

Return of the Global Indian

Software Professionals and the Worlding of Bangalore

▲ CAROL UPADHYA

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Indian information technology (IT) professionals are a key example of this type of migration. As a group of mobile, transnational knowledge workers circulating within the global information economy, IT professionals have become a highly visible segment of the Indian diaspora in the West. While the dominant trend for several decades has been the movement of highly educated professionals from India to the West, many of these high-tech migrants have recently been induced to return to India—in part due to its newfound image as an emerging economy following the economic liberalization program of the late 1990s. The city of Bangalore

in particular, with its burgeoning software industry, is viewed as a place that offers economic opportunities and lifestyles similar to those available abroad. Data on this reverse flow are unreliable, but the Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs has estimated the number of returnees at 10,000 to 20,000 a year since 2000, and a NASSCOM (the software industry association) report claims that 35,000 IT professionals returned to Bangalore alone between 2000 and 2004 (Varrell 2011, 305).¹ These figures represent only a small proportion of highly educated international migrants from India, but they point to a significant shift in the migration pattern of skilled professionals, from a “brain drain” to a “brain gain” (see Chacko 2007; Khadria 1999).

The sojourn abroad, and the subsequent return of IT professionals to work or invest in Bangalore’s software industry, is linked to the reconstitution of the nation and citizenship as well as to transformations in the urban milieu. I describe an emerging “global Indian” form of citizenship and identity that has been largely promulgated by the Indian state in its efforts to encompass Overseas Indians (the official nomenclature) within the national community, but which also has provided transnational professionals with new strategies for claiming, creating, and negotiating citizenship. This neonationalist discourse converges with the patriotic narratives of Indians living abroad who desire to give back to the motherland and help to build the “new India” by returning to share their wealth, knowledge, and entrepreneurial skills. The themes of return and the “new India” are both marked by the idea of the “global”, which in turn signifies modernity and progress. But they are by no means placeless projects.² In this chapter I also explore how this kind of neonationalism is played out on the ground through returnees’ strategies of emplacement, especially in the case of Bangalore. Returnees, driven by a desire to help India take its rightful place in the world, bring with them new ideas about modernity and proper civic life through which they reenvision the city as a global place. These practices of place making have clear material outcomes for urban society, economy, and politics. They also neatly dovetail with the program of neoliberal urban redevelopment that has been promoted by political and economic elites in order to transform Bangalore into a so-called world-class city. I flesh out this argument through an examination of the narratives and practices of IT professionals living abroad and those who have returned to Bangalore. I also look at broader discourses that circulate within transnational social fields inhabited by Overseas Indians and those living in Bangalore, especially through cyberspace and the media.³

A few clarifications about the notion of “return” and the cohort of IT professional returnees interviewed in Bangalore are in order. In many cases, the return of software professionals to Bangalore is not a simple move back home but is just one journey within a larger pattern of circular or multinodal transnational mobilities. Most Indian software workers are deployed on temporary contracts (“bodyshopped”) or are employed by Indian software services companies who send them abroad on short-term onsite assignments (see Upadhyia and Vasavi 2008; Xiang 2007).⁴ But many IT professionals and other highly educated migrants connected with the IT industry have migrated more or less permanently to Western countries, or hope to do so.⁵ However, even for IT professionals who have obtained a permanent-residence permit or foreign citizenship, the plan to settle down abroad is usually contingent, and the dream of return always hovers in the background. Moreover, for some techno-managerial professionals, coming back to India is not really a process of return but is just another stage in a transnational career strategy. In the context of career-driven global mobility, the terms *migration* and *return migration* do not really capture the complexity of these movements. In this chapter I primarily draw on the narratives and experiences of those who have lived abroad for a number of years and have then chosen to return to India, leaving aside for the present purpose the larger number of circulatory techno-migrants who come and go at frequent intervals (Ong 2005b).

The majority of techno-migrants as well as returnees are lower-level routine programmers or middle-level managers. However, a significant subcategory consists of those who have risen to senior levels in large tech companies in the United States and elsewhere and have been deputed to head their Indian subsidiaries. According to one source, 95 percent of foreign-owned multinational software companies in Bangalore are headed by Indians who have lived and worked abroad—mostly in the United States (Kapur 2002; cited in Chacko 2007, 136). A top headhunter (recruitment agent) estimated that around 250 to 300 high-level executives of IT companies in Bangalore have come back from the United States. In addition, a number of returnees relocate to India in order to start their own IT companies, feeding into Bangalore’s growing startup culture. These entrepreneurs often shuttle between Bangalore, Europe, East Asia, and the United States as they look after their business interests that straddle several borders (Upadhyia 2004). This chapter focuses primarily on these higher- and middle-level professionals and entrepreneurs, who in the popular imagination are the archetypal “global Indians.” They also epitomize the neo-

nationalist ideological stance and emplacement strategies of returnees in Bangalore.

