Abstract

This dissertation is based on ethnographic research in the South Indian branches of the Sivananda Yoga Vedanta Centres (SYVC), an international non-profit institution with a mission "to spread peace, health and joy through yoga." The project describes the lived dimensions of relations across difference in the SYVC, offering an intimate perspective on the inter-cultural relations of globalization. I argue that imaginations of spiritual India at work in the production of transnational yoga eclipse power relations that frame and support the situation of middle class Westerners' escape to a spiritual place while others labor to make this escape comfortable.

As a transnational organization, the SYVC also participates in a wider global complex of relations between wealthy and poor nations, catering to students and guests from both India and abroad, as well as managing both voluntary staff and paid workers from widely varying backgrounds. This makes the SYVC an important case for a study of the intercultural relations of globalization, even as organization founder Swami Vishnudevananda's own mission for the organization was to overcome the divisions of nation, culture, and history. Yet, unlike the Free Trade Zones of neoliberal policies where cheap production is enabled by global political economic forces, the SYVC structure is situated in a spiritual economy of *karma yoga*, or selfless service, and peace is the stated goal. Here, low wage "flexible labor" contrasts with the work of volunteer staff with a spiritualized mission, whose cultural capital and/or greater economic flexibility allow them to give their time and labor for free. This transformed economy with a focus on the "spiritual" makes the SYVC fertile ground for consideration of ethical issues in our global political economy and an examination of the limits of cosmopolitan ideals.

FLEXIBLE LABOR IN A SPIRITUAL ECONOMY:
PEACE, WORK, AND INEQUALITY IN GLOBALIZED YOGA

by

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Note on Diacritics, Transliteration, and Translation

This project was conducted in the transnational and multilingual spaces of an organization that draws vocabulary and concepts from Sanskritic Hinduism and from regional Indian languages, especially Malayalam and Tamil. For words derived from Sanskrit used commonly in the organization, including names of important Hindu texts and deities, I do not use diacritical marks but rather quote according to standard organizational spelling (as derived from official publications), which is more or less common to standardized spellings of these words in English (eg: jivan, atman, Siva, Krishna, Bhagavad Gita).

When introducing non-English words for the first time, I italicize the word and give a gloss, immediately following. Thereafter, non-English words remain in standard Romanized script. A simple glossary at the end contains basic definitions for all non-English words and acronyms repeated more than once in the text. When quoting or directly referring to original sources that reference Sanskrit words, I follow the diacritical style of the original text.

Unless otherwise specified, all translations from participant observation and interviews conducted in Malayalam and Tamil are my own. In some cases, to clarify for the benefit of readers who know these languages, I have given key phrases or words in the original Malayalam or Tamil. In these cases, I follow the Library of Congress guidelines for diacritical marks.

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Prologue

July 1, 2010

Rain pours down outside the open-air hall, filling the aural landscape with a dense harmony of drops, which substitutes for the usual cacophony of birdcalls. The late morning air is thick and humid, compared to a few hours before, when meditators in this space sat tightly bundled in shawls and light blankets against the cool morning air. Monsoon time is low season at the *ashram* (retreat, literally "monastery"), so just a small number of new guests have arrived on this first day of the Yoga Vacation, and we are gathered in this spacious central hall in the Sivananda Yoga Dhanwantari ashram in Neyyar Dam, Kerala, for an orientation.

At the morning staff meeting a few hours before, the ashram's director, who would be leading the orientation, had asked two staff members to set out the mats in a V-shape so that guests could face one another. Although I was just there to observe, I found myself taking the initiative with this set-up a few moments before the meeting was to begin, since the assigned staff had not arrived. I called to a couple of women who were not yet involved in conversation and asked for their help, and we took just a few minutes to roll out four thin grass mats in two rows, oriented in a V-shape with the opening to the large altar at the head of the hall. Someone got the idea to line up a fifth mat straight across the back of this arrangement, somewhat like this: V.

Of the nineteen people in the room, ten, including the leader, are men. Eight of these men are Indian, and five of these Indian men choose seats across the far-back fifth mat, while the other three seat themselves in the back two rows of the V. Seated next to one of them, is a male guest apparently of East Asian background. Also in the back row is a stylishly dressed black woman from Paris. In the front rows, there are four other non-Indian women on one side, all of

whom are fair skinned and appear to be of European ancestry, and on the other side, two white women (including myself) and two Indian women.

The leader, the ashram's director, is a middle-aged Zimbabwean-born man of European ancestry. Trim, clean-shaven, and smiling, dressed in straight white cotton pants and an Indian-style simple white button-front tunic, he faces us from a rug positioned in the open center of our V, with his back to the altar. After pulling his posture upright, he calls the meeting to a start from his cross-legged position on the floor, by droning out three loud *Om* sounds, the classic or universal *mantra* (sacred sound). Behind him on a raised stage, six altar deities are enormous – the size you might find in a large temple. A ten-foot bronze figure of Nataraj, the dancing form of Siva, has recently been installed in the center back of the altar. There is a nearly life-size granite statue of Sankaracharya, a monk who holds an important place in the Hindu philosophical lineage followed at this ashram. And there are equally large granite statues of Parvati, consort of Lord Siva, and the organization's two *gurus* (spiritual teachers), Swami Sivananda and Swami Vishnudevananda. All are adorned in fresh flowers, and Parvati is draped in a green silk *sari*, or Indian dress.

