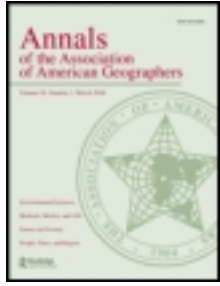


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Living the Way the World Does: Global Indians in the Remaking of Kolkata

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The transnational activities of migrants continue to gain attention from scholars, national governments, international institutions, and social movements. The migration–development nexus is of special interest and includes the various ways in which both recent and more established diasporas engage in reshaping their former homes. This article considers the proliferation of gated communities and ethnic enclaves meant to house (primarily elite) return migrants in several cities of the Global South using the case of luxury condominium developments in the Indian city of Kolkata. These buildings are marketed equally to overseas Indians as second homes and to locals who wish to inhabit a transnational, cosmopolitan lifestyle in these spaces. The analysis interrogates the figure of the global Indian—a character central to the design and marketing of these developments—in terms of how it has been mythologized, monopolized, and deployed to help reshape the city. Interviews with apartment owners—both local and nonresident—from one of the most prominent of these international-style projects in Kolkata highlight the disjuncture between the assumed lifestyle of transnational migrants and the buildings meant to house them. The findings suggest that we need to think more carefully and critically about what kinds of changes are made possible by either the involvement or the invocation of wealthy overseas communities in development within their former countries. *Key Words:* *development, diaspora, migration, transnationalism, urbanization.*

移民的跨国活动,持续受到学者、国家政府、跨国机构以及社会运动的关注。“移民—发展”的关系特别令人感兴趣,包括新近和已建立基础的海外离散者参与重构他们之前的家的各种管道。本文运用印度加尔各答城市中的豪华大厦开发案例,考量本为全球南方数个城市中的(以菁英为主的)返乡移民提供住所的门禁社区与族裔飞地之增长。这些建筑不但行销给海外印度人做为第二个家,亦行销给期望住在此般具有跨国寰宇主义生活风格空间的在地人。研究分析探问全球印度人的角色——一个设计与行销上述建案的核心特徵——如何被神秘化、垄断,并用来协助城市的再造。本文访谈这些位于加尔各答的国际风格建案的其中一个最为突出的公寓所有者们——包含在地居民与非住民,凸显出预设的跨国移民生活风格,与原本旨在提供他们住所的建筑两者之间的断裂。研究发现主张,我们必须更谨慎且批判性地思考,富裕的海外社群透过参与或祈愿,有可能会为他们的母国发展带来什么样的改变。关键词:发展,离散,迁徙,跨国主义,城市化。

Las actividades transnacionales de migrantes siguen atrayendo la atención de eruditos, gobiernos nacionales, instituciones internacionales y movimientos sociales. La conexión migración–desarrollo reviste especial interés e incluye las diferentes maneras como diásporas recientes y bien establecidas se involucran en reconfigurar sus anteriores patrias. Este artículo estudia la proliferación de conjuntos residenciales cerrados y enclaves étnicos construidos para dar albergue a migrantes de retorno (primariamente del tipo élite) en varias ciudades del Sur Global; se toma como caso ilustrativo el desarrollo de condominios lujosos en la ciudad de Kolkata, India. Estas unidades residenciales se venden por igual a hindúes residentes en el extranjero, a manera de una segunda casa, y a residentes locales que desean disfrutar en estos espacios de un estilo de vida transnacional y cosmopolita. El análisis examina la figura del hindú global—un carácter central tomado en cuenta para el diseño y mercadeo de estos desarrollos—en términos de cómo ese modelo figurado ha sido mitificado, monopolizado y desplegado para ayudar en la reconfiguración de la ciudad. Las entrevistas con propietarios de los apartamentos—tanto locales como no residentes—de uno de los proyectos más representativos del estilo internacional construido en Kolkata resaltan el desfase entre el pretendido estilo de vida de los migrantes transnacionales y los edificios que se supone deben albergarlos. Los descubrimientos sugieren que deberíamos pensar más cuidadosa y críticamente acerca de qué tipo de cambios pueden sobrevenir gracias al involucramiento o la convocatoria de comunidades extranjeras adineradas alrededor de proyectos de desarrollo dentro de sus anteriores países. *Palabras clave:* *desarrollo, diáspora, migración, transnacionalismo, urbanización.*