Return and Neonationalism

Most returnees in Bangalore appear to be IT professionals in the younger and middle-aged groups who come back to India to work in the software industry or start their own companies. AnnaLee Saxenian (2004, 176–77) notes that until the 1990s, few of the thirty thousand Indian professionals working in Silicon Valley returned to India, unlike in the case of Taiwan where the return migration of engineers played a key role in realizing the “Taiwan miracle.” However, from around 2000 the pattern of Chinese “astronauts” (referring to Chinese families whose members shuttle between Greater China, North America, and other places; see Ley and Kobayashi 2005; Ong 1999) began to be replicated among transnational Indian IT entrepreneurs and professionals, suggesting that the earlier pattern of brain drain is being replaced by “brain circulation” (Saxenian 2004). By most accounts, this reverse brain drain has been stimulated by the rapid growth of the Indian economy following liberalization; the rise of the software industry, which opened up new employment opportunities for highly educated professionals; the wider availability of consumer goods and leisure industries that cater to the upwardly mobile middle classes, which made India more attractive to returnees by affording them lifestyles similar to those that they enjoyed in the West; and the more difficult economic and political environment in the United States after September 11 and the subsequent series of economic crises. In contrast to earlier decades, India is now viewed as a place where IT professionals can both advance their careers and be “at home.” Kishore, a marketing professional employed by a large American computer chips manufacturer, who relocated to Bangalore in 2005 after living in the United States for ten years, said:

I am not really keen on coming back to India just because it is my birthplace. But from what my friends and associates tell me, things are going to move out to India in a big way. I want to be here to catch all the action happening. Also, I feel I have saturated there. I get paid well. Yet, I feel I am not doing much there. It is time I moved out to a different place. Experience a new place and new people. I am ambitious and I want to have new challenges.

But these economic and technological developments are not the only driving forces behind the return flows. This chapter calls attention to the political, cultural, and moral dimensions of return migration.

Politically, strategies of return and practices of citizenship among migrant professionals have shaped, and been shaped by, India's policies toward Non-resident Indians (NRIs), or Indian citizens living abroad,⁶ and Overseas Indians (the current official designation for a broad range of people of Indian origin who are citizens of foreign countries). Unlike several East and Southeast Asian countries (Ong 2005a), India has not actively or systematically encouraged the return of highly skilled migrants as a development strategy. Instead, the Indian government has viewed techno-professional NRIs as a brain bank that can be tapped for financial resources and perhaps expertise from a distance (Kapur 2003; Khadria 2001). NRIs were initially courted by the Indian government in the 1970s as a significant source of remittances, foreign exchange, and capital investment (Lessinger 1992), and NRIs were encouraged to invest in India through the provision of special legal and economic privileges, such as favorable interest rates.⁷ More recently, the state's interest in cultivating Overseas Indians has expanded beyond narrow economic goals, especially under the coalition government led by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP, or "Indian People's Party"), a right-wing Hindu nationalist party that came to power in 1999. This government floated the concept of a "global India" encompassing people of Indian origin (even several generations removed) across the world, similar to the category of "Chinese living overseas" (Nonini and Ong 1997, 9). India was reimagined as a potentially powerful country that is culturally (rather than geographically) defined through a transnationalized version of *hindutva* (a right-wing and exclusionary political ideology that promotes "Hinduness" as the basis of Indian culture; see Rajagopal 2000). Shampa Biswas writes, "In calling on Indian-Americans to contribute to the Indian economy, the Indian state has hailed them as 'Indians,' reminding them of their (cultural) connections to India" (2005, 58). This culturally redefined idea of the nation, which enjoins material, political, and other kinds of contributions by "citizens" living abroad, has been embraced by many NRIs and RNRIs (returned NRIs) who inhabit transnational social fields such as the one constituted by the circulation of IT capital and labor (van der Veer 2005).

India's approach to "transnational governance" has undergone significant shifts since the 1990s (Dickinson and Bailey 2007, 758), representing

alterations in the prevailing notions of nation and citizenship. For instance, the government promulgated several changes in citizenship laws in order to create an official “global Indian” category of quasi-citizenship. A long-standing demand of the NRI lobby has been that India should permit dual citizenship, which would accord legal recognition to their transnational existence and greater ease of transactions and movement. Overseas Indians argue that dual citizenship will enable them, as patriotic diasporic subjects, to participate more fully in India’s development even while retaining the “safety” of a foreign passport (see Faist 2000, 209–10). To address this demand, the Persons of Indian Origin (PIO) scheme was announced in 2002, which granted special rights such as visa-free entry and property ownership to certain categories of “people of Indian origin” who have acquired foreign citizenship. In 2005 the government went a step further by introducing an additional category of “Overseas Citizenship of India” (OCI), which provides a sort of quasi-citizenship for Indian-origin foreign nationals (Anupama Roy 2006).⁸ These state actions concretized the official construction of a global-Indian community and effectively deterritorialized Indian citizenship (Anupama Roy 2008).⁹ They represent a form of cultural nationalism that at once narrowed the definition of the citizen to include only particular classes and communities of Indians and broadened the definition to encompass certain categories of noncitizens of Indian origin living abroad. Eligibility for OCI membership was initially limited to those who had emigrated after 1950 to particular regions and countries, namely North America, Europe, Australasia, Singapore, and Thailand. This ensured the inclusion of primarily middle-class, educated migrants who left India in pursuit of economic success, and the exclusion of descendants of indentured workers who were shipped overseas during the colonial period as well as more recent labor migrants to the Persian Gulf (Anupama Roy 2008, 242). The OCI scheme clearly targeted highly skilled migrants of the post-1970s generation (Varrel 2011)—especially those deemed to be professionally successful (Dickinson and Bailey 2007, 765–66)—which is in line with the class bias of Indian policy toward Overseas Indians that has aimed to construct a “neoliberal economic cosmopolitan community” (Edwards 2008, 453).¹⁰ These policy shifts have produced what Aihwa Ong (2006, 121) terms “latitudinal citizenship,” creating divisions within the diaspora based on transnational market relations (Vora 2011, 313–14).

