agents, and all the names on the provided

lists, lived scattered throughout out the vast Delhi region. None of the prospective interview participants lived in Gurgaon. Due to the nightshifts and the specific characteristics of this field, which are further addressed in the next chapter, it was difficult to rely on the CC-agents to commit to actual interviews. All the prospective interview participants initially agreed to be interviewed, but later during call-backs and confirmations they usually excused themselves and provided a new phone number to a friend that they assured would agree to an interview. This went on for weeks. As social anthropologist Bob Simpson (2006: 125) underscores "you don't do fieldwork, fieldwork does you". After all, fieldwork in itself is a form of social interaction that is undertaken to secure information for research purposes (Gold, 2005: 93). Eventually my first interview participants became more engaged in this unpredictable field access process, and facilitated contacts to trusted colleagues that committed to in-depth interviews. The sampling process thus turned into "snowball sampling" (Burgess, 1984: 55), whereby the informants were asked to put the researcher in touch with colleagues who then were interviewed, and in turn this process was repeated. The formal informant group in this study thus reflects the social network of my first interview participants. Since the first informants all were male the informant group turned out to be predominantly male. Fifteen call-center employees were interviewed in this study: 4 women and 11 men. While the gender distribution is far from equal in this study it however corresponds to the male-female distribution in the call-center industry in India. This is also underlined in previous studies with larger samples (see Poster, 2007a: 280). All informants were either university graduates or were pursuing degrees, and none of them were married. Those that were from the NCR lived with their parents (7), and those that were from other states (8) lived independently or shared an apartment with friends/colleagues. They all lived in Delhi, but most worked either in Gurgaon or Noida. The average age was 23, and most had worked more than one year in this field. In CC-work primarily two types of calls are differentiated: inbound and outbound. The latter calls are made by the CC-agents themselves in order to collect bills/debts or conduct sales, whereas inbound calls are made by customers that are seeking support regarding various products and services (Poster, 2007a: 279). Several informants in this study worked or had worked with both inbound and outbound calls. The informants also worked or had worked in smaller and larger call-centers. Except for the gender distribution the sample was heterogeneous, which was an advantage in this study. In the first Appendix section the informant background information is outlined in detail.

3.3 Empirical Material Collection

In fieldwork usually multiple research strategies are applied in order to facilitate flexibility (Burgess, 1984: 144). This study primarily relies on interviews and observations. Additionally documents were continuously read and obtained

throughout the course of the fieldwork. Following the fieldwork period I also maintained frequent contact with many of the informants through e-mail for follow-up purposes and additional queries.

As a preparatory strategy I initially conducted a literature review of recent research and relevant theoretical publications. This preparation served as the basis for a semi-structured interview guide that was developed before I left for India. My interview guide deals with three themes: call-center work experiences and global interaction, overall social changes from working in this industry, and perceptions about globalization. The interview guide was developed to facilitate conversations rather than structured direct question interviews. I assumed that I did not have to write many sub-questions as I remembered my last trip to India as a very "talkative experience". The opposite turned out to be the case as this was a research scenario. After the first two interviews I added several supportive sub-questions. However the need for sub-questions varied from informant to informant as some informants could converse about the main themes effortlessly, while other informants needed supportive sub-questions. The interview guide is provided in the fourth Appendix section.

A digital audio recorder with a microphone was used in order to record the interviews. No objections were raised in this regard by the interview participants. Most interviews lasted approximately 45 minutes. Some interviews lasted 30 minutes, while some interviews lasted more than 90 minutes. The length of the interviews depended on how much time each informant could spare. All the interviews were conducted outside the call-center environment in for example their homes, canteens, and parks in New Delhi.

Observations were as well conducted throughout this study, but they were foremost unplanned and occurred after interviews and while I was visiting call-centers and walked about in Gurgaon and other areas in the NCR. My visits to the call-centers were short as I was not allowed to freely walk around on the premises or to bring any electronic devices. These field specific characteristics in the NCR are also explained in the next chapter. Particularly walking about and interacting with the local people in the call-center areas provided many fruitful observations and reflections about this field. As part of my overall observations in the NCR I also regularly interacted with students at JNU, and visited many middle class families through the people I was staying with in Gurgaon. I as well met with the interview participants and their friends on several occasions under informal circumstances, whereby the observations constitute the informal material collection in this study. The informal observations were important to generate knowledge about the day-to-day social positions of the informants, but in general to also develop a basic understanding about current life in the NCR. As such the observations complemented the interview material, and they were thus collected simultaneously, and thereby facilitated a better understanding of the actual social context, fields and structures where the informants worked and lived their lives.

3.4 Analysis Method

Initially the interview material was transcribed, and the collected complementary reading materials and the field observation documentation were coded and organized. In the next step a direct interpretation analysis method was applied. This method is process-oriented whereby the researcher pulls the material apart and puts the material together by in more meaningful ways (Creswell, 2007: 163). The aim of this method thus is to establish patterns by searching for correspondence between the identified central phenomena and/or categories. In this process main themes underlining similarities and differences emerged from the empirical material. Based on this analytical research process I also realized that structure and agency are of central importance in this study, and therefore both aspects need to be addressed in an integrative manner.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

In field research we always need to make ethical considerations. Participation in this study was voluntary and participation was requested through informed consent. It was thus important to explain the aim of the study, underline that participation in this study can be denied voluntarily, and to also stress that the interviews and the other collected materials were only to be used for the intended research purposes (Kvale, 1997: 107). When this study was completed the interview participants and the people that facilitated field access were provided opportunity to read the study and to offer suggestions for amendments before the study was finally published in the open access "Lund University Publications" database.

In this study the interview participants are cited under pseudonyms. Confidentiality is of particular importance in this study. As this study focuses on call-center employees rather than call-centers as organizations the participants were asked not to mention their company name on the record, or to elaborate about the particular services that their company provides. Some interview participants lived in subsidized student housing, which meant that they took a risk by participating in this study. Living in subsidized university housing while working was prohibited in their case. Not only could they be fined, but they also could be expelled from their university. Due to such circumstances actual names, interview locations and dates are not disclosed in this study. The confidentiality principle needs to be maintained to avoid risks towards the interview participant's professional and private integrity (Kvale, 1997: 109).

4 LOCAL DUALITIES & TRANSNATIONAL SPACES

This chapter outlines the structural and interactional sociology of the call-center employee realities in the NCR, and thus provides the structural and actor characteristic foundation for the field study analysis in the following chapter. In order to empirically ground this explorative social reality illustration this chapter as well cites the interview participants and their experiences. While the three sections in this chapter deal with the transnational call-center phenomenon on national, regional, industry, and actor levels these sections are closely interrelated, and serve as a necessary descriptive field and actor background outline for the following chapter.