"*Om Namah Sivaya* [salutations to Lord Siva]. Welcome!" the leader says. "For how many of you is this your first experience of an ashram?" All but he and I raise our hands.

"And who can tell me what is the meaning of ashram?"

One of the Indian men in the group, a middle-aged fellow wearing a tracksuit, raises his hand to say "A place where you can get peace."

"A place of learning," ventures a slender blonde woman from one of the front rows.

The ashram director smiles and says, "Right. Those are the two main principles." Now, he continues:

> Here at the ashram, you don't have to be anyone in particular. Everyone is more or less the same. It's kind of a communist setting, really…. No matter what your position outside, we are all equal here. This gives us an opportunity to look at ourselves from a different point of view and meet people from different points of view, different countries... and different cultures....

In the rest of his short lecture the leader continues to introduce the subject of yoga, describing an "ancient tradition," not just for the body. He talks about the purpose of life: "to learn more about … ourselves… and how to find peace and happiness." He offers some guidelines about behavior and the rules of the ashram – everything from the timing of meals and required activities, to dress that respects local culture (no tight or low-cut shirts for ladies, no nude or "partially nude" swimming – i.e., women should swim in clothes, not bathing suits), and the importance of conserving water and electricity. He then introduces the important concept of *karma yoga*, or selfless service, telling us one reason for the practice is that "once you start doing something [to contribute to a place]…you wash the dishes, you [sweep] the floor – it makes you feel like you belong there." The idea is to make the ashram feel like home. Since the ashram stands in, he tells us, for the home of the guru, work is a way of creating a sense of belonging to the guru and his lineage. Towards the end of his lecture, he offers some guidelines about going in and out of the ashram.

"We have an in and out pass system," he tells us. All guests need to present an out pass to the security guard before leaving the ashram. "Reception won't give an out pass during class times," but at other times this pass is available, and when leaving the ashram for good, the pass will be given once payment is made. He adds:

> We ask you not to frequent the local teashops and the village area. The reason is that a few years ago we didn't have any restrictions and started having problems. People were going to the teashops and … basically relaxing and not following the discipline.

He mentions that people were smoking and drinking and "then a report

[came] from the police that there were drugs." He continues: "If you want to stretch your legs, we suggest you go right," instructing the guests to follow the road down and go to the nearby dam or else go across the road to the lakeside, where there are some benches to sit and look out at the water.

Following the lecture and a short question and answer session, the group ventures out for a tour of the ashram, dashing through the heavily falling rain up the ashram's central stairway to the inner rooms of the ashram's oldest building. He shows them a small meditation room at the top of the stairs, the small *devi* (female form of the divine), temple to the side, and another small hall for daily chanting of what members of the organization refer to as the "world peace mantra," *Om Namo Naraayanaya*, a mantra for the god, Vishnu. He later shows them to the back grounds of the ashram where there are spaces to pitch tents, an outdoor bathhouse with common sinks and stall toilets, and, in the far back, a medical clinic where guests can pay for massages or simple therapies. Circling around, he would also show the main dining hall, the large halls for practicing *asanas* (postures), and the ashram's boutique and health hut, but because of the rain, I chose not to follow.

****

Figure 1 Ashram director lectures a yoga vacation group from the altar at Neyyar Dam ashram, March 2011

In this orienting session, repeated approximately once every two weeks at the start of each new Yoga Vacation period, the ashram and its staff officially mark out the important physical spaces and describe what matters both here in this ashram and in the wider field of transnational yoga. As a set-up to this ethnography, the scene is meant to do much the same. It is a staging of what matters and what types of international bodies come together in the name of yoga. It is also a demarcation of who and what does not matter, so much, in this frame. While I didn't complete the tour, I can surmise that the leader did not take the guests into the back rooms of the ashram's main building, where a large kitchen is peopled by a team of local, mostly female, workers who prepare the ashram's meals and the temple food offerings. Kitchens in India are usually semi-private spaces, and of course most public institutions tend to shelter paying guests from the spaces where work is conducted. Nor did he take guests into the underbelly of the reception

building where linens, cleaning supplies and mosquito nets are stored, and where at that time of day, several local women were likely busy folding sheets they had brought in from the clotheslines, still damp, before the onset of the current downpour. He did not follow the ashram's many female sweepers conducting their work in the ashram's interior spaces: emptying waste bins, dusting corners, and collecting used dishes or other items out of place.

The selectivity of this ashram tour may not surprise. Even if some of the features of this Hindu-oriented ashram (perhaps deities, mantras, and temples) are not familiar, the wider phenomenon of "white people doing Hindu things," sometimes in a consumerist spirit, is not so uncommon. And while the collected bodies of international cosmopolitans assembled here may seem a natural thing of our contemporary globalized world, the poor daily wage workers who live mostly in the surrounding village area, are generally not part of the vision of globalized yoga, even where, as I emphasize in this dissertation, a *vision* of world peace is essential to the mission of the organization that employs them. Still, the disparities of our globalized world and the work of the very poor are as commonplace as western privilege and consumerism. Though the ashram does some charitable work for individual workers and other local people, this work is not essential to the organization's mission or the purpose of globalized yoga. As a senior staff member of the organization said in a private interview "Essentially the organization's purpose is to spread the teachings of yoga and *ayurveda* [a traditional medical system]. When it comes to [the local workers], how the organization impacts the people is incidental, actually" (December 13, 2010).