The deterritorialization of the nation-state has been augmented by the intensifying “materiality” of diasporic relations (Werbner 2000). Most of the policies directed at NRIs since the 1980s have been oriented toward

garnering their resources, and more recently toward promoting NRI investment, for example by setting up Special Economic Zones (SEZs) exclusively for them. The reconstitution of Indian citizenship as well as the discursive construction of the global Indian community reflect a political reconfiguration of sovereignty and citizenship and are also firmly rooted in India's neoliberal development agenda. These policies have provided a mechanism and incentive for Overseas Indians who hold foreign passports to engage in business activities or freely pursue their careers across borders, or to return to India while retaining foreign citizenship—a kind of “flexible citizenship” (Ong 1999) or “diasporic citizenship” (Siu 2005) that has been particularly advantageous for affluent NRIs living in North America and Europe.¹¹

Negotiating Citizenship and Belonging

Mobile software professionals are located in a liminal political-legal position from which they try to negotiate between different forms of citizenship and residence within India as well as in the countries where they live and work. As a result, the legal categories that frame their global movements are invested with different symbolic meanings and are manipulated in line with their transnational life strategies.

For many NRIs, a foreign passport appears to be nothing more than a convenient document. Very often, a decision to apply for a U.S. (or other foreign) passport is linked to a definite plan to return, because it provides assurance that one can always go back to the United States if things do not work out in India. While return is often framed in terms of a nationalist desire to help “develop” the nation or a more self-centered ambition to “catch the rising tide,” returnees keep their options open for themselves and their children by retaining their foreign passports or residence permits. Like the Chinese “astronauts,” Indian IT professionals may return to India to pursue their careers or to reconnect with Indian culture, but plan to send their children (who usually have U.S. passports) back to the United States for their higher education. Kishore speaks about his plans for his four-year-old daughter: “I want Pooja to have an *Indian grounding*. That’s probably one of the main reasons I want to come back. . . . She speaks of Halloween and Easter. I want her to know Holi and Diwali too. . . . At least till her graduation she should be here. Then she can go to the USA again for higher studies.” Although this example suggests that highly skilled migrants have evolved a form of “flexible” or “graduated” citizenship (Ong

1999, 2000), most IT professionals living abroad still struggle with questions of citizenship, identity, and belonging.¹² Acquiring a foreign passport requires the formal revocation of Indian citizenship, which for many NRIs signifies renunciation of the mother country—a decision that is fraught with moral and political anguish. For this reason, several long-term residents of the Netherlands whom my research team and I interviewed in 2005 were eagerly waiting for dual citizenship to be legalized by India so that they could acquire Dutch passports without losing their Indian citizenship. The OCI category has partly resolved this dilemma: while it does not represent full citizenship it allows migrants to think of themselves as citizens of India and to enjoy most of the privileges of Indian citizenship, rendering the acquisition of a U.S. or European passport a mere formality. The availability of PIO and OCI cards has effectively transformed the notion of citizenship among transnational professionals into one that is in some ways flexible, yet is firmly rooted in a reconstituted Indian national and cultural identity.

Although the OCI and PIO policies were not formulated with the intention of attracting Overseas Indians back to India, an unintended consequence of these schemes has been the facilitation of such returns. Prior to 2003 many migrants were hesitant to return to India because of legal problems associated with foreign citizenship.¹³ Now, a foreign passport coupled with an OCI card allows them to live on par with other Indians in most respects while still being able to easily travel to and from India. For many NRIs, acquiring a U.S. passport is the tipping point that enables them to realize the dream of return. What is usually regarded as the final step in the assimilation of immigrants—attainment of citizenship—ironically has become the mechanism that allows them to return to the home country.

The redefinition of citizenship among transnational IT professionals is linked more broadly to the reconstitution of Indian identity, and the reimagination of India itself, from the autarchic nationalism of the freedom struggle and the early post-Independence period to the more expansive global-Indian identity that has emerged since the 1980s. The graduated form of citizenship that these policies have introduced is the legal counterpart of the figure of the global Indian that has been made popular by the mainstream English media—a new class of worldly, techno-savvy, progressive, and entrepreneurial professionals whose return to India will transform the social, political, and economic landscape.

Return as Reciprocity: Building the New India

For many IT migrants, the act of return is the culmination of a long series of movements and flows—including remittances to families at home, investments in Resurgent India government bonds,¹⁴ or support for charities and NGOs. Although return may be regarded in many cases as a strategy for consolidating their new class position or social status within India, returnees' calculations are not purely financial or practical. As noted above, returning to India is often represented as a form of reciprocity, a way to repay their debt to the nation by contributing to economic development and social renewal.¹⁵ In particular, they see themselves as helping India to become a global economic power—a “new India” that has cast off its Nehruvian socialist legacy in favor of rapid economic growth and capital-led change.

This attitude was expressed by several software professionals working in Europe, who voiced a nationalist pride in the IT industry and India's newly prominent place in the global economy. For them, software is India's special contribution to the world, a global industry at the vanguard of the new economic growth curve that will garner respect for India and Indians. The aspirations of transnational Indians merge into India's post-liberalization development narrative, and a newly assertive nation beckons Overseas Indians to return and be a part of this great change. The head of the Belgium office of a major Indian IT company put it this way: “I had a vision—that the Indian IT industry must grow large enough to be taken notice of, and this is what has happened. This was in the mid-1990s. Then, a lot of young people wanted to become software engineers because they thought it was a ticket to the West. But my vision was to position India so that people would queue up to come to India. And this is what is happening now.”