4.1 Linking "New India" & the "International" BPO Industry

The rise of the Indian software sector and the call-center sector embody a new era of global openness in India. Under prime-minister Rajiv Gandhi in the 1980s India attempted to achieve national progress through socialist development strategies, such as large public investment regimes, but this model failed and in the early 1990s India was on the brink of disaster (Nassimbeni & Sartor, 2008: 29). The next Indian government in response rapidly liberalized and opened the Indian economy, and applied for a loan from the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The IMF in turn conditioned structural reforms. The following so called "New Industrial Policy" reversed the previous protectionist and socialist development models in favor of a more free market-oriented development strategy, which came to incite foreign direct investment (FDI) inflows. The economy was "decentralized" as many sectors – such as insurance, telecommunications, and aircraft – were opened up to private investors (Nassimbeni & Sartor, 2008: 30). The rapid rise of outsourced IT- and call-center sectors in India thus does not only signify the rise of new industries, but this expansion as well reflects a new era of economic openness and global integration, which has spurred new confidence and hope of national progress in India (Greenspan, 2004: 35).

In recent research and popular commentary call-centers are viewed as transnational organizations that transcend national boundaries. Transnationalism however is a contested notion that may refer to cosmopolitan citizenry, identities, values, and rights that transcend national boundaries and institutions, but it can also refer to "international citizenry" or "internationalism" where states and nations are the main sources of identification and constitute the world stage central actors (Stokes, 2004: 121-122). In India the call-center industry is primarily referred to as "*international* business process outsourcing" (BPO). This business sector is as well referred to as off-shore outsourcing or IT-enabled services (ITES) (Greenspan, 2004: 92). Support services companies that cater to

Western customers do not only include “voice processes” over the phone but as well include internet based support – for example “e-mail processes” – whereby this industry sometimes is also referred to as “ITES-BPO” (Basi, 2009: 42). Outsourced CCs are moreover diverse organizations with variable services that span from supportive solutions and advice to sales and transactions, and therefore demand different organizational types and employee training regimes (Basi, 2009: 39). Some CC-agents only take 10 to 15 customer calls per shift, while some bill-collecting CC-agents can make hundreds of short calls during one shift. The employees in this sector that I met formally and informally rarely referred to their workplaces as “call-centers”. When they however mentioned call-centers that serve local customers they however differentiated between domestic and international call-centers. Domestic call-centers provide support services for customers in India, such as mobile phone support services, and do not offer the range of diverse services that (international BPO) call-centers offer to Western clients. Instead the informants consistently referred to working in “international processes” and “BPOs”. The employees in this field study thus identified themselves as employees in a multinational industry and as employees in international business *processes*. They rarely identified themselves as employees in specific companies. The employees in this industry are young, they often switch companies in search of better work and financial conditions, and they seldom stay in this industry long-term.

4.2 Call-Center “Fortresses” & Door-to-Door “Jeep Convoys”

The informants in this study consistently underlined that Western companies outsource service jobs to India to save costs. They also widely underscored that that this industry foremost provides employment to the urban youth and thereby primarily leads to sector specific development in the “metropolitan cities”. Foreign companies also outsource to India because the English-speaking population in India is one of the best educated in the world, but at the same time English-speakers in India constitute “only” about five percent of the total population (Greenspan, 2004: 37). Despite impressive economic growth rates widely-shared development, according to development economists Jean Drèze and Amartya Sen (2002: 307), has not been achieved in India after (or before) the reforms in the 1990s as some sectors, such as agriculture, have almost stagnated and many poor states in India have not been able to keep up with the national growth rates. Despite the rapid industrialization and urbanization of Gurgaon from an undeveloped farming lands area in the state of Haryana to a domestic and multinational business center and the main CC-hub in India such development asymmetries, however, are as well evident in this progressive region.

Today Gurgaon is illuminated by burgeoning new multi-storey office buildings, the presence of some the largest companies in the world, the close proximity to the New Delhi international airport, and numerous large shopping

malls have been built next to the business districts. The developments in the NCR also include a flourishing real-estate development industry that provides luxury townships, gated communities, and golf courses. Locally these developments are metaphorically captured by the marketing slogan "India shining" (Brosius, 2009: 174). This slogan was originally coined for the (unsuccessful) parliamentary reelection campaign of the BJP-party. Today this slogan instead captures the "gold-rush-mood" real estate developers that advertise "World class city living" and "Global living for global Indians" (Brosius, 2009: 176). Nikhil, a CC-agent that has worked in the industry for more than two years, recollected the following about his first (BPO) call-center experience:

> "I had never seen an office like that in my life. It was like… I have seen in movies, the Western movies, but I never thought that in India we could have offices like this".

From a distance globalization appears transformative in the NCR. While some areas in the NCR unmistakably look like the advertised "shining India", many other areas are poor and stagnant. In Gurgaon I regularly walked around in the various town areas, and interacted with the local people. The locals were usually unable to even provide basic information about local directions in English. Outside the large shopping malls in Gurgaon I encountered local youths that wished to communicate, but they expressed frustration over the fact that I did not speak Hindi. During my previous travels throughout India I only met people that were unable to speak English in rural areas or areas where tourists seldom visit. In New Delhi people from "all" walks of life speak English. The limited or lack of English language skills among locals living or working next to the call-centers in Gurgaon manifests an asymmetrical or "two-speed" globalization. In and around the call-center and business districts in Gurgaon there are many poor areas. Most local people are not participating in "shining India", but they are rather passive "spectators" of a landscape that is changing into a multi-storey office building and shopping mall scenery. To the outside world Gurgaon is presented as a prosperous area. Before arriving in Gurgaon I expected to find cafés and parks where I hoped to interact with the call-center employees under more informal circumstances. There are no cafés, small shops or even benches outside the call-center gates. The call-center hub area of Gurgaon instead is a hybrid of old buildings and new security gated buildings that exist side by side but in entirely separate worlds. In the third Appendix section pictures from the field are provided to illustrate this duality and asymmetry. While the CCs in Gurgaon and Noida widely are upheld as open transnational spaces that enable global interaction, on the local level, paradoxically, the call-centers are isolated modern-day fortresses. Call-centers are autonomous high-security organizations. As a visitor you have to announce your arrival ahead of time, you sign in at the security gate where you are provided with an electronic badge/key which you have to use to electronically open the main entrance, and once inside you are not allowed to use your mobile phone or computer. The employees in some leading call-center companies are not even

allowed to bring a pen or food to their workplace. The securitization varies from call-center to call-center as one informant noted:

> "It depends on what kind of process you are involved in. My banking process was quite confidential, you know, they restricted all those things, gadgets, mobiles, anything, pagers, sensors, calculators. Food? I don't know about the other companies, but in my company it was not allowed. Everything is provided where we work, in the building".