In a way, too, my project's emphasis on yoga can be described as incidental. This project fits in to and directly builds on recent scholarship on transnational modern yoga, but many of the inequalities I critique here can also be found in other types of transnational institutions with

idealistic missions, such as religious institutions and NGOs. Yoga, and in particular this transnational and multicultural version of it, is a lens through which I examine the everyday intercultural encounters of globalization, and the spiritual ideals of the SYVC are important points of reflection to my analysis. But if my interest and passion had taken me there, I may have found parallels in any number of transnational institutions in India (or other postcolonial nations), with either religious or secular aims. Nonetheless, I believe the SYVC's situation at the axis of spiritual tourism, orientalism, and sincere spiritual idealism is especially provocative, if not singular.

While visions of peace emphasized in the practice of modern yoga do claim to offer "an opportunity to look at ourselves from a different point of view and meet people from different points of view" (as the orientation leader claimed above), actual practices of seeing more often attend to the lush surroundings of Kerala. Ashram visitors are encouraged to gaze on the nearby natural beauty, but not visit, speak to, or otherwise engage with the local people. Moreover, while the "selfless" work of karma yoga is meant to encourage belonging, wage work or paid labor is not envisioned as serving the same function. The senior staff member quoted above told me, later in the same interview "I think the motivation for paid [workers] to be here is essentially… to find livelihood – to support themselves and their family…."

The short scene I have included here also strikes a few chords that will echo in the chapters that follow – notes that illustrate how the different peoples and bodies engaged in globalized yoga orient themselves in relation to one another. Some speak with knowledge but tend to situate themselves in the back row, so to speak. Gender, class, and national origin divide up the cosmopolitan and international spaces of modern yoga, both figuratively and in real, embodied life. Who comes and goes, and under what authority is also a matter of concern. And finally, the

visions of community and of peace imagined in globalized yoga often fail to include some of the people and bodies that are vital to its success, especially in the contemporary globalized spaces of yoga in India.

Chapter One
Introduction

This dissertation is based on long-term ethnographic research in the South Indian branches of the Sivananda Yoga Vedanta Centres (SYVC), an international non-profit institution founded in 1959 in Quebec, Canada with a mission "to spread peace, health and joy through yoga," (http://sivananda.org/about).[1] In the chapters that follow, I analyze social relations in this transnational institution in the context of global cultural and economic flows that affect and produce relations of inequality. Through sustained participant observation and in-depth interviews with the organization's volunteer staff and paid workers, during research periods of varying lengths between 2005 and 2011, I endeavored to understand how people of different backgrounds and different positions in this spiritual organization[2] conceive of and relate to one another, and how these relationships reflect on the broader picture of relations across difference formed in the context of globalization. Research for this dissertation was based primarily in the SYVC's largest and oldest Indian ashram in Kerala, with shorter stays of one to several months in the other SYVC sites in South India, as well as one month of research in the organization's North Indian sites.

I interpret the SYVC in particular and globalized yoga in general as a frame for intimate contacts that reflect and are shaped by larger processes of the "global cultural economy" (Appadurai 1996). That is, the small-scale interactions and encounters that are part of the everyday working relationships of this international organization in India can help us to understand the larger-scale inter-cultural relations of contemporary globalization, where globalization refers to multiple interwoven processes that have brought about an unprecedented interconnection between people across space and experience, or what Appadurai refers to as a "neighborliness, even with those most distant from ourselves" (1996:29). I interpret Appadurai's

words to suggest that processes of globalization can bring about both a literal, *spatial* neighborliness among people who are socially distant and a figurative *sense* of neighborliness or shared community among the geographically dispersed.

For conducting an ethnographic study of this kind, Veena Das' words, drawing from Strathern (1995), about the centrality of relations to anthropology are instructive. Das observes that the "concrete relations that we establish in living with others are like shadows of the more abstract questions – that is, we learn about the nature of the world in the process of such living" (2007:4). This way of thinking has implications for scale – in this case, studying broader patterns of globalization by looking at everyday (and neighborly) relations in one relatively small, globalized institution. It also has implications for my own place in the ethnographic project. I entered into relationships in this institution as a subject constituted by the same forces I wished to study. My positionality *in relation*, thus, is central to the overall patterns examined here.

A close examination of these "concrete relations" in the SYVC, an organization in which "peace, health and joy" are central aims and therefore actively promoted and discussed, reveals both the possibilities and the limitations of such cosmopolitan ideals. In this way, this study is not an attempt to applaud or fault the efforts and shortfalls of one community, but rather an endeavor, through the lens of one well-established institution with high ideals and a long-standing international community, to understand some of the limits and possibilities of peace, health, and joy in our increasingly global world. In the chapters that follow, I describe the lived dimensions of relations across difference in the SYVC, offering an intimate perspective on the inter-cultural relations of globalization.

