

# Unequal Mobility Regimes of Indian Gated Communities: Converging Regional, National and Transnational Migration Flows in Indian Metropolitan Cities

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## Abstract

Examining high-skilled professionals of Indian origin who decide to return to India to settle down in so-called gated estates or communities, which now form part of Indian mega cities' landscape, this article describes the mobility regimes of these estates' diverse populations in three South Indian cities and the power relations between these high-skilled professionals and their staff. We address the lacuna to study these estates as sites of human capital mobility convergence where international and regional migration and mobility patterns of the diverse groups become entangled and mutually constitutive. Combining theoretical models pertaining to skilled migration research as well as mobility studies and ethnographic description and analysis, we aim to conceptualise gated communities in a way that highlights not only the interconnectedness of local, regional, national and transnational migration, but also their correlation with different forms of (physical, social, cultural, economic) (non-) mobility. At the same time, we argue that these interconnecting social fields are marked by power differences, social and economic inequality, and disparate access to mobility. These factors lead to a differential outcome for the different social actors implicated in our study and eventually to the sustenance of huge economic as well socio-cultural disparity in contemporary India.

**Keywords:** Indian gated communities, Indian return migrants, Indian knowledge workers, Indian diaspora, new Indian cityscapes, changing Indian urban geographies, new strategies for social exclusion, new civic islands, manufactured communities, new Indian infrastructure havens, models of urban withdrawal/urban participation

## Introduction: Migration and Development

India has placed itself as one of the most dynamic countries in transition, becoming the second fastest growing large economy in the world (behind China) (Drèze and Sen 2013; Tejada and Bhattacharya 2014: 5). India's elites, with their access to high-quality training (in India or abroad), are the great beneficiaries of these record-high growth figures. In terms of overall social and human development, however, India seriously lags behind. India was ranked 136 out

of 187 countries listed by the UNDP Human Development Index (HDI) in 2012. India's large majority, in other words, has not benefitted from India's recent introduction into the neo-liberal global market economy (Tejada and Bhattacharya 2014: 6). One fourth of India's population is still living in absolute poverty, while, at the same time, there are extremely mobile groups that form an emerging middle class. This class constitutes a significant proportion of the entire population forming "pockets of prosperity and

islands of well-being” (Nayyar 2012). The well-known Indian economist Nayyar goes as far as to argue that today there are two different, almost dichotomized, worlds in India: a new global India and a local one (which he calls Bharat) (2012: xii). The first is referring to economic growth, wealth and prosperity, and the second to the “old” India, involving those people and social fields that have remained excluded from socio-economic growth and its benefits. In other words, India’s development has been lopsided, beneficial to some, and excluding most others. This article focuses on one type of these “pockets of prosperity,” also known as housing estates or gated communities in India’s southern metropolitan cities, where many so-called high-skilled Indians who worked abroad, mostly in the USA, decided to settle. We, however, describe that in these estates, “old” and “new” (global) India meet each other, and analyse the ways in which the poor are not excluded, but form an indispensable part of gated communities.

Transnational migration has constituted an important element of contemporary processes of social transformation in India. Official figures showed that in 2013, India was the country of origin of more than 14 million international migrants (Tajeda and Bhattacharya 2014), while one decade earlier the Government of India (GoI), had already boasted an Indian diaspora of 20 million Indians, including people of Indian origin but with foreign passports (Sinha-Kerkhoff and Bal 2003). In many cases, migration has been seen as a symptom of underdevelopment. In the last decade or so, the potential positive role of migration for development has been recognized, both in countries of origin and receiving countries. Policy makers and researchers are trying to determine under which conditions migration is favourable for countries of origin, countries of settlement, multinational corporations, and the migrants themselves (Blakewell 2007).

Since the early 1990s, the Government of India (GoI) has moved from a position of indifference to one of actively seeking the involvement of the “Indian diaspora” in India’s development

(Sinha-Kerkhoff and Bal 2003). Several recent studies on returning Indian professionals have described these returnees as important factors in the socio-economic development of India (e.g., Chacko 2007; Tejada and Bhattacharya 2014). They see the transfer of advanced technical skills and managerial knowledge as important contributors to India’s development. Others describe that the returnees turn towards the “new” India, as seen in Ilkjær’s PhD dissertation (2015), but nevertheless incorporate select elements of the values and lifestyles associated with the “old” India, especially in relation to inter-generational family ties and in commitments to giving back to the community. Ilkjær contends that the orientation “the returnees” maintained towards the “new” India did not constitute a complete rejection of everything from the “old” India. Rather, parts of the “old” were carried forward and pieced into their projects of return to the “new” India. They were thereby incorporated into the returnees’ ways of being “global Indian citizens.” In this article, we analyse that in order to maintain these “ways of being” “appropriately Indian,” as Radhakrishnan (2011) articulates, the upscale estates where most of these professionals decide to settle require a continuous inflow of low-skilled workers from various parts of the country.

