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Call Center Workers in Neoliberal India:

The Production of Homo Economicus

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree Master of Arts
in Anthropology

by

Abraham T. Cherian Jr.

2015

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Call Center Workers in Neoliberal India:
The Production of Homo Economicus

by

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Master of Arts in Anthropology

University of California, Los Angeles, 2015

Professor Akhil Gupta, Chair

This thesis endeavors to delineate methods of examining Indian call centers and its workers from an anthropological perspective. It will explore the external economic and social forces including neoliberalism, flexible accumulation, and moral density that create conditions in which call centers in India can assist American customers, while at the same time remaining attentive to the external social forces that give rise to the individual. Moreover, this thesis will investigate the social forces that the neoliberal subject, homo economicus, internalizes by exploring neoliberal governmentality and the theory of practice. Beyond analyzing theoretical literature, this thesis focuses upon documentary films on Indian call center workers as valuable sources for exploring the actions and bodily practices of Indian call center workers. Ultimately, this thesis charts the ways in which the academic literature on neoliberal governmentality, time-space compression, pastiche, American cultural

imperialism, forms of capital, symbolic violence, and linguistic anthropology related to situated interaction can be affectively employed to interrogate how Indian call center workers conduct themselves on the local level.

The thesis of Abraham T. Cherian Jr. is approved.

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2015

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Introduction

“Homo economicus is an entrepreneur, an entrepreneur of himself.”

– Michel Foucault.

This thesis will attempt to elucidate a method of writing an anthropology of Indian call centers. It will begin by appropriating various theorists to come to a better understanding of the neoliberal processes and external forces that allowed for the call center industry to develop in India and shape the neoliberal subject. These processes will be revealed through examining theories on neoliberalism, flexible accumulation, the labor theory of value, ways of mitigating the rate of profit, the expansion of the division of labor, moral density, time-space compression, American cultural imperialism and pastiche (Durkheim 1964; Giddens 1971; Gopal et al. 2003; Harvey 1989; Harvey 2007; Jameson 1990; Mandel 1990; Marx and Engels 1976; Said 1994; Wolf 1982). The following two chapters of this thesis will investigate the external forces that have been internalized by homo economicus and how the internalization of these forces shape the actions and bodily practices of homo economicus. Homo economicus, in an Indian context, is the Indian subject who has been shaped by neoliberal governmentality. This thesis will use Michel Foucault’s neoliberal conception of homo economicus. Foucault believes that homo economicus is a self-regulating subject that is shaped by and has internalized competition and analyzes the world through a cost-benefit analysis. Furthermore, Foucault states that in the neoliberal era, “Homo economicus is an entrepreneur, an entrepreneur of himself”(Foucault 2008:226). Through considering biopower, neoliberal governmentality, the forms of capital homo economicus attempts to accumulate, and symbolic violence, these forces will be illuminated (Bourdieu 2000; Foucault 1990; Foucault 2008; Foucault 2009). The final chapter of this thesis will look at practices on

the local level by analyzing two documentary films on call centers, *John and Jane* (2009) and *Diverted to Delhi* (2003).

Multinational companies which started setting up call centers in India in the late 1990s, have established call centers mainly for cost savings. From the late 1990s to 2001 the call center industry had grown 30%-40% a year. By 2008, the projected annual revenue of call centers in India was 17 billion dollars (Stitt 2003). According to some estimates the Indian call center industry employs 350,000 workers (Bajaj 2011). 92% of the revenue from the Information Technology-Business Process Outsourcing (IT-BPO) industry, which includes the call center sector, has been generated from major metropolitan cities (including Tier 1 cities such as Delhi and Mumbai). Moreover 76% of IT-BPO employees are in the 18-30 year old age bracket (NASSCOM 2010). Furthermore the United States is the largest export market for the IT-BPO industry (Hindu 2014). The call center industry in India came about in large part because of the infrastructure changes that reduced the charges of making/receiving international phone calls through the use of information technology and satellite communication. This closed the gap between the costs of international calls compared to the costs of making phone calls within a country (Stitt 2003). In addition the labor costs are substantially lower with a typical Indian call center employee earning \$250 a month as well as not receiving benefits (medical, retirement) afforded to US employees (Bajaj 2011; Stitt 2003). Companies are also able to hire employees that have college degrees as opposed to less highly educated US workers. According to “The Global Call Center Report: International Perspectives on Management and Employment,” 70% of Indian call center employees are college graduates compared to 20% in the United States (Holman et al. 2007). College educated employees would be difficult to find in western countries for this kind of work (Stitt 2003).

This thesis will comprise of three chapters. The first chapter will explore the external social forces that allow for a call center industry to exist in India which serve American customers. It will also investigate how external social forces shape and produce the individual, create the possibility for Indian call center workers to negotiate amalgamated identities, and transform work, familial and cultural practices. Specifically the first chapter will examine neoliberalism, flexible accumulation, the labor theory of value, ways of mitigating the rate of profit, the expansion of the division of labor, moral density, the production of the individual, time-space compression, American cultural imperialism and pastiche (Durkheim 1964; Giddens 1971; Gopal et al. 2003; Harvey 1989; Harvey 2007; Jameson 1990; Mandel 1990; Marx and Engels 1976; Said 1994; Wolf 1982). The second chapter will reveal the external social forces that the neoliberal subject, homo economicus internalizes. It is through internalizing these forces that homo economicus comes to be seen as a competitive self-regulated subject that accumulates forms of capital dictated by symbolic violence. The second chapter will look at biopower, neoliberal governmentality, and the theory of practice in detail (Bourdieu 2000; Foucault 1990; Foucault 2008; Foucault 2009). Finally the third chapter will consider the external social forces and those forces that homo economicus internalizes in an attempt to analyze documentary films on call center workers in India. It will interrogate the everyday bodily practices and actions of Indian call center workers on the local level by focusing on the documentary films *John and Jane* and *Diverted to Delhi*. *John and Jane* is a documentary film set in Mumbai, India that observes call center workers in the workplace, at home, and while participating in recreational activities. *Diverted to Delhi* is set in New Delhi, India and mainly focuses on the practices of call center trainees who aspire to apply for call center jobs (Ahluwalia 2009; Stitt 2003).

Chapter 1

External Social Forces, Call Centers, and the Individual

The introduction outlined how an effort to delineate an approach to an anthropological study of call centers will be undertaken in the course of this thesis. This includes considering the external forces that shape homo economicus, the forces that homo economicus internalizes and how these insights can be utilized when examining practices on the local level through looking at documentary films on Indian call centers. This chapter will investigate external forces such as neoliberalism, flexible accumulation, ways of mitigating the rate of profit, the expansion of the division of labor, time-space compression, American cultural imperialism and pastiche in an attempt to illuminate a method of studying Indian call centers from an anthropological perspective (Durkheim 1964; Foucault 2008; Giddens 1971; Gopal et al. 2003; Harvey 1989; Harvey 2007; Jameson 1990; Mandel 1990; Marx and Engels 1976; Said 1994; Wolf 1982).

Neoliberalism and Flexible Accumulation

The late twentieth century in India has seen a shift from a more closed economy to a more open one as a result of neoliberalism. The implementation of neoliberal policies in India resulted in the growth of the information technology and call center industry. Neoliberalism has facilitated an intensification of capital accumulation and great flexibility in its accumulation (Gopal et al. 2003; Harvey 2007). The neoliberal economic reforms of the early 1990s in India paved the way for the current era of deregulation, which has encouraged an enormous investment of western surplus which maintains its rate of profit through expansion. This has taken the form of foreign direct investment (FDI) into India and has attracted multinational corporations to set up residence in India because the costs of labor are lower than they are in western countries. This has resulted in a boom in the specialization

of information technologies from software companies to call centers. These changes would not have occurred without state intervention and the changing of laws to favor neoliberal policies (Harvey 2007; Mandel 1990).

The era of neoliberalism more broadly was ushered in as a result of the global economic crises of the 1970s in the United States. Prior to neoliberalism, embedded liberalism, which advocated a strong social welfare state, strove for very low unemployment and provided rates of high growth in the United States during the 1950s-1960s. However because of the cost of the Vietnam War and the cost of social programs, growth rates had declined by the 1970s. This combined with the strength of unions and their ability to command high wages led to a decline in the rate of capital accumulation. Consequently, the economic and political power of the capitalist class also declined during this period. This led to flexible accumulation policies which allowed the capitalist class to bypass union constraints. Proponents of neoliberalism advocate strong private property rights, free markets, free trade and a curtailing of state intervention as well as the social welfare state. Advocates believe this promotes a greater social good through ideals they hold dear such as freedom and individual liberties (Harvey 2007).