The connections between émigré communities and their former homes has long been a source of interest for many in sending and receiving countries, but a number of factors have intensified the contemporary focus on the transnational practices of newer and older migrant groups. These include geopolitical and security concerns, the integration of immigrants into new host communities, and the economic impact of remittances (Levitt 2001; Demmers 2002; Mohan 2006). The potential for diasporas or overseas workers to help build or rebuild their home countries has spawned a flurry of activity by international institutions, national governments, and local authorities alike (De Haas 2010; Hugo 2012). The fact that remittances—money sent back by workers to their home countries—rank second only to oil exports globally and far outpace both foreign direct investment and aid to developing countries makes it clear why the migration–development nexus has become such an integral growth strategy for countries like Haiti, Lesotho, and Tajikistan, among many others (World Bank 2012). Some scholars, however, have questioned the long-term viability of such strategies given the vulnerability of migrant income to external pressures—natural disasters, economic downturns, and political conflicts, to name but a few (Fix et al. 2009). Others have suggested that the scramble for diasporic resources by various actors leaves the actual nature of development and the roles played by the diaspora relatively unscrutinized (Mohan 2008; Raghuram 2009). As the U.S.-based transnational solidarity network Association for India’s Development (2004) has asked, “What kinds of developments in India are Indians in the US (and other countries) making possible?”

To answer such a question, this article examines one particular type of diaspora-influenced development—new housing construction in the Indian city of Kolkata. Although much of the migration and development literature has focused on remittances and investments, it is equally important to look at “less visible, quantifiable and tangible forms . . . [which may] have a more critical impact than their pecuniary counterpart” (Kapur 2005, 357). In Kolkata, money remitted by migrant workers is not remaking the city. Instead, it is the proliferation of new housing projects marketed as “global” to local elites who wish to live cosmopolitan lifestyles and to diasporic Indians seeking a familiar and comfortable second home that is transforming the landscape. Such projects have been undertaken by private developers—some of them nonresident Indians themselves—or through public–private partnerships

(Roy 2011). A particular narrative of migration and transnational identity—aspirational and idealized—is central to the appeal of these buildings. This is the story of what I call the global Indians: successful, educated professionals, connected to international networks via work, family, or their own overseas experiences and desires to return or remain connected to their homeland. Such developments thus become a home place for at least two distinct populations—diasporic or overseas Indians and local nonmigrants who wish to emulate or approximate these mythologized migrant lifestyles.

Kolkata is not the only place in which we see diasporas and locals sold on the allure of global—usually gated—communities. Suburban villas on the outskirts of Beijing have been sold to both wealthy locals and to overseas Chinese living in Canada, the United States, and Australia (King 2004). Gated condominium complexes in Beirut and Riyadh are similarly marketed equally to overseas communities across the world and to local elites (Glasze and Alkhayyal 2002). Baecker’s (2013) examination of postconflict reconstruction in Beirut notes the importance of connecting the refashioned city center to global networks through new luxury apartment buildings built explicitly to entice the bodies and resources of the Lebanese diaspora. Perera (2011) makes a similar observation about the emergence of new apartment towers in Colombo, Sri Lanka, designed to attract and house rich locals and transnational migrants alike. In Kolkata, too, these new building projects offer potential buyers the opportunity to “live the way the world does,”¹ while suggesting to planners, politicians, and local communities that such developments are a key signifier of achievement for cities that wish for global prominence (Bose 2007).

What does the life-space of the world look like, as reproduced in a luxury, gated apartment designed for transnational subjects and aspiring locals? I interrogate the notions of global living as embodied in the figure of the global Indian—a mythologized set of migrant experiences and preferences at the heart of urban transformations in cities like Kolkata. The return of the global Indian and the housing that he or she inhabits gives evidence of Kolkata’s resurgence from a site of urban decay through much of the twentieth century (Roy 2003; Chattopadhyay 2005) to one of revitalization and growth in recent years. Global Indians are not the reason for the adoption of neoliberal urbanization strategies by governments of all stripes in Kolkata, but their presence—both physical and ideological—helps to materialize the city’s connections to global circuits of capital, labor, and ideologies (Roy

2011). It is they—as well as locals also employed in similar professional fields—who are meant to populate the industrial parks and high-tech suburbs on the fringes of Kolkata, built to attract large corporations and multinationals (Dey 2011; Samaddar 2012).

This article explores these dynamics in three parts. The first examines the mythologies that produce the figure of the global Indian as an ambiguous concept that simultaneously blurs the line between forms and histories of migration and yet becomes monolithic and focused on certain types of trajectories at the expense of others. The second examines the changing landscapes of Kolkata and the increasing importance of housing developments that embody the assumed lifestyle and preferences of the global Indian. The third focuses on the case of the South City Towers, a prominent but controversial township development built with an explicitly international style in mind to see what appeal they hold for their residents. Drawing on interviews with several owners of flats within these buildings, this article highlights the disjuncture between the expectations that owners might have had and the reality of the buildings themselves.

Constructing the Global Indian

I use the term *global Indian* to capture the wide range of identities and appellations used to signify the modern experience of migration from the subcontinent: non-resident Indian (NRI), person of Indian origin (PIO), overseas-born Indian (OBI), desi, East Indian, Indo-Canadian, Indian American, South Asian, and a host of others besides. Yet although the actual experience of emigration has produced multiple variations on the theme of a global Indian—at least in the ways that it is used by the Indian state and many in the culture industries—it refers to a very specific instance: that of primarily elite, transnational subjects living in the countries of the industrialized world. Its power lies in part in being able to subsume the distinct trajectories of migration from the subcontinent under the apparently universal narrative of professionals—doctors, engineers, scientists, and academics among them—who have emigrated to countries such as Britain, the United States, Canada, and Australia. There is also a temporal distinction that is often collapsed in the global Indian formation, between those who are Indian citizens living and working abroad (the NRI) and the Indian diaspora (those with ancestral roots in India).

Thus although there are many other Indians and their descendants who might claim some kind of global

identity, the global Indian idea does not necessarily include such diversity. Instead, the narrow view of the elite transnational subject dominates, a perspective made possible only by privileging some migrant experiences at the expense of others. This means, for example, celebrating the lives of the model minority Indians (Prashad 2000) and ignoring or obscuring the histories of indentured migrants to the Caribbean and South Pacific, Sikh labor migrants to North America at the turn of the century, or contemporary Indian workers in the Gulf, to name but three cases. This elite global Indian has become a staple in the popular imagination, the press, and popular discourse, a regular figure in films and television (Desai 2004) and courted by successive Indian governments (Dickinson and Bailey 2007). Indeed, the changing attitude of the Indian state toward its emigrants (both diasporic and short-term) has been remarkable, from one bordering on suspicion and hostility in the postindependence period to one of embracing them more recently (Sahoo, Bass, and Faist 2012), and made possible by the creation of overseas citizenship opportunities, provision of special visas for visits, relaxation of rules on investment, and celebration of the achievements of prominent members of diaspora communities (Bose 2007). Such measures did not create relationships between India and its émigrés; rather, they seek to capitalize on them. When an Indian magazine published the first of what is now an annual global Indian issue, it celebrated the achievements of second-generation “overseas-born Indians (OBIs) . . . [born] in the two great migrations of the 1960s and 1980s to largely educated professionals” (“The OBIs” 2004, 3).

Why the fascination with this particular manifestation of Indian migration by the Indian state and culture industries? What does the global Indian offer the subcontinent? One aspect might be the narrative of success rather than struggle in the lives of software engineers, lawyers, doctors, entrepreneurs, and other professionals living apparently comfortable lifestyles. An Indian government-commissioned study fairly salivated at the prospect of overseas Indians possessing assets roughly equivalent to India’s gross domestic product, a Gujarati diaspora in the United States controlling 5 percent of that country’s wealth, and Indian information technology (IT) engineers in Silicon Valley ranking second only to Chinese immigrants in terms of numbers of millionaires (Singhvi 2001). But the global Indian must not only be wealthy; he or she must also be a well-behaved and disciplined subject, one whose transnational activities do not extend to, for example, extremist politics or criminal behavior. Instead, he or she must exemplify

what one editorial calls a “good NRI,” one who “sends their savings back to India, gives money to their poorer relations, sets up schools, colleges and hospitals in towns and villages where they grew up” (Singh 2002). In an interview conducted in 2004, J. C. Sharma, a former senior diplomat and one of the chief authors of the Indian government’s influential report on the size and developmental potential of its diaspora (Singhvi 2001), suggested that the success of global Indians rests largely on their ability to behave in accordance with the rules of their new societies while retaining a strong link to their heritage. For Sharma and many others like him, it is this mythologized and idealized global Indian who will help to build the new nation and who therefore holds such appeal for the state and the culture industries alike. In Sharma’s view:

Our destinies are interlinked. The overseas Indians are an excellent resource for us. If today India is shining, then the diaspora is shining too. We say to the diaspora that you have as much to gain from us as we do from you; it is a mutually beneficial relationship (personal communication, interview, 18 March 2004, Ministry of External Affairs, New Delhi).

Global Indians and Kolkata’s Rebirth

What kind of future can the global Indian offer Kolkata? The city has been in decline for the better part of a century—due to industrial flight, a large-scale refugee influx, and political turmoil, among other factors. It is no longer a preeminent node in circuits of capital and empire and has been bypassed in stature by Mumbai, Delhi, and Bangalore (Mehta 2004; Dupont 2011; Goldman 2011). The efforts to regain its former prominence have centered on joining the rush to become a world-class city—attempted, for example, by enticing multinationals to relocate, by hosting major spectacles and events, and by engaging in a frenzy of real estate development. Another marker of urban globality has become the physical presence of immigrants (Schiller and Simsek-Caglar 2011). Such sites are becoming locations where global capital and immigrant flows intersect (Sassen 2002). Similarly, a certain kind of “translocality” is remaking urban social space, with migrant agency a key factor in the ongoing redefinition of people, place, and identity (Smith and Eade 2008).

The global Indian can show that Kolkata is a node in ongoing patterns of migration both from and to the subcontinent. In particular, locating the global Indian

in Kolkata fits with a narrow view of subcontinental outmigration embodied in the experience of professional classes and transnational elites. The state of West Bengal, of which Kolkata is the capital city, does not have the extensive labor migrant flows or historical diasporas produced by states like Punjab, Gujarat, or Kerala (Raghuram 2007). It is, however, a source of professional emigrants—educated, upper class, often upper caste—the heart of the global Indian image. It is their presence (or memory) in and of the city that can potentially reaffirm its place on the world stage, and indeed it is explicitly to them that local politicians appeal. The state’s Chief Minister, Mamata Banerjee, in a recorded message played at the North American Bengali Conference (NABC) in Las Vegas, urged nonresident and diasporic Bengalis to invest in West Bengal:

I welcome you all and this is your state. Please come here and share your ideas, views and give suggestions to make this state better and I know you all love your state and have sentiments attached to the soil. (Sen Gupta 2012)

Whereas the state government has more recently begun to vigorously recruit its diaspora for developmental purposes, sentimental attachments to the soil have been promoted for much longer in Kolkata. As with other migrant flows and their connections to former homes, much of this has occurred informally, such as the sending of money home, the building of a house, or support for a local charity or initiative. Increasingly, however, real estate developers and returning migrants have begun to influence the reshaping of neighborhoods and regions more purposefully, especially in ways that simulate the experiences—whether long or short term—of being abroad. The story of ethnic enclaves built in destination countries by immigrants is well known, but it has become more evident in recent years that reverse migration can often have the same effect in sending countries. In this sense it is not only a story that Little India is created by expatriates in Dubai but equally that returning migrants might purchase a home in Little Dubai in Delhi, built to remind them of their time in the Middle East (Vora 2008).

In a similar vein, the site of the most significant real estate developments in the city of the past few decades is awash in buildings that conjure the global Indian in lifestyle, vocation, and physical presence. These are the eastern fringes, the only direction in which the city can expand, home to a large expanse of wetlands and a series of satellite townships reclaimed from them. By the late 1990s this area had also begun to attract the IT industry as it reoriented more purposefully to India—not only

to primary sites such as Gurgaon, Bangalore, and Hyderabad but also to secondary ones, including Kolkata. Although local environmental protests led to the declaration of protected status for the wetlands, this has done little to stem its attractiveness to developers. Within a few years apartment complexes—many of them public–private partnerships and many others illegal—sprung up throughout the area, especially along a highway that skirts the eastern edges of Kolkata and leads from middle-class residential neighborhoods in the south to the airport in the northeast (Samaddar 2011; Dasgupta 2012).

Boasting names such as Oasis, Bengal Silver Spring, Ideal City, The Empire, Hiland Park, and Technopolis, these projects bring high-rise towers of up to thirty floors onto an urban landscape with few buildings higher than ten stories (Bose 2007). Some—such as Rosedale Gardens, a venture led by nonresident Indians from New Jersey, and Kolkata West International City on the opposite side of town and built with capital and expertise from Indian émigrés in Indonesia—have direct involvement and leadership from global Indians (Bose 2013). Most, however, are domestic enterprises, built in many cases as partnerships between municipal and state agencies and local developers. A rash of multiplexes, shopping malls, golf courses, private schools, medical facilities, amusement parks, and gated green spaces and waterways has burgeoned alongside the new residences. The marketing of such developments is in many ways not unlike what one might find for any condominium tower from Toronto to Berlin to Singapore (King 2004; Lehrer and Laidley 2008; Kern 2010), offering an elite existence replete with all of the amenities deemed necessary for the cosmopolitan life. What sets the Kolkata housing developments apart is the importance of the figure of diaspora in the selling of these buildings, not only to potential inhabitants but also to local politicians, investors, and elites. These housing developments have been a great success, often selling out their units long before ground has been broken, and ensuring yet more to come. During initial fieldwork in 2004 I counted some forty projects marketed toward the global Indian or with their assumed lifestyles in mind, most in the design stage. By 2007 many of these were under construction, with a further forty planned; by 2012 the number had risen to 120, many now no longer on the periphery but rather in the heart of the city itself. Although many have proved to be controversial in their environmental and social impacts, local activists have found them hard to challenge, for to call them into question is to call into question both global Indians and

the good they are purported to embody (Vasundhara 2010). I examine how these dynamics play out in the final section of this article by studying a particularly successful township development that straddles the eastern edges of the city.

South City and the Global Life

Flush with the success of selling their condominiums on the edge of town, a consortium of some of the most prominent local and national developers envisioned a new 32-acre minitownship within the boundaries of the city itself. South City was to be built on the grounds of a former industrial site and its promise was grand: the largest development in Kolkata, with the tallest towers, the biggest mall in eastern India, the best school, the most exclusive country club, the most beautifully landscaped pond, and so on—all gated for the enjoyment of its inhabitants (South City Projects 2013). In 2004, the project was little more than a set of plans. By 2007, three of its four towers had begun to rise, and by 2012 it had cemented its place on the cityscape. A promoter (Rakesh²) told me that all of his lots had sold out quickly and often at levels far above the original asking price. Indeed, he said that some 1,500 out of 1,740 total units were purchased before a single tower broke ground. In line with the projects in the wetlands, here, too, the lure of a global lifestyle—and perhaps transnational bodies themselves—is key. Gopal, another promoter, boasted that fully 35 percent of apartment owners were NRIs and that some 50 percent of flats were being reserved for overseas Indians—although he also admitted that promoting a building with NRI inhabitants was a great marketing tool. True or not, the perception among some in the area is that projects like South City are for foreigners, not locals. For example, Raju, a construction foreman, said to me in 2007, pointing at the towers inching toward the sky:

Do you see those flats over there? All of them are owned by NRIs like you. But I will tell you what, come back here at night, come back here at nine or ten o'clock tonight and I'll show you something. A hundred flats and only ten lights will be on. Only ten of them will have people in them. All the rest of you are overseas.

There have been other complaints as well regarding South City. To some it stands as a symbol of the heavy-handed ways in which a desire for global recognition might overwhelm local desires and needs. Its current site was once the home of a prosperous factory now fallen into disrepair and bordered Vikramghar Jheel, one of

the largest remaining water bodies within Kolkata. Locals have long sought to clean up the increasingly polluted area so that it might function as a mixed-use landscape for recreation, fishing, and other community needs (Vasundhara 2010). Instead of developing a sustainable space for their own use, however, local residents soon found themselves confronting a scheme that raised global priorities and imagining above their own. Many who live in the neighborhood wondered how the influx of so many newcomers and cars would affect noise and air pollution levels. Others questioned the wisdom of such dense development within an existing residential neighborhood and competition for city services. As the towers took shape, local protests grew on multiple fronts. Trade unions protested the often shoddy and unsafe working conditions that led to several worker deaths during construction (Express News Service 2007). Several residents' groups filed court challenges based on the increase in noise and traffic in the region both during and after construction (Vasundhara 2010). Housing and poverty activists rallied around Sambu Singh, one of the few remaining workers from the previous factory who refused to be displaced for the new developments, although some 7,000 others had been unceremoniously thrown out already. He died under mysterious circumstances but not before drawing attention to the South City Projects (S. Basu 2011). Environmental groups have decried the development's illegal encroachment onto a full acre of the existing water body and filed lawsuits to halt construction. Several state and federal agencies concurred and ordered that the third and fourth towers of South City should be halted (J. Basu 2006). The project, however, with support from civic and state officials who viewed it as a prestigious and landmark development symbolizing Kolkata's renewal, went ahead. And although among some locals South City gained the nickname "Towers of Violation" (Vasundhara 2010), to most it simply became a fact of life.

By 2012, and contrary to prediction, South City was not a ghost town, one of the "migra-villages" common in Central America (Kapur 2005), full of diasporic capital but no diasporas themselves. The township was bustling with people. NRIs, diasporas, and local elites mingle in its glittering mall full of international food chains and franchises, multinational brands and designer labels, supermarkets and luxury items for sale on every floor. A multiplex theater plays Hollywood and Bollywood blockbusters, and South City's International School tells prospective parents that it will "bring out the David Beckham, Bill Gates, or President Obama"

in their child (South City International School 2012). As an enclave of consumerist fantasies and middle-class aspirations, South City would not be out of place in any of a thousand locations across the world—tweaked for local idioms and preferences but in essence purveying the same message of elite privilege and the promise of participation in (or perhaps entrance into) the world of cosmopolitan transnationalism.

The developers of projects such as South City target local elites, diasporas, and migrants in their selling of apartments and dreams. Polished model units offer tours for the local market, along with massive billboards that promise the opportunity to "live in the sky," "own a home with India's biggest swimming pool," and to "live the way the world does." Internationally, South City embarked on the roadshows common to many of its fellow developers, often employing celebrities as spokespersons and traveling not only to what salesman Rithwik calls the "London–New York–Toronto triangle" but also to the NABC as well as smaller regional events in places like Liverpool, Sussex, and Birmingham. Rithwik also reported visits to the Persian Gulf; although the Bengali NRI population is much smaller there, South City reasoned that they were even more likely to return to Kolkata than diasporas from the United States and United Kingdom. To diasporas and overseas Indians, the message also concerns "global living." Rather than offering the opportunity to enter an aspirational cosmopolitan lifestyle, however, the focus in such sales pitches has been on providing a dwelling with all the modern conveniences and standards owners might be familiar with and expect from experiences in other parts of the world. Such efforts produced clear results, both at home and away, with the project such a success that the originally planned three towers became five with a substantial number of flats owned by overseas Indians. What motivated these people to buy into South City's vision? What has been their experience with the development since their purchase?

The final part of this article draws on a series of interviews conducted in 2012 with some of the residents to answer such questions. This research is a subsection of a much broader project involving ethnographic fieldwork in Kolkata with residents, planners, politicians, housing advocates, promoters and developers, construction workers, and other key informants regarding changes to the city over the course of the past two decades. In this case I interviewed a total of forty individuals—thirty diasporic and ten resident Indian citizens—recruited via South City's residents' association and snowball sampling methods. All interviewees are between the

ages of twenty-eight and fifty-five and included twenty-seven men and twenty-three women. Interviews lasted for approximately one hour and consisted of a series of semistructured questions pertaining to the reasons owners had been attracted to South City and what their experiences with the building had been. Common themes that emerged among respondents in the appeal of the development included the importance of security features, location in the city, and the type and number of amenities—“world class” was an often-repeated phrase. What I also discovered was a clear disjuncture between the image (and appeal) of South City sold to prospective buyers and many of the realities of the flat they actually received.

The Appeal

Of the South City condominium owners interviewed, none were full-time residents in Kolkata but instead treated the flat as a second home to be used for annual visits with friends and family. All were currently based in the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, or Western Europe; some spent up to six months in India. When asked what drew them back to Kolkata, most gave as their answer some aspect of family ties and connections. Nikhil, a software developer based in Boston, said:

My parents are getting older and I want to make sure that I can go and see them and make sure that they are well. They used to come and visit me but as they have gotten older the trip is harder on them. So I go out there. It hasn't been easy on me though because the summer is so hot and there's no AC in my parent's house. That's one of the reasons I wanted to buy into South City.

For Mita, an architect in London, there is both obligation and desire to return:

I go back twice a year—it's expensive but I still do it. It isn't always easy being in Kolkata (or anywhere else in India for that matter) but every time I go back I remember something else I miss.

For most, a flat in South City holds the promise of a return to the city in more comfort than they have been accustomed to in Kolkata. Paroma, an executive with a pharmaceuticals company in Nashville, speaks approvingly of what developments like these portend for the city:

Yes, I saw the new construction when I was driving in from the airport by taxi. It's about time—finally, the city is beginning to come up again.

Bishnu, a doctor in Toronto, marveled:

When I first stepped foot into this flat and came up here to the third floor, I opened the windows and felt a breeze I had never felt before in Calcutta. It was cool and refreshing and clean. I couldn't hear the sounds of the city at all. In fact, I felt as though I wasn't in Calcutta at all.

The Reality

Not all had such positive impressions, however. Sonali, a New Jersey-based architect, complains:

I paid top dollar for this apartment, one of the most expensive in the city. But when I came to inspect the finished product I found construction materials all over the unfinished interior, broken floor tiles, chipped plaster, uneven windows, air conditioners not functioning, and most of the amenities that were supposed to be part of the complex are nonexistent.

Gautam, a London-based marketing executive, was similarly unhappy with the condition of his flat and has received no satisfaction from the property managers—Jones Lang LaSalle Meghraj, the Indian subsidiary of the global real estate services firm in charge of delivering finished flats to the NRIs:

I have contacted them on multiple occasions and rarely receive a timely response. I'm not in Kolkata enough to stay on top of what's going on with it and I feel that the builders are taking advantage of our absence from the country not to fulfill their promises. Like other Bengali NRIs we bought these flats to maintain our roots in West Bengal. The way we have been treated is shocking and sends the wrong message to us.

Anamitra, a broadcast producer in New York City, was disappointed to find the promised amenities undelivered:

The lawn and green space that was promised seems now to have been turned into a car park and the clubhouse and pond area remains unfinished in the center of the towers. All in all it just has a feeling of being unfinished.

Perhaps the part of the development that has most fully delivered on its promise of “global living” has been the South City Mall attached to the towers. Unfortunately for some, the poor condition of the apartment towers as opposed to the mall was a sore point. As Toronto-based banker Anjan said:

Overall I was really surprised at what it looked like inside. While the mall itself is as advertised—gleaming, air conditioned, sparkly, all new and shiny—the apartments are far from it. The hallways are not AC, the windows

seem dirty and the place as a whole is very dusty and really unfinished.

One might read the distance between the promise of South City and the disappointments of owners such as those just cited as not limited to an international-style development in a city of the Global South; we might find such complaints among many a condominium owner in many a place, yet the implications in this context are potentially more significant. South City and similar projects in Kolkata are not simply buildings that might fail to live up to their potential. They are indicative of a particular developmental strategy that relies on successful appeals to transnational subjects and local elites alike. If the space between the promise of global living and that actual life remains so large, what will be the effect on the remade city? Will the projects eventually lose their appeal and become the hollow shells of *migra-villages* bemoaned elsewhere? For now, residents in South City are not leaving in any significant numbers. Ironically, the disappointment in the lack of promised amenities seems to be one point on which the global Indians in South City and locals might forge commonality—after seeing the shabby state of the pond area, the residents' association within the towers reached out to the same environmental organizations that had fought the construction in the first place to help arrive at a solution.

Conclusion

What can we learn from these complex ways in which migration and development might be manifest in the remaking of cities of the Global South? How do we understand the particular ways in which transnational subjects and locals who wish to live globally might help to transform the cityscape, not only by what they do but also by where they reside? We must look beyond remittances, investments, or even the physical presence of diasporas and overseas Indians. Instead, the invocation of tropes such as the global Indian and “global living” can play an important role in simultaneously catalyzing and affirming connections to international networks and lifestyles. It is also clear that we must look carefully and critically at the types of transformation engendered by such notions of globality. It is necessary, therefore, to interrogate more closely what we mean by the life spaces and migrant experiences we invoke with concepts like the global Indian. I have suggested that this figure as it is popularly imagined is a fetishized, narrow, and exclusionary reading of a much richer and diverse

set of migrant flows, returns, and aspirations. Although the appeal of such a celebratory yet limited characterization seems clear, the consequences of a disjuncture between that appeal and the actual reality of the buildings themselves is less apparent.

To some locals who buy in, the buildings might offer an entrance into a transnational life-world as represented by popular culture and promoters alike. For some diasporic and migrant populations they might provide a more comfortable way of visiting and staying rooted to their homeland. In South City's case, its success has led to more projects in other parts of Kolkata and even a \$100-million venture to build a township in Sri Lanka (Indian Realty News 2011). But if such housing developments have negative environmental or social effects on their surroundings, or if the construction of the buildings fails to achieve the standards of global living that are such an essential part of their appeal, we could be left with an unsustainable, incomplete, or ultimately abandoned experiment in diaspora-influenced development.

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Notes

1. A slogan used in the advertising campaign by South City Projects, the housing project examined in the final section of this article.
2. Unless public figures, the names of interview subjects have been altered to preserve confidentiality.

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