Through its small- and large-scale implications, this ethnography aims to contribute to the bourgeoning field of Modern Yoga Studies and to broader debates in the anthropology of

globalization. The main body of this first chapter is an introduction to the smaller scale contextual details of the project, introducing the SYVC organization in the context of Modern Yoga Studies. Chapter Two expands on the specific context of the SYVC, attending to the various social locations at play in the SYVC's transnational sites in South India, including my own. The larger scale of the project – how this study of the SYVC fits in to the contemporary anthropology of globalization – will be the focus of the rest of this introductory section and is also expanded in Chapter Three, where I set forth the theoretical frame for my approach. In that chapter I draw from literature on globalization, transnational feminism, and postcolonial theory to understand the processes through which the uneven relations of globalization become central to the functioning of this international spiritual organization and yet remain invisible to many who benefit from these inequalities.

Transnational Yoga in the Anthropology of Globalization

Anthropologists who study globalization and the transnational have pointed to the ways in which the forces of globalization – often hailed as an equalizing movement that allows the proliferation and sharing of ideas, technology, and knowledge, or what Coronil (2000:352) refers to as "a progressive process of planetary integration" – in fact continue and deepen unequal relations between people and nations (Cvetkovich and Kellner 1997, Freeman 2007, Ganguly-Scrase 2003, Grewel and Kaplan 2005, Mills 2003, Mullings 2005, Ramamurthy 2003, Storper 2000, Thomas and Clarke 2013). My work here engages with these questions of access and inequality and articulates with what Faier and Rofel have called "ethnographies of encounter," which "distinguish themselves by considering how culture making occurs through everyday encounters among members of two or more groups with different cultural backgrounds and unequally

positioned stakes in their relationships" (2014:364). Leaders in the SYVC conceive of their movement as one grounded in the pursuit of peace and intercultural harmony, and many of the organization's international participants take up yoga as a means to practice an alternative lifestyle, inclined towards health and spirituality. As the ashram director put it, in his orientation for new guests, discussed above, "no matter what your position outside, we are all equal here." Yet, the terms of access to yoga instruction and to the spiritual and health opportunities presented by yoga are not universal.

Like other ideas or institutions with a global span, including one of the most prevalent but often overlooked examples, biomedicine (Lock and Nguyen 2010, Van Hollen 2003), the SYVC takes on different forms in its different localities. In India, SYVC sites are shaped by the privileged travel of international guests, yoga students and volunteers; the short- or long-term study and employment of educated, middle-class Indians; and the daily work of Indian wage-laborers. These differently privileged and differently motivated constituents bring their own priorities and needs to bear on the SYVC and in this process live out its various local meanings in India. These constituents also encounter one another and the SYVC organization itself in various ways. Sometimes they form meaningful friendships and challenge one another's worldviews. More often, they share a space and are impacted by many of the same processes, but do not interact in meaningful ways or else do so under conditions of dominance and subservience. These conditions resemble larger overall patterns in the cultural economies of globalization (Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2004, Faier and Rofel 2014, Mills 2003, Ong 1999).

My concern to address participants at all levels of this organization arises out of the SYVC organization's explicit grounding in notions of peace. Scholars of peace in anthropology (Sponsel and Gregor 1994), geography (Williams 2013), and in the

interdisciplinary field of peace studies (Adolf 2009, Cortright 2008) have, since the early nineteenth century, engaged in careful deliberation about the meaning of peace – whether the absence of war, political nonresistance or war-refusal, or a cultivated, organized nonviolence in response to social injustice, as in the work and writings of Gandhi (Cortright 2008:6-8). According to the Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies at Notre Dame University:

> Within peace studies, "peace" is defined not just as the absence of war (negative peace), but also the presence of the conditions for a just and sustainable peace, including access to food and clean drinking water, education for women and children, security from physical harm, and other inviolable human rights (positive peace). This idea is rooted in the understanding that a "just peace" is the only sustainable kind of peace; an approach that seeks merely to "stop the guns" while ignoring the denial of human rights and unjust social and political conditions will not work in the long run…. Scholars and peacebuilders are united not by ideology, but by a commitment to finding nonviolent solutions rooted in justice (http://kroc.nd.edu).[3]

Some of my questions at the start of this study were: how can an organization founded on ideals of peace and intercultural harmony look so similar to institutions globalized on the premise of enhanced profit margins and economic efficiency? Is the organization's mission of peace simply a spiritual-cum-moral veneer designed to manipulate altruistic participants to devote their time, energies, and financial backing? Do disparities in the treatment and position of Indian vs. foreign participants in the SYVC represent corrupt influences at the top of the organization, or are they a result of routine submission to the status quo rather than an overt exercise in discrimination? More importantly, what are the real and perceived benefits to the people who serve the ashram as low-wage workers in the Indian sites? And how do low-wage workers perceive and relate to the organization's overall mission and the people who work as the organization's committed volunteers?