The aim of neoliberalism is capital accumulation through the extraction of surplus-value. What distinguishes the neoliberal era from previous eras is the intensification of capital accumulation. As mentioned above, this has been accomplished through flexible accumulation (Harvey 2007). David Harvey explains that flexible accumulation,

...rests on flexibility with respect to labour processes, labour markets, products and patterns of consumption. It is characterized by the emergence of entirely new sectors of production, new ways of providing financial services, new markets and above all, greatly intensified rates of commercial, technological and organizational innovation...the time horizons of both private and public decision-making have shrunk, while satellite communication and declining

transport costs have made it increasingly possible to spread those decisions immediately over an ever wider and variegated space. [Harvey 1989:147]

Flexible accumulation has increased the amount of labor available without the migration of workers to different countries through the use of information technologies. In the case of Indian call centers, flexible accumulation allows for the use of Indian labor to work in different time zones without workers having to leave India in order to service customers in western countries. Thus technology facilitates a large reserve army of labor without movement which increases surplus-value available to capitalists. Flexible accumulation, through the use of technology, has facilitated the organization and coordination of a global labor force and as a result eroded workers rights in western countries. Flexible accumulation has also aided the movement of capital. All of these characteristics have in essence occurred because of flexible accumulation, aided by technology, to compress time and space. Compression of time and space enables an increase in the rate at which a commodity is produced and distributed, and the ability to access commodities that were once in different spaces through technological and organizational means for the purposes of increasing capital accumulation (Aneesh 2006; Harvey 1989; Harvey 2007; Wolf 1982).

Mitigating the Rate of Profit and the Labor Theory of Value

As seen above flexible accumulation through the use of technology compresses time and space to mitigate the rate of profit by extracting surplus-value. Other ways to mitigate the falling rate of profit is to purchase cheaper raw materials, labor, and technology as well as to sell finished commodities in untapped markets. Market expansion is inherent for the capitalist to mitigate the falling rate of profit and a means of outcompeting one's

competitors. Further approaches to mitigate the falling rate of profit include changing laws and economic policies that favor those in power and privatization which requires a strong state to enforce regulations, the reinvestment of surplus in new industries and markets, and specialization, associated with a more complex division of labor, which increases organizational efficiency (Harvey 1989; Harvey 2007; Mandel 1990; Wolf 1982). Before turning to these topics though, it is important to understand why labor is the only commodity that produces surplus-value and why it is important for the capitalist to extract surplus-value. Understanding this in turn will illuminate why numerous paths are taken to mitigate the rate of profit which consequently is why call center work is outsourced to India.

In the capitalist mode of production, commodities are produced solely for exchange. The variables – including the means of production (tools, machines), raw materials, and labor power – that are used to produce commodities are bought or owned by the capitalist (Mandel 1990; Wolf 1982). While the exchange value of raw materials and the costs of running and maintaining the means of production are passed on to the consumer, the commodity of labor - specifically labor-power - can produce more value than it costs because the capitalist is only paying the cost of making and maintaining the worker – otherwise known as the reproduction costs. The reproduction costs for which the capitalist compensates the worker can be produced by the worker for part of the working day. The rest of the time the worker produces surplus-value for the capitalist which the capitalist accumulates. Therefore, the value that commodities embody is only a consequence of the labor of the worker. In the case of Indian call center workers, the reproduction costs of Indian workers are substantially less expensive than the reproduction cost of western workers. Purchasing Indian labor allows capitalists to accumulate significantly more surplus (Mandel 1990).

Neoliberal Practices of Mitigating the Rate of Profit and Their Effects

Capitalists are compelled to invest surplus in production to accumulate more capital to thwart competitors because competition is systemic in the capitalist mode (Mandel 1990). As competition becomes more fierce, the rate of profit goes down and eventually a crisis can ensue. There are a number of ways to mitigate the falling rate of profit. One way the capitalist mitigates the falling rate of profit is by investing in technology to more efficiently organize and reduce the costs of production and increase the output of commodities. There are other ways of mitigating the falling rate of profit that coincide with economic practices in the neoliberal era. Neoliberal practices seek to search for cheaper commodities (raw materials, labor, technology), expand into new markets, change laws and economic policy and employ specialization, associated with a more complex division of labor, as a way of increasing organizational efficiency (Harvey 2007; Mandel 1990; Wolf 1982). Neoliberal practices and their effects include the threat and implementation of deindustrialization, the manipulation of trade laws, forging of alliances between the west and native elites in the periphery and, the exploitation of labor and resources. These practices have furthered the information technology and call center industries in India (Gopal et al. 2003).

The practice and threat of deindustrialization have been used to further capitalist goals in the era of neoliberalism. In the current era, multinational corporations have been able to dictate demands to third world countries by threatening to withdraw foreign direct investment (FDI) if they find the regulations, costs of resources, labor and taxes of other countries to be more favorable (Gopal et al. 2003; Harvey 2007).

In the neoliberal era, countries like India are participating in a system where the rules of the system are defined by those in power. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) and

World Trade Organization (WTO) also have a hand in brokering agreements which quell resistance from peripheral countries on capitalist reforms all the while claiming that these reforms will enable the peripheral countries to become competitive within a capitalist mode of production through the rhetoric of the liberatory and progressive aspects of the market (Gopal et al. 2003).

The organization of neoliberal practices has contributed to the entrenchment of capitalist logic. The periphery/center organizational structure facilitates capitalist transactions. The peripheral countries provide labor, and resources that are turned into commodities and are ultimately beneficial to western multinational corporations that operate in the peripheral country as an enclave economy (Gopal et al. 2003).

The powerful western countries forge alliances with the native elite of the peripheral countries and both parties benefit from this arrangement. Often times educated native elites from peripheral countries are educated in western ways. This comprador class in peripheral countries who implement the capitalist policies and facilitate the increase in the rate of profit for multinational corporations, stand to benefit by working along with those at the center (Gopal et al. 2003; Wolf 1982).

Organizational practices have also attempted to make the capitalist system more efficient. The extensive use of software databases in the neoliberal era enable multinational corporations to centralize operations, make administrative processes more efficient, and exercise an amount of control on periphery subsidiaries not possible prior to the existence of information technology. For example, the networks of today are much more sophisticated and allow for the real time monitoring of activities. These networks have real time consequences as well because these interventions allow for the control of the periphery without having to be present (Gopal et al. 2003).

Western capital is not only employing Indian resources and labor to further their gains but is also selling western commodities to the Indian consumer to further their surplus. Through the use of American technologies, Indian labor is used to aid companies to make software for export. Furthermore, rather than using indigenous labor to boost indigenous companies, often the cream of the crop is employed by multinational corporations based in the West to help them accumulate surpluses. In addition, the rate of growth of the use of computers and internet connections in India compared to western countries has risen exponentially. In much the same way as software companies, Indian labor is employed to staff Indian call centers which ultimately serves to increase the rate of profit for western multinational corporations. Moreover call center workers' contact with western culture through their training, and interactions with western customers, precipitates a desire to be more western which manifests itself in the consumption of western commodities (Gopal et al. 2003). Through flexible accumulation practices, which employ technology to compress time and space, Indian labor, expands the global pool of labor available to multinational corporations (Harvey 1989). The increase in the supply of labor available to capitalists decreases the costs of labor through the creation of a reserve army of labor, available to work, on a multinational scale hence increasing the rate of profit (Wolf 1982). These points are nicely summarized by Karl Marx in the following quotation,

The main purpose of the bourgeois in relation to the worker is, of course, to have the commodity labour as cheaply as possible, which is only possible when the supply of this commodity is as large as possible in relation to the demand for it, i.e., when the overpopulation is the greatest. Overpopulation is therefore in the interest of the bourgeoisie, and it gives the workers good advice which it knows to be impossible to carry out. Since capital only increases when it employs workers, the increase of capital involves an increase of the proletariat, and, as we have seen, according to the nature of the relation of capital and labour, the increase of the proletariat must proceed relatively even faster. [Marx and Engels 1976:415]

In the neoliberal era, flexible accumulation practices which enable an increase in the supply of labor available to capitalists is a proxy for overpopulation that Marx refers to (Harvey 1989; Marx and Engels 1976). Moreover an increase in the labor supply expands the division of labor and allows for greater specialization to facilitate organizational efficiency which ultimately serves to increase the rate of profit while at the same time dividing the proletariat through various occupational categories that are differently remunerated and which in turn have different interests for those in different categories (Giddens 1971; Mandel 1990; Wolf 1982).

With regard to the expansion of the division of labor, Marx argues once a surplus of more than basic needs is produced, an exchange economy can be created and the division of labor can expand. Marx believes private property and specialization are coupled with the expansion of the division of labor in an exchange economy. Marx explains the origins of the production of commodities and an expanded division of labor suggesting that each community's means of production and survival are dictated by their surroundings. Through contact with other communities, communities begin to trade goods. As demand increases, people specialize in making particular commodities for exchange. Marx's explanation of the expansion of the division of labor can also be applied to Indian call centers. As contact between Indian and western companies increase through flexible accumulation practices which compresses time and space, the division of labor expands and becomes more specialized (Giddens 1971; Harvey 1989).

The neoliberal era characterized by an intensification of capital accumulation compared to previous eras, uses technology amongst various practices as mentioned above to mitigate the rate of profit in order to employ Indian labor to increase surplus-value thus increasing

capital accumulation. The capitalist in turn uses the accumulated capital to invest in production to stave off competition. Moreover, an increase in Indian labor expands the division of labor which facilitates specialization, and organizational efficiency (Giddens 1971; Harvey 1989; Harvey 2007; Mandel 1990; Marx and Engels 1976; Wolf 1982). The next section will continue to explore the external forces involved in a proposed study of Indian call centers. Emile Durkheim's concepts of the division of labor, solidarity and moral density will be examined to understand how the individual is produced in a complex division of labor (Durkheim 1964; Giddens 1971). In addition, the concepts of time-space compression, American cultural imperialism and pastiche will be considered and how they alter the individual, work practices and family structure (Harvey 1989; Jameson 1990; Said 1994). Investigating these ideas will enable one to come to a better understanding of how the use of Indian labor for call centers expands the division of labor and produces the individual in India. Furthermore grasping the effects of the compression of time and space will help one to comprehend how it allows for the possibility of Indian call centers, the transformation of call center workers' identities through western pastiche, familial routines, and occupational habits (Durkheim 1964; Giddens 1971; Harvey 1989; Jameson 1990; Said 1994).

Solidarity, Moral Density, Expansion of the Division of Labor, and the Production of the Individual

In this section, Durkheim's (1964) concepts of the division of labor and its transformation from simple to complex through moral density, the cult of the individual and how the individual is produced will be examined in order to continue to outline a manner in which to examine Indian call centers. Before turning to these ideas though, it is necessary to first understand how morality and solidarity serve as stabilizing forces for societies and the

division of labor. Durkheim (1964) elaborates upon two types of solidarity. The more elementary form is mechanical and the more complex form is organic. Both types of solidarity serve to allow simple and complex societies to operate in a cohesive manner (Durkheim 1964).

Mechanical solidarity occurs in societies with an elementary division of labor. Solidarity or the kind of integration of society is established by the set of common moral beliefs (religion) that the entire population subscribes to. One way of assessing social solidarity in society is to look at the types of laws in society. Because society shares a common set of beliefs, laws can be looked to as an externalization of these beliefs. In mechanical society, laws are penal in nature. When laws are broken, they violate the collective consciousness and punishment is given to those who violate laws to avenge the violation of moral rules and to make the violator atone for their violation (Durkheim 1964; Giddens 1971).

Organic solidarity on the other hand is a different type of solidarity compared to mechanical solidarity. It comes about as the division of labor becomes more socially complex and specialized with an increasing amount of differences amongst various people in society. Organic solidarity is not based on shared belief systems and a strong collective consciousness but on knowing that one's occupation is helping society function smoothly in the larger scheme of things. The laws that are typically incorporated in an organic society are laws that are restitutive in nature. These laws require violators to atone not by punishing but through seeking to restore balance by implementing a restorative penalty (Durkheim 1964; Giddens 1971).

The cult of the individual comes about as a result of organic solidarity and a more complex division of labor. As a result, the basis of morality shifts from god to the importance of the individual and the rights an individual has. The cult of the individual

rather than traditional moral beliefs is the common moral basis of society that a specialized division of labor shares (Giddens 1971).

Through a complex division of labor the collective consciousness declines, organic solidarity develops (which presumes that individuals are distinct from each other), specialization occurs and individuals are produced. The division of labor becomes more complex as different societies begin to interact with each other. As a result, they become not as socially and economically divided. The neoliberal era in India through employing satellite communication and information technology compresses time and space which increases the pool of Indian labor, and facilitates the interaction of Indian workers with western customers as seen in the case of Indian call center workers. An increase of this kind of interaction between groups is called moral density. This interaction tends to increase as result of an increase in both volume and density of population in societies but can occur without population expansion. Moral density facilitates a complex division of labor which leads to the production of the individual and a decline in the collective consciousness (Giddens 1971; Harvey 1989; Harvey 2007; Marx and Engels 1976).

It can be argued that individuals are compelled to employ other practices of flexible accumulation to accommodate the needs of western capital in the postmodern era which seeks to accelerate turnover time in order to increase capital accumulation. In the case of Indian call center workers their identities and work practices have become flexible in order for multinational corporations to meet their ends (Gopal et al. 2003; Harvey 1989). This in turn has complicated and altered worker habits, relationships with family and friends, and workers' own identities. To better understand how the postmodern era has allowed for these possibilities, it is necessary to delve into David Harvey's (1989) work regarding the effects of time-space compression in the postmodern era as well as Edward Said's (1994)

ideas about American cultural imperialism and Fredric Jameson's (1990) thoughts on fragmentation and pastiche.

Time-Space Compression, American Cultural Imperialism, and Pastiche

It is critical to discern Harvey's (1989) concept of time-space compression and its effects to survey an anthropological course of investigating Indian call centers. Harvey's (1989) article, "Time-Space Compression and the Postmodern Condition," argues that space and time have been compressed in the postmodern era which has affected a number of facets of life. These include culture, politics, economics and society. Time and space compression and its effects have occurred as a result of flexible accumulation. Technological innovations in communications, transport, transnational media, and information technology have facilitated this (Harvey 1989).

The production of ephemeral images and the creation of experiences which can be purchased has increased the rate of turnover time. The time at which people consume has also increased at a more rapid rate. The production, exchange, distribution and consumption of ephemeral commodities and thus the increase in turnover time affects culture in a way where it is rapidly undergoing change. Fashion, labor practices and ideas change instantaneously. Commodities are thought of as readily available and expendable. This shapes societies in various realms, from goods, labor practices, values, identities, and interpersonal relations. In the case of Indian call center workers the effects of time-space compression allow for flexibility in their identities and work practices. This constant change and diversity leads to a fragmented non-cohesive society compared to the past (Harvey 1989).

According to Harvey (1989) space has also been compressed through technological advances. Through technological advances, people are able to connect to other people, media, and cultures immediately. This was not possible prior to satellite and information technology. This allows for the commingling of commodities from different locations in one space devoid of its origins, history and social relations. This in essence makes geographic space invisible. This phenomenon is seen in Indian call centers. Call center work which was previously performed in the west (including North America, Australia, the United Kingdom) has been moved for reasons of flexible accumulation (facilitated by technology) to large urban centers in India. Indian call center workers interact with American customers in a space not available prior to information and satellite technology (Harvey 1989).

Furthermore, time-space compression has allowed for the cultural forms of a dominating metropolitan center, the West, to monopolize representation and self-representation in the non-West. Edward Said's (1979) seminal work on Orientalism which traces a history of western cultural knowledge and representations of the East or Orient, representations that were always entangled in relationships of power and hegemony, also comprises of a significant discussion of the Occident's internalization and consumption of hegemonic Orientalist cultural forms and icons. Herein, Said (1994) later suggests that the late modern and post-colonial era is characterized by the project of western cultural imperialism that in turn, compresses and shapes the world in its own image for the purposes of resource extraction and trading commodities in new markets of the East. This project of cultural imperialism is facilitated by time-space compression. Hence American cultural imperialism unceasingly becomes a presence in the lives of call

center workers from accent training to cultural icons and conspicuous consumption that they attempt to aspire to (Said 1979; Said 1994).

Jameson's (1990) ideas on the effects of late capitalism in the postmodern era will be looked at to advance an anthropological means of studying Indian call centers. Jameson (1990) believes that the technological advances in the era of late capitalism shape postmodernism as did the technologies of previous eras such as the modernist and realist eras. However Jameson (1990) believes the postmodern era is ideologically distinct from previous eras. Values and politics become archaic very quickly and a fascination with dilapidated materials occurs which is a reaction against modernism's emphasis on high culture. These characteristics of postmodernism amongst others have come into being because late capitalism has found it increasingly difficult to rapidly create inventive new products of utility to fill needs. It has instead turned to quickly changing aesthetics as a way to increase the rate of profit. This has paved the way for a postmodern era of commodified aesthetics, and one in which the focus is on the present and any sense of history has been erased by accelerated turnover times (Jameson 1990).

Jameson (1990) takes great pains to distinguish the plight of the subject in the postmodern era. The subject is no longer alienated as they were in the modernist era. Instead, the subject has become fragmented and decentered in the postmodern era because of constant change and a lack of connection to the past incited by the rapid turnover times associated with late capitalism. Fragmentation erases authenticity and results in a synchronic combination of multiple elements. Authenticity, which is a key element of style, is based on a sense of the past and temporality. Thus the fragmented subject's authenticity, style and identity are non-existent because of rapid turnover times. Instead, pastiche serves as a synchronic placeholder for style. Pastiche takes styles from the past and imitates them in a

neutral way in the present without reference to its historical underpinnings. In doing so it transforms style categories associated with the original, into codes that have no link to the past (Jameson 1990).

Jameson's (1990) concept of fragmentation can be applied to Indian call center workers. Pastiche allows for the possibility of Indian subjects to take on amalgamated identities in call centers which serves as a site for different cultures, places and times that are compressed in one space. In addition the compression of time and space through organizational and technological means creates circumstances where Indian call center workers can assist western customers in different time zones through flexible work practices such as working odd hours and on days that were unthinkable prior to information technology and satellite communication. Being flexible and accommodating to the needs of western capital have come at a cost though. Traditional family structure, work and cultural practices and consumption patterns of Indian middle class families have changed (Harvey 1989; Jameson 1990; Said 1994).



This chapter has explored the external forces that have permitted the call center industry to develop in India and produced the neoliberal subject, homo economicus. The next chapter will investigate how homo economicus' interaction with society and bodily practices are molded through the forces homo economicus internalizes. It will specifically examine the processes involved in shaping homo economicus into a competitive, self-regulated subject that strives to accumulate various forms of capital. These processes will be revealed by considering Foucault's ideas regarding biopower and neoliberal governmentality and Pierre Bourdieu's theory of practice (Bourdieu 2000; Foucault 1990; Foucault 2008; Foucault 2009).

Chapter 2

The Internalization of Social Forces and Homo Economicus

The previous chapter uncovered how the individual is produced by the development of a complex division of labor through moral density. Furthermore the concepts of time-space compression, American cultural imperialism and pastiche were examined and how these processes facilitate flexible practices that mitigate the rate of profit in service of western capital (Durkheim 1964; Giddens 1971; Gopal et al. 2003; Harvey 1989; Harvey 2007; Jameson 1990; Mandel 1990; Marx and Engels 1976; Said 1994; Wolf 1982). This chapter will attempt to shed light on the neoliberal processes involved in call center workers auto-regulating themselves, incorporating the competitive aspects of the market into themselves, as well as attempting to accumulate various forms of capital by investigating biopower, neoliberal governmentality and the theory of practice. By exploring these topics, it is believed that one will come to a better understanding of how to go about conducting an anthropological study of the neoliberal subject involved with call centers and the external forces that the subject internalizes and how it shapes them (Bourdieu 2000; Foucault 1990; Foucault 2008; Foucault 2009). Before discussing biopower and the theory of practice in greater detail, a brief overview of these concepts will be given.

Overview of Biopower and Symbolic Violence

It seems as though Foucault (1990) and Bourdieu (2000) have similar views on power with different points of emphasis when considering biopower and symbolic violence. Both Foucault (1990) and Bourdieu (2000) believe power not only restricts. They believe that power limits and constructs possibilities. Furthermore they believe power is external to the subject and internalized by the subject. Specifically for Foucault (1990) biopower is a

type of constructivist power that on the one hand, regulates people on the level of the population. On the other hand, biopower seeks to implement disciplinary techniques on individual bodies. In both cases the subject internalizes these types of biopower. For Bourdieu (2000) symbolic violence is exercised on individuals by those in power through shaping societal structures and categories which appear to be natural which in actuality are historical. The habitus is in part the internalized social structure of a society within an individual (Bourdieu 2000; Foucault 1990; Wacquant 2007).

The History of Sexuality and Biopower

This section will consider biopower for purposes of surveying an anthropological approach to Indian call centers. It will begin by looking at how Foucault (1990) reveals that the modern discourse on sex is a conduit of biopower. Foucault (1990) discusses how in the 17th and 18th centuries speaking about sex became more constrained and silenced and contrarily how discourses on sex proliferated in order to regulate it. The way in which sex could be talked about expanded but was more controlled in terms of talking about sex vis-a-vis scientific categories rather than speaking about it in a humorous manner or conventional terms. Scientific categories entered the discourse because of the need for government to collect data about the population. This growing focus on sex made people become more aware of it and influenced them to talk more about it in sanctioned ways. As sex became an object of knowledge and of interest to power, non-marital discourses expanded in an attempt to control them. In the 18th century the discourse on sex grew in relation to children, schools, medicine, psychiatry and criminality (Foucault 1990).

Foucault (1990) explains how biopower as a new form of constructivist regulation bolstered control over non-marital discourses on sexuality by structuring how people can

resist subjugation and what type of knowledge is possible. Foucault (1990) also contrasts biopower from a previous repressive power incorporated in the sovereign which is characterized by the sovereign's ability to take things away, whether it be wealth or life from the people the sovereign ruled. Biopower on the other hand attempts to support and maximize individual life and the life of a population. Biopower is exercised over individual bodies by trying to implement techniques to make individuals more efficient and disciplined in a variety of arenas including schools and factories. Moreover biopower is exercised over the population in order to support and regulate it. Both of these types of biopower are incorporated into the discourses on sexuality. Subjects who aspire to know about sex and discover it are embracing and internalizing a type of biopower that has been prescribed by making sexuality an object of knowledge with the intent of controlling reproductive behavior to regulate the population. In a similar manner call center workers employ and incorporate forms of biopower to improve themselves in a manner which are shaped by and of interest to power (Foucault 1990).

Neoliberal Governmentality, Homo Economicus, Competition, Self-Interest, and Self-Investment in Human Capital

A shift to biopower has enabled the use of neoliberal governmentality as a means for neoliberal subjects, such as Indian call center workers, to regulate themselves. In what follows, an attempt will be made to trace the trajectory of neoliberal governmentality. As mentioned earlier, biopower is a technology of power that is used to direct the populace. It came to prominence as power shifted from the sovereign to an art of government through governmental apparatuses. As this shift from the sovereign to automatized, rational governmental apparatuses occurred, the incorporation of the market came into the purview

of the state which later transformed into neoliberalism which sought to apply market techniques to government and instituted a focus on competition (Foucault 1990; Foucault 2008; Foucault. 2009).

Neoliberalism seeks to maximize efficiency, curtail governmental action in favor of individual liberty and freedom. Governmentality aids in the neoliberal agenda of promoting liberty and freedom. Governmentality amongst other things entails the governing of the self through the regulation of possibilities and the production of forms of neoliberal knowledge and discourses which are incorporated into the subject and presented as choices in which the subject exercises freedom and chooses how to conduct herself. In addition freedom allows for the qualities of autonomy and enterprise to be incorporated into oneself in order to choose to regulate and gauge oneself in accordance with neoliberal principles. The self-regulated subject is the kind neoliberalism seeks to produce because it aims to limit government intervention (Foucault 2008; Rose 1998; Rose 1999).

Foucault (2008) views the subject shaped by neoliberal governmentality as homo economicus. Homo economicus is a subject that has been shaped by and internalized the market ideology of competition. Not only are homo economicus along with the market molded by a competitive cost benefit point of view but all aspects of society and culture are as well. Subjectivity is recast in capitalism whereby the relation between capitalists and workers is obscured and viewed differently. Both capitalists and workers invest in themselves in order to enhance their individual human capital. Human capital is typically thought of as competencies and talents but can include any activity pursued that is deemed appealing to the market which allows one to gain from interactions. The wages that capitalists and workers earn is refashioned as wages earned according to the amount of human capital an individual possesses. The freedom to pursue one's interests is a key feature

of neoliberalism where the computing and measured homo economicus selects from a possibility of choices that are shaped in a manner where the governmental apparatus makes desirable choices easier to pursue and undesirable options more difficult to engage in. As neoliberal subjects, call center workers attempt to accumulate forms of human capital by selecting options guided by neoliberal logic that are in their own interest and are ultimately of interest to power (Foucault 2008; Read 2009).

A transition will now be made to discussing Bourdieu's (2000) theory of practice and the different types of capital that individuals try to accumulate in the neoliberal era given the systems of meaning in a particular society and the symbolic violence exercised by those in power. These insights can be applied to Indian call center workers as they navigate the world of Indian call centers and accumulate forms of capital prescribed by it (Bourdieu 2000).

Analytical Tools of the Theory of Practice

In a continuing effort to detail a method to an anthropological study of call centers, Bourdieu's theory of practice will be examined. Bourdieu (2000) introduces us to a number of concepts in his theory of practice. He introduces us to habitus, capital, and field. Habitus is the learned temperament that one uses when interacting in society. Habitus is imparted by internalizing the external social structure which on an unconscious level shapes one's idea of what is possible and what is not allowed. However one's habitus is subject to change as one interacts with people and society and as society changes. The amount of change in one's habitus is limited by childhood influences and class background. Habitus is in effect structured by past social forces. Habitus also structures interactions and practices that one has with society in the present (Bourdieu 2000; Wacquant 2007).

The habitus one has is shaped by the amount and various forms of capital which, Bourdieu (2000) expounds upon. Bourdieu (2000) specifically discusses economic, social, cultural and symbolic capital and how these resources are used by people in society to gain from interactions they have. Economic capital are fiscal resources. Social capital, through being part of a group, allows one to leverage the resources of a group. Cultural capital entails the possession of culturally valued knowledge, and status and using it to one's advantage. Symbolic capital is capital that allows one to profit from having qualities of distinction that are valued by those in power in a particular society but are not recognized as capital. These forms of capital shape the habitus of call center workers which call center workers use to interact with western customers. It is possible to gauge one's habitus by examining the amount and type of capital one accumulates over time (Bourdieu 2000; Wacquant 2007).

Habitus and field interact with each other to shape the practice of the individual. According to Bourdieu (2000), fields are different spaces within society that are governed differently and have their own norms compared to other fields. Three features within a field are noted by Bourdieu (2000). Those who enter a field must abide by its conventions if one is to flourish within that field. The second feature of a field is there are contestations over capital between those (people, institutions) at the top of the hierarchy and those at a lower level. Another feature is the conventions a field uses and the degree of autonomy it has over controlling its conventions on assessment. In the case of the latter two features, those at the top seek to protect the distribution of capital and the standards in their field whereas those at a lower level attempt to change the hierarchy (Bourdieu 2000; Wacquant 2007).

The interplay of the learned temperament of habitus and the construction of social structure within a field limit and present a realm of possibilities of practice to the individual.

The individual's internalized habitus and the external social structure of the field and how they correspond or conflict with each other is analyzed to understand social situations and whether or not the social structure is reproduced or is transformed. Call center workers strive to accumulate various forms of capital, such as cultural, symbolic and social capital. These forms of capital are incorporated into their habitus which interacts with the field they are in to construct possibilities of practice for call center workers (Bourdieu 2000; Wacquant 2007).

It is through the use of the tools of habitus, capital and field that doxa can be better understood. Doxa is the logic of everyday life that seems natural. It is the unquestioned systems of meaning of doxa in a locality that forms common beliefs and unifies members of a locality (Bourdieu 2000; Wacquant 2007).

Bourdieu (2000) is critical of categories of thought and systems of meaning believed to be logical and culturally appropriate that are used by those in power to justify their position in society. These critiques that Bourdieu (2000) seeks to make is supported by his concept of symbolic violence. Through symbolic violence those in power impose systems of meaning in imperceptible ways that yield acceptance from those without power of the current power structure (Bourdieu 2000; Wacquant 2007).

Symbolic violence in turn ties into Bourdieu's (2000) concept of misrecognition. According to Bourdieu (2000) the individual does not understand that the existing social order is not natural but an arbitrary order shaped by the elite, and historical processes. While misrecognition in some ways allow individuals to function within society without constantly questioning society it can become a hindrance to clearly seeing the underlying power structure and their relationship to it. Those contesting doxa raise possibilities of being within society that challenges the established order. This transforms doxa into a questionable

orthodoxy which allows competing heterodoxies to vie for power. Those in power exercise symbolic violence on call center workers by shaping doxa and its unquestioned systems of meaning. As doxa seems to be natural, call center workers attempt to accumulate types of capital dictated by it. Through accumulating various forms of capital influenced by doxa, call center workers support and unknowingly exercise symbolic violence on those who have not accumulated forms of capital prescribed by doxa (Bourdieu 2000; Wacquant 2007).



This chapter and the preceding one have been devoted towards examining the ideas pertaining to the external forces that the subject internalizes in an attempt to outline a way to conduct an anthropological study of call centers. In the proceeding chapter, this thesis will investigate the everyday practices of call center employees. This chapter will employ time-space compression, American cultural imperialism, pastiche, biopower, neoliberal governmentality, the theory of practice and linguistic anthropology to illuminate the practices of call center workers (Bourdieu 2000; Foucault 1990; Foucault 2008; Foucault 2009; Goodwin and Goodwin 2000; Harvey 1989; Hutchins 1993; Jameson 1990; Moore 2008; Sacks et al. 1974; Said 1994). The films *John and Jane* (2009) and *Diverted to Delhi* (2003) will be critically analyzed in order to account for practices on the local level.

Chapter 3

Everyday Practices of Call Center Workers

The previous chapter uncovered the forces that the neoliberal subject, homo economicus, internalizes including neoliberal governmentality. Specifically it looked at how homo economicus governs itself by making choices based on forms of neoliberal knowledge and how the internalization of competition affects self-investment in order to increase one's own human capital. Furthermore it revealed that, through symbolic violence, those in power shape the forms of capital that homo economicus attempts to accumulate (Bourdieu 2000; Foucault 2008). This chapter will examine the films *John and Jane* (2009) and *Diverted to Delhi* (2003) to see how social forces affect the actions and bodily practices of Indian call center workers.

The Impetus of Establishing Call Centers in India, College Graduates, and Job Training

With technological improvements in satellite communication and information technology and the implementation of flexible accumulation practices and neoliberal economic reforms in India in the 1990s to reduce state intervention in the market, multinational corporations began investing FDI into India and establishing a new call center industry. This was done as a way for corporations to mitigate the rate of profit by purchasing and using technology to compress time and space to expand the pool of labor to increase surplus-value through purchasing Indian labor. Employing less expensive college-educated Indian labor allowed corporations to gain a competitive advantage over employing more expensive less-educated western workers (Giddens 1971; Gopal et al. 2003; Harvey 1989; Harvey 2007; Holman et al. 2007; Mandel 1990; Marx and Engels 1976; Stitt 2003; Wolf 1982).

For English speaking university graduates call centers are marketed to them as a “hip” place to work. They are provided with shuttle service to and from work, food, and

organized extracurricular activities outside of work as well as amenities such as fitness facilities and game rooms in the workplace itself. These amenities are provided in addition to salaries that are on average higher than those given in most industries. Amenities are included in part to mitigate the high attrition rate of performing customer service work, often times during late night shifts, with overseas customers. It is typical that employees will leave the job within six to eight months of being hired. As attractive as these jobs are for college graduates, employers are highly selective and these jobs are difficult to secure. With a 30% unemployment rate amongst college graduates many turn to call center colleges to improve their spoken English and customer service skills to increase their chances of getting a job at a call center. Having customer service skills to service western customers is necessary, in order to meet the needs of a new service sector that has developed as a result of neoliberal policies (Harvey 2007; Stitt 2003). Graduates are shaped by biopower and neoliberal governmentality and hence choose to invest in themselves and implement disciplinary techniques on the body. They accumulate forms of cultural, symbolic and social capital considered important to power to make themselves competitive in the marketplace. American cultural imperialism deems that Indian subjects mirror their American customers cultural knowledge and approximate their accents to facilitate the accumulation of western capital (Bourdieu 2000; Foucault 1990; Foucault 2008; Foucault 2009; Jameson 1990; Said 1994).

In India's call centers, employees are taught to speak like their customers. The impetus of having call center workers learn to speak with a different accent is related to the desire of western companies to not let their clientele know that they are calling someone in India and hence outsourced their customer service. This is despite American customers often recognizing they are calling an Indian call center. In addition western companies are

concerned with customers ease of understanding call center employees, as Americans tend to have difficulty dealing with others that speak in a manner different from their own (Stitt 2003).

The Analysis of the Practices of Call Center Workers Through Film

The neoliberal era in India is characterized by an intensification of capital accumulation compared to previous eras, through the use of flexible accumulation practices. Flexible accumulation seeks to mitigate the rate of profit by being flexible in production and consumption through the use of technology and increased organizational efficiency which creates the possibility of call centers in India serving western customers. Satellite communication and information technology compress time and space to employ Indian labor for western capital which serves as a proxy for over-population, increases surplus-value, and produces the individual by expanding the division of labor through moral density. Individuals themselves are compelled by western capital to adopt flexible identities and work practices, which alters family structure and relationships, that further the ends of western capital. These external forces affect subjects who internalize these forces and seek to strive to accumulate forms of capital that are prescribed by doxa. What follows are a series of examples from *John and Jane* and *Diverted to Delhi* in which the concepts explained in chapter one and chapter two will be applied to come to a better understanding of the external forces that Indian subjects internalize. These two documentary films have been selected because of their depiction of the everyday lives of call center workers in India. Together both films examine the lives of workers outside of work, at work, and in training. Moreover the films reveal the ethnographic intricacies of the lives of call center workers and the bodily practices that workers impose on themselves (Ahluwalia 2009; Bourdieu 2000; Durkheim 1964;

Giddens 1971; Gopal et al. 2003; Harvey 1989; Harvey 2007; Jameson 1990; Mandel 1990; Marx and Engels 1976; Said 1994; Stitt 2003; Wolf 1982).

While other fictional films such as *Outsourced* (2006) and the Hindi language film *Hello* (2008) are about call centers in India they caricaturize those involved with call centers and do not feature the everyday lives of call center workers as a central part of the story. *Outsourced* is a “fish out of water” tale revolving around an employee named Todd at a Seattle company whose work has been outsourced to India. Todd goes to India to manage an Indian call center and the film chronicles his hardships of living in a different country as well as the romantic relationship he develops with an Indian employee. *Hello*, based on Chetan Bhagat’s (2007) book *One Night @ the Call Center*, is centered around six call center agents. One evening after a party, the agents leave the party together and are on the verge of a fatal car accident when they receive a phone call from god who tells them to draw upon their self-confidence and faith to get through trying circumstances.

In contrast, the documentary films mentioned have been selected because of their portrayal of the everyday lives of call center workers (Ahluwalia 2009; Stitt 2003). The techniques used to make documentary films can be likened to the same techniques used in ethnographic fieldwork. As Bill Nichols notes, “Documentary [film] calls for specific techniques to give cinematic embodiment to lived encounter and historical events, experience and reflection, research and argumentation. It, like ethnographic fieldwork, calls for specific ways of being among and apart from those ultimately represented in words or film” (Nichols 1998:13).

John and Jane on the one hand, follows a number of call center workers in Mumbai, India. The film captures their everyday lives, not only in the call center they work at but also outside the workplace. The film manages to shed light on the lives of workers at home,

shopping, engaging in recreational activities and meeting friends. It is also able to document different workers with various levels of satisfaction of working at a call center. On the other hand, *Diverted to Delhi* follows trainees at call center training centers in Delhi, India and focuses mainly on the preparation trainees go through to eventually assume the duties of a call center agent. The film features trainees in the classroom, but also presents scenes of trainees meeting outside the classroom, at home, and being interviewed for jobs. *Diverted to Delhi* and *John and Jane* jointly survey the spectrum of how call center workers are trained, the actual work they perform, and their lives outside of work in the two largest urban cities in India, where most call center work is centered. These films have also been chosen because they visually showcase the bodily practices that call center workers incorporate into themselves in ways that other forms of media cannot demonstrate (Ahluwalia 2009; Stitt 2003). Moreover they serve as rich sources in which situated interaction can be analyzed using the tools of linguistic anthropology (Goodwin and Goodwin 2000).

Sarah Pink summarizing David MacDougall's work on the uniqueness of film asserts that film has the uncommon capacity to convey bodily practices and the experience of sensory information of the subject, "David MacDougall (1998) has drawn from phenomenological anthropology, the anthropology of the body and of the senses to argue that because the individual subject takes a central role in film it has a potential for communicating about sensory experience transculturally that cannot be achieved in writing" (Pink 2006:17). Furthermore, the unparalleled ability of film to reveal social and cultural information is succinctly formulated in the American Anthropological Association's (2001) statement on "Guidelines for the Evaluation of Ethnographic Visual Media," "Visual representations offer viewers a means to experience and understand ethnographic complexity, richness and depth, which are the distinguishing features of anthropological

knowledge. Visual media can convey forms of knowledge that writing cannot” (American Anthropological Association:1).

Actions and Bodily Practices of Call Center Workers

Below are a series of examples from the documentary film *John and Jane* that follows a number of call center workers in Mumbai through their everyday lives in a variety of contexts. The theory discussed in the first and second chapters will be applied to these examples which include neoliberalism, time-space compression, biopower, neoliberal governmentality, pastiche, American cultural imperialism and symbolic violence. By doing so an attempt will be made to illuminate the external forces that shape homo economicus and the forces that homo economicus internalizes (Ahluwalia 2009; Bourdieu 2000; Foucault 1990; Foucault 2008; Foucault 2009; Harvey 1989; Harvey 2007; Jameson 1990; Said 1994).

In one vignette a call center employee named Namrata is featured. Namrata is involved with verifying authorization and providing secured records to those who call. Namrata has renamed herself Naomi. As she recalls, “I was training in Infinity Tower and Namrata totally became Naomi” (Ahluwalia 2009). Naomi looks visibly different from other featured Indian call center employees. Naomi has blonde hair and eyelashes, and very light colored skin. Employees at the call center often ask Naomi where she is from. Of all the workers featured in the film, she speaks closest to what would be commonly considered a North American accent. In one scene Naomi is shown walking around a mall. While there, Naomi goes into a cosmetics store and tries on different types of makeup with the help of an employee. Naomi lets the employee know that the mascara she is trying on is too dark for her as she has blonde eyelashes. Later she mentions that she has, “...habits that are totally

very Americanized” (Ahluwalia 2009). Furthermore she states that, “ I love to gather myself and to be just me” (Ahluwalia 2009).

This vignette demonstrates how neoliberalism, time-space compression, neoliberal governmentality, pastiche, American cultural imperialism, forms of capital and symbolic violence form the neoliberal subject, homo economicus (Bourdieu 2000; Foucault 2008; Harvey 1989; Harvey 2007; Jameson 1990; Said 1994). Neoliberalism seeks an intensification of capital accumulation (Harvey 2007). It is through Harvey’s concept of time-space compression, facilitated by technology, that the call center industry is possible. In addition the interaction between Indian employees and western customers and cultures located in different time zones compressed in one space would not have been possible prior to information technology and satellite communication (Harvey 1989). This allows call center workers to culturally immigrate, without leaving India, through their interaction with American customers and culture (Aneesh 2006). This example also signals how Foucault’s (2008) idea of neoliberal governmentality shapes the Indian subject. Neoliberal governmentality seeks to produce subjects that are self-regulated. The automatized governmental apparatus produces and regulates neoliberal knowledge and discourses which the subject internalizes and chooses from by exercising freedom. Namrata has internalized the values of investment, interest, and competition and acts accordingly by “being herself.” Namrata invests in herself by exercising freedom and making choices that are in her own interest and consequently, of interest to power (Ahluwalia 2009; Foucault 2008; Foucault 2009).

Namrata believes it is in her interest to adopt a pastiche of an American accent, have bleached blonde hair, eyebrows and eyelashes, and to change her name to Naomi, for the purpose of increasing her human capital to stay competitive (Foucault 2008; Jameson 1990;

Said 1994). Consequently, according to Jameson, pastiche is adopted by subjects as accelerated turnover time, facilitated by time-space compression, allows for the imitation of styles without reference to its historical circumstances (Harvey 1989; Jameson 1990). The pastiche that Namrata takes on is also reflective of the influence of American cultural imperialism on call center workers (Jameson 1990; Said 1994). As noted in the preceding chapter, Said (1994) argued that American cultural imperialism seeks to mold the world in its own image to facilitate commerce. From Bourdieu's (2000) perspective Namrata has accepted doxa and internalized it as part of her habitus and accumulates cultural and symbolic capital and leverages those resources to gain from her everyday interactions. The symbolic violence perpetrated against Namrata is evidenced by observing the measures she takes to increase her cultural, social and symbolic capital that doxa imposes. She also exercises symbolic violence on others by being an example of what one who adheres to doxa should strive for.

Another vignette showcases Oaref (he goes by Osmond at the call center) who is a call center worker set on starting his own business to achieve his dream of becoming a billionaire. In a particular scene we see him in his flat adorn with images of modernity from Italian motorcycles and sports cars to fancy houses. While singing "Are You Lonesome Tonight?" by the American singer Elvis Presley (1960), Oaref notes that he is a fan of Elvis because he was a billionaire. He also mentions how he does not waste time meeting with friends and instead uses that time to improve himself. One such way he does so is by reading "self-help" books such as *The Magic of Believing* by Claude Bristol (1991) which outlines ways of accomplishing goals through the use of motivational techniques. Oaref believes he has changed himself and also become a person with a more positive demeanor as a result of working at a call center. Also hanging on his wall is a very detailed weekly time

schedule. Blocks of time filled with activities are etched out on a weekly schedule, to make him more efficient. He also has goals written down on it as well as motivational phrases such as, “It’s not over until I win” (Ahluwalia 2009).

This example further exhibits how neoliberalism has produced homo economicus (Foucault 2008; Harvey 2007). Through time-space compression Oaref’s desires and aspirations for a different life have been influenced by images of western commodities, popular culture icons, and self-help experts (Harvey 1989; Said 1994). The incorporation of neoliberal governmentality shapes Oaref in which he through his own self interest (and of interest to power) exercises freedom and chooses to implement a form of biopower through the use of disciplinary techniques on the body to increase efficiency through use of a weekly schedule to increase his human capital (Foucault 1990; Foucault 2008). He reads self-help books to increase his competitive edge as neoliberalism dictates at the expense of relationships he has with friends. He chooses to invest in himself to increase his human capital after work instead of spending his leisure time meeting friends (Foucault 2008). His adoption of a pastiche of techniques derived from the west showcases the influence of American cultural imperialism on call center workers (Jameson 1990; Said 1994). He has accepted doxa that has been incorporated into his habitus. His habitus and the field interact to shape his practices. He surrounds himself with images of symbolic and cultural capital in the hopes of inspiring himself to accumulate the forms of capital necessary to advance in the field he is surrounded by (Bourdieu 2000).

Another example features Glen, a call center worker who works at night. In one scene his mother, who Glen lives with, repeatedly attempts to wake him up in the morning but to no avail. Later they talk about Glen’s job at the call center. Glen mentions how he works all the time and does not receive either Indian or American holidays off. His mother

responds by saying that call centers exist for customer convenience and they must be open all the time. Sydney is another call center worker who works at night and has difficulty sleeping during the day. His mother says that Sydney is tired of working the night shift. Sydney talks about how the only people he gets to meet are people from work because during the day he tries to sleep. He also alludes to the call center as being a different world. Sydney says, “After doing a whole night shift, you’re back in India” (Ahluwalia 2009).

Not only do worker’s identities become flexible to meet the needs of western capital but their work practices as well. This in turn alters cultural practices, family interaction, and relationships. Glen works at a time and on days unfathomable prior to satellite and information technology. He is no longer able to observe regional and religious holidays as he did previously. In addition the amount of time that Glen spends with his mom has changed because of the night shift he works, at a call center. Both he and Sydney have difficulty sleeping as a result of working at night. New work patterns are put in place through the use of information technology and satellite communication to aid western customers which introduce changes into call center workers lives that they are unaccustomed to. Sydney is no longer able to meet friends during the day because he tries to sleep and cannot meet friends at night because he works (Harvey 1989; Jameson 1990; Said 1994). Sydney also suggests that the call center is a space where western cultural immigration occurs without leaving India through his interactions with American customers. Moreover Sydney “returning to India” after going home from work demonstrates how the compression of space has made the call center an American space for Sydney which has altered his perception of the world despite the call center actually being in India (Aneesh 2006; Harvey 1989; Jameson 1990; Said 1994).

The documentary film *Diverted to Delhi*, explores the training processes that call center employees go through. The documentary focuses on groups of trainees. One group of students is trained at the North Star training center in Delhi. The North Star students aspire to be call center employees and do not have any experience working in call centers (Stitt 2003).

In one scene, Gunjan is with her North Star classmates in a computer lab using a computer program which trains students to speak with an American accent. On this occasion the students are interacting with a computer accent-training program (Stitt 2003). This is an instance of what Edwin Hutchins (1993) describes as distributed cognition. The cognition that occurs in this example is a result of the interaction between the students and the computers they are using. The students are taught how to pronounce certain words by the computers which they repeat and in turn, receive feedback from the computers. This demonstrates the cognition occurs as a result of interacting with the environment and that cognition is influenced by interaction and does not occur exclusively within the actor (Hutchins 1993). Furthermore it reveals the adoption of American pastiche among Indian call center workers, and the pervasiveness of American cultural imperialism which attempts to mold markets in a similar manner to extract resources and facilitate trade (Jameson 1990; Said 1994).

While it is evident from these examples that neoliberalism has not only externally influenced but penetrated and colonized the body of homo economicus, there are moments where subjects act out everyday forms of resistance (Foucault 2008; Harvey 2007; Scott 1987). Borrowing concepts from linguistic anthropology such as code switching and language ideologies can help to elucidate these acts. Gail Jefferson's transcription system will

be used to transcribe the moment of situated interaction below (Goodwin and Goodwin 2000; Moore 2008; Sacks et al. 1974).

During another scene in *Diverted to Delhi*, the North Star students are singing a song from the film *Dil Chahta Hai* (2001) (translation: *The Heart Desires*) called “Koi Kahe Kehta Rahe” (2001) in a park outside the classroom and speaking in Hindi. They decide to make fun of how their classmates speak in class and switch into this topic by code switching into English and then imitating their classmates in Hindi. The word “topic” that Surendra uses below indexes the classroom setting as students are supposed to give presentations in English about certain topics in the classroom (Stitt 2003).

(1)

Surendra: Jzamana roothe hai kis ke liye vo toh ek hai punch line. After that I'll only start the topic. ((other students are talking in the background, it is very difficult to make out what they are saying, students laugh also))

Now the punch line is let society disapprove. After that I'll only start the topic

Neeti: Vineet kharna. Sir Jzamana roothe roothne do ha ha ha haa. ((Imitates Vineet speaking politely, Neeti and students laugh))

Vineet will say it like this. If society disapproves let it disapprove ha ha ha haa

Student: Mannu

Mannu

Neeti: Mannu Sir Sir Jzamana roothe, roothne do ha ha ha haa ((Imitates Mannu speaking quickly and then laughs))

If society disapproves let it disapprove ha ha ha haa

Student 2: Aur Aur Gunjan?

and and Gunjan?

Surendra: Neh / / ne~Neh Neh vo~vo~ne~ne

No, no, no she she no no

Neeti: JZAMANA ROOTHE ROOTHNE DO ((Imitates Gunjan speaking. Students laugh including Gunjan))

If society disapproves let it disapprove

Surendra: ***It's very much true Jzamana roothe roothne do***

It's very much true if society disapproves let it disapprove

Prior to Surendra speaking they sing the first two verses of “Koi Kahe Kehta Rahe.” The English translation of the first verse can be translated as, “Let people say, let them repeatedly say how very insane we are” (Mahadevan et al. 2001). The second verse can be translated as, “This world is ours to kick around (so why should we care)” (Mahadevan et al. 2001)? It is ironic and significant that they sing this song on this occasion. The trainees are subjected to speaking only in English in the classroom in order to ultimately further the

interests of western capital. Also they have been asked to speak only in English outside the classroom as well (Said 1994). Yet they sing a Hindi film song which can be seen as an everyday act of resistance. Moreover singing the song evokes further acts of resistance (Scott 1987). On this occasion the North Star students are code switching between Hindi and English. They are not in the classroom and gathered in an informal setting. One can infer, given they are outside the classroom and outside a formal setting where speaking English is required, that they feel more comfortable speaking in Hindi. During the conversation, English is interjected into the conversation for a brief period. English is spoken because the subject switches to the classroom. The word “topic” indexes the presentations that students give in the classroom in English. This speaks volumes about language ideologies. The educational institution values the students speaking only in English in their classrooms to further reinforce what has been taught. It is also recommended that the students speak only in English when they are outside the classroom as well. Thus the educational institution values a monolingual language ideology. This practice has been put in place to serve the needs of Western capital and its American customers. However, the students demonstrate through their practice in this instance that they clearly violate the educational institution’s ideology of speaking only in English outside of the classroom. This act of resistance is contrary to what is demanded by educational institutions trying to shape subjects who invest in themselves by exercising freedom and choosing to participate in a world molded by neoliberalism (Foucault 2008; Harvey 2007; Moore 2008; Said 1994; Scott 1987). This act can also be seen from Bourdieu’s (2000) perspective as the students interacting in multiple fields with their habitus within the classroom and outside the classroom and contesting doxa. The significance of Surendra using the word “topic” is that he felt the need to speak in

English in that moment to refer to the classroom environment because of the monolingual English language ideology of the classroom (Moore 2007).

Based on the data one could assume that the students view English as a language that is necessary to speak in formal settings whereas Hindi is a language that can be used in more informal settings which allows them to be more expressive. The reality on the ground though is that the students are socialized to use English and Hindi interchangeably given their multi-lingual socialization outside the classroom. This is seen in the film when Gunjan is talking to her parents and both she and her parents are speaking in English and Hindi interchangeably. Essentially these students come from multi-lingual environments outside the classroom and are being forced to conform to a monolingual ideology in the classroom. Trying to improve their spoken English in this manner is probably counter to the way they use English in everyday life (Moore 2007; Stitt 2003).



This chapter considered the theoretical literature presented in the previous two chapters and sought to apply its insights on external social forces and the forces homo economicus internalizes. The documentary films *John and Jane* and *Diverted to Delhi* were analyzed to shed light on the actions and bodily practices of Indian call center workers. The chapter found that the self-regulated Indian call center worker, homo economicus, invests in themselves by attempting to accumulate forms of capital that is prescribed by doxa to gain a competitive edge. In addition flexible practices of Indian call center workers upsets and alters cultural and family routines as well as relationships. Moreover Indian call center workers contest doxa through everyday forms of resistance (Bourdieu 2000; Foucault 2008; Harvey 1989; Scott 1987).

Conclusion

Beginning with the first chapter, it revealed the external social forces that allowed for the call center industry to take root in India and shape and produce the Indian subject, homo economicus (Durkheim 1964; Giddens 1971; Foucault 2008; Harvey 1989; Harvey 2007). The second chapter looked at the external social forces that homo economicus internalizes (Bourdieu 2000; Foucault 1990; Foucault 2008; Foucault 2009). Next, the third chapter explored the actions and bodily practices of Indian call center workers by examining the films *John and Jane* (2009) and *Diverted to Delhi* (2003).

More specifically the neoliberal era is one marked by an intensification of capital accumulation (Harvey 2007). Flexible accumulation practices, including the use of information technology and satellite communication, mitigates the rate of profit by compressing time and space. This has allowed for the possibility of Indian call centers to exist which serve the purpose of assisting American customers. Additionally time-space compression has in essence created an overabundance of global labor available to use in service of western capital and facilitated the use of low-cost, highly educated Indian labor (Gopal et al. 2003; Harvey 1989; Holman et al. 2007; Mandel 1990; Marx and Engels 1976; Wolf 1982). Moreover the use of technology increases moral density through greater interaction between groups (such as Indian call center workers and American customers) which leads to the expansion of the division of labor, the waning of the collective consciousness and the production of the individual (Durkheim 1964; Giddens 1971). Individuals become flexible in terms of their identities, and work practices in order to meet the needs of western capital. Rapid turnover times and the ability to access commodities, culture and people from different places in one space through time-space compression has facilitated flexibility in the identities and work practices of Indian call center workers, as well as their adoption of American pastiche. American cultural imperialism in turn seeks to

shape the world in its own image to facilitate commerce (Harvey 1989; Jameson 1990; Said 1994). Subjects are not only shaped externally by neoliberalism but internalize neoliberal logic through neoliberal governmentality. Neoliberal governmentality seeks to produce the self-regulating subject, homo economicus. Homo economicus internalizes forms of neoliberal knowledge, and possibilities that are regulated through neoliberal governmentality. Homo economicus freely chooses to pursue their interests by selecting from options presented on how to direct oneself. Homo economicus has internalized the market ideology of competition which also shapes society and culture in a systemic manner. Neoliberalism refashions capitalism where the relations between capitalist and worker is hidden. Instead all neoliberal subjects attempt to invest in themselves by accumulating various forms of capital to increase their individual human capital (Foucault 2008; Read 2009). Homo economicus attempts to accumulate economic, cultural, social and symbolic capital. The types of capital homo economicus attempts to accumulate is prescribed by doxa. Those in power exercise symbolic violence on homo economicus by shaping doxa (Bourdieu 2000; Foucault 2008). As we have seen in the examples above, Indian call center workers are self-directed subjects that internalize the neoliberal logic of competition and exercise choice by selecting options that are in their interest and accumulate forms of capital to invest in their own human capital through actions and bodily practices (Ahluwalia 2009; Bourdieu 2000; Foucault 1990; Foucault 2008; Foucault 2009; Stitt 2003). For instance Namrata invests in herself by investing in forms of cultural, social and symbolic capital by changing her name to Naomi, drastically modifying her appearance and accent to increase her overall human capital according to what is valued by doxa (Ahluwalia 2009; Bourdieu 2000; Foucault 1990; Foucault 2008; Foucault 2009; Jameson 1990; Said 1994). In addition, as a consequence of workers adopting flexible practices to accommodate western capital, their familial habits,

cultural practices, and personal relationships are altered in the process. These consequences are seen in the lives of Glen and Sydney. Glen is not able to observe any religious or regional holidays as a result of working for a call center that assists American customers. Both Glen and Sydney's ability to maintain familial relations and friendships are transformed drastically because of their unusual evening work hours (Ahluwalia 2009; Harvey 1989; Harvey 2007; Said 1994). Sydney's cultural perceptions are transformed from working at a call center. He regards the call center as an American space and separate from the world outside of it. In essence Sydney culturally immigrates to the United States every night he works in the call center through interacting with American customers in spite of the fact that the call center is located in India (Ahluwalia 2009; Aneesh 2006; Harvey 1989; Jameson 1990; Said 1994). Despite the instances where call center workers follow the prescriptions of doxa, they also exercise everyday forms of resistance to it. This is demonstrated when North Star trainees meet outside of the classroom to participate in recreational activities. While the instructions by the North Star administration are to speak only in English outside the classroom, the North Star trainees do otherwise on this occasion. Although the field they participate in as North Star trainees prescribes a monolingual ideology, the trainees, informed by their multilingual environments outside the classroom, choose to speak a mixture of Hindi and English instead (Bourdieu 2000; Moore 2008; Scott 1987; Stitt 2003).

Future Trends of Indian Call Centers

Having summarized the thesis in the previous paragraph, this paragraph will consider the future trends of Indian call centers and situate it alongside the movement of western capital. More recently in the media, there are reports of the Indian call center industry losing 70% of its business to the Philippines and call centers in the Philippines employing more call center

workers compared to call centers in India. Based on projections, India could lose 30 billion dollars in lost revenue to the Philippines. Reports cite Filipino workers as being easier to train because of their greater familiarity with American popular culture and American English compared to their Indian counterparts. Studies suggest 30% of Filipino college graduates are employable in the call center industry as opposed to 10% of Indian college graduates. In addition the Philippines being a former American colony is cited as a reason why Filipinos are accustomed to American culture (Bajaj 2011; NDTV 2014). These findings seem to correspond with neoliberal logic and American cultural imperialism (Harvey 2007; Said 1994). Selecting the Philippines as a destination to establish a call center industry further mitigates the rate of profit by employing Filipino call center workers who are not in need of as much training to meet the needs of American customers (Harvey 2007; Mandel 1990; Wolf 1982). Furthermore, given that the Philippines were a former American colony, it facilitates the project of American cultural imperialism which attempts to shape the world to meet the needs of western capital. Given that this is the case, Indian elites who own and manage Indian call centers to service western capital have established call centers in the Philippines to mitigate the rate of profit for these reasons and because of better utility infrastructure and lower transport costs for employees. They have also attempted to establish call centers in small cities in India (Tier 2 and Tier 3 cities) to reduce the costs of operation to further mitigate the rate of profit (Bajaj 2011; Gopal et al. 2003; Harvey 2007; Mandel 1990; NDTV 2014; Said 1994; Wolf 1982). Perhaps in-part because of these developments, Indian firms have shifted their focus and moved up the information technology services value chain and have primarily marketed themselves as a destination for software creation and management. To this end, the Indian information technology advocacy group National Association of Software and Services Companies (NASSCOM) has

rebranded Indian firms as providing business process management (BPM) services rather than business process outsourcing (BPO) services to American customers (NASSCOM 2013). As more global bodies have been incorporated into a global pool of labor through the compression of time and space to create more surplus-value available to western capital, the division of labor has become more specialized and certain regions of the world perform different types of information technology work to suit the needs of western capital (Durkheim 1964; Giddens 1971; Harvey 1989; Harvey 2007; Mandel 1990; Marx and Engels 1976; Wolf 1982).

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