CC-employees are provided free transportation to and from work. As local CC-agents from the NCR rarely live in Gurgaon or Noida they are shuttled door-to-door from their homes to the call-centers and back home in large jeeps or vans. As Poster (2007b: 80) also notes in her study these company cab services have changed the local traffic landscape in the NCR – one call-center can run up to 120 cabs. Large jeeps filled with young people headed to or from Gurgaon or Noida have become a distinct highway traffic feature. Organizing the company cab services is a great logistical challenge, but without these jeep or cab convoys it would be impossible to employ the urban Delhi youth in this industry and have them come in on time due to unreliable or limited local public transportation. After the CC-employees finish their work shifts in the early morning hours a cab picks them up to drive them home within thirty minutes. Most informants stated that it takes 1-2 hours to travel one-way with the call-center cab to work. The CC-agents thus step outside their home at a specific time where a jeep waits to take them to work, once in Gurgaon or Noida they enter the call-center, and after at least eight hours of work they are picked up by a jeep that drives them home. In this regard one informant critically noted:

> "We are cheap labor, being picked up from different places, and then they come and drop you off outside your workplace, you work, you are done working, and they take you back".

This transportation system and the gates and securitization of call-centers hence minimize the interaction between CC-employees and the local community in Gurgaon and Noida. The call-center employees arrive about thirty minutes before their shift starts. When they arrive they may stand outside their call-center to converse with colleagues, some smoke cigarettes, and then they go inside to start their shift. Usually this is their only interaction with the local milieu. Inside the CCs provide the necessary amenities – such as food cafeterias and resting areas.

4.3 Urban Youth Employment & Nighttime "Graveyard Shifts"

In previous research the transnational call-centers in India have been described as young- and open-minded, and comfortable workplaces (Pal & Buzzanell, 2008).

One informant for example described the CC-sector as the "youngsters' industry". A branch colleague of his underlined that this industry has facilitated new opportunities in the lives of young university students in India:

> "After the advent of call-centers young people like me, they got access to good money, they could handle their studies, at the same time they could do job along with your studies, and when I mean job, I don't mean that we are getting very meager salary, we get very reasonable salary, we can save for ourselves, for our future, we can also use it for expenses".

Unlike the Indian software industry the CC-sector does not depend on employing engineers, and therefore can employ a wider cross section of people (Greenspan, 2004: 93). While most CC-agents have or are pursuing college-degrees this is usually not an overall requisite among CC-recruiters. The informants in this study had variable university degree backgrounds – e.g. French, history, political science, business, and bioscience. Notably many informants stated that CC-work was their first job, and their main motivation to continue working in this industry was merely financial. In a leading call-center agents can earn a middle-class salary of between Rs 15 000 to 20 000 per month (Rothermund, 2008: 202). This allows them to participate in "shining India". As one informant expressed:

> "It's only BPO that has helped me buy Lee t-shirts, and Reebok shoes, and stylish watches… If it would be another industry I would not have made it so early, after just passing 12th [high school]. In all sense, man, you talk about luxury, you talk about status, you talk about your own development, it is helping a lot".

Another informant noted that he had changed his habits and behavior since he started working in this sector due the relatively high salary that CC-agents are able to earn despite limited work experience:

> "You earn, you get paid a lot of money, the whole way you eat, the way you sit, the way you drink, everything changes for you, you spend more money than you used to. I was hanging out at this place the other day, it was Mocha, a café bar, I ordered a cup of coffee, this Colombian some coffee, I did not think about it until then, until yesterday, and I said: "I paid 95 Rupees for a cup of coffee, which is way more than one liter of gas".

Most informants however used their salaries to help with their family's expenses, and/or to finance their future studies and career paths. While it is not difficult to find employment as a CC-agent further career opportunities, such as management and trainer positions, are limited in this industry and therefore very competitive. Despite the financial benefits CC-work is foremost a temporary undertaking among the young people in this industry. Many employees "burn out" in about

one year due to the nightshifts (Poster, 2007b: 94). My informants consistently referred to CC-work as "unnatural". Critically one informant expressed:

> "Yeah, I admit, you have good money over here, you get very fast jobs, but at the end of the day you look forward to live your life as a normal human being. Working in night shifts does kill you, or going [to work] in evenings does not sound good. A middle class family in India have a mentality, an appreciating mentality of working 09:00 to 16:00, it's a fantastic job for them. …I want to live a good life, far from this BPO thing".

Working in accordance with North American daytime hours means working at night-time in India, which all informants found troublesome in various ways. My informants referred to the late nightshift as the "graveyard shift", which was expressed to negatively alter sleeping habits, cause ill health, and strain social relationships. This inmost consequence of transnational CC-work in India has been covered in previous research, and these health and social costs are as well evident among the informants in this study. A bill-collecting CC-agent, Rishi, who had only worked in this industry for 3 ½ months explained: "…working in nights makes me uncomfortable, I have some problems with my stomach, oh man, huge problems". He also expressed that his overall habits have changed for the worse due to the alternation of his everyday life:

> "I usually reach home at 9:30 in the morning, so I have to try to sleep, then I watch some movies and TV, 1 or 2 hours, eating, it's very difficult to sleep in the morning, you can't get proper sleep, so after that, everything changes, every routine changes. The eating habits change, I can't always rely on my mom, so I have to eat what I can at the canteens".

As Poster (2007b: 95) underscores in her study the NCR is not a 24 hour city region like the major city regions in the Western world, and therefore does not cater to its nighttime inhabitants and workers. The BPO call-centers thus exist to cater to the service industry on the other side of the globe, whilst the local city has not adapted to provide services to this urban nighttime population. CC-employees also have to work during Hindu holidays/festivals, such as Diwali and Holi. An informant expressed frustrations about the social stress and limited free time that follows from working in this industry:

> "I don't get time off, today is my day off, and still now I'm with you, and I have not spent an hour with my parents, because this is the only day that I got an off [day] throughout the week, that really annoys my parents a lot. …I'm not able to celebrate occasions, when we have Diwali or Holi we need to work in our call-centers, we are not getting an off[day], so it's ridiculous sometimes".

While CC-employees are financially able to enjoy parts of "shining India", such as shopping malls, their free time during the weekend often is reserved as an opportunity to "catch up" on lost sleep. Several informants noted that they did not get much time to do anything else than sleep during the weekend. Anjali explained:

> "Actually I don't get that much time to watch movies, TV. I don't get time to spend with my family. Most of the time I prefer to sleep. You know, shifts become so stressful for us, so we don't get much of time".