NRIs returning to set up their own IT businesses speak of building the nation through investment in the “knowledge industries.” According to the founder of a high-end startup in Bangalore who had moved back from Silicon Valley, professionals with the “right skills and mindset” are now returning to India, and this influx of brainpower and entrepreneurial talent will transform not only the Indian IT industry but also India itself. Rajiv, another entrepreneur who moved to Bangalore in 2004 after nearly twenty years abroad, is an example of this trend. He had established a successful telecom company in the United States, which he sold before returning to India to start a new enterprise. Soon after his arrival in Bangalore in mid-

2005 his relatives threw a welcome party for him, where Rajiv gave a long speech (in English) about his decision:

I am happy to be back. To my country. To my family. To my people. This country gave me a lot of opportunities, and I am what I am because of that. Now I'm here to give back some of what I took. It's my turn to serve my country. I believe that if everyone who has left our shores and gone abroad were to come back and do their bit for our country, we would go leaps and bounds ahead from where we are today.

NRI websites showcase the experiences of successful returnees like Rajiv, reinforcing the patriotism that is echoed in many returnees' narratives. In an article about Vani Kola, the founder of two successful tech companies in the United States, who returned to start a venture in Bangalore, the reporter notes: "Indians are going back. Many are younger folks who see an opportunity to become India's version of a [Vinod] Khosla or [Desh] Deshpande."¹⁶ . . . They want to jump into the nation's booming, crazy, thrilling tech industry and take advantage of their knowledge of both India and the USA. Some hope to get rich. Others want to help their homeland. Most want to do both" (Maney 2006). At the same time, returnee entrepreneurs highlight the obstacles they face as businessmen—bureaucratic red tape and corruption, inefficiency and inadequacy of basic services, and poor infrastructure, especially in software boomtowns such as Bangalore. Their desire to "develop" the nation along the lines of Silicon Valley goes hand in hand with the urge to reinvent and reform the city, urban governance, the polity, and society at large.

Emplacement and the City

I have argued that the return of highly educated IT professionals to India is not only linked to an emerging global pattern of expert labor circulation. It also reflects a neonationalist discourse emanating from the Indian state (and from the diaspora itself) that embraces these professionals as global-Indian citizens and bearers of a new globalized modernity. The return of global Indians is spurred and legitimized by the narrative and dream of a powerful "new India" that is economically developed and globalized as well as culturally grounded. Now I explore the articulation of global aspirations through the "worlding" of Bangalore—a process that is driven in part by RNRIS and more broadly by the software industry. Returnees re-

gard Bangalore as a place where they can live and work while still dwelling largely in the transnational social field that connects them with the West. While narratives about migration and return are usually framed in terms of the nation-state, other sites (both below and above the level of the nation) have emerged as key places where processes of globalization are being worked out—in particular the new “global cities” of the South. It is to these cities that return migrants mainly gravitate (Chacko 2007).¹⁷

Bangalore is seen by returnees as a “happening place,” because of the presence of the software industry and also due to the city’s purportedly cosmopolitan culture and the availability of sophisticated lifestyle services—a vibrant pub culture, good restaurants that offer a range of international cuisine, shopping malls with all the essential brand-name stores, elite international schools, and expensive gated communities and residential complexes. Bangalore has become, symbolically as well as materially, the place where the idea of the “global” gets linked to that of the “Indian,” a process that unfolds in part through returnees’ strategies of “emplacement” (Narayan 2002).

Making Place, Making Class

While returning transnational professionals speak of going “home,” their actual return is not to their places of birth but to an imagined “new India” embodied in global cities like Bangalore. Their sense of belonging and identity is wrapped up in global imaginaries of success and advancement, and the urban places where they live need to be refurbished and invested with new meanings. Return sets in motion a process of reterritorialization, driven by social and economic aspirations and diasporic longings, by which this home is created and materialized. While mobile individuals may construct their homes almost anywhere (Nowicka 2007), the recreation of India, or of particular places within India, as home involves a particular set of practices and orientations that draw on not only their experiences abroad but also imaginaries of the new India that circulate within the postliberalization new middle class (see Fernandes 2006; Upadhyaya 2009). To realize the dream of return and to lay claim to India as their own place, returnees must reinvent and colonize the city, in part by reproducing a model of contemporary living they have learned abroad. The act of return involves practices of emplacement as RNRIs attempt to locate themselves within the existing urban social matrix—putting down roots through the purchase of property, acquiring the material trappings

of a lifestyle that marks them as cosmopolitan Indians, and enacting their status as successful professionals through new social practices and the articulation of modern, enlightened values aimed at establishing their distance from the (negatively marked) “old India.” In this way, the wave of return has fed into ongoing processes of urban reconstruction that is linked to the implantation of the global software industry in Bangalore, as well as to the formation of new subcultures and lifestyles in the city that stem from the fracturing and transformation of the middle class.

This dual process of class making and place making is most evident in Bangalore’s high-end, self-contained, and heavily securitized luxury-apartment complexes that enclose within their high walls an array of recreational and domestic facilities on par with affluent housing complexes in the West. Real-estate developers in Bangalore explicitly cater to returnees by building exclusive gated communities that make it possible to “survive” in India through separation from the disorder and the environmental degradation of the rest of the city (see Bose 2007). These posh residential developments with names (almost always in English) such as Palm Meadows, Oakwood, and Serenity self-consciously evoke American suburbia or European-style luxury. Inhabited mainly by RNRIS, Western expats, and wealthy Indian business families, these enclaves, most situated in the periurban periphery of a rapidly expanding and increasingly chaotic “megacity,” successfully simulate affluent Western lifestyles. While many returnees are acutely conscious of, and even apologetic about, the contradictions inherent in their lifestyles, many believe that by introducing “better” ways of living they are helping to realize the dream of the new India. For them, Bangalore—or at least the locations within the city where they live—represents India’s future.

Returnees attempt to establish their class position by enacting a lifestyle that is distinct from that of the older, local upper-middle and middle classes—a cosmopolitan one that in practice looks outside for its standards and models while retaining allegiance to an abstract notion of Indian culture. Returnees’ narratives point to a constant search for the material appurtenances of this lifestyle—elements that are appropriately trendy, tasteful, and exclusive—Indian contemporary in style but “not too Indian.”¹⁸ The efforts of the returnees Kishore and Asha to establish their household in Bangalore illustrate this quest. This couple, in their mid-thirties, planned their relocation from the United States meticulously, making several visits to Bangalore during 2005 to find the right house in the best location as well as the best school for their daughter. During this lengthy process that

entailed many discussions with Bangalore-based friends and relatives and long tours around the city with real-estate agents, Kishore repeatedly said that he wanted to live in the most “happening” and “up-market” part of town. Their other requirements reflected the model of living they had become accustomed to in the United States: “I would like an independent house, but it should also have all the modern facilities like gym, club house, health room, swimming pool, huge gardens, you name it. . . . It should be a big house, with very high ceilings. And it should be close to these up-and-coming international schools.” While driving around the city in search of apartments, they frequently made disparaging remarks about the design of the buildings and houses they saw, which they thought compared poorly with homes in the United States. Kishore constantly criticized “south Indian homes,” which are not “up-to-date with style and design.” They finally settled on an apartment in a new complex located in a “hip” and central part of the city. They were happy with the location and facilities, but Kishore was concerned about the image that their address would convey because of the street name: “I wonder why they can’t name the road something else? Papanna Road sounds so silly; it doesn’t have the same class as saying, ‘Hey, I live on Lavelle Road, or Richmond Circle.’ *Papanna* sounds like some old, shoddy place.”¹⁹

While the software industry, with its more than 250,000 well-paid and well-traveled employees, has been a major factor behind the restructuring of class as well as urban space in Bangalore, the influence of returnees such as Kishore and Asha, who bring with them new aspirations and ideas about the “good life,” also appears to be significant. Within these larger processes of class (re)formation, transnational professionals emplace themselves as bearers of cosmopolitanism, a global-Indian identity, and contemporary international lifestyles, values, and social practices within an urban landscape defined by very different sets of social coordinates and histories. Globalizing cities of the South such as Bangalore are transformed by their transnational economic linkages, and also because they become sites for crystallizing diasporic imaginations.

Remaking the City

In addition to their pursuit of transnational lifestyles, RNRIs are remaking the city through direct involvement in civic activism and governance reforms. Returnees negotiate their reentry into India and positioning in urban society not just as successful migrant subjects who have achieved a

new social status but as carriers of a specific ideology, set of social values, and mode of living through which they seek to transform India. They return equipped with self-proclaimed enlightened, liberal, and forward-looking orientations and practices, which form a lens through which they judge India's disorder, rampant corruption, and *chalta hai* (easy-going) attitude. Many returnees desire to reform local society and government and to contribute to India's development through various forms of social work, philanthropy, and civic activism. Bangalore is envisioned not as a chaotic Third World megacity but as what India is (or should be) becoming—a modern, well-ordered metropolis run by an efficient and transparent government that is aided by enlightened civil society.

These acquired values have directly fed into the processes of neoliberal reform and urban redevelopment that have been under way in Bangalore since the late 1990s, in which the globally oriented professional and business classes, especially IT industry leaders, have played a major role (Upadhyaya 2009). To promote Bangalore's status as a world city, regional political and business elites in tandem with international development agencies and the national government engage in intensive programs of urban restructuring and infrastructure development. NRIs who return to Bangalore to take advantage of its booming economy see themselves as part of these larger transformations. Many RNRIs express a wish to "make change happen" by contributing to the remaking of the new city and a refurbished civil society.²⁰

The influence of RNRIs on middle-class public life and city politics in Bangalore became quite visible during the 2000s. To illustrate this, I refer to two high-profile RNRIs who are active in Bangalore, but this kind of civic involvement is seen among many other less prominent returnees as well. The first example is Ramesh Ramanathan, who gave up a successful banking career in the United States to return to India and become involved in public service. In 2001 he founded a civic organization, Janaagraha Center for Citizenship and Democracy, to push municipal reforms and citizen-centric urban development in Bangalore, such as decentralized ward-based planning and budgeting. Janaagraha's slogan is "be the change you want to see." Subsequently, Ramanathan became a key figure in the reformulation of national urban-development policies, especially through the Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission—a large central-government program that provides matching grants for infrastructure development and urban-governance reforms in selected cities (a program that has been heavily criticized by urban activists for its elitist bias).