In this dissertation, I conclude that forces contributing to inequality in the SYVC are the result of structural forces largely beyond the personal motivations of individual participants, yet

these structural forces are embodied and acted out by individuals through both subtle and overt modes of behavior and communication. Thus, the inequalities seen in the SYVC can be said to reflect the larger inter-cultural relations of globalization and may have something to teach us about processes that affect all of us in the context of a globalized world. The vision of peace offered by the SYVC depends on a limited and limiting worldview narrowed to a community of like-minded individuals with similar privilege, a form of what I call "conceptual blind spots."[4] In the SYVC, cultural illegibility often obscured difference from the vision of those in positions of privilege and thereby perpetuated uneven relations. That is, people in power often did not conceive the extent of their own privilege because they failed, due to language barriers and other aspects of social distance, to recognize the advantages inherent in their own lives or to even conceive the ashram's workers as part of the community imagined in their idea of the SYVC. The "we" in "we are all equal here" referred to a limited constituency of participants. Although there was a reach for a global, inter-cultural community, this reach mostly failed to grasp those who were not contained in or by the organization's sense of self, including many of the workers who keep the organization running in India. But this is not an effect limited to organized spirituality movements with visions of peace and global harmony. In the wider global context we all inhabit, it is much the same. The mental frames or conceptual lenses of privilege combined with a focus on the self or on those individuals and entities closest to the self (one's own family, community, or nation) can obscure the experiences and struggles of those on the margins of this perception and make everyday injustices invisible or else minimize their apparent relevance to the people who benefit from them (Butler 2004).

Although there is a large and growing scholarship on Modern Yoga, to date this research has assumed and focused on the middle class and cosmopolitan status of participants. My

research in the SYVC puts power and inequality at the center and considers the experiences of participants of all socio-economic status. Through this lens of unequal relations, I have endeavored to understand the effects of a globalized spiritual practice on its neighbors and others in India, particularly the paid wage-workers employed by the organization, many of whom do in fact live in the homes and communities neighboring SYVC sites. I aim to shine a light on the potential for connection across difference and also show how easy, though not inevitable, it is to miss this potential, even in international and altruistic organizations like the SYVC, due to conceptual blind spots – frames of mind that obscure the "others" of our individual experience. Yet, I offer, through a simple turn of mind, a shift of focus, these "others" can be incorporated into our vision.

In her book *Power Lines*, a study committed to "transracial feminist alliances" (2008:iv), Aimee Carrillo-Rowe writes: "The meanings we make alongside those we love, particularly across lines of difference, allow us to remake our assumptions and widen our vision of the political field" (2008:43). As an international organization focused on the ideals of spiritual unity, health, peace, and happiness, the SYVC does bring people into contact "across lines of difference" and is often host and home to meaningful relationships across these lines. In this writing I aim to show both the possibilities and the limits of interconnection across difference in the SYVC, and the opportunities, both seized and missed, for remaking assumptions and widening vision, in the context of globalization. I approach this in part through a reflection on how my own vision has shifted through friendships and alliances formed in the international spaces of the SYVC, a move grounded in the theories and methods of feminist anthropology, and based in my commitment to transracial and cross-cultural alliance.

A Note on Culture

Before I move on to the body of this introductory chapter, a few words about the dissertation's notion of cross- or inter-cultural relations. Anthropologists have been debating about the term "culture" since the beginning of the discipline. In a fully transnational era, "culture" as a presumably bounded, homogenous, or stable concept is untenable, and so in recent years, many have argued that the word itself, heavy and laden with the history of this limiting use, should be discarded or forgotten (Brightman 1995). Likewise, ideas of cross-, inter-, or intra- cultural encounters are somewhat problematic, as they seem to harken back to a bounded "culture." On the other hand, as Christoph Brumann argues, because the concept of culture has gained wider recognition outside the discipline of anthropology, and often functions in "a roughly anthropological way," it may be worth hanging on to "as a convenient term for designating the clusters of common concepts, emotions, and practices that arise when people interact regularly" (1999:1).

Arjun Appadurai has argued against the use of the word "culture" as a noun, which I more or less follow throughout this writing, favoring instead the adjectival form "cultural," which can be a useful heuristic for talking about difference (1996:12-13). Although it gestures at a noun-form, I believe the notion of *inter*-cultural can be useful, especially as it serves to communicate beyond the critical debates in the discipline. I use the term inter-cultural here to refer to the ways that people of different experience and background meet, converse, and interact in the context of this organization, yet I take full account of Appadurai's grammatical insight as well as Lila Abu-Lughod's directive to "write against culture," as such (1991). I am committed to the value of nuanced and sensitive accounts of *individual* exchanges, encounters, and narratives, informed by a studied reflexivity of my position in relation to the other participants in

my research. I also favor Appadurai's notion of "*imagined worlds*, that is, the multiple worlds that are constituted by the historically situated imaginations of persons and groups spread around the globe" (1996:33).

Further, my thinking on yoga and the ethics of the inter-cultural encounters in the SYVC have been influenced by the writing of Joseph Alter, especially his chapter on "Mimetic Skepticism and Yoga" wherein he invites a skeptical stance on the privileged status of "cultural reality" as "the defining basis of human experience" (2004:213). Put simply, he argues that the notion of culture at the center of one of anthropology's key tenants, cultural relativism, participates in and reinforces an illusory sense of cultural reality as reality itself. Using yogic philosophy as a tool for social criticism, Alter argues that "the meaningful worlds people create [called culture] are, in fact, not webs of meaning but, as Yoga suggests, the ensnaring web of *māyā* [cosmic illusion]" (2004:221). This observation reveals the tenuous nature, from a yogic perspective, of an analysis of intercultural relations through a lens of culture, bringing to mind Geertz's comparison of cultural analysis to a "turtles all the way down" theory of cosmology. "Cultural analysis is intrinsically incomplete" (Geertz 1973:28-29). Locating the "culture" at the heart of inter-cultural is intrinsically impossible.

Still, to think through the shared and overlapping aspects of the imaginings at work in globalized yoga, and to think through the ways in which contrasting imaginaries are shaped by forces that can and must, for communication beyond the discipline of anthropology, be called cultural, I speak of inter-cultural relations. In the SYVC there are differences of language and understanding between people of different nationalities and ethnicities from different regions of the world, often contrasted among participants simply along lines of "Indian" vs. "foreign," or "Eastern"/ "Indian" vs. "Western."[5] But there are of course also important differences between

people of shared language or geographic region, for an infinite number of reasons including differences of caste, class, or religious community, not to mention personal history.[6] The ways that these differences and similarities are negotiated and how they are categorized and managed between people within and outside the reaches of named categories is of interest to this study, so the material below will offer some contribution to ongoing debates about the stakes and terms of "culture." In what follows, I turn to the subject of yoga itself.

What is Globalized Yoga?

Most readers of this dissertation will have heard of yoga in their everyday lives, and not just in academic contexts. Countless non-specialists with whom I have shared the topic of my doctoral research have remarked with some amount of knowledge about yoga. Whether having seen classes listed among the program of activities at a local community or fitness center, having a vague sense that yoga is about stretching and can help decrease stress, or having a relative or friend who has travelled to India to practice meditation or find a guru, all nod affirmatively in recognition of the word. Yet many follow that nod with a vague and questioning look. "Just what do you *mean* by yoga?" and "What *kind* of yoga?" are questions I have heard many times, both in North America and in India, among people in and outside of the communities of my research.

Thankfully, there are a number of recent publications that help us to answer the first of these questions. In the wake of the recent surge in popularity of yoga and the broad recognition of words and ideas associated with yoga throughout cosmopolitan communities around the world, there are numerous studies that illuminate yoga's complex transnational history. In the following section I situate globalized yoga in the context of the growing academic field of Modern Yoga Studies and the scholarly study of contemporary guru movements, to answer the question "What do you *mean* by yoga?" Next, I offer an answer to the second question, "What

kind of yoga?" in an introduction to the Sivananda Yoga Vedanta Centres[7] organization, its founder, history, and structure. In this section I also aim to clarify the aims of the dissertation project and its unique contributions to the existing literature. In a short final section, I outline the research I undertook to complete this study and provide a summary of the remaining chapters of the dissertation.

Introducing Globalized Yoga

This section offers a biography of yoga, drawing on Igor Kopytoff's notion of a "cultural biography of things" (1986) and on scholarly work on the emergent meaning of yoga.[8] My aim here is to make clear how my work builds on the substantial and important writing that has come before it, particularly in the context of what Elizabeth De Michelis has called "Modern Yoga Studies" (2004) . I review scholarly literature demonstrating how yoga came to have meaning in and outside of India in the context of colonial and postcolonial processes, esotericism, counterculture, and later more mainstream trends in fitness and health. Then I turn to the broader realm of globalized Hindu-influenced guru movements, which also form an important context of Modern Yoga's biography.

Defining Yoga

In arguing for the usefulness of what he calls a "biographical approach" to commodities (1986:66), Igor Kopytoff says the questions that should be asked are

> similar to those one asks about people: What, sociologically, are the biographical possibilities inherent in its "status" and in the period and culture, and how are these possibilities realized? Where does the thing come from and who made it? What has been its career so far, and what do people consider to be an ideal career for such things? What are the recognized "ages" or periods in the thing's "life," and what are the cultural markers for them? How does the thing's use change with its age, and what happens to it when it reaches the end of its usefulness? (Kopytoff 1986:66-67)

For scholars of religion and South Asia, yoga is a multifarious word with deep and wide-reaching roots, and as such not a single "thing" at all. Mircea Eliade writes, and indeed most authors addressing the subject acknowledge, that "etymologically, *yoga* derives from the root *yuj*, to bind together, 'hold fast,' 'yoke,'" (1990:4). As Ian Whicher has observed, yoga, in this "broad and very general definition" is "the generic term for various paths of 'unification,' Hindu or otherwise..." (1998:6) . As such it can, according to Eliade "designate any *ascetic technique* and any *method of meditation* (Eliade 1990:4). Whicher argues further that

> in its proper and philosophical context… Yoga refers to South Asian Indian paths of spiritual emancipation, or self-transcendence, that bring about a transmutation of consciousness culminating in liberation from the confines of egoic identity or worldly existence (Whicher 1998:6).

Yoga can also mean the state of "union" achieved through these "paths of 'unification,'" referring to a union of the *jivatman* (individual soul) with the *paramatman* (absolute) (Whicher 1998:27). The SYVC defines yoga as this union and also refers to four main paths of yoga, namely Karma Yoga, Bhakti Yoga, Raja Yoga, and Jnana Yoga, which I will discuss below.

Perhaps the most well-known and widely cited scholarly work on the subject, from a history of religions perspective, is *Yoga: Immortality and Freedom*, by Mircea Eliade, first published in 1954. This work provides an in-depth and organized overview for a Western audience of the yoga philosophy expounded by Patanjali, the second-third century CE pundit, in his *Yoga Sutra* (Whicher 1998:39). Patanjali's treatment of yoga represents, in Eliade's words, a "system of philosophy" (1990:4) recognized as one of the six main schools of Hindu philosophy, and as such, is the most canonical summary of the meanings and practices of yoga. Yet, as Ian Whicher demonstrates in a more contemporary take on the subject, the word yoga has been used since the Vedas (1998:7), the ancient hymns understood to constitute the foundational principles of "Hinduism" (itself a heading given to a broad array of related philosophical traditions). In the

Rig Veda, "yoga" was used in its earlier sense as a noun, meaning "connection," but some "rudimentary ideas and practices" now associated with classical yoga may also have underlay aspects of this first of the four Vedas, dated around 1200 BCE (Whicher 1998:7, 9-13), specifically, the idea of self-transcendence, and the practices of "*dhyāna* (meditation), *dīkṣā* (spiritual initiation), [and] *tapas* (asceticism)" (1998:9).[9] The concept of yoga, as such, can be dated to perhaps as early as the fifth century BCE, in the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad*, which mentions "*adhyātma-yoga*, the 'Yoga of the inner self'" (Whicher 1998:18).

Yoga has survived through many ages, and can be described, as Eliade put it, as a "living fossil" (1969:361). For this reason it has long fascinated religious scholars. Yet yoga's recognition today goes far beyond the walls of the academy. Today this ancient word denoting a philosophical system, a set of practices, or paths to self-transcendence developed in South Asia has become one recognized by laypersons around the world. Moreover, there are also devoted practitioners of yoga distributed throughout the globe, and there are numerous businesses invested in teaching yoga, selling yoga accessories, or simply using images or ideas associated with yoga to sell health, youth, or beauty. Following Kopytoff, we might ask: Was this globetrotting a biographical possibility inherent in its status at birth? And if not, where does today's globalized yoga come from, and who made it?

Globalized Modern Yoga

Elizabeth De Michelis has addressed the origins of what I call globalized yoga in *A History of Modern Yoga,* by reckoning the ages of yoga (and of Hinduism) into two parts: Classical and Modern (De Michelis 2004:37). Modern Yoga here, is separated from the so-called Classical Yoga of Patanjali and classical yoga (not capitalized), which she uses to refer to "all types of yoga current before the second half of the eighteenth century," marking anywhere from 1757 to

1773 as “the beginning of British Orientalism,” (De Michelis 2004:38). De Michelis’ book was among the first to try to make sense of the forms of yoga that have become popular outside of India and to sort out the various strands of influence on Modern Yoga. De Michelis figures what she calls Modern Yoga in both India and the West as part of esotericism, or New Age religion, “evolved mainly through the interaction of Western individuals interested in Indian religions and a number of more or less Westernized Indians over the last 150 years” (2005:2).

De Michelis pins the first instance of the “cultural trend” of Modern Yoga to the writing of “the Transcendentalist Henry David Thoreau, who, in a letter to a friend, wrote ‘...I would fain practice the yoga faithfully. To some extent and at rare intervals, even I am a yogi’” (2004:2-3). For De Michelis, Thoreau's statement is significant because it was the first instance where

> yoga was taken up by a Westerner while remaining a Westerner.... Westerners were starting to perceive ‘yoga’ as something they could engage in, not just as something ‘out there.’ This religio-cultural trend became a very important and influential motif of East-West exchanges from about the last quarter of the nineteenth century onwards... (2004:3).[10]

Thoreau's letter is dated 1849. But the other important date for De Michelis and others with regard to the globalization of Hinduism coincides with Swami Vivekananda's talk at the Chicago Parliament of Religions in 1893, and his publication of a volume on *Raja Yoga* in 1896 (De Michelis 2004:3). Vivekananda's systematization of yoga for a world audience marks an important and foundational moment in the social life of yoga, which De Michelis figures as the beginning of Modern Yoga. This is also the moment when yoga begins to make sense to and, as De Michelis emphasizes, *for* a wider world, so that Modern Yoga at birth has the distinct biographical possibility of global travel and import.

De Michelis’ book provides a thorough historical analysis of yoga’s transnational development, grounded in scholarly religious study, and I draw from her periodization here.[11]

However, I have reservations about the construction of the categories Classical and Modern, embedded as they are in the political context of colonial and postcolonial constructions of India, as well as nationalist and communalist imaginings of history. Ideas of India's Classical past cannot be taken at face value.[12] As Romila Thapar put it, as far back as 1975, "a major contradiction in our understanding of the entire Indian past is that this understanding derives largely from interpretations of Indian history made in the last two hundred years," (1975:3). Nicholas Dirks has said of even the quintessentially Indian institution of caste, that it was shaped and institutionalized in part through the "historical encounter between India and Western colonial rule" (2001:5). This is, as Dirks emphasizes, not to say that

> it was simply invented by the too clever British, now credited with so many imperial patents that what began as colonial critique has turned into another form of imperial adulation. But I *am* suggesting that it was under the British that "caste" became a single term capable of expressing, organizing, and above all "systematizing" India's diverse forms of social identity, community, and organization (2001:9).

It would seem to be so with yoga, as well as with Hinduism. The singularization of both these terms, for systematizing what were once more dispersed streams of philosophy and practice comes about precisely through the interactions between East and West that De Michelis describes as so instrumental in forming Modern Yoga. Therefore, it is not her Modern Yoga, with which I take issue, but her Classical Hinduism, and from it, Classical Yoga, which she glosses as "continuing if untouched or not greatly affected" in opposition to Modern Hinduism, which shows influences of "British Orientalism, Serampore mission and Unitarian ideas" (De Michelis 2004:37). Our very understanding of that Classical past cannot be disassembled from the politically charged history through which the rest of the world has come to know India. As Joseph Alter argues in his book, *Yoga in Modern India*, notions of a purer, more timeless yoga are a product of the Orientalist tradition, and based on a myth of "the sage lost to the world in the

Himalayas" (Alter 2004:17). In my estimation, the term globalized yoga, or as it has been more recently hailed "transnational yoga" (Goldberg and Singleton 2014:1) more aptly describes the same phenomenon, emphasizing the cultural and spatial dimensions of this incarnation of yoga, while suspending the question of time.

Nonetheless, De Michelis' work situating yoga's development in an exchange of ideas between Western Theosophists and Indian nationalist elites is an important and foundational one in the scholarly approach to globalized yoga. De Michelis historicizes what she calls "cross-influences" between Unitarian doctrines, Transcendentalism and Neo-Vedanta that had not been previously acknowledged in the histories of either Western esotericism or Indian Neo-Vedanta (2004:55). Beyond that, and along the lines of Dirks' argument about caste, De Michelis, Mark Singleton and others, whose work I will discuss below, have successfully demonstrated that yoga has come into focus as a particularized object of scholarly and popular attention precisely through its co-production in a transnational realm (De Michelis 2004, Singleton and Byrne 2008, Strauss 2005). As such, we can understand earlier Western scholarly work like Eliade's as integral to the exchange of ideas that has shaped, not merely described, what we now think of as yoga.

Joseph Alter's *Yoga in Modern India*, "an intellectual history of yoga's embodied practice" (2004:8), locates yoga's emergence in Modern India as the product of uniquely Indian postcolonial circumstances. Written by an anthropologist, whose "insights and methods [are drawn from] historical anthropology" (Alter 2004:8), Alter's work is deeply concerned with

> the legacy of Orientalism and the myths of continuity, intellectualism, and High Culture that all scholarship, even scholarship on culture with a small 'c,' produces and reproduces… [The book] is guided … by a kind of neo-sociology that directs attention away from agency, meaning, and culture as such so as to provide analytical focus on the contingent history of social facts, in this case the social facticity of yoga (Alter 2004:8).

Here we have a careful consideration of history and practice in India that lends another angle to the discussion of the origins of Modern Yoga. Alter argues that despite Western imaginings of India as the place of a more pure, authentic and spiritual yoga, it was in fact "in India that yoga was modernized, medicalized and transformed into a system of physical culture" (2004:10). Because of Alter's previous ethnographic research in a wrestling akhara in Varanasi (1992) as well as his critical study of nationalism in the dietary and sexual ethics of Mohandas Gandhi (2000), his study of yoga is immersed in the world of physical culture and the body in India, as well as the formation and production of particular modes of embodiment in relation to nationalism.

Alter's writing provides an important anthropological-historical critique of yoga's production and change over time in India and argues with the "popular imagination… that 'modernized' physical Yoga is… a product of Western 'misunderstanding'" (2004: 10). He does not, however, extend his research to transnational forms of yoga and the extremes of commodification that in my view are unique functions of globalization. Alter acknowledges that

> Dick's Sporting Goods, a U.S.-based athletics equipment retailer, now markets a line of yoga workout clothing and exercise equipment, and both the Discovery Store and Whole Foods carry a line of yoga self-help videos as well as various accessories for practice.... But lest one be seduced by the ultra-modernity of the Discovery Store display of mass-produced videos and mats, it should be pointed out that outlets in India, for many years, produced and sold hundred-count packets of waxed-cord catheters for *sutra neti*... as well as copper and plastic *jal neti* pots for "nasal purification" (Alter 2004:9).

But are not the global- and mass-marketing of yoga products an excessive form of the perhaps long-standing association of yoga with consumerism? Scholars writing about globalization and the accompanying transformation of cultural processes often point out that global interconnectivity, as such, is nothing new (Wadley 2000). It is rather the speed and ubiquity of both physical travel and the travel of information through electronic media that lead to what

Harvey has called a “time-space compression” (1989). Appadurai describes this long-scale transformation, going back to “the expansion of Western maritime interests after 1500” as an emergence of “an overlapping set of ecumenes… in which congeries of money, commerce, conquest, and migration began to create durable cross-societal bonds” (1996:28). Through to the present, this has resulted in what Appadurai terms a “new global cultural economy [which] has to be seen as a complex, overlapping, disjunctive order that cannot any longer be understood in terms of existing center-periphery models” (1996:32). In this landscape the now fully globalized yoga offered in organizations like the SYVC makes the manufacture and distribution of yoga props and accouterments if not ultra-modern at least ultra-global. Notably, these globalized forms are often concerned with marketing their yoga as continuing an ancient tradition, explicitly grounded in Hinduism, even as the spread of yoga to the West is obviously tied to major changes in its meanings and forms of circulation, including the widