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The Indian Diasporic Elite

While the previous chapter described the lifeworlds of the poorest segments of the Indian community, this chapter explores the experiences of the Indian *elite* in Bahrain. The size of this segment of the diasporic community is difficult to gauge, but my estimates suggest approximately 30,000 individuals. As merchants, accountants, bankers, doctors, advertising executives, and other well-paid professionals—accompanied to Bahrain by their spouses and children—these men and women work in the skyscrapers their impoverished countrymen have built. As one might expect, members of this diasporic elite lead lives significantly different in character from those of the Indian transnational proletariat. Yet is the Indian diasporic elite subject to the same structural violence that characterizes the experience of the transnational proletariat in Bahrain, or do the significant resources they bring to bear (in terms of social, cultural, and economic capital) mitigate their vulnerability to this structural violence? Albeit with certain caveats, the ethnographic data I collected suggest that the diasporic elite *do* find themselves enmeshed in webs of dominance that appear strikingly similar to those of their impoverished countrymen and countrywomen on the island. I conclude the chapter with a description of the strategic transnationalism that makes up the diasporic elite’s principal response to the vulnerabilities they face during their sojourn on the island.

**Transnational Theory and the Gulf States**

In constructing a theoretical lens through which the social sciences might begin to unpack the complex social fields wrought by the increasing
mobility of labor, social scientists have focused almost to exclusion on transmigrant populations spread across particular geographical polarities. Like the Indian laborers described in the previous chapter—most of whom, even while abroad, remain fixed on their home communities in India—the case studies that inform transnational theory typically examine lives spread across two nations. In their seminal collection, Basch, Glick, and Szanton Blanc (1994), for example, look at the institutions constructed by various groups of Caribbean and Filipino transmigrants in the United States, mostly within the greater New York City area; Smith and Guarnizo’s collection (1998), while geographically diverse, nonetheless relies almost exclusively on case studies of populations with a transmigratory endpoint in the United States; Goldring (1998) examines the social fields that encompass Las Animas, Mexico, and the transmigrant community in the Bay Area; Smith (1998) describes the formidable conduits between Ticuani, Mexico, and the burgeoning Ticuanense community in Brooklyn, New York; and Matthei and Smith (1998) chart the transfer of Los Angeles gang structures through the transnational conduits binding south central Los Angeles to the Garifuna communities of the Belizean coast. Ongoing contributions to this empirical foundation, most of which are focused on these south-to-north conduits, arrive in ever-greater numbers. From this springboard, social scientists have hypothesized processes that strain or erode the foundations of the nation-state (Appadurai 1996; Kearney 1991; Hobsbawm 1990, 182–83; Ong 1999, 214), explored the social fields that cross national boundaries (Basch, Glick, and Szanton Blanc 1994; Goldring 1998), delineated a “cultural bifocality” endemic to contemporary transmigrants (Rouse 1992, 41), and periodically assessed the viability of anthropology’s territorialized notion of culture (Hannerz 1996, 19–22; King 1991, 6).

In ascertaining how the case presented here fits within this larger literature on the transnational movement of people through the circuits of global capitalism, one can certainly delineate parallels between the case of the Indian transnational proletariat in Bahrain and the case studies underpinning much of the theoretical production of transnational theory. Yet in the previous chapter I described a structure of dominance rooted in the state and manifest in the habitus configuring everyday interactions between transmigrants and citizens. As a system, this structure binds and constrains transmigrant agency in particular ways: this transnational proletariat’s movement back and forth across the Indian Ocean, for example, is fettered by the systemic controls exerted by a sponsorship system that ties transmigrants to an individual sponsor; their ability to move about the
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island and to meet, organize, and communicate with other transmigrants is strictly monitored and controlled; their status on the island holds no promise of permanency or assimilation; and their inability to engage the Bahraini legal system hampers recourse in the many dilemmas they encounter. An accounting of these differences points to a principal pattern in the transnational literature: although most of the case studies fit the polar model of home and away, most also focus on migration from the global south to the global north, and therefore to particular types of states—wealthy, democratic, and nominally open societies, some of which (like the United States) have articulated an identity ostensibly based on the assimilation and incorporation of difference.

What about populations migrating to other sorts of destinations? A handful of ethnographers have begun to explore the transmigration experiences of those moving outside the Western conduits that predominate in the literature. Leichtman, for example, presents the case of the Lebanese diaspora in Senegal, arguing that the transnational canon fails to appropriately gauge the “important role colonialism has played in influencing transnational processes in other parts of the world,” an influence she describes as shaping the destinations of transmigrants, promoting particular economic hierarchies, encouraging racism, and offering or withdrawing the protections implicit in citizenship (2005, 666, 681). Aihwa Ong, in her well-known work (1999), describes the flexible positions negotiated by cosmopolitan individuals tethered to multiple locations around the Pacific Rim, including (but not limited to) endpoints in North America. More specific to transnationalism on the Arabian Peninsula, Anh Longva (2000, 2005) argues that the large transnational populations in the Gulf states have played an integral role in forging the fundamental structure and logic of the state, a logic she sees as ethnocratic in nature. Gamburd’s ethnography (2000) of Sri Lankan domestic workers and their time in the Gulf details the panoptic control exerted by host families over the women they hire, as well as the fleeting and contingent avenues by which these women exert agency. As ethnographers have begun to examine transnational populations moving outside the global north, analysis has charted alternative forms of the state, other regimes of repression and control, and new configurations of dominance over the trans-status subjects moving between nations. These works suggest that the ability of men and women to forge transnational lives can, under particular configurations of state and culture, be significantly more constrained than the models emanating from analyses of transnational flows with an endpoint in the global north. In this sense,
then, the case study presented here is meant to join those looking at transnational movement outside the West (Leichtman 2005; Willen 2007; Ong 1999; Sarker and De 2002), and following Ong (1999, 214–15), to further illuminate the processes by which governance is extended over the mobility endemic to transnational populations in the contemporary milieu.3

Although this chapter is meant to complement the literature concerned with transmigration to endpoints outside the global north, I also use the data I collected to address the fundamental geographical polarity underlying much of transnational theory. Unlike the transmigrants portrayed in the vast majority of the literature, and unlike the Indian laborers described at the outset of this chapter, the Indian diasporic elite in Bahrain are, generally speaking, not caught between two places: their struggle has little to do with the dilemmas of maintaining a social field spanning Bahrain and India. Rather, members of the Indian diasporic elite build and maintain social fields that are rhizomic, stretching from Bahrain back to India, certainly, but also reaching to numerous other points around the globe. Although this model bears some resemblance to Ong’s notion of flexible citizenship, it is the “citizenship” portion of that concept that becomes particularly problematic in the Gulf states, for members of the Indian diaspora in Bahrain rarely find sanctuary in Bahraini citizenship. Rather, they maintain social relations and an identity that are, at best, moored in the Gulf states.

The Lure of the Gulf

On a warm spring day in 2003, I found myself lost in the traffic circles of Saar, one of Manama’s many burgeoning suburbs. I had arranged a five o’clock appointment with George, a busy manager at a dairy plant and a fellow member of the Manama Toastmasters, the international club I had recently joined. After circling the nondescript factory several times, I noticed the small sign on the side of the building, and passing through the security gate, I arrived ten minutes late for the interview. George’s office was piled high with paperwork and files from his daily responsibilities, and after a long discussion about the impact of Gulf migration on his home state of Kerala, George described his own motivations for coming to Bahrain:

I’d been working in India, in different parts of India, for about three years. And I had been working with one of the best companies, one of the best paying companies in all of India. In spite of all my hard work
and struggle when I was younger, I could only make…not more than 100 dinars [$265] a month. One hundred dinars, that used to be my salary, and I would work 16 hours [a day] sometimes, 20 hours, whatever it is. I was in sales, moving to different places, traveling and touring. It’s a big, vast country. In sales, you have to get from one place to another, so there’s a lot of travel. So my salary over that period, take the average, was about 100 dinars. Now when you come here to Bahrain, if you’re lucky you can make two, three times that.

Six weeks later, at a manufacturing warehouse on the opposite side of town, I spoke with Deepali, a young professional, about her experience working in India:

So I started working in American Express in Delhi, and it was quite good, an international company and all that. But the money was so bad!…The pay there was equivalent to 50 dinars [$133] a month, and I was like, “what is this?” So I realized that I was living, but I was not happy. I would be sulking the whole day. I had to get up at 5:30, and change two buses to be in the office by 8:00. I’d finish at 5:00, again two buses, and reach home by 8:30, 9:00.

As George and Deepali make clear, the petroleum-rich nations of the Arabian Peninsula continue to provide economic opportunities that surpass readily available positions in India. The relative pay scales of Gulf-based and Indian-based jobs are common knowledge in professional circles and figure prominently in the long-term career strategies of many of the individuals with whom I spoke. Furthermore, the lure of the Gulf draws individuals at many different points of their career: for every young professional recently arrived on the island, I met others near the end of their career. For example, as a former officer of the Indian navy explained, he and his wife, a radiologist, saw a sojourn in Bahrain as a stepping stone to retirement: “In two years, we could save what would take us seven or eight years in India.” Another Indian who originally left India for Oman on the eve of the 1991 Gulf War noted that, at the time, “for every dollar you earned in India you could earn six here in the Middle East.”

Karen Leonard recently concluded that “market forces rather than individual agency are driving the expatriate workers in the Gulf” (2003, 156). As Deepali and George suggest, market forces play a key role in many decisions to come to the Gulf. Yet in the interviews I conducted with
professionals and other members of the diasporic elite, other justifications for the move abroad also figured prominently in the decision process. In general, many were seeking jobs more connected to global finance, insurance, business, and other related arenas, all in the domain of what Appadurai (1996) calls the global financescape. The oil wealth of the Gulf has fostered the growth of these sectors, and Bahrain, as the regional hub for significant portions of the Gulf’s financial and service industry, is one avenue into the world of transnational business. The economic gain associated with occupations in the sectors of the financescape is complemented by the possibility of transfers to other, more desirable locations (typically Europe, North America, Australia, and New Zealand). In this sense, Gulf destinations serve as a catalyst for even greater diasporic displacements (Leonard 2003, 131).

Other reasons cited by the professionals and skilled laborers I interviewed fall entirely outside the economic calculus often bound to migration. Take the case of Shahzeb, an administrator in an educational institution on the island. The son of a Pakistani (and Muslim) diplomat, Shahzeb grew up in India, where he fell in love with a young Indian (and Hindu) woman. After their controversial marriage, the young couple began to look beyond the borders of Pakistan or India for a place to begin again. The difficulties of life in either of those places, with all the incumbent pressures of a cross-national and cross-religious marriage, were in their estimation too formidable. As they described it to me, Bahrain “represented a sort of neutral ground for us. With the difficulties between Indian and Pakistan, neither place seemed ideal for settling down. Bahrain represented such a place—a neutral ground where we could begin our life anew.” Another successful Indian administrator, Mariam, echoed this sentiment: “I came to Bahrain in 1981. I came not because I wanted to work—I just needed a change of scene. This is my second marriage. My first husband died in India. In India, when you get married…a widow is never looked on in the same fashion as a normal person.” For Mariam, whose story I explore in more detail later in this chapter, Bahrain represented a new start beyond the pressures and confines of the socially constructed role of the Indian widow.

Along these same lines, the recent rise of the Hindu/fundamentalist BJP, a political party intertwined with the increasingly polemical relations between the Muslim and Hindu populations in India, has also pushed Muslim Indians out of India. As a wealthy Indian corporate executive described, “Hyderabad…no, India in general, is no longer a safe place for Muslims. Every year things are changing, and for Muslims it is getting worse.” Like many members of the Indian diasporic elite, he is looking westward for
his future: he had established residency in Chicago and, at the time of my research, was preparing to move his family in the coming year. Moreover, he was no longer maintaining a household in India.

Finally, many members of this professional class were born in Bahrain. Many of these second- and third-generation Indian transnationals are part of the historic subcommunities of the Indian diaspora in Bahrain. The largest and most influential are the Bhatias, the Hindu portion of the Sindh community, cast from their homeland in Karachi after partition. Building upon mercantile linkages already established in the Gulf, many members of the Sindh community eventually moved families and resources to Bahrain, Dubai, and other urban ports of the region. Other Indian groups with a long-standing presence in Bahrain include the Gujarati businessmen whose enterprises historically centered on the sale of gold; the Bohra community, an Indian Muslim sect with a belief system particularly configured around business (see Blank 2001); and the Dhobi community of laundrymen. Over the last two decades, these historic components of the diasporic community have been joined by the sons and daughters of the generation of engineers and professionals who arrived in the 1960s and 1970s. Together they are children between, if not without, national allegiance. As one young woman, the daughter of a construction manager, answered my questions about her “home”: “Where am I from? It’s a very tough question. Sometimes I felt as if I was a kite, blowing between countries, from nowhere.”

To recapitulate, while Leonard suggests the centrality of market forces in the “push” factors that encourage transmigration from South Asia to the Gulf, the purported centrality of those economic calculations must be gauged against the wide variety of other reasons that factor in decision processes. Following Mahler’s call (1998, 82–83) to disaggregate the transmigrant populations by class, I suggest that these noneconomic factors often play a larger role in the transmigratory calculus of the diasporic elite than in the decision processes of the transnational proletariat (see also Gamburd 2000) and, as such, serve as a marker of class. Whereas the members of the transnational proletariat by and large arrive for solely economic reasons, members of the diasporic elite find themselves in Bahrain for a panoply of reasons, including—but not limited to—those of an economic nature.

In analyzing the structural violence levied against the transnational proletariat, I have argued that the economic compulsions—and the transnational debts incurred by members of this proletariat in securing work in the Gulf—are keystones in the structure of dominance that permits and even encourages episodic violence against foreign laborers in the Gulf. If we keep
in mind that economic factors are only one facet of the calculus that brings members of the diasporic elite to the petroleum-rich nations of the Arabian peninsula, then the question becomes this: Are the members of the diasporic elite free from the vulnerabilities rendered by this structure of dominance? Put another way, do the variety of compulsions, both economic and non-economic, that push members of the diasporic elite out of India correlate with a degree of freedom from the structural violence their impoverished countrymen encounter in the Gulf? In the next section I explore this issue and suggest that although the diasporic elite’s reasons for coming to Bahrain are diverse, once ashore their encounters with the citizenry and state are strikingly parallel to those of the transnational proletariat.

**Everyday Encounters and the Exertion of Dominance**

I collected the following story from Anhil, a third-generation merchant at the apex of the Indian diaspora in Bahrain:

Walking down the street, if I see five or six Bahraini guys coming toward me, I take the other road. I just don’t want to go through them—it’s to that point here. If you see five or six of them coming in a group, you go around the corner and come back later…things have happened to me once or twice. I’ve gotten into physical fights. One time I was parking my car, and this guy wanted to park in the same spot. He tells me to move my car, and this led to an altercation. He hit me. I hit him back. And all of the sudden his friends come, and there are ten of them. And then I thought, if I keep hitting this guy back, then ten guys are going to hit me. So I just left, and he hit me a couple of more times as I was getting away. When I got home, I realized that this was the stupidest thing I did, because I was in an alley, and these guys have no respect for—I hate to say this—but they have no respect for their lives.

Another time, I used to have an office downstairs here. And this road, it’s all expat store owners—Indians, Filipinos. And what happens is this: we double park, and everybody knows everybody, they just come and ask us, and we just move the cars. So this Bahraini guy comes for the first time to the road, and my car was blocking the street. Normally a guy would come in and ask me to move it. He comes into my office, storms right past my secretary, and bangs
his hand on my desk telling me to move my car. And I just lost it—I told him not to bang the table. And the next thing you know, it’s a big thing, and he’s called the cops. The first thing the cop asks me is this: what nationality are you? I asked him what that had to do with anything. Finally I said that I was Indian, and he took my license. Then it became another big thing. I had to get my license back, and I had to pay fines for double-parking my car, which under normal circumstances in Bahrain isn’t anything. I was technically wrong, but it’s a law that’s never enforced in Bahrain.

Incidents like this reinforce to me that the less interaction you have with Bahrainis the better.

In laying out a strategy for transnational anthropology, Aihwa Ong argues that “the anthropology of the present should analyze people’s everyday actions as a form of cultural politics embedded in specific power contexts” (1999, 4). In the next two sections, I follow Ong’s advice by portraying these everyday interactions between citizen and foreigner as a means of describing the “specific power contexts” that members of the Indian diaspora encounter as they move about the island. The character of these interactions, where violence is always possible and recourse by the transmigrant to legal and institutional frameworks is difficult, is part of what Franklin called the “informal nature of domination” that transmigrants face in Bahrain (1985, 104). Like Gupta, however, I see the division between the formal and informal venues as problematic: rather, through an analysis of these everyday interactions we can see the state “implicated in the minute texture of everyday life” (Gupta 2006, 211). The pattern of these everyday interactions reveals the deployment of two contradictory logics that are key to understanding the systemic violence levied against foreigners of all classes.

Elite members of the Indian diaspora, whether recent arrivals or the children of transmigrants, envision themselves as components of the transnational financescape, a term deployed by Appadurai to describe the mysterious and rapid disposition of global capital in the contemporary world (1996, 34). As highly trained human capital, elite members of the Indian diaspora contribute to key sectors of the Bahraini economy as engineers, doctors, managers, financiers, and advertising executives, and in countless other positions that the undertrained citizenry are incapable or unwilling to fill (Khalaf and Alkobaisi 1999, 284; al-Rasheed 2005, 1). In doing so, members of the diasporic elite find themselves in cadence with the version of Bahraini nationalism widely purveyed by the state and its citizenry, a
blueprint that envisions Bahrain as the progressive hub of finance and service industries in the Gulf, a beacon of modernity in the region, and a tourist attraction constructed around the city as a site of consumption. Yet the hierarchical logic of this global financescape—the logic that, in many cases, drew the diasporic elite from their homeland to Bahrain—coexists with a contradictory set of power relations codified in the state and manifest in the everyday interactions between foreigner and citizen-host. In these everyday interactions, even the lowliest citizen holds power over the educated and successful transmigrant. The friction of these two competing visions is evident in a continuation of the interview with Anhil, the merchant quoted earlier. In exasperation, he appealed to the neoliberal logic edified in Bahrain’s national vision: “I mean, I have a business. I run things! I import things into this country! I pay taxes! I export things! And there are very few Bahrainis who actually do that—I actually purchase things made in Bahrain and export them to other countries, and earn an income for Bahrain!”

Bourdieu (1987) uses the concept of habitus to describe the learned dispositions individuals bring to bear in social interactions. In describing the interactions between citizens and noncitizens in the petroleum-rich states of the contemporary Gulf, scholars have connected this habitus to a “master-servant mentality” (Leonard 2003, 144), often stretching back to the particular configuration of the pearling industry’s indentured servitude or to the tribal structure of the Bedouin peoples (Beaugé 1986, as quoted in Longva 1997, 78). Others have connected the citizenry’s habitus to the explosive period of modernization wrought by the discovery of oil, a particular configuration that Champion argues has resulted in a “mudir syndrome,” using the Arabic word for “boss,” where every citizen sees him or herself as entitled to a position of authority and command over the legions of foreigners at work in the Gulf states (1999, 5). These explanations may provide some perspective on the genealogy of power relations in the contemporary Gulf, but as contemporary expressions of inequality these relations are more than simply vestiges of the past: they illustrate modern forms of dominance and governance. More acutely, this structure of dominance substitutes nationality, ethnicity, religion, and citizenship for the class logic wrought by the neoliberal model, a model that is at once essential to the predominant national vision promoted by the state and, at the same time, antithetical to the ethnocratic and sectarian order of the Bahraini state.

On an individual level, transmigrants encounter these particular forms of governance as a daily matter of course: at traffic stops and accidents—alarmingly common on the island—police commonly request the nationality
of those involved as the first order of business. Several of my informants remarked that altercations often devolved into citizens shouting, “I’m a Bahraini!” Newspaper articles ubiquitously list the nationality of individuals in the course of reporting: “A Pakistani barber was reportedly deported last night after stabbing a former employer”; “A Bahraini was stabbed in the back in a clash between two groups of men”; “A Moroccan woman was attacked after accepting an offer of a lift home to Juffair from a Manama hotel.”

In everyday interactions and in the discursive terrain of the media, individuals are described in terms that locate their relationship to the state by way of their ethnicity and nationality, thereby reinforcing the bonds between what Longva (2005), in her analysis of the Kuwaiti state, describes as the ethnocratic basis of state power and meaning of citizenship. Or, as Neha Vora (2008) has aptly argued, middle-class Indians quickly develop a racial consciousness during their time in the Gulf.

The governance of the transmigrant, in the Foucauldian sense of both direct governmental control and, more obliquely, a regime of order, discipline, and organization, is constantly reinforced in these daily interactions. The effects of this governance take shape in the residential patterns that characterize life on the island. Whereas poor and middle-class members of the diaspora often live in urban enclaves—in particular neighborhoods, once Bahraini, and now abandoned to the foreign underclass—the upper segments of the diaspora often dwell in the upscale mixed neighborhoods peripheral to the city. In these locations, most of my informants stated, they had little to no interaction with Bahraini neighbors. As an Indian construction manager with an older villa in the suburb of Riffa remarked, “We have never made any Bahraini friends. I’ve lived in Bahrain for so many years—twenty-three, twenty-four years—but I haven’t made any Bahraini friends. I don’t visit their families, and I don’t go to their festivals.” The social activities of Indian nationals are largely confined to Indian restaurants, the many clubs and voluntary organizations dominated by the Indian diaspora, and the temples, mosques, and churches of the expatriate elite.

These separate social worlds are characteristic of the Gulf, and the governance that produces this separation helps explain the function of exclusion and dominance in a plural society (Longva 1997; Nagy 1998, 84–85; Vora 2008). In this section, however, I have also sought to connect the habitus deployed by citizens in everyday encounters to the Bahraini national project. That national project channels a neoliberal logic and is manifest in both the discursive terrain, where Bahrain is perceived and projected as a site of global consumption, a boomtown, and the financial and service hub of the
Gulf, and also in the material realm, where shopping malls and skyscrapers rise along the low shores of the island, and educated and trained human capital streams to the island in service of this vision. Yet in the everyday interactions between citizens and foreigners, the basic class logic of this neoliberal model is mitigated by the logic of citizenship, itself the conceptual nexus for racial, ethnic, religious, and gendered vectors. Understanding the terms of this contradiction, I argue, is key to understanding the everyday violence foreigners encounter on the island.

**Encounters with Power: The Diasporic Elite and the Kafala**

The habitus deployed by citizens in their everyday interactions with noncitizen transmigrants represents a key force in the subjectification of members of the Indian diaspora—both working class and elite—as servants of the Bahraini state and its citizenry. In Wolf’s multivalenced notion of power, this roughly corresponds to *interactional* power, manifest in relations between individuals, and *embodied* power, in the Nietzschean sense, that draws “attention to how persons enter into a play of power” (1999, 5). Through the deployment of this power, as an expression of habitus, the achieved differences and hierarchies wrought by the neoliberal logic of global capitalism are eclipsed by the citizen/noncitizen dichotomy: whereas impoverished laborers complained of being constantly pelted with stones on their journey between their decrepit labor camp and the small grocery store a block away, Indian men of significant worth and accomplishment avoid Bahrainis on the street, endure constant ethnic slurs, and avoid any public or direct confrontation with citizens.

In his analysis of the state, Foucault noted that “relations of power, and hence the analysis that must be made of them, necessarily extend beyond the limits of the state. In two senses: first of all because the state, for all the omnipotence of its apparatuses, is far from being able to occupy the whole field of actual power relations, and further because the state can only operate on the basis of other, already existing power relations. The state is superstructural in relation to a whole series of power networks that invest the body, sexuality, the family, kinship, knowledge, technology and so forth” (1985, 64). Without denying the certain, interlocking relationship between everyday practice and the relations of power codified in the state, in the case of Bahrain we can also delineate the opposite of Foucault’s point: the habitus deployed by citizens in their everyday interactions with transmigrant
foreigners depends on a state apparatus configured to reinforce the hegemony of citizen over noncitizen. In other words, the habitus that citizens bring to their everyday interactions with noncitizens, and in that sense, the governance exercised over the diaspora as a whole, is itself premised on a series of structural arrangements, codified in the state, that formally reinforce the power of the citizenry over the transmigrants on the island.

As should be clear from the earlier chapters of this book, the risks and uncertainties of life in Bahrain often coalesce around the kafala, or sponsorship system. Unlike the working class, most members of the diasporic elite retain control of their passport. Their kafeel, however, whether an individual or a corporate entity, still mediates their relationship to the state. The power of the kafeel is invested in a series of procedures and documents, including the work contract, which specifies a particular period of time (typically two or three years) at a particular salary; a no-objection certificate, which clears the transmigrant to enter the country and take a job; and a residence permit, which is associated with a particular employer and a particular job. These contractual, legal, and bureaucratic aspects of the kafala are essential components by which the asymmetrical relationships between citizens and foreign workers are constructed. In essence, they channel power to the kafeel.

The following letter to the editor of one of the English newspapers in Bahrain illustrates some of the practical and bureaucratic dilemmas faced by the professional and elite members of the Indian diaspora:

I have been working at a local further education institute as a senior lecturer in travel and tourism for almost fifteen years. During this period I am happy and proud to state that I played a pivotal role in training hundreds of Bahrainis sponsored by the Labour Ministry to take up jobs in various airlines and travel agencies. On December 30, 2003, I was asked by the owner to sign a document stating that I received all my dues from the institute since my date of joining in February 1989. Since I refused, my salary for December 2003 was not paid. I threatened to take the matter to court. This type of tactic has been tried several times on me but I never succumbed to the owner’s coercion.

On December 30, 2003, at 6 pm the owner convened a meeting where he verbally and in writing promised to pay BD2,000 [$5,306] immediately and BD1,000 [$2,656] by mid-2004. This amount, being only one-tenth of what I should receive, was turned down. On
December 31, 2003, I lodged a complaint at the Labour Ministry and since no settlement was reached, they passed the dispute on to the courts. On January 6, 2004, the owner sent me two invoices to the tune of BD16,800 [$44,576] being sponsorship charges. A grave violation. All these matters were brought to the attention of the Indian Embassy.

The act was merely to intimidate me to sign the document. Six months have passed and I am without a job. My family is here and my daughter goes to school. I am living by begging and borrowing. Many institutes have come forward to hire my services. They all do have valid work permits and are willing to change my sponsorship. The major impediment, I need permission to work. When I approach the Labour Ministry with this request, they have directed me to the Ministry of Justice and on approaching the Ministry of Justice, I am directed to the Labour Ministry. So between these ministries I am being sandwiched for no fault of mine. I will be more than happy to leave the island if my dues are settled in full according to the labour laws for the private sector.

I strongly feel that only the press can play a role in bringing my plight to the attention of concerned authorities. Signed, Jacob Samuel

Jacob’s dilemma points to the vulnerabilities even well-placed individuals face in the difficult working environment of contemporary Bahrain. If we take his calculations at face value, his employer had accumulated a debt to Jacob of nearly $80,000. After resisting his employer’s attempts to erase this debt, he appealed to the bureaucratic institutions of the state. My informants on the island were clear about the Indian embassy’s inability or unwillingness to negotiate these sorts of dilemmas with the Bahraini government, and like several of my informants, Jacob found himself “sandwiched” between the Ministry of Labor and the Ministry of Justice. Although a handful of my informants had carried cases through the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs to the courts, none had found success in this venture. As one Indian individual told me, “nobody I know has ever received a good judgment from the court.” Longva, who spent many hours of her fieldwork in the courthouses of Kuwait, concluded that “non-Kuwaitis, finally, had no absolute legal autonomy. They were all subordinate to their Kuwait employers/sponsors in what was to them one of the most important aspects of their lives, namely, work” (1997, 129). This conclusion matches the
perception of the Indian community I encountered in Bahrain, and it is this perception—as much as the reality of the situation—that keeps noncitizens from engaging the extant legal framework on the island.

In his letter, Jacob also mentions that “many other institutes have come forward to hire my services.” As this statement suggests, the kafala structures a labor market that is not free. Transmigrants are bound to particular jobs, and their ability to switch jobs depends on the goodwill and acquiescence of their kafeel. In essence, the foreign workers, whether laborers or professionals, are bonded labor, and the structural arrangement of the kafala fetters their ability to act as free agents on the labor market or, put another way, to escape the dominion and exploitation of particular sponsors.

The power of the sponsor to prevent foreign workers from departing the exploitative conditions of a particular job, however, is only one facet of the systemic control the diasporic elite face. Many of the professionals arrive alone—in the parlance of the diaspora, they are “in front” of families whose members await the necessary paperwork and visas in order to join them in Bahrain. Individuals seeking a “family visa” must, again, work through their kafeel to obtain such permission, and several of my informants reported this requirement as another fulcrum of abuse. They must prove that they earn over 250 dinars ($664) per month, the state-mandated minimum for those wishing to bring their families to Bahrain, and a figure barely large enough to cover the expenses of maintaining a family there, which typically includes the cost of the Indian diasporic community’s private schools. They also need the sponsor to sign off on the paperwork that will allow their families to reside on the island.

Wives, sons, and daughters also face numerous difficulties in obtaining employment on the island. As another letter to the *Gulf Daily News* described the situation:

My wife has both an NOC [no objection certificate] from my sponsor as well as a job offer from a company who is providing sponsorship. We do not have any children. But unfortunately after dozens of visits to Immigration by the company’s [representative] the transfer from my family visa to my wife’s potential employer’s visa is rejected. The reason specified was “Transfer from family to work is only possible if position in work permit is teacher, executive secretary or nurse.” My wife’s occupation does not fall in either of these categories. I would like to have GDNPR [General Directorate of Nationality, Passports and Residence] opinion on above as this is a crucial phase of life for
my wife. She has excellent qualifications and experience and the law saying she cannot work even if she gets a job and sponsorship will shatter her dreams. I would like to know if this is really a law?

The GDNPR spokesperson replied as follows: “We thank the reader for his complimentary comments. We would like to confirm that transfers from a family visa to a work visa are only possible through GDNPR if the job category is teacher, nurse or executive secretary. The only possible alternative for the reader’s wife is for her prospective employer to approach the Ministry of Labour for a Local Transfer as it may be possible for her to transfer directly from one sponsor to another on a local transfer.”

Although it is of interest that the opportunities for transmigrants’ wives and daughters reveal the gendered aspects of the foreign workforce on the island, the key issue here is that obtaining the family visa, as well as obtaining a “local transfer,” is contingent upon the goodwill of the sponsor (successful in this case). Hence the power invested in the kafala extends beyond the labor of an individual foreigner: the kafeel also has power over the very presence of a foreigner’s spouse and children.

Both the diasporic elite and the transnational proletariat face similar, systemic vulnerabilities under the kafala. Because the transnational proletariat cannot bring family members to the island, however, the vectors of vulnerability surrounding foreign workers’ families are unique to the diasporic elite. Yet these are not the only vulnerabilities unique to this class of foreign workers: members of the diasporic elite, and particularly merchants and business owners, face another distinct set of risks unique to their economic position. Bahraini law requires that all business ventures have at least one Bahraini owner. This rule has resulted in the formation of a class of “silent” or “sleeping” partners among the Bahraini citizenry—individuals who lend their name to the business registrations of foreign-born entrepreneurs. Leonard, working with the Indian population in Kuwait and the Emirates, says that “these working relationships are typically quite nominal, with sponsors taking commissions from many foreigners annually but not participating in the business” (2003, 138). In my discussions with the professional and entrepreneurial community, the established rate for this relationship was BD100 ($265) per month. Unlike the conditions reported by Leonard in the United Arab Emirates, however, in Bahrain these relationships are prone to abuse, and many Indian entrepreneurs I met related stories of financial disaster resulting from the silent partner relationship. Ahmed, an Indian Muslim, briefly described his own experience with a
Bahraini partner: “I started a business here a few years back, but it collapsed. Once it became successful, the sleeping partner stole it out from under me. Once he saw that the money was being made through my efforts, he took it from me.” As these comments suggest, the relationship is inherently fraught with complications wrought by the citizen/noncitizen polarity, and the vulnerability foreign entrepreneurs face is reinforced by the difficulty they encounter in both accessing and utilizing the legal system.

A small number of individuals in the diaspora escape some portion of these vulnerabilities through gaining citizenship, which makes Bahrain exceptional in relation to the rest of the Gulf, where generally transmigrants (and particularly non-Arab transmigrants) can never become citizens (see Falzon 2003, 675; Leonard 2003, 139). Bahrain has recently opened channels to allow applications for citizenship, and a small number of prominent foreign businessmen with long-standing ties in the kingdom have successfully applied. The explicit requirements include twenty-five years of residence (or fifteen years for those of Arab descent), although many of my contacts in the Indian community noted that some of the prominent businessmen who had achieved citizenship did not meet this requirement. The application itself is followed by a series of interviews in which applicants are expected to demonstrate a facility with Arabic. Individuals also reported that large fees are involved, although the amounts described to me varied from BD20,000 ($53,000) to upward of BD70,000 ($186,000). Long delays are also the norm. As one individual stated, “I began the application process three years ago. They called me for interviews—they’ve interviewed me twice. The last one was a year ago, and they said they’d call me again. They haven’t called since, so I’m just waiting.” Another prosperous Indian merchant described his experience: after beginning the application process, they requested his passport. With a business that required constant travel back and forth to India, he rescinded his application after three months, as he needed his passport to travel.

Although Bahraini citizenship decreases the vulnerability of foreign-born entrepreneurs and merchants to the kafala, it is a path only available to the wealthy. Moreover, it does little to address the lived experience of the diasporic elite on the island, a fact intricately related to the ethnocratic underpinnings of the concept of citizenship prevalent in the Gulf region. As one Indian merchant observed, “For the Muslims, maybe citizenship is a possibility, but for the rest of us, it’s a different ballgame. . . . If I go to the market, to the souk and I see you [the author], I know you’re a Westerner. If somebody sees me, he says, okay, an Indian. If I take a Bahraini passport,
my face says that I’m an Indian. The people will still not take me as a Bahraini. They will treat me as an Indian.”

My well-placed informants among the Indian community reported that the number of Indian nationals who successfully obtained citizenship could be counted on one hand. Although the number of Bahraini citizens of Indian origin is very small, many of the older families on the island possess a certificate of residence. Obtained before the 1950s, these permanent residence permits allow members of the Indian diaspora to be “self-sponsored” and thereby escape the power-laden relationship with a citizen-kafeel. For the remaining great majority, however, negotiating the complexities of residence permits, work permits, permits for family members, and contract renewals is a constant struggle.

In this section I have attempted to illuminate the Indian diasporic elite’s experience with the kafala. I have focused specifically on the visa regulations, residence permits, business licenses, and other bureaucratic requirements that, en suite, channel power to the citizen-kafeel. Unlike the working-class Indians described in the previous chapter, members of the diasporic elite face less comprehensive risks in coming to Bahrain. Although the actual amount of debt involved may be much larger than that incurred by members of the transnational proletariat, few members of the diasporic elite incur debts of the relative magnitude of the working class. The vulnerabilities of the diasporic elite are typically confined to the businesses they have built on the island and the financial well-being of their nuclear family. As I illustrated in earlier chapters, the vulnerabilities of the Indian transnational proletariat encompass the productive assets of the extended family and, in a more poignant sense, their basic ability to survive.

Nonetheless, members of the Indian diasporic elite in Bahrain are susceptible to the power and inequities of a foreign system, a fact directly tied to their trans-status. Although they may bring a variety of strategies to the table, none overcomes the subjectification wrought by the citizenry’s habitus—the set of learned dispositions that exert the citizen’s dominance over foreigners, that reinforce the logic of race, ethnicity, nationality, religion, and culture over that of class; a habitus that continually asserts the dominance of citizens in a nation heavily dependent on the contribution of educated and professional foreigners. The fettered agency the diasporic elite brings to bear against the vulnerabilities of this system is often insufficient, and insecurity about the future in Bahrain is a common trope in their conversation. As a result, members of the diasporic elite commonly forge contingency plans as a response to the uncertain future. In the next
section, I explore these contingency plans—themselves another form of agency—in depth.

Strategic Transnationalism

In one sense, the kafala can be conceived as a system for managing and controlling the flow of labor to the petroleum-rich states of the Arabian Peninsula. Through an examination of the practical and everyday experience of this system, I have sought to portray the kafala in terms of the power it channels and codifies—a system that not only manages the flow of transmigrants to the island, but also one that seeks to manage and control these foreign workers during their time on the island. I have argued that we can see these power relations in the everyday interactions between foreign workers and citizen-hosts, conceived in terms of habitus, and in the structural, bureaucratic practices and policies that underpin those interactions. In this section, I portray the agency deployed by Indian diasporic elite in reaction to the dominance they face in Bahrain.

In part, this agency may be viewed as a response to the difficult conditions and problematic, everyday relations codified by the kafala. This agency, however, can also be seen as a response to more general conditions—conditions outside the bounds of the everyday interactions I have described. Those conditions include a chronic uncertainty about the future. As noncitizens, the great majority of the diasporic elite live by the whims of the state and the citizenry: their tenure on the island is always under threat of revocation; the positions they hold are subject to their individual sponsors and to the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, which can, as its purview, revoke or fail to renew residence and work permits. Together, these more general vulnerabilities coalesce under the concept of Bahrainization.

In its simplest reading, Bahrainization is the nomenclature of the kingdom’s efforts to replace foreign workers with citizens. The rudiments of this collection of policies were in place in the early 1970s. At the same time, Bahrainization is an ever-evolving set of policies and directives, often contradictory, that mandate particular ratios of citizen employees to transmigrants, often in particular sectors of the economy. For example, in the mid-1990s the state mandated that all taxi drivers on the island must be Bahraini nationals. During my fieldwork on the island, business owners reported that in many sectors one must hire one citizen for every transmigrant employed; hotels track their citizen-to-noncitizen employee ratios, and
those with the largest proportion of citizen employees receive awards from the government. New Bahrainization policies are frequently announced in the newspapers of the island, and although infrequently codified in law or comprehensively enforced, they nonetheless destabilize the livelihoods of foreign workers on the island. Foreign entrepreneurs and business owners are never sure if the laws will allow them to continue working on the island; capital reinvested in the business is always at risk, for a single edict can close the door to particular sectors of the economy for foreign workers. During my time on the island (2002–3), for example, the new minister of labor and social affairs announced a directive of 100 percent Bahrainization for the ministry itself, which included the Bahrain Training Institute, my sponsor institution and home to a large staff of expatriate instructors on multiyear contracts. Similarly, a year after my departure, the minister of labor and social affairs announced the kingdom’s plans to fully “Bahrainize” car sales showrooms, supermarkets, travel agencies, and furniture stores by 2006.

With the future of the transnational presence in the Bahraini workforce always uncertain, the active transnational connections established and maintained by members of the Indian diaspora are more than an attempt to keep in touch with the culture of their homeland; these connections are essential components of their livelihood strategies—active networks sought to balance the uncertainties of life outside the Indian state and, more specifically, the vulnerabilities unique to the nations of the Arabian Gulf. Although many of the families I spoke with maintain a presence in India, most have also extended their networks westward. Frequently these networks are an extension of historic, transnational familial and social networks established in the colonial and postcolonial era—rebuilding, for example, connections with portions of the family that found their way to colonial Africa under British rule or, alternatively, to England itself, where many of the former Indian colonial bureaucrats obtained citizenship.

Many of the family histories and migration narratives I collected illustrate these points, but in the sections that follow I present vignettes describing the particular circumstances and histories of two different members of the Indian diasporic elite in Bahrain.

Mariam’s Story

Mariam’s family is from Goa, the former Portuguese colony on India’s western coast. Her father worked for the British colonial administration, a post that eventually carried him to colonial Uganda, where Mariam and three of her siblings were born. Her father retired from that position and
moved back to India but was unable to secure sufficient employment to feed the family, so he returned to Africa. The three youngest children, including Mariam, remained in Goa with their mother to finish their schooling. When Idi Amin came to power in Uganda, her siblings, sensing trouble, began to move their money to Canada; at that time, Mariam noted, “Canada was still raw—they wanted people.” One brother stayed behind in Africa and lost everything, and later went to Canada as a refugee.

Mariam married in Goa and planned a life in India. She and her husband moved about India in search of better work, but after the untimely death of her husband she returned to Goa to work as a teacher. Goa is a conservative city, she said, and the life of a widow is not an easy one. As related in the preceding chapter, Mariam stated that “a widow is never looked on in the same fashion as a normal person.” With her family spread around the globe, Mariam began to consider other options. Her sister suggested she come to Bahrain. Although she had never been to Bahrain, it was like a homecoming: “we’re a big family,” she described, “and we’re all separated. We’re all out, some in Canada, wherever else, in Africa. My sister was here [in Bahrain], so coming to Bahrain, I felt like I was returning to my family, you know?” Her sister helped arrange employment for Mariam at one of the large embassies on the island.

After some years in Bahrain, Mariam remarried a Goan transmigrant she met on the island. They are uncertain about how long they will remain in Bahrain. Her daughter is in school at the American University in Dubai but intends to continue her studies in the United States. Her parents and siblings are naturalized British citizens. Three of her siblings are “out”—a term she used to describe their presence in Canada, and the remainder are “here,” meaning in Bahrain or India. When I noted that she used “here” to refer to both Bahrain and India, she replied, “I know, I know! It’s because we’re so close to Bahrain—Bahrain is so close to India, we feel we are there. It’s just like India here!” Her brothers in Canada have children now, most of whom have married Canadians. They still maintain a house in Goa—“we have our own place—you have to have one! In case you’re thrown out of Bahrain, you have to have a roof over your head”—a common enough practice, but one not shared by all members of the diasporic elite.

For Mariam, Bahrain represents one juncture in her family’s long transnational history. Through her familial relations, she maintains contact with her home city in India, with the United Kingdom, fleetingly with Africa, and most strongly with Canada. Her daughter, while at the time in the United Arab Emirates, plans on relocating to the United States, thereby
establishing a new beachhead in the extended family’s geographical distribution. Mariam’s job in Bahrain is a good one—her position at a Western embassy provides an additional buffer against the tides of Bahrainization. At the same time, her husband’s position at an advertising firm is more precarious, for it is the very sort of position that the government is seeking to Bahrainize. The network of family and friends, established over a lifetime, provides Mariam and her nuclear family with the opportunity to weigh the vulnerabilities of life in Bahrain against the costs of relocation to one of the other nodes in her global network.

**Farid’s Story**

In the final decade of the nineteenth century, Farid’s great grandfather, a Bohri Muslim from the westernmost Indian state of Gujarat, embarked on a pilgrimage to Mecca. The journey by ship and land took the better part of three months each way; including a two-month stay in Mecca, his sojourn lasted nearly eight months. After a stop at Muscat at the entrance to the Gulf and passage through the Strait of Hormuz, the ship anchored in the shallow bay between Muharraq and Manama, the two principal islands of Bahrain. There, before journeying onward to Mecca, Farid’s great grandfather encountered a busy port and market, and a British/Indian colonial bureaucracy actively seeking merchants and traders from points east.

Returning from his pilgrimage, Farid’s great grandfather began to plan for the move to Bahrain, and after ten years of preparation, he arrived in 1902. His brother eventually joined him, and the two—shuttling back and forth between Bombay and Bahrain—profited as merchant traders of various goods. Eventually, Farid’s great-grandfather’s three sons took over the business. Like the family’s first generation of transmigrant merchants, the three brothers shuttled back and forth between Bombay and Bahrain every two or three years. One brother managed the business, the second, either in transit or in Bahrain, was brought up to speed, and the third cared for the families and properties in Bombay. One of the three brothers, a reckless spendthrift who, when alone in Bahrain, would inevitably purchase the latest model Mercedes or an American-made Harley Davidson motorcycle, was eventually pushed out of the business and permanently relocated to Bombay, where he was given a small piece of property to manage.

The two remaining brothers now controlled the business in Bahrain. In the years that followed, one brother’s son fell in love with the other brother’s daughter, and subsequently they married against the wishes of their parents. Farid was the new couple’s firstborn son, and within a year
of his birth (in the mid-1960s) the couple moved to Bahrain. Initially they lived with their parents in the “joint family” tradition of India, in a flat in the historic central souk of downtown Manama. Farid’s father opened a haberdashery on one of the narrow thoroughfares of the souk, all under a business license acquired before regulations required a Bahraini partner. This arrangement means that he and his family are “self-sponsored.” Today, Farid and his wife run the same store his father built decades ago, and he has several warehouses and a small office, all of which are located near the original business.

The business is profitable, but Farid remains insecure in Bahrain. Additional businesses he has opened over the years require a Bahraini “sleeping partner,” and although the initial agreement is often for BD100 ($265) a month, these partners often increase their demands once a business shows a profit. As Farid noted, “He [the sleeping partner] comes and tells you he wants BD500 [$1,326], and you have no choice. You have to give it to him. Otherwise he’ll just pack you off. Your whole existence in Bahrain depends on him.” It is a constant threat, and he has avoided sleeping partners’ attempted takeovers by loading threatened businesses with debt. Although he has the license for the haberdashery, he is not a permanent resident. He still has to renew his residence permit every two years.

Farid considered getting a Bahraini passport. Through a well-placed local contact, he weighed the option of paying BD20,000 ($53,056) for a Bahraini passport, calculating that he would then be able to save hundreds of dinars per month on the businesses by avoiding the need for sleeping partners. Instead, however, he began moving his resources to Canada. As he described the process, “it wasn’t easy. I had to do a lot of running around, but I got my [Canadian] passport. So if I get kicked out of here—and that could happen, because there really aren’t any laws here—if they did revoke my residence permit, there are no courts I could go to or anything like that. It would just be done. . . . But now I know I can go to Canada, and I’m relatively comfortable there. I could start a business, do something, get a job. . . . It’s a safety net. At least in the back of my mind, that part is safe. I mean, it was a big thing for me. You might not understand.”

As a fourth-generation Indian transmigrant, Farid has a significant connection to Bahrain. His businesses represent a considerable financial resource built over several generations. Moreover, the business license he inherited provides his cornerstone business—the haberdashery—with a degree of insulation against the vulnerability wrought by the kafala and sleeping-partner system. Nonetheless, the tenuousness of his existence in
Bahrain, illustrated by his inability to use the legal system and his distrust of the mercurial Central Population Register (which issues the residence permits), led him to procure citizenship in Canada.11

Aihwa Ong uses the term flexible citizenship “to refer especially to the strategies and effects of mobile managers, technocrats, and professionals seeking to both circumvent and benefit from different nation-state regimes by selecting different sites for investments, work, and family relocation” (1999, 112). Although both Farid and Mariam generally fit this model, I use the term strategic transnationalism as a means of downplaying the importance of citizenship in the diasporic elite’s strategic geographical calculations. Although citizenship remains one important variable in their strategic planning, only a small handful of the Indian diasporic elite are citizens of Bahrain. Instead, like Farid, with citizenship in Canada, or Mariam, with citizenship in the United Kingdom and India, members of the Indian diasporic elite build transnational networks to mitigate the vulnerability that noncitizens face in Bahrain. In this calculus, the diasporic elite seeks to benefit from opportunities in Bahrain: as a primary regional nexus in the global financescape, Bahrain is dotted with transnational corporations that serve the more conservative surrounding nations. These opportunities, combined with the generally higher remuneration than that paid to those holding similar positions in India, make work in the Gulf a lucrative, if risky, venture for the Indian diasporic elite. In responding to the vulnerabilities wrought by the structure of dominance that constrains and controls the foreign population in Bahrain, the Indian elite build on historic networks forged in the colonial and postcolonial era—transnational networks that connect them to multiple continents. They also forge new networks that engage global capitalism in multiple territories and venues. Together, these historic and new networks—the essential fabric of this strategic transnationalism—are at once a reaction to the vulnerabilities particular to the Gulf states and a sophisticated and strategic adjustment to the mobility inherent to the demands of the neoliberal financescape.

Transnationals Unbound

The great majority of case studies in transnationalism focus on migration to the West, and particularly to the United States. The structure of dominance that Indian transmigrants face in Bahrain is composed of a significantly different set of vulnerabilities than those typically portrayed
in these case studies. In this chapter I focus on the diasporic Indian elite, and through my analysis I challenge the fundamental bipolarity not only of these typical transnational models (in the sense of people with social fields spanning two nation-states), but also of diasporic models (in the sense of people with a particular relationship to a territorial homeland). Like a handful of other scholars concerned with contemporary transnationalism, I seek to illuminate the transnational lives of populations moving outside “the West,” widely conceived.

Using the basic bifurcation suggested by Mahler and already used by Leonard, I compared the lives of the Indian diasporic elite in Bahrain with those of the Indian transnational proletariat on the island. My analysis suggests that, on the one hand, the diasporic elite face a variety of vulnerabilities unique to their socioeconomic position: the presence of their families on the island, for example, renders them vulnerable to particular forms of abuse under the sponsorship system. Similarly, the businesses they own and manage open them to another venue of vulnerability. On the other hand, the ethnocratic underpinnings of the structure of dominance in place on the island reject the class-based logic of the neoliberal system, and generally subject members of the diasporic elite to the same forms of everyday structural violence that their impoverished countrymen—the transnational proletariat—face. The color of their skin, their language, religion, and culture, their nationality: these vectors all come in to play in the subjectification of the diasporic elite as servants to the Bahraini national project.

Unlike their impoverished countrymen at work on the island, however, members of the Indian diasporic elite build and maintain a set of global networks to mitigate the vulnerabilities rendered by this structure of dominance. The insecurities of life in Bahrain, including the violent undercurrents of their everyday encounters with the citizenry, but also encompassing their structural inability to assert their rights in the bureaucratic machinery of the state, push them to a strategic transnationalism. Their lives are, in some sense, untethered from both the local milieu of Bahrain and the diasporic, ancestral homeland of India: their allegiance is to what Appadurai has called the “nonterritorial transnation” (1996, 173).