Ramanathan was nominated as a “Young Global Leader” by the World Economic Forum in 2007.

The second example is Rajeev Chandrasekhar, convener of ABIDe (Agenda for Bangalore Infrastructure Development), a private-public task force that was appointed by the newly elected BJP-led state government in Karnataka in 2008 to revive the city and address pressing urban problems caused by rapid growth. The task force includes key bureaucrats and politicians as well as representatives of the private sector, especially prominent RNRIS (including Ramesh Ramanathan). Chandrasekhar is a successful entrepreneur who began his career with Intel in the United States and returned to India in 1991, subsequently founding BPL Mobile, one of the earliest private-sector telecom companies in India. Now a venture capitalist, he has been extensively involved in public activities, including being chairman of the Infrastructure Task Force of the Government of Karnataka (1999–2002) and a director of the new Bangalore International Airport. He is also a member of Parliament.

A major focus of such high-profile returnees is to develop urban infrastructure—widening roads, building flyovers and underpasses, working on the new international airport project, and so on—and to put in place the physical facilities needed to make Bangalore a so-called world-class city (mainly by facilitating mobility and traffic flow). These efforts in turn are expected to attract and retain foreign investment and the IT industry’s client base. The urban reform agendas of Janaagraha and ABIDe support this vision of urban transformation and the administrative and urban-land-market reforms that are deemed necessary to push through large urban redevelopment and infrastructure projects, including redrawing the map of Bangalore itself to create the largest metropolitan region in the country. In general, RNRIS like Chandrasekhar and Ramanathan advocate neoliberal and technocratic approaches to urban planning and governance, with an emphasis on private investment, public-private partnerships, and the introduction of the latest (usually imported) technologies. These “social entrepreneurs” also work closely with the state, whose policies are being rethought in line with this essentially corporate vision of urban development.²¹ As Thomas Blom Hansen and Finn Stepputat (2005, 30) put it, transnational subjects who have become “proper citizens” through their class, education, and sojourn abroad are recruited to aid in the “civilizing process” needed to make urban India livable as well as amenable to foreign capital.

Many ordinary RNRIS also espouse an urge to improve their environ-

ment by remodeling political and governmental processes. For instance, many of these RNRIS are active members of city-oriented websites and Internet-based interest groups that focus on urban problems such as environmental degradation, traffic congestion, and bureaucratic inefficiency.²² Similarly, young U.S.-returned IT professionals who populate the many large upmarket apartment complexes around the outskirts of the city organize their housing societies (residents' bodies responsible for the maintenance of common facilities) along the lines of apartment complexes in the United States. A comment frequently heard in residents' meetings, when problems such as garbage clearance or careless use of facilities are being discussed, is: "This could not have happened in the U.S."²³ Returnees thus bring with them a model of respectable living and civic life. By promoting a more "civilized" mode of existence, they help to establish the difference between themselves and the so-called old middle class or traditional Indian society.

Conclusion

I have explored the phenomenon of return migration among Indian IT professionals by locating it at the intersection of several broad trends: (1) the emergence of a new image of "India shining" in the era of liberalization, which is partly linked to the success of the software-outsourcing industry; (2) the creation of a global-Indian identity that draws on a new form of cultural nationalism premised on moral obligations of reciprocity rather than citizenship rights and duties, and is buttressed by legal changes that have underwritten practices of graduated citizenship among high-tech migrants; and (3) the worlding of Bangalore by political and economic elites in tandem with RNRIS' strategies of emplacement and class distinction. This assemblage of disparate processes points to the forging of new global pathways (Werbner 1999) through which international capital, expert labor, transnational professionals, managers, entrepreneurs, and cosmopolitan images of progress traverse and reshape the urban landscape of cities like Bangalore. These processes are also closely interlinked—the deterritorialization of citizenship represented in the OCI card is matched by the deterritorialization of Bangalore in the imagination of IT elites and RNRIS, for whom the city is largely an extension of Silicon Valley. At the same time, the globalizing of Bangalore is a project of a state eager to propel India onto the world economic stage, just as the reinvention of citizenship has been driven by a similar political agenda.

This interplay of the global, national, and local simultaneously generates within it a number of contradictions that are manifest at several levels. These include the category of the “global Indian,” who is legally a noncitizen yet a true Indian patriot, the affluent professional who comes back to serve the motherland yet lives a Californian lifestyle, and the schizophrenic city of Bangalore, whose worlding has created multiple fissures and dissensions. But these transformations also provide a resolution to the contradictions that they have thrown up. For example, the global-Indian identity allows returnees to think of themselves as participating in the advancement of the nation even while living and working in globalized enclaves largely cut off from the rest of the city.

Return is always to a home, and home is constituted by the migrant’s imagination, memories, and aspirations. In this case the home that IT professionals imagine is a future India, one that retains certain elements of its “glorious past” and ancient culture but that will soon leave behind the chaos and poverty of the current moment. The return of successful NRIs to Bangalore has aided the symbolic projection of the city as a place where the new India is being forged. Return also sets in motion simultaneous processes of deterritorialization and reterritorialization—reverse migration by IT professionals, impelled by both global economic trends and neonationalist sentiments, reinforces the remaking of Bangalore into a place that is attractive to mobile global capital and transnational subjects. The resultant processes of spatial and economic reconfiguration embed the city in the global while simultaneously inscribing the expanded space of the nation—conceived as a moral, cultural, and economic community—within the space of the reimagined city. Bangalore represents the new India, conceived not only as an economic power but also as a new nation and collectivity of citizens—one that crosses borders in embracing Indians with diverse nationalities, histories, and places of residence but that also incorporates them into an increasingly homogeneous transnational cultural and class identity. Impelled by the neonationalist dream of reinventing India, migrants returning to India have become, through their strategies of class making and place making, central agents in the realization of that dream.