Our article is based on ethnographic data that was collected over a two-year period, in 2013 and 2014.<sup>1</sup> It is one of the outcomes of a larger project on the presumed development-(return) migration nexus. Ratnakar Tripathy, our main researcher in India, carried out a study of ITs/ITES (information technology and IT-enabled ser-

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<sup>1</sup> Our joint research project entitled “Migration, Development, and Citizenship: notions of belonging and civic engagement among Indian (knowledge-) migrants in The Netherlands and return migrants in India” was funded by the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research NWO/WOTRO. Ratnakar Tripathy was the main researcher in India. Kate Kirk was the main researcher in the Netherlands. All names of informants and estates mentioned here are pseudonyms as to protect the anonymity of our interlocutors.

vices) in three Indian mega-cities and selected only those informants who had spent a considerable number of years abroad as professionals. The larger purpose of the ethnographic work was to assess the impact of so-called highly skilled knowledge workers on development processes in different parts of India. For the purpose of this article we addressed our ethnographic material from a different angle and discovered something new. In fact, we found that the relation between Indian skilled return migration and development is very complex and a genuine assessment of return and the development (mobility) impact needs to go beyond a simple (economic) study of knowledge and skills transfers. It must also include not only return migrants and their relatives, but all other socio-economic groups and adopt a holistic development approach.

The large majority of our approximately seventy informants were in their forties and early fifties, male and married, often with one or two children. Only ten women were officially "interviewed," and mostly in presence of their husbands. Though Tripathy also interacted with skilled return migrants in technology incubation set ups, this article is based on observations and conversations he had with inhabitants of two gated estates in Hyderabad, two in Pune and one in Bengaluru (Bangalore), as well as on observations and informal interactions with service staffs frequenting these estates. Srivastava (2015) describes the mushrooming of "New India's" gated enclaves that regulate physical mobilities as much as they trigger emotions such as fear and moral superiority. Our main interlocutors reiterated that they had opted for these segregated spaces because they found it difficult to cope with the existing conditions in the "real" or "old" India and prefer to live in spaces which are gated and secured (cf. Illkejaer 2012). They share migratory trajectories, class, professional and often religious (but normally not caste and linguistic) backgrounds, as well as lifestyle norms and values and could therefore be considered as a "community" in some sense. Though some of our interlocutors stated that they had returned

to India because of termination of employment contracts (and visas), many claimed they could have stayed on abroad but came back to India because they believed that India now offered an enabling economic environment with adequate career and future prospects. Yet, apart from such structural conditions, personal reasons were more often quoted as having determined return. Family, and the presence of ageing parents in particular, was often the primary reason they provided for return. The desire to have their children socialized in "Indian culture" was also mentioned as an important factor.

Our "return" migrants remain highly mobile, however, and one of the reasons our elite professionals provided for having "settled down" in gated estates was because these upmarket residential areas (cf. Varrel 2012 and 2016 and Searle 2016) offer them the possibility to remain transnational. Furthermore, these estates reunite them with their family and provide a suitable Indian but secure milieu for their children, as well as a cosmopolitan setting commensurable with the place they had left behind. In fact, our interlocutors explained that these communities combined the good of the "West" with India, while "New India" simultaneously shut out the undesirable realities of "old India," as well as corrupting elements of "Western culture" (cf. Radhakrishnan 2007: 156).

We found that these estates function as sites of mobility convergence, where migration and mobility patterns of the diverse groups of residents (returnees, their relatives, and staff) have become entangled and mutually constitutive. By using the regimes of mobility framework (Glick Schiller and Salazar 2012), we aim to highlight the interconnectedness of local, regional, national and transnational migration, mobility and sedentarism, and the "old"/local and the "new"/transnational India. In line with Glick Schiller and Salazar, we explore apparent conceptual binaries that often characterize studies of development, mobility and migration. By observing case-studies of the inhabitants of a number of gated estates in Southern India, we demonstrate

how tightly interwoven the old and the new India have become precisely through the interconnected nature of local and transnational migration within these gated communities. At the same time, we argue that these interconnecting social fields are also marked by power differences, old and emerging social and economic inequalities, and disparate access to migration and mobility, leading to highly differential outcomes and new forms of exclusion for the different social actors implicated in our study.

### **Gated communities as Sites of Mobility Convergence**

Upmarket housing estates in Pune, Hyderabad and Bengaluru are places where transnational, national, regional and local migratory flows of various groups are connected and tightly interwoven. The gated estates are inhabited by affluent transnational return migrants, partners and children. Yet another significant migration flow is formed by the parents of these return migrants, who are often persuaded to leave their own residence and start residing close by— if not together with— their children and grandchildren in the gated community. Besides, these estates have attracted a substantial number of much less affluent male and female labourers who provide essential services to these return migrants, which are indispensable to the infrastructure of the gated communities. The availability of this labour is the result of internal migration (within the city/region/nation). Migration often does not follow a clear-cut route, and step-by-step migration is part of the migratory process. Individual/family, societal and cultural and, often, economic considerations have motivated unskilled, semi-skilled and skilled labour to move on and work in the gated estates should not necessarily be the end of these migratory flows in their lives. Yet, we demonstrate in this article that inbuilt power relations within these estates often result in the immobility rather than mobility among these service-providing groups.

In this article, we describe this convergence of local, regional and international migration

patterns and use the term mobility as a key analytical term to unravel its differentiated workings. We use the term with reference to spatial as well as socio-economic and cultural mobilities and argue that these apparent binaries of difference should in fact be understood within the same frame of analysis. For instance, within one group physical/spatial mobility may lead to socio-economic (im-)mobility and/or be its consequence. Besides, mobility flows amongst groups are interwoven and high-skilled (spatial-) mobility may cause low-skilled (socio-cultural, economic or spatial-) mobility and/or sedentarism. (cf. Glick Schiller and Salazar 2012; Hackl et al 2016).

Although there are indeed fundamental differences between internal and international migration, our research findings underline the need to acknowledge that both internal and international mobilities create an integrated system, which can be observed at a range of scales: family/household, community, national, and the constellation of countries linked by migration flows (King and Skeldon 2010: 1620). This study focuses on the interrelations between different forms of migration, unequal class relations, and socio-economic im/mobility. Although migration is one of the key issues in our article, we feel that mobility captures the confluence between migration and the configuration of class (and gender) in contemporary globalizing India more adeptly. We do not consider mobility and immobility as two extreme ends of the same continuum, but rather as two sides of the same coin. One may experience spatial immobility and social mobility at the same time, or be immobile in terms of living conditions but potentially be highly mobile. In other words, we consider mobility, immobility, migration and sedentarism as structurally interconnected conditions, albeit temporary and dynamic at the same time (cf. Götz 2016:10; Raitapuro and Bal 2016). Our article does not only demonstrate how different forms of migration and mobility of various groups mutually influence and shape each other, it also reveals how the implications of these convergences may be beneficial to some but curb the mobility of others.

In the following sections, we elaborate on how and why these gated estates came into existence and we analyse the ways in which the individuals living in these estates govern the place as fairly autonomous “mini-states.” We examine the mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion they employ to regulate the relationships between upper classes and lower classes, the inside and the outside, and the “new” and the “old” India. The last section argues that workers in these gated communities form the backbone of the new lifestyle designed and chosen by the high-skilled professionals. Here, we focus on poor female domestic workers and their affluent employers and argue that they live in a kind of structural, albeit inherently unequal, interdependence with each other (cf. Ray and Qayum 2009). We closely analyse the dynamics of this process of convergence, where both the employees and the employers assist the other to attain their separate goals, albeit to different extents, for some facilitating and for others (further) limiting their mobility.

### **Re-ordering India: Return to the “Gated Communities”**

Mega-cities in India are generally described as the most important destinations of massive poverty-induced migrations of illiterate and unskilled peasants and labourers (Mukherji 2013: 36). Only very recently, scholars have developed an interest in the highly skilled Indians residing in these same mega-cities and who have no intentions to emigrate because of the emerging opportunities in their home economies, higher education levels, and declining wage differentials between India and the so-called more developed North. What is more, with the declining North-South divide, in some instances some of these Indian urban giants now accommodate migrants from the more affluent North, including high-skilled return migrants from the “North” (cf. Gollerkeri and Chhabra 2016: 52-53).

Most of our informants identified family ties and their patriotic feelings as the most important reasons for their return to the country (also see

Chacko 2007). Nearly all of them had left their Indian “home-towns” or “home-states” – in which they were born/did primary schooling – for good, choosing to live in newly created urban spaces. Their migration trajectory, either on their own or often with their parents, had typically begun with educational migration to elite institutions of higher studies in other parts of the country. This change was followed by transnational migration, before or after marriage. After returning to India, some had tried to settle down in the region where they were born, but rarely remained there. Hemant, for instance, a proprietor of a software start-up in Hyderabad, spent several years in his home district of Tirupathi looking for business opportunities related to agriculture. He had to finally settle down in Hyderabad, however, because the employment opportunities it offered were better. Moreover, some informants like Naga, an angel investor from Bangalore, invested heavily in his hometown of Madurai, but continued to live with his wife and children in Bengaluru. He was attracted to the mega-city not only for work, but also because of access to better educational, residential and other infrastructures. Seen from a migration perspective over a long stretch of time, the high-skilled migrant left his/her home town to an Indian urban centre, went to the USA, and finally (but not definitely) ended up in an Indian mega-city, more commonly described as an “India-USA-India” life journey. Indeed, in most cases, it is difficult to say whether the tale of internal migration embeds the tale of transnational migration, or the other way around. However, this is only one of the ways in which internal and transnational migration converge.

The gated communities notably attract a variety of categories of people, including non-(transnational/regional-) migrant citizens, expatriates, residents (of Indian origin) who were not born in India, and foreigners on relatively long stints of work in India. We thus find in the gated communities a web of mobilities crisscrossing each other, with little fixed pattern. Even though the movement of the Indian return migrants

seems to follow a fairly regular pattern, we hesitate to call these migrants “return migrants” as is usually done by policy-makers and scholars alike. This is because the residents in gated communities want to keep their migratory options open, thus ruling out the finality of return. In the early 1990s, the Government of India’s (GoI) began to value the Indian diaspora’s multiple associations and long distance connections with India (cf. Sinha-Kerkhoff and Bal 2003). The government also began to see in return a great benefit as it seemed to compensate for the outflow of highly skilled migrants, establishing a brain gain instead of a brain drain. In this “diaspora option,” highly-skilled migrants are viewed as carriers of social, cultural, and economic capital that is waiting to be harnessed to the advantage of India (cf. Ilkjaer 2012; Sinha-Kerkhoff and Bal 2003).

The gated estates, a form of walled or fenced residential complexes, are found all over the world. Even though they are established for different purposes and come in many shapes and sizes, many of them seem to pivot on notions of exclusion and segregation on the one hand, and social integration on the other (e.g., Atkinson and Blandy 2013; Caldeira 1996; Coy and Pöhler 2002). An important additional clue on the classification of these gated communities was provided by Mr. Kulkarni, the 85-year-old chairman of a housing society in Pune. He used the shorthand “cosmo” (i.e. cosmopolitan) for residential estates that housed Indian residents from different cultural, linguistic, and sometimes even caste who rarely had different religious backgrounds and often had ancestral roots in different parts of the country. Being the chairman of a society predominantly occupied by high-skilled Maharashtra (return) migrants, he was aware of other complexes that mimic not simply the civic orderliness of developed countries, but more diverse Indian cultural traits as well. In the Palm Beach Retreat in Bengaluru, for example, which could be described as “highly cosmo,” the residents celebrate the American Independence Day and Thanksgiving with as much zeal as the Hindu festivals Holi or Diwali.

According to Kulkarni, real estate companies often specialize to accommodate certain types of clients. For example, Green Park Constructions in Pune mostly deals with those who have close family ties with the state of Maharashtra in India, whereas Anand Constructions are considered to be more “cosmo.” For instance, a gated community dominated by Maharashtrians more strongly maintains more Indian culture because of features like a temple, a shared language and cuisine. An intermingling of residents from different corners of India, on the other hand, seems to lead to a more “Western,” largely “American” milieu around the premises duly reflected in the architecture, the demography of the staff and the estate’s layout, not to mention the numerous activities and facilities at the estate clubhouses. A highly cosmo complex like Palm Beach in Bengaluru may not even consider building a temple, not because the residents are any less devout, but because it would be near impossible to elect the god to be installed among residents from such disparate parts of the country. Very often the (mostly Hindu) residents thus leave a space for worship in their homes for the deity of choice.

There are three other aspects of the gated communities that will now be discussed. First, the residents of these communities are aware of their unique place in the society and identify with people “like us,” which generally indicates a high level of income, exposure to the west, and high levels of civic sense, i.e. similar habitus. Second, the process selecting homes starts early and may be the first decision in the process of returning to India. During their temporary annual visits to India, the migrants often update themselves on the residential options available. Third, even though the return migrants are also driven by nostalgia and attachment to the country that motivates them to come back, they are wary of returning to the same India they left behind. They thus attempt to create their own heavily modified version of India that is built around the gated residences, schools and office spaces, all of which seem like replicas of institutions more prevalent in the “developed West” where they lived

before. They are then able to largely stay away from pollution, dirt, crowds, poor infrastructure, poverty, and insecurity commonly faced by “others,” particularly the poor women and children inhabiting these cities. Once these are eliminated, the return migrant adds to this lifestyle recipe a strong “Indian flavour” by employing a large number of domestic staff the family could not afford in the US. Especially for the “reluctant female returnee” (cf. Ilkjær 2016), it is the existence of a “culture of domestic servitude” in “old India” (cf. Qayum and Ray 2003) that makes the (husband’s) plan to return more acceptable or even attractive. Vaishali, a former professional-now-turned-housewife in Pune readily admits that the lure of domestic help was a major reason to come back. She confirms the same is true of a great majority of the return migrants, especially females. Any visitor to a gated community will be struck by the number of staff members scurrying about the premises. They range from gardeners, repairmen, drivers, gym attendants to female domestic labourers, not to mention the employees seated in the estate office complex. These employees can be divided into two main groups – first, the ones employed by the families individually and second, those employed by the housing society for general maintenance services, clerical jobs and administration. A household was found to employ on average three people: a female cook, a “driver” and a part time so-called maid servant (paid domestic worker).