About 28 percent of the Indian population lives in urban areas, and there is a pull-factor that attracts people to urban centers (Rothermund, 2008: 177). In this study all the informants that are from or have grown up in the Delhi region lived in their parents' home, and did not want to relocate to Gurgaon or Noida. While researchers and popular commentators view the rise of call-centers in India as an evident transnational phenomenon it has however not been explicitly noted that the call-centers in the BPO industry also constitute "inter-regional" and "inter-state" phenomena in India. All informants in this study notably differentiated between the "in-stationed" CC-staff and the "out-stationed" CC-staff. This categorization is applied among the call-center agents to differentiate between employees that are from the region – the in-stationed – and those employees from other Indian states that have moved to the call-center hubs or surrounding regions to find work or attend universities as out-stationed. This industry thus is not only a transnational or international social phenomena, but locally on the call-center floor and outside the call-centers young people from all parts of India that work in the BPO industry are interacting and expanding their social networks. In effect the out-stationed people usually move to the call-center hubs, such as Gurgaon, while in-stationed people stay in New Delhi with their families. As one "out-stationed" informant explained:

> "Yeah, out-stationed people like me, 90 % of out-stationed people, those that are from other states than Delhi, they settle down in Gurgaon, but people who have families here, who have their own land, their own houses, they own properties in Delhi, they can't just shift to Gurgaon, because of one job".

5 ANALYSIS

The analysis chapter is divided into three thematic sections that critically and interpretatively address the empirical research focus in this study – identity and globalization – in relation to previous research findings.

5.1 Regressing "National Identity Management" Regimes

During one of my evening visits in one of the largest call-centers in Gurgaon I noticed that a CC-agent trainer greeted his manager with the words "Good morning". He introduced himself as "Harry", but quickly thereafter explained that his real name is Harjeet. He also stated that even his parents, whom he lives with despite his promoted position in the industry, also call him Harry. While his Western name is a part of him and he follows North American daytime work hours during Indian nighttime hours he underscored that his identity unquestionably is Indian. While previous research has demonstrated "national identity management" regimes in call-centers and "Americanization" of CC-agents such regimes were not recognized by the informants in this study. They rather consistently underscored their Indian cultural belonging. Talan expressed:

> "At the end of the day I'm still an Indian at heart. I might be working, I might be calling Americans, you know, like working in their time, but we are still Indians at heart. You can ask any BPO guy…".

While the length and types of CC-training procedures vary between the companies the "cultural training" that CC-agents receive is limited to often a few days. Firsthand the call-centers train their prospective CC-agents in the actual service process methods. The voice-and-accent training is also a central element in the preparation of a CC-agent, but this training is rarely as rigorous as has been demonstrated in previous studies. None of the informants in this study recognized "national identity management" regimes in their work. Bill-collecting CC-agent Rishi underscored:

> "It doesn't work like this. My manager and my company do not want any accent from me, they want dollars from us, you collect, how does not matter".

> "Until now in most of the call-centers where I have worked I should have a neutral accent. I'm not required to have that American accent or the UK accent. I should have the accent that I have, since my childhood". (Pranav)

> "It's absolutely not possible to turn one's accent in a span of one week, because we are born and raised in India…" (Shreya)

"Accent neutralization" has specifically been viewed with suspicion by some academics and commentators as institutionalized masks that may cause "de-Indianization" or "cultural neutralization" among the CC-employees (Shome, 2006: 108-109). All the informants in this study however explicitly underscored that they had not undergone such training regimes. This was consistently expressed by the informants during the formal interviews and during our informal interactions in their everyday lives. The so called "national identity management" regimes appear to be regressing, as informants that worked in both Gurgaon and Noida virtually shared the same opinion on this matter. Such indications of change and/or normalization have as well been identified in a recent study where call-center employees refuted that they were ever subjected to imposed "Westernization" (Basi, 2009: 86-87). Sandeep elaborated on this matter further, and stressed that the CC-industry is changing and moving away from its more questionable methods that were standardized during the industry's early periods:

> "As far as my experience goes, when I had training in voice-and-accent I was not trained to talk like an American, I was not trained to talk like a British, I was just told: "keep it simple, plain, and neutral". As far as telling the customers that we are calling from India… …we just tell them that we are calling from New Delhi, we would never tell them that we are calling from New York, or we are calling from Washington DC, we just tell them the truth. Before there was a trend when the call-centers were in a natal stage in India, there was a trend that people use to have alias, like a second name, but later we were told that we should tell them our real names, and if they have any trouble in understanding our names we should keep it short. …Yes, it's a change now, because most of the Americans right now they have accepted that Indians or any other Asian countries who handle BPOs or run call-centers they can deliver good work, they are capable. The sulk is over".

Most previous research in this field is grounded in field work studies that were carried out about five years ago, whereby the informants' answers in this matter appear to illustrate a change process that is enabling a more heterogenic form of global interaction in this industry. According to the informants both the CC-agents in India and for example the US-customers know that the CC-agents do not "sound like Americans". As time has passed the US-customers, as mentioned above by Sandeep, have also learnt or increasingly become accustomed to the fact that inbound and outbound service calls are managed by CCs in India. As underlined above by the cited informants even the use of aliases is retracting. According to another informant this trend has developed because US-customers are increasingly demanding to know whom they are actually speaking with. Previous research has also addressed the fact that CC-agents are subject to abuse by Western customers. While this is not uncommon most informants expressed that this negative side of transnational interaction as well is regressing, which appears to be another indicator that cultural frictions in these phone service

interactions also are retracting. For example Pranav noted that he does not encounter abusive customers regularly, but sometimes he receives such calls:

> "Sometimes they are racial. It's not a huge number, but still there are some people who still have this mentality. When you pick up the call and they realize that you are an Indian, they forget about what happened with the product, and start abusing, by saying that "I don't want to talk to an Indian".

The informants in this study also consistently reasoned about any Western cultural biases in their work from an instrumental perspective in the sense that they adapted somewhat to for example US-American accents during customer service interactions in order to provide their services successfully and efficiently. One informant explained that during customer service interactions CC-agents primarily tend to concentrate on pronouncing certain frequently used service related words – so called "hot words" – in for example an US-American accent rather than completely transforming their way of speaking English. One informant stated:

> "…because it is only for their sake we are changing ourselves, because if they are not able to understand our language it would be a problem for them, …so we are adapting ourselves to their culture".

The CC-agents in this manner rather demonstrated an emphatic perspective towards the customers as service receivers, and thus did not experience such minor cultural adaptations as "colonial subjugation" or as the commoditization of identity. Shreya expressed:

> "They are not turning us into US-people, you know, they just teach neutral accent, proper, the faults in our English are just rectified. They just tell us the proper way of pronunciation, so a US-customer will also understand, so a UK-customer will also understand".