Notes

1. Presumably these numbers do not include the large number of temporary migrant workers who have not acquired permanent residence or citizenship of foreign countries, but only those who have returned after relatively long sojourns abroad.

2. The term *global* appears in many contexts in contemporary India, from media reports to the narratives of IT professionals and entrepreneurs. The category has become so ubiquitous in middle-class and state discourses that it approaches Ernesto Laclau's (2005) concept of an "empty signifier"—one that is so malleable or multivalent that any meaning or function can be attached to it, depending on context. In this chapter there is no space to unpack the multilayered and often conflicting meanings of the global in different social fields (from the corporate world to middle-class lifestyles), or even for this group of transnational subjects, but the narrative should provide some sense of the shifting content and strategic uses of this category. While I sometimes use quotation marks to indicate these features of this term, their absence does not mean that I use the term to refer to a concrete set of processes or characteristics. Of course, in India the term *global* often stands in for the *West* or even *America*, but in combination with the term *Indian* it also represents a reconstructed national, modern, or class identity, a cosmopolitan outlook and subjectivity that is not purely Western nor traditional Indian. Moreover, it is a category that is under construction, highly mediated, and politically inflected.

3. This chapter draws on data collected for a study of Indian IT/ITES (information technology and IT-enabled services) workers in India and abroad that was carried out by A. R. Vasavi and me, along with a research team at the National Institute of Advanced Studies, Bangalore, between November 2003 and March 2006. The field research was conducted in Bangalore, India, and in the Netherlands, Belgium, and Germany during 2004 and 2005. The research project was funded by the Indo-Dutch Programme on Alternatives in Development and was conducted in collaboration with Peter van der Veer of the University of Utrecht (Upadhy 2006; Upadhy and Vasavi 2006). The material on which the chapter draws consists mainly of long unstructured interview transcripts, notes on informal interactions with IT professionals and observations in their workplaces and homes, and gleanings from news media and the Internet. The chapter also draws on my earlier work on IT entrepreneurs in Bangalore (Upadhy 2003, 2004), and subsequent research based mainly on secondary sources, media, and Internet research. The informants quoted here are all given pseudonyms.

4. This type of circular techno-migration has been facilitated by the H-1B visa scheme in the United States (which has the largest demand for software workers), which was introduced in the early 1990s to attract highly skilled temporary workers. Other countries, such as Australia, Germany, and the United Kingdom, have similar schemes that have facilitated the immigration of Indian IT professionals.

5. Temporary workers often view an assignment in a foreign country as the first step toward migration, and they may use the opportunity to search for regular employment and acquire permanent residence. Significant numbers of H-1B visa holders converted their status to permanent resident during the 1990s, swelling the number of Indian immigrants to the United States to more than two million (Chakravartty 2005, 61; Khadria 2001).

6. To qualify for the NRI designation—which carries certain financial and tax benefits—a person must live outside India for more than 183 days a year.

7. According to one source, since 1991 NRIs and people of Indian descent have ac-

counted for almost a quarter of India's direct foreign investment (Visweswaran and Mir 1999/2000, 104; quoted in Biswas 2005, 57). Although India is the top-most remittance-receiving country in the world (World Bank 2011, 13), state policies target investments by high-worth NRIs and tend to ignore the greater significance of remittance inflows from lower-skilled workers, especially from the Persian Gulf.

8. These changes in citizenship law were promulgated through the Citizenship (Amendment) Act 2003 and the Citizenship (Amendment) Ordinance 2005. An OCI card provides a few more privileges compared to the PIO status, but does not include the right to hold an Indian passport or political rights such as voting or holding office. Although many NRIs see OCI as a form of citizenship, India still does not allow true dual citizenship (i.e., it is illegal for citizens to hold passports of other countries). The NRI category applies to Indian citizens living abroad, while the PIO and OCI cards are like long-term visas for noncitizens of Indian origin.

9. The apparent expansion in the definition of citizenship embodied in the Citizenship (Amendment) Act 2003 has occluded a deeper ideological shift from the principle of *jus solis* (birthplace) to that of *jus sanguinis* (blood ties and descent) (Anupama Roy 2008, 223, 237). Under the new definition, the migrant, even when permanently absent and having acquired a foreign passport, remains "Indian" by culture, descent, and emotional attachment to the motherland (Anupama Roy 2008, 240). This shift is in line with global trends in which the sending countries of international migrants are "expanding extraterritorially by de-territorializing political membership" while receiving countries are "stepping up the pressure aimed at assimilating and securing the loyalties of their migrant populations" (Berking 2004, 110). In the case of India, these changes have been driven by a clear political agenda—the attempt to create a deterritorialized Indian nation or "global Indian family" that is implicitly understood as Hindu (Hansen and Stepputat 2005, 34).

10. In 2005 the new Congress Party-led government extended the right to apply for an OCI card to PIOs living in other countries, except for Pakistan and Bangladesh (Anupama Roy 2008, 244). But membership was still restricted to Overseas Indians who had migrated from India after January 26, 1950, thereby applying mainly to highly skilled migrants in western and Persian Gulf countries (Edwards 2008, 459). Kate Edwards (2008) argues that this shift in policy mirrored a wider change in popular perceptions of NRIs, from the negative image of "not required Indians" to the "national reserve of India." This transformation was closely linked to economic liberalization, which "involved in state projects in new ways some strategically selected communities of the wider Indian diaspora" (454).

11. In the remainder of the chapter I use the terms "NRI" and "Overseas Indian" in their common generic sense, and interchangeably, to refer to Indians living abroad regardless of whether they have taken foreign citizenship or PIO/OCI status, rather than in their narrow legal sense. Although rules about investment and taxation vary depending on one's citizenship status, the government has tried to woo all well-to-do Indians abroad across nationality and residence categories. As the following discussion shows, the distinctions between citizen and non-citizen, resident and non-resident, are in any case blurred.

12. For an illuminating example of how Indian businessmen in Dubai negotiate between various forms of citizenship and belonging—transnational, diasporic, economic, and cultural—see Neha Vora (2011).

13. Before the introduction of the PIO scheme, a foreign passport was a liability for those wishing to work or establish a business enterprise in India because one needed a special visa, a work permit that had to be renewed yearly, and other such clearances. In addition, economic activities were hampered by restrictions on real estate and business investment and steep rates of taxation, which have been considerably reduced following economic liberalization. Moreover, returnees who still held Indian passports would lose their rights to return to the host country. A key difference between the PIO and OCI cards is that with the latter, a noncitizen of Indian origin can apply for reinstatement of Indian citizenship after five years of residence in India (the normal rule is residence of ten years), adding another level of flexibility to citizenship rules that primarily benefit transnational professionals and entrepreneurs.

14. These bonds were floated in 1998 by the State Bank of India on behalf of the Government of India to attract investments by overseas Indians and foreign corporate bodies. They were issued in foreign currency including US dollars and British pounds, the purpose being to augment India's foreign exchange holdings and mitigate the balance of payments problem. The Resurgent India bond scheme raised \$4.2 billion mainly from Overseas Indians, while another scheme in 2000 called India Millennium Deposits raised \$5.5 billion (source: Shefali Anand, "Rupee's Likely Defender: Bond, India Bond," *The Wall Street Journal India*, February 3, 2013, <http://blogs.wsj.com/indiarealtime/2012/05/28/rupees-likely-defender-bond-india-bond/>, accessed February 3, 2013). Although these schemes are marketed as an opportunity to contribute to India's development, cynics note that NRIs invest in them mainly for their high financial returns.

15. Aurelie Varrel (2011, 306) suggests that the discourse of reciprocity is part of the mythology that has been built up around the figure of the NRI as a "necessarily successful but homesick professional" (as in the Bollywood movie *Swades*), and that the popular notion that returnees are driven by patriotic values is misleading. However, we should not discount the strength of ideological or cultural motivation. The particular form of Indian national identity that has been produced within the affluent diaspora in the West, together with the efforts of the Indian state to woo NRIs as a key resource for development and to incorporate them into the body politic, have produced a compelling affective discourse and sense of national belonging among many migrants. This is indicated by the substantial flows of diaspora philanthropy and other kinds of NRI involvement in the "development" of their home villages and regions across India (Geithner, Johnson, and Chen 2004).

16. Vinod Khosla and Desh Deshpande are well-known and successful NRI tech entrepreneurs in the United States.

17. Recent scholarly work has focused attention on the worlding of metropolises of the Global South that have emerged as key nodes in the movement of labor, capital, and expertise across the globe, often bypassing nation-state structures (Ananya Roy 2008; Robinson 2002). Such cities attract not only expat (foreign) professional

and technical experts who manage their new deterritorialized industries but also a new class of “national” transnational professionals and technocrats who return from sojourns in the developed world to their own countries to work or invest in these off-shore enclaves (Nonini and Ong 1997; Ong 2005a).

18. While dwelling in the West, many IT professionals conspicuously display their Indian-ness by decorating their homes with various “ethnic” objects acquired in India, but upon return they usually subscribe to international styles and fashion and tend to deplore everything that symbolizes the “traditional Indian” (unless it is a valuable antique object).

19. Pappana is a personal name in Kannada (the language of the state of Karnataka where Bangalore is located), and the street is probably named after a local notable of that name or a bungalow that used to be on that road.

20. The circulation of global capital and transnational professionals through the city are of course only part of the story of the worlding of Bangalore, which also includes government-funded urban redevelopment and infrastructure projects and the booming speculative real estate market. On the role of international and transnational Indian capital in urban redevelopment in Bangalore, see Goldman 2011. The tighter focus here on the return of transnational IT professionals draws attention to just one facet of the materialization of the “extraterritorial” within territories of the metropolis (Ananya Roy 2008, 827).

21. Another example of RNRI activism is R. K. Misra, the winner of the Lead India contest run by the Times of India media group in 2008. See Udupa 2011 for an account of this and other English media-led campaigns to reinvent Bangalore in accordance with so-called global standards.

22. See, for example, the website Citizen Matters, <http://bangalore.citizenmatters.in/>.

23. Sahana Udupa, personal communication, Bangalore, November 20, 2006.