The well-known software boom in India in the past few decades provides the broader economic background to the gated communities. The Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) that started in the late 1970s and continued in the 1980s, was accompanied or replaced by a growing trend of “off-shoring” from the mid-1990s and which became attractive to a wider range of companies in developed countries. Mazumdar (2010: 243-244) explains that “outsourcing and off-shoring thus began to combine and a number of Indian companies, including software corporates, entered the BPO field considerably aided by the Indian government’s policy of “no

taxation on IT export earnings.” Even Western multinational BPO companies began to locate some of their operations in urban India and all this went hand-in-hand with increasing numbers of IT-enabled services (ITES) located in the Indian metropolis. Our informants, almost all men, were not just employees in ITES/BPO combines, but often directed them or were entrepreneurs delivering IT-enabled services. In any case, their work required the mobility and transnational allegiances they possessed.

As the term “gated” would indicate, the estates enable the knowledge worker to shut out many features of Indian life that they find undesirable, letting in only those characteristics/commodities/people of real or old India that they need or can tolerate. The estate gates that isolate these communities from noise, dirt, chaos, poverty, etc. thus symbolize a stern social filter. In many ways, they resemble what Sreekumar (2013), drawing on the notion of *heterotopias*, described in the context of Bengaluru as a contested space that is at once real (as an existing geographical place), as well as imagined (as a future anterior). The new transnational techno-class in India’s mega-cities indeed created such *heterotopias*, which include both elements of “real” or “old” India as well as their own imagined India, which together form a transnational new India in these gated estates (cf. D’Costa 2012). Importantly, the migrant communities that reside in these estates turn into agents of development, spreading the message of the new India in the real India (cf. Upadhy 2013: 141-161).

### **The New India of the Gated Communities**

Blakely and Snyder (1997: 85-99) identify three basic categories of “communities” living within gated estates: (1) “lifestyle communities,” (2) “prestige communities” and (3) “security zones.” In India, we find that gated communities form residential clusters in the fashion of industrial clusters where contiguity, functionality and utilitarian supply-chain related issues are the foremost identifiers rather than a deeper sense of community bonding. Our gated communities are

known for their harmonious living, minimizing conflicts through a system of social relationships which may be termed “distant neighbourliness,” ridding relations of intimacies characteristic of close communities. Notably, Royal Indian Raj, a real estate company in Bengaluru, used the innovative phrase “couture community” to describe their Italian-style villas, openly admitting the synthetic exclusivity of the community (Outlook, August 18, 2008). The sense of “community” in the gated estates in urban India is thus based on a common transnational identity both Indian and global (transnational), making it more like commonality than community.

The GoI as well as MNCs and Indian firms invite the highly skilled professionals to return to India, not despite their transnationalism but because of it (Varrel 2011). These “pendle communities,” or “highly-skilled globetrotters,” involved in a human capital “emigration-return cycle” or even “brain circulation” (quoted in Seele 2008: 98) establish ties between the country of return and previous residence, allowing the accumulation of social/cultural and economic capital at different places and thereby creating a transnational value-added migration chain (cf. Seele 2008: 99). The ever-present tension between the transnational sentiments and Indian-ness is well illustrated by the case of the children in the gated communities. A large number of returnees admitted that an important reason for coming back to India was to ensure that the children absorb some “Indian-ness” and not become rootless individuals. This may happen more tangibly through frequent interactions with the grandparents and other family members, but also and more often via full-time or part-time female domestic workers. These reside within staff quarters or in squatter settlements in close proximity to the gated estate or even within the particular family’s apartment which architecture is often specially designed to house such “servants” and who impart a minimal level of “Indian-ness” to the children. Merits derived from this “entangled urbanism” (cf. Srivastava 2015) i.e., their ability to afford domestic staff were enumerated in unambiguous ways.

Amardeep, for instance, admitted that his wife was quite satisfied with the gated estates as “the cost of running a household is cheaper here than running it there [in the USA].” It also leaves her more time for what she would like to do. This serial entrepreneur from Hyderabad added that “if she has her way she would like to stay here. She feels quite comfortable over here. Because I think she has much more freedom in terms of help, infrastructure, and the household support which is here.” In similar fashion, Kumar, a software start-up founder from Hyderabad, explained to Tripathy that he had seen “certain people who had returned with the intention of staying put in India but could not do so and had to go back” to the US. Unlike these people, he had decided to stay put and he elaborated that a foremost reason for this choice was the availability of domestic staff, which he almost likened to extended family:

one doctor family, they came back. Their kids could not get comfortably settled here so they returned. That is one thing. But as you must have seen, I personally feel life in India – types of servants or cooks we engage, lively things around us ...I think we have much more.

Ravi, another informant explained:

The clarity of coming back from the US dawned on me when my daughter was born. Multiple reasons why it became clear why I had to come back [indistinct]. So, what happened after our daughter was born – first of all the help we could get in the US which is pretty limited. You are on your own and it’s hard to manage a little baby at that point of time and we thought we need external help. That was one reason [for return].

Though many returned couples depend on such an arrangement for child-care, the presence of this human being from “old India” does not easily fit however in their imagination regarding “new India” often conjured while still living in the USA and which proposes day care centres and/or an equal and contractual relation between employers and employees (cf. Qayum and Ray 2003: 538). Besides, “entangled urbanism” also has its dangers and not too much of “old India”



is tolerated within gated communities. What is more, most of the parents show a clear preference for the “international” schools that mimic the western patterns of education and even award European or American certificates such as an International Baccalaureate.

We found that upon return to India, residents often persuaded their parents to stay with them in the gated estates, or at least in close proximity. This provides another example of mobility convergence in the estates: in this case, the internal migration of the parents who join their transnational children, who have often returned to look after these elderly or ailing family members. These parents often have well-defined roles in the gated communities. In the Somvihar Society in Kothrud, Pune, Tripathy discovered that the entire administration of the society was run by a group of above-70 parents who occupied their children’s flats. Mr Kulkarni, the 85-year old president, already quoted before, jokingly claimed that Somvihar is an instance of a gerontocratic government. On a more serious note, he explained that the younger lot in the society either live abroad or are too busy with work to make time for the society. As a result, the Somvihar society carried a strong touch of an old-age home with separately marked spaces for elderly women and men in the club buildings – an area for card-playing men, spiritual lectures for the aged, and provision for yoga classes for the old. Senior citizens of the estates often played the role of custodians for their children’s properties and were responsible for the smooth running of matters within the estates.

During conversations with the managers and office holders from all the five societies surveyed in Pune, we also inquired about the most recent crisis or system breakdown faced by the gated communities. In every case our informants failed to come up with a significant example of a real disaster except a case of minor theft in a Pune estate. The gated communities justify their very existence by anticipating and pre-empting all possible crises likely to be created by the malfunctioning of the city’s municipal systems

in India, thereby practically functioning as near mini-states. In all the five estates, the communities pursue their autonomy by ensuring the following: (1) Back up source of power when the city supplies fail; (2) Back up of water supply with wells and tankers apart from the corporation’s supplies (one estate in Hyderabad had even installed a water filtration plant); (3) Internal security at the gates and constant patrolling – in every case residences were connected with residences through intercoms and with each other through walkie talkie; (4) Independent system for sewage management – Somvihar in Pune applied composting and produced fertilizers for their own gardens and other neighbouring societies. (5) A wide range of staff to carry out the routine tasks such as gardeners, cleaners, plumbers, electricians, repairmen, overseers, swimming and sports coaches and yoga instructors, and even tailors and washer men, to name a few.

Clearly, such an intricate system is also highly labour-intensive. In some instances, most of the required services are outsourced to external agencies and companies to ensure that the governing committee of the gated community is not responsible for overseeing everything. In most cases, the residents have to deal directly only with the domestic staff. As one of the resident chairmen put it through a classic Laplacian clockwork metaphor for an automated system: “you need to rewind the clock occasionally but it mostly runs on its own.”

### **Symbiosis between the Transnational and the Internal Migrant**

Clearly, however, the system does not run without a wide range of labour employed in the estates and perhaps the most visible and vital are the female domestic workers. Our special focus on these female domestic workers in this last section of the paper aims to demonstrate the myriad ways in which the lives of transnational returnees have become intertwined with those of labourers who migrated to the same megacities from rural areas or (small-) towns and cities within the state or beyond, and have often

continued to move locally (within the mega-city), in search of work and trying to escape exploitation elsewhere. Though our project focused in particular on the category of high-skilled migrants, our ethnographic material did not only uncover the confluence of the migration trajectories of our high-skilled informants and their employees, but also the unequal power relations between them. We discuss the severe implications of these relationships in terms of mobility and immobility of both employers as well as employees.

Thus far, we have argued that the “disorganized” and “unpredictable” reality of the outer world made it vital for the return migrants to follow organized procedures in their residential spaces (cf. Illkejaer 2012). Yet, their organized “transnational” life-styles in the gated communities can only be maintained through the daily circulation of service workers. In fact, service providers such as chauffeurs, maids/domestic workers, nannies, cooks, plumbers and guards are essential for the segregated and insulated spaces (cf. Chase: 2008). We found that the workers employed in the estates, whether by the individual employer or the estate office, were often migrants from distant as well as nearby places. In the case of Pune, the Janawadi slum near Senapati Bapat Road provided a steady source of labour to a whole string of gated societies including the two estates we surveyed. Paradoxically, the migrant worker plays an essential role in keeping the larger Indian reality at a safe distance, while being from the “old India,” also brings a homely Indian touch to the lives of the return migrants. Transnational mobility of the whole family is also assured by these staffs who are paid throughout the year, even if the family is occasionally or most of the time abroad. Besides, during such absences, many staffs also look after the well-being of aged parents who stay put. In other words, they facilitate both the (transnational) mobility and immobility of their employers and/or their parents/children. Representing the “real India,” these workers are allowed, and are indeed welcomed, inside the gated commu-

nities, though they often require gate passes and record daily entry at the gates.

The Indian middle class’s obsession with the housemaid (commonly labelled as “maid woes”) is a widespread feature in living room conversations across the country. In the case of the gated communities, this dependence may in fact be seen as a basic prerequisite for the relative autonomy of the gated communities. In such setups, the migrant labour, disciplined by the gated milieu, would seem to represent an airbrushed and easily acceptable version of the “authentic” or “real” India as against the heavily processed Indian-ness of the return migrants. As Nimita, a part time software consultant and housewife from Bengaluru with Bihari origin (and thus a Hindi-speaker) narrated, her only real and consistent contact with the city is her Telugu maid from Telangana who is quite fluent at Kannada, as well. Nimita’s borrowed Kannada vocabulary, however sparse, proves to be very useful when she goes out in the city.

Our informants seemed aware of discourses on gross (physical and socio-economic) exploitation of female- domestics and continuously replicated that maids employed at the gated estates received salaries two or two-and-a-half times as much as the prevalent rates outside. Tripathy was also repeatedly told how satisfied these employers were with their female workers, who they treated “respectfully”, unlike the reality in “old India.” Indeed, our informants talked about their “homemakers,” often carefully avoiding to call them “servants” and during a visit to one of the Hyderabad estates, Tripathy could indeed spot “the homemaker” eating her breakfast at a table in the kitchen, which is not common among Indian households with no exposure to the workaday equalitarianism in Western Europe. Several employers also told Tripathy that they looked after the educational needs of employees’ children and provided health care if needed to the whole family. In short, our informants consciously or unconsciously tried to avoid talking about the structural (socio-economic and cultural) inequality that exists between them and staffs.

Tripathy was informed that domestic workers in estates are trained and recruited through training and placements agencies which also teach these women to use an apron and amenities and gadgets like toilet paper, silver foil, as well as vacuum cleaners. However, such training and recruitment agencies disguise the basically informal character of this labour. Besides, while these women personify “the real India” in the gated community, they are advised to leave most of this “traditional” India behind once they enter “New India.” In the gated communities, these women have to keep their hair combed, come in clean and simple clothes, and be sparse with their traditional Indian jewellery and make-up (cf. Soofi 2011). It also remains a fact that these women do not have (labour-) unions or other institutional support providing (socio-economic and physical) security and in case of exploitation these women have no other option than silently bear with it and stay put or move on and lose their only source of income.

Indeed, these employees often work fixed hours and get paid holidays. They perform routine daily tasks, and part-timers who often work for more than one family in one or even more gated estates generally are assured ‘autonomy, flexibility and mobility absent in the lives of their live-in counterparts’ (Panchadhay 2014: 73). Moreover, their work is made easier through the use of gadgets such as vacuum cleaners, hot water, washing machines, dishwashers and other electric appliances. The lives of these domestic workers may come to resemble the lives of women in other “Service Factories of the New Economy” in contemporary India, such as the social reality faced by girls working in ICT-based call centres (Mazumdar 2010: 225-309). Mazumdar explains that the rapid expansion of this new form of employment, combined with the relatively higher earnings, regulated working hours, acquirement of new English-language communication skills and social and culture capital, exposure, etc. have provided much more positive inclination toward employment in call

centres among the Indian lower-middle-class and relatively young females in India. Mazumdar reminds us however that such jobs in call centres contain formal but insecure employment relations within an oppressive and unfree atmosphere as girls are constantly monitored to intensify the labour process (280). Likewise, female domestic workers in estates might experience some kind of mobility, yet this mobility is monitored, limited and conditional. Through the close proximity with their employers’ transnational life-styles, homemakers learn about alternative ways of child care and food preparations, conservation and hygiene. However, in order to ensure the transnational life-styles of their employers they have to be domesticated in this “New India” and distanced from the actual daily reality of the slums outside the gated estates where most of them reside. Besides, in absence of their employers, they are required to stay put, even if (family) obligations and/or festivals outside the city or state, require mobility. Thus, whereas the gated estates are “spaces of unlimited flows” for the transnational returnees, they are not so for the domestic service workers who work there. The close and intimate relations between a local employee, her transnational employer and his/her family members in these new working places does indeed engender mobility amongst these female domestic workers through the provision of new social, cultural and more economic capital. At the same time, this mobility is still based on structural inequalities, not only between the rich and the poor in India but also between the “transnational” and the Indian national. The gated estates provide a secluded space for successful Indian return migrants, without curbing their transnational mobility. Although employment in an estate represents some form of upward social and economic mobility for the domestics, physical and even other forms of mobility are curbed. Moreover, there is no possibility for any career movement. Farhan, an activist in Hyderabad who also resides in a gated community, explained the discrepancy through his remark:

When I used to run my small company, a kilometre from here, my driver used to earn more than what the rookie programmer would earn. But the rookie programmer had a growth path. There is nothing for the driver. That's not for the maids. They are drivers and maids because the state has completely withdrawn from education.

The work of these women and other labouring classes frequenting these gated communities thus allows them a great deal of proximity with the "global" life-styles of their employers and indeed a great proximity with "transnational" new India, which is even sustained by their labour. Yet, the same forces also distance them from their own daily reality in the city and other people that reside therein and they now form a sort of class by themselves with different and new aspirations. One of these is even greater mobility but the unequal power equation does set limits to the transformation of these employees into the transnational and privileged subjects their employers constitute. Instead, they are expected to facilitate the freedom of movement for their employers by staying put in their estates to watch their houses and their families. In other words, employment for the low-skilled workers in gated communities is a vehicle for social-cultural and economic mobility but simultaneously restricts their physical mobility, and especially their scope for transnational migration.

### Conclusion

This article focused on the inhabitants of a number of gated estates in three South Indian cities. We described these estates as sites of mobility convergence where migration and mobility patterns of the diverse groups of residents (high-skilled Indian return migrants, their relatives, and staff) become entangled and mutually constitutive. By using the regimes of mobility framework, we highlighted the interconnectedness of and between local, regional, national and transnational migration and physical, socio-economic and cultural (im-) mobilities amongst variously mobile inhabitants in gated communities constituting both "old" and "new" India. We also demonstrated that in these secluded gated spaces,

these interconnecting social fields are marked by power differences, social- and economic inequality, and disparate access to mobility, leading to differential outcomes for the different social actors in our study. In other words, the return of high-skilled migrants to India has transformed the local and national landscapes of mobility/immobility in different albeit asymmetrical ways. We showed how the convergence of the migratory streams and social and economic mobility, and the limbo-like quality of the gated lifestyles, are closely related. The fact that the residents of these gated communities impose on themselves a uniformitarian and automated system that rids their lives of the rich variety seen outside the gated estates ("old" and "real" India) with all the attendant chaos, insecurity and dirt, distinguishes these secluded estates from "ordinary" residential areas. This self-imposed seclusion and ensuing restrictions in their movements and connections, is a price the residents are clearly willing to pay.

Satyam, a top scientist with an Indian multinational pharmaceutical firm, was the only returned knowledge worker among all our interlocutors who settled in his own ancestral house in Hyderabad. He felt that returning to India to settle in a gated estate would have defeated the very purpose of return. However, he was clearly an exception. In fact, the knowledge workers constituting our ethnographic study, and most of whom worked in the software industry, seemed to prefer to live in a "new" India, adopting a lifestyle ruled by predictable algorithms and an iterative logic, to use a metaphor lifted from their professional lives. The constant quest for certainty, predictability and repetitiveness aimed at some kind of security and insulation from the untidy world of the Indian cities, perceived by our informants as "old India." Apart from secured sedentarism, these gated estates also guarantee constant and transnational mobility of our highly skilled "return" migrants. However, and somewhat contradictory, the confluence of these two qualities, i.e. mobility and sedentarism available in "new India" is only assured by the in-flow of

service workers from “old India,” not in the least female domestics. The entrance of the latter in gated estates does entail physical, socio-economic and even cultural mobility and distancing amongst these poor female migrants. Yet, the unequal power equation within these gated communities not only limits these mobilities but even dictates immobility of these less privileged (often female) inhabitants of “New India.” The continued growth and spread of such gated communities at a rapid pace and their increasing predominance in Indian urban spaces is therefore expected to lead to, and already has, grave socio-political consequences and further deepen the existing (gendered-) socio-economic disparities and inequalities in India’s urban landscape.

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