5.2 Between & Within "Traditional" & "Modern" Realities

In India the growing middle class has been regarded as the vanguard of economic progress during the last 20 to 30 years (Rothermund, 2008: 196). Among social scientists the middle class in India is divided between an "old" middle class that is proud of India's struggle for freedom and growing importance in the world, and a "new" middle class that is not as bound to tradition and more absorbed by "Western consumption lifestyles" (Rothermund, 2008: 198). While the "old" middle class members ascribe more importance to traditions they however also read English-language newspapers, earn university degrees, and live "modern lifestyles". My informants cannot be strictly positioned in either a new or old Indian middle class as they rather negotiate between these positions, and at the

same time they are many times part of both these worlds through their family ties. This negotiation process between modernity and tradition can lead to significant social frictions in the lives of CC-agents. The CC-employees are responsible professionals and hard workers that risk their health by taking on nighttime shifts, but by the public in India they are stigmatized as "night workers". One informant explained that culturally nighttime is not considered to be an acceptable time to work in India. The lack of 24 hour cities in India indicates this. Many informants expressed deep frustration over the fact that relatives and friends of their families hold negative and misinformed perceptions about call-centers. Ayana explained that she has been working in call-centers as a full-time "out-stationed" CC-agent for more than two years without her parents' awareness:

> "For the last two years I'm working, they [parents] don't know about that… Their thinking is very different, very different from what we do in the call-center, they don't know about that. They think in a very different manner…. one day my mom's sister was telling me that working in a call-center is a very bad thing, the girls go there, US-client come, and the wrong things [happen], they smoke, they do whatever they want, they booze".

Naima explained that she also refrains from revealing her fulltime CC-work life:

> "Most of my friends they don't know actually that I'm working, but the people that stay close to my place, they know. Because I brought my cab, so they have seen. They have a perception as if "Oh my God, this child is working in call center, and cab comes and drops them at night, and I don't know what takes place over there", so these kinds of things, Indians have not been able to adapt to that culture, but we are working there and we know what is happening".

While the urban youth in this industry are hard workers and tax payers their input in society and sacrifices are not always recognized locally. Pranav expressed pride about his work, but also frustrations about the local misconceptions of CCs:

> "I if you ask a parent, if you ask a guardian what do you want your son or daughter to be, they will pop out with engineer, doctor, or something, but they will never say he should become a call-center employee. Initially I had a lot of problems at home, my father was totally against this, my mother was totally against this, but I need to work in a call-center for some personal reasons. Initial stages I was thinking: "oh man, where have I come, this is not the thing, this is not the way life goes, this is not the thing that I want to do". …but then I realized gradually if nobody is working hard how can this industry last for the last 10 or 12 years? There are a lot of companies who are still coming to India, still planning to establish in India, because of the good service that India is providing. Because of the hard work of those people, this industry still is existing".

According to Giddens (2002: 12) traditional family systems are undergoing transformations around the world, and the impact of this change influences most social arenas from work to politics. While the "new" middle class is known for its fashion and shopping preferences this group also opposes the traditional role of women as submissive wives and want women to earn their own incomes (Rothermund, 2008: 199). Unlike in the software industry where most engineers are men the call-center sector, as mentioned in the first chapter, is open to and even prefer to employ women for CC-work. This is also revealed in the informants' discourses as they perceive the call-centers as spaces or fields of empowerment where women and men have the same opportunities and are treated as equals. About the opportunities for women in call-centers Narain noted:

> "Comparatively among working people, they are more free, more independent, they have equal opportunities… ….in our company there are six managers, three of them are females. And all of them had started working at the same time".

The male informants in this study that had worked in domestic call-centers also expressed that they had identified differences between women in international and domestic call-centers. One informant explained:

> "As the working environment is totally different it puts an impact on the workers as well. In domestic call centers the girls are not so open. …the dressing sense is strict to Indian culture, but in international call centers the dressing sense of women has influence of broader, they like to dress like UK women or US women. Apart from that they like to go to pubs, discos. …they are more liberated, but in domestic call centers they are not. Because the range of the world is not so bigger in domestic call centers, as compared to international call centers".

While the female informants in this study all planned for a long career in this industry they also noted that they have to deal with "conservative views" in society as a constant irritation. Planning for a long-term career in this industry however is not easy for women due the grips of traditional society. As Anjali stated:

> "There is a time, after a girl gets married she is not allowed to work there [call-centers], but before that they are working".

> "It is up to the families, you know, if their family is not rigid, and not very orthodox, depends totally on their families, if their families are willing to. Otherwise, girls who are out-stationed girls, coming from outside Delhi, they can go for BPOs". (Talan)

Dipanker Gupta (2000: 8), a sociologist from JNU, is highly critical of the Indian middle class members that regard themselves as "modern" by virtue of their shopping habits. Gupta refers to this middle class as a "Westoxicated elite" that has mistaken modernity for contemporary trends and fads. Gupta (2000: 2) notes: "Modernity has been misrecognised in India because of the tendency to equate it with technology and with other contemporary artifacts. …Modernity has to do with attitudes, especially those that come into play in social relations". In traditional societies identity is sustained by the stable social positions of community members, but when such societies change identities are created and re-created more frequently (Giddens, 2002: 47). While "India shining" and the "global living for global Indians" discourses have emerged rapidly such popular consumerism transformations, as critiqued by Gupta (2000), do not equate modernity. Gupta (2000: 3) underscores: "Modernity always comes in baby steps, more so in a country like India where tradition was not only deeply entrenched but also highly elaborated in all walks of life. Traditional India was perhaps the most stratified society in the world, as it ritually sanctioned the separation among human beings on the basis of cast in such fine detail". The stigmatization of CC-workers in India thus exemplifies frictions between traditional and modern realities. While modernity cannot emerge overnight, judging from my interactions with the urban youth that work in the CC-industry India is however taking those baby steps. In Giddens terms it thus can be argued that the CC-employees have "destabilized" their traditional social positions by entering and working in the BPO industry – as a modern field – as they are navigating between modern and traditional realities.

5.3 Local & Global Identification – "Their" & "Our" Culture

In a cosmopolitan world, Giddens (2002: 45) underscores, more people than before are interconnected and interact with people with other beliefs, whereby they are required to justify their beliefs internally and to others. The informants in this study perceive globalization as increased connectivity between peoples and cultures from around the world. Talan however expressed:

> "Globalization means cultural exchanges, but that is their culture, this is our culture, see, it is not affecting, it is not influencing our culture …not to the tiniest".

Almost all of my informants expressed explicit "their-and-our culture" distinctions during the interviews when globalization and call-center work matters were discussed. Such distinctions were as well constantly expressed by the informants and other CC-employees during our more informal interactions and meetings. While Pranav expressed "their-and-our culture" distinctions he at the

same time credited his transnational work experience as facilitating for his interest and knowledge about other cultures and nations:

> "Initially I was afraid of interacting with a person who is not from my country, I was really nervous, and then when I came, when I got this job, things came normal, I get more interested to know of cultures of other countries. If you are from Sweden, I want to know what's there in Sweden, I want to know everything. I'm really curious about this".

The CC-agents that worked with customers from many different parts of the world expressed positive and negative categorizations about "other cultures" based on their customer interaction experiences. For example Nikhil is a Spanish language graduate, and he therefore has worked with both English and Spanish speaking customers from North and South America, and Europe. While he expressed that there are exceptions among individuals he decisively maintained the following opinion with reference to his two-year outbound and inbound call-center work experience:

> "I believe the Latin Americans are more cooperative. The people from Spain are a little impatient, they are becoming like [US-]Americans".

Most informants in this study worked with US-customers, but Pranav received customer calls from North and South America, Europe, Africa, and Asia. Based on his experiences he also expressed distinctions about the different nationalities that he had interacted with. In one of his positive categorizations he for example stated:

> "Ireland people are good. They never abuse".

In some cases Pranav has been reminded of India's colonial past through abusive customer calls. Such confrontations enforce cultural differentiation in a negative manner, and thereby make it hard for the CC-agents to see one world beyond "their-and-our culture". Once Pranav got the following question and remark from a customer:

> "...are you from India? We have ruled over you for 200 years, you know".

While the informants are proud of their cultural heritage and made explicit and implicit "their-and-our culture" distinctions simultaneously "seeds" of cosmopolitanism were also identified. While one informant explained that he is proud of his Indian culture and that he proudly shares and demonstrates Indian traditions and customs to US-company representatives when they visit the call-centers hubs in India he at the same time noted that he is able to reason beyond cultural and/or national boundaries. Accordingly this informant underlined that global interaction through CC-work enables increased connectivity that transcends

national borders, whereby he expressed to some extent experience deterritorialization:

> "It just feels like we are not just staying in India, we are just part of a global world. …we don't feel that we are working for some American or a British person we just feel like we are working for a person from this planet Earth".

Such experiences were in particular expressed by CC-agents that make outbound calls in bill/debt-collection work. Through phone-based interaction bill-collecting CC-agents are introduced to social localities in the Western world that they did not know existed before they started working in the CC-industry. For example a female informant explained that she had been introduced to new ways of reasoning about family life and social relations by interacting with US-Americans through her outbound bill-collecting work:

> "I have learnt about American culture. Like… what you mean by single mother…. I just knew about my Indian culture, but now a lot of things have changed in my mind, if this is happening this is not wrong, or if this happening, this is not right, so I learnt about their life situations, what they are doing, he is saying "she is not my spouse, she is my kid's mother", that is a different thing for me".

While the above informant expressed a new proximity to localities on the other side of the globe at the same her and other informants' experiences underline the evident distance between the CC-agent social locality in India and the "Western" social localities. In some cases this distance has even lead to cultural shocks. Narain gave the following explanation:

> "There was a lady, she told me "my father passed away, that's the reason why I got late" [with the payment], …I did not have the words, I did not know how to respond, because death in the family, in India, we can't talk about money at that time. She didn't speak anything, I didn't speak, and finally she hung up. The client monitored that call, I had a session with the manager, and she told me "no, it's not like that, the culture is entirely different, even when such things happen, you are a collector, you have to collect the money".

Overall the CC-agents expressed that they feel the world has shrunk since starting to work in this industry. One informant for example said: "the world is in my palm". They expressed that globalization has influenced their worldview, and that they feel closer to the rest of the world as employees in international processes and multinational companies. To some extent their maps of social classifications thus have been influenced by taking on work in this transnational industry. Cosmopolitanism and cultural interaction that actually challenges your reasoning and identity, and that demands you to justify your world paradigm to yourself and

to others however was not experienced by the informants in this globalized work arena. Among the informants and among the numerous other CC-employees that I interacted with informally while visiting call-centers in the NCR I only met one CC-agent, Rohan, whom regarded himself as cosmopolitan. He explained that his cosmopolitan reasoning and world-views are unrelated to the call-center industry. While the call-center industry and nighttime work shifts have altered his habits, and enabled him to participate in "shining India" he does not credit his cosmopolitan life to the call-center industry. Rohan instead expressed that he never has felt strictly bound by local cultural norms and conventions:

> "Before I moved to Delhi, before I started working [in call-centers], I was a guy, like I used to communicate in English with my friends, I felt more comfortable speaking in English than I did in any other language, because, I don't know, I have always had friends from outside, like from different parts of the world".

Unlike his colleagues in this industry Rohan did not primarily reason in terms of "their-and-our culture" or position himself in a specific cultural locality. Global interaction is not only a professional undertaking for Rohan, but it is rather a cosmopolitan lifestyle that is a part of his identity. He is for example a member of the so called "Couch Surfing Project" – *www.couchsurfing.org* – which is considered to be the largest hospitality exchange network in the world. "Couch surfing" basically entails providing free sleeping accommodation to world travelers. When Rohan returns home from the gated call-center world he does not explicitly or implicitly return to traditional Indian society. He shares an apartment with one of his best friends. She is an independent professional. His closest friends from the USA regularly visit him in India, and through his "couch surfing" network Rohan receives visitors from all corners over the world. Unlike his colleagues in the call-center industry he thus regularly interacts with people from many parts of the world face-to-face, and as well outside the call-center walls. At one time he for example hosted friends and visitors from Canada, England, Japan, and Denmark, which Rohan described as:

> "….it was like a whole United Colors of Benetton family".

6 CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

Upon arriving in India I anticipated that my field study would be about commonalities between call-center employees and their Western customers. Once I entered the field my original preconceptions, which were grounded in previous research findings, changed and were eventually reversed. I realized that the manifestations of globalization need to be studied through the scope of everyday localities where people interact and position and reposition their social maps in relation to the various transformative forces of globalization.

The transnational call-center field in India is an evident example of social dualities that embody change and continuation. To capture such multidimensional social phenomena we thus need to address structure and agency. In one end the call-center buildings symbolize modernity, rapid development and the new open India, but on the local level these buildings are gated and securitized organizations that do not facilitate interaction between the local people and call-center employees. At the same time, while new and shining buildings can be built rapidly and transform the landscapes in localities peoples' identities, whether they are part of a new India or not, are deeply socialized phenomena and bound to local realities and traditions. Identities do not transform with corresponding rapid speeds. The way we navigate in the world is conditioned by our habitus, our internal dispositions, and the very social context and fields that we navigate within. Notably the characteristics of the composite "national identity management" example that was introduced in the first chapter – Anil – appears, as expressed by the informants, to be regressing. This study thus provides a glimpse into a new social arena that seems to be finding its equilibrium by allowing or enabling more heterogenic interactions between CC-agents and Western customers. Paradoxically, as expressed by the informants in this study, both CC-employees and for example US-customers oppose – albeit for different reasons – the outcome of national identity management strategies. The CC-agents expressed that they wish to keep their Indian names in their professional work, while their customers at the same time have started demanding to know who they are actually interacting with. More heterogenic approaches in the call-center work field in India appear to some extent "de-mechanize" this form of transnational interaction, and thereby enabling more personal interaction between Western and Indian localities. We should however not treat the findings in this field study as generalizations. The findings are glimpses or indications into the life worlds and experiences of call-center employees that could motivate larger and more elaborate field studies to further explore these new tendencies and findings.

Scholars have argued that globalization transforms our habitus by dissolving the links between identity and place, and identity and tradition (Schirato & Webb, 2003: 151-152). In this sense the informants in this study however resisted the transformative forces of complex connectivity. While the informants articulated that they were experiencing increased connectivity and accredited their professional global interactions as facilitating for their awareness, curiosity and

knowledge of "other cultures" the concept of complex connectivity however, as Tomlinson (1999: 20) notes, as well entails changing identities and value systems. Such transformations were not experienced by the informants in this study. They rather reasoned in terms of "their-and-our culture", and navigated between modern and traditional India explicitly and implicitly. Deterritorialization, which is said to weaken the ties of culture of place by distant forces (Tomlinson, 1999: 29), however seems to be at play to some extent among many informants as they expressed that they are negotiating between modern and traditional social positions and realities. In Gidden's terms we thus can identify the stretching of local societies and increased connectivity between social contexts, but since this extended reach of localities does not come with any normative cosmopolitan intent this stretching of modernity is rather "thin". The cosmopolitan identities among CC-agents that previous commentators have identified thus seem far-fetched from my field study experience. These identities are either ascribed by outside observers and commentators, or they are misinterpreted due to the "national identity management" regimes that were foremost conducted during the industry's early development stages. As Basi (2009: 107) notes these identities rather showcase "institutionalized cosmopolitanism", since CC-employees, as revealed in this study, both experience increased connectivity and global awareness, but at the same time experience cultural clashes and distances due to their bounds to and/or preferences for their local and national culture(s).

Habitus only makes sense in specific local contexts or fields of networks and relations between positions (Lawler, 2008: 131). We cannot separate the local from the global, as modernity, in Gupta's terms, moves in "baby-steps", but it also means that the local is not produced by the global. As social anthropologist Jonathan Friedman (2007: 110-111) critically states against hyperglobalist or evolutionistic perspectives: "...there is a world culture, and people, information, money, and technology all flow around the globe in a rather chaotic set of disjunctive circuits that somehow bring us all together". In localities people usually transform the actual meanings of external cultural influences, and reinterpret or rearrange global influences to fit local cultural norms and value systems. As Tomlinson (1999: 9) fundamentally underlines most people are not world travellers and human time and space is foremost found in local life. During my field study I for example had numerous conversations with a female CC-agent about a prospective interview, but many times she was difficult to reach over the phone due to her night-time shifts and daytime sleep patterns. When she did not answer her phone a popular music song was played instead of a ring tone. During repeated calls in the middle of scorching summertime in India over and over again I heard the song "Last Christmas" by 1980s British pop group "Wham". In my part of the world this song is usually only played in December, but since Christmas has no meaning in India this song is instead reinterpreted as a mere pop song that can be played in the summertime. Meaning is thus adapted and reconfigured in localities whatever the original meaning was of this Christmas pop song. To globalize culture thus is not to homogenize culture as local cultural forces will find ways to integrate external cultural influxes according to local

meanings and cultural frameworks. As social anthropologist Arjun Appadurai (2002: 165) underscores: "The globalization of culture is not the same as its homogenization, but globalization involves the variety of instruments of homogenization (armaments, advertising techniques, language hegemonies, and clothing styles) that are absorbed into local political and cultural economies…". Increased connectivity and ICT as well can promote heterogenization by for example facilitating more intense interactions between communities that share similar traditional customs and languages (Schirato & Webb, 2003: 157).

In conclusion, this field study provides an empirically grounded commentary about globalization and social change processes as grounded in local cultural realities, which many times are rigid and resist change and at other times are renegotiated as identities are pulled between the forces of modernity and tradition. In order to understand the potential influence of social change from the scope of globalization we therefore need to conduct research on the local level if our aim is to understand how people construct meaning and navigate between social positions in relation to the variable influences of globalization. The transnational call-center phenomenon and its actors is an evident example of this.

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APPENDICIES

I INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS

Name (pseudonym)	*Alias*	*Age*	*Home State*	*Lives with family/alone*	*BPO Experience*	*Customer Countries*
Nikhil	Rafael	22	Bihar	Independent	25 months Inbound, Outbound	US, UK, Latin America, Spain
Talan	David	23	Delhi	Parental home	15 months Outbound	US
Anjali	*Mary*	20	Delhi	Parental home	12 months Inbound, Back office work	US, UK
Naima	*No alias* *	20	Delhi	Parental home	11 months Inbound	US
Shreya	*Michelle*	20	Delhi	Parental home	6 months Inbound, Outbound	US
Pranav	John	20	Delhi	Parental home	13 months Inbound	US, UK, Canada, Ireland, Mexico, Africa, Philippines
Ayana	*Jennifer*	22	Bihar	Independent	24 months Outbound, Inbound	US, Mexico
Rishi	Ethan	21	Delhi	Parental home	3 ½ months Outbound	US
Sandeep	No alias	25	Uttaranchal	Independent	18 months, Inbound	US, UK
Deepak	No alias	26	Bihar	Independent	+ 25 moths Inbound	US
Narain	No Alias	26	Kashmir	Independent	19 months, Outbound, Inbound	US
Amol	Phillip	23	Uttaranchal	Independent	3 months, Outbound	US
Chander	No Alias	22	Delhi	Independent	36 months, Inbound	US, Canada
Vijay	**	28	West Bengal	Independent	+ 12 months, Outbound	US
Rohan	No Alias	24	Assam	Independent	+ 24 months Inbound	US, UK

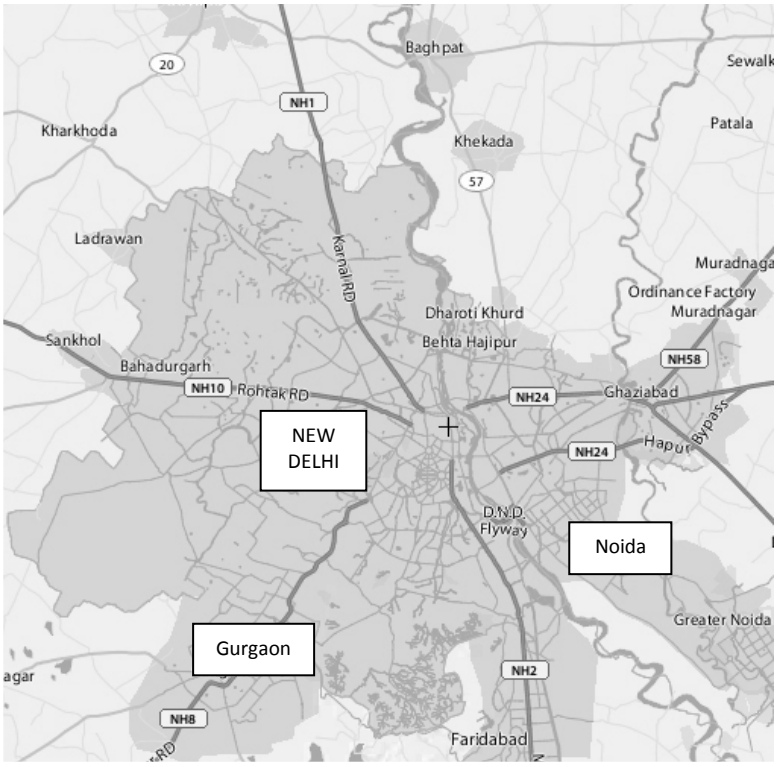
* Female

** Did not disclose his alias

II MAPS

Map of *India*.

Map Source: Google Maps.



The *National Capital Region of Delhi*. This region includes the National Capital Territory of Delhi, and the bordering urban areas in the states of Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan. *Gurgaon* is located in Haryana, while *Noida* is located in Uttar Pradesh.

Map Source: Yahoo Maps

III PICTURES

The NH-8 highway border between Delhi and Gurgaon, and the entrance to "shining India" in Gurgaon: New high ways, bill boards, multinational companies, modern multistory buildings, shopping malls, and gated communities.

The Ambience shopping mall in Gurgaon. Currently the largest shopping mall in India with 300 shops. A five star hotel is also attached to this shopping complex. Next door a new shopping mall called "The mall of India" is under construction. When completed this complex will be one of the largest shopping malls in the world (4.5 million square feet).

A new *domestic* and *multinational* business area in Gurgaon. This business area is located next to most of the shopping malls.

The DLF Gateway Tower. An illuminating 12-strorey building in Gurgaon. Some of the tenants are BPO companies that provide call-center services. This building belongs to the largest Indian real estate development company DLF, and is located next to multinational companies such as Ericsson.

A Call-center area in Gurgaon's "Electronic City" district.

A typical Call-center area in Gurgaon where new office buildings are situated next to old buildings.

A gated *IBM call-center* in Gurgaon.

Left: *New real estate* developments in the affluent parts of Palam Vihar in Gurgaon.
Right: An image of *new and traditional India* in Palam Vihar, Gurgaon.

The other side of Gurgaon. Many such poor areas are found in or around the business and call-center areas in Gurgaon.

Left: Poor area close to some of the largest call-centers and businesses in Gurgaon. Right: The poorest people in Gurgaon live under high-way bridges between the call-center areas and the new shopping malls and business centers.

Traffic in New Delhi – traditional and new India.

Street life in central New Delhi.

Jawaharlal Nehru University, South Delhi.

The New Delhi Railroad Station.

IV INTERVIEW GUIDE

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Age
Gender
Marital status
Highest level of education
Home state
Type of call centre/service
Work hours/shifts
Work experience
Calls/shift (average)
How long is the average customer call?

CALL-CENTER WORK & TRANSNATIONAL INTERACTION

Have you worked in any other workplace outside the BPO CC-sector? Differences and similarities? E.g. regulations, rules of conduct, dress code, interior design, "organizational culture"?

What does it take to be recruited in the CC-sector? What qualities do recruiters look for? E.g. young and/or unmarried people? Language and social skills? Other skills?

How was your first week in this work setting? How was it to interact with customers from other countries for the first time?

How can a CC-agent fail in his/her work? I.e. what can you not say/do – cultural sensitivity?

How much training did you receive? What kind of training is provided, and how long? How are you familiarized with the customers' cultures? Movies, documentaries, workshops? Do you receive continuous training? Are your skills reassessed?

When you are working with e.g. US-customers are you instructed to "sound American"? Or is the aim to sound "neutral", i.e. "non-Indian" in your case?

Is your work place "social" during work hours? I.e. do you interact with colleagues, or are you mostly working in a booth with the calls? Is there any teamwork involved?

Do you work with one or many aliases? How do you choose your alias(es)? If you have used the same alias for a long time has it become a part of you? Do you also answer to your "Western" name/alias outside the call center? Is the alias concept a form of acting?

Do you work with certain scripts? Examples? Are you allowed to disclose your location in India when you are interacting with Western customers?

Is interaction and communication different in some way when speaking to Indians compared to "Western" customers? Are there differences between the different client countries?

What are the benefits from working in this industry?
- Knowledge about the world and self?
- Financial benefits?
- Community improvements/development?
- New friends and expanding social networks?
- Improved language skills?
- Professional development?
- How does India benefit?
- Other positive benefits?

What are the negatives aspects about this industry?
- Stress and tensions due to nighttime shifts? Sleep patterns?
- Are your interactions with your local community reduced due to your nighttime work?
- Relationships with friends (from outside the call-center sector) and family?
- Is your Indian identity "held back" during work hours?
- Are you overeducated for this job? Temporary work role, or long-term commitment?
- Is this form of globalization a "one-way" cultural "exchange"? "Western bias"?
- Ethical aspects? Implying to be located in for example the US while you are not?
- Hostile/aggressive customers: Political aspects - outsourcing?

SOCIAL CHANGES & TRANSNATIONAL WORK

Have you or something about you changed in any way since you started working in the BPO industry? What do you do during your free-time to distance yourself from your work?

Has your perception of your locality and Western localities and cultures/nations changed? Do you experience a new global distance or closeness?

Social changes experiences due to CC-work?
- Change of relationship with your local community and family/friends?
- Change of status? Independence?
- Change of habits, interests, and ways of speaking?
- New friends and social networks?
- New habits – such as going to the shopping mall and pubs, "Western movies" etc?

Change of identity/how you view yourself? Increased individualization? Less tradition? New ambitions and goals, or new insecurities?

Are gender roles different in this work field compared to the rest of society? A source of empowerment? Do CCs improve gender equity and independence among young people?

PERCEPTIONS ABOUT GLOBALIZATION

How do you perceive globalization from your life and work experiences? What is globalization according to you?

What are your reflections about the role and possible purposes of globalization?
- *Business and Economic* – global markets, trade, outsourcing, efficiency?
- *Cultural and Social* – global awareness? "Homogenization of the world?" I.e. common codes and practices? Sense of belonging to a globalized world? A "single" social and cultural setting? Connectivity – is your local life connected to the global world? Heterogeneity? I.e. a blend or hybridization of cultures?
- *Political and institutional* – "global and local issues", transnational social, economic and environmental interaction and cooperation.

Do you think or experience that time and space are compressed? For example, you are usually working throughout the night, and you are able to interact with people from the other side of the globe through ICT. Do you feel closer to the rest of the world – or the parts of world that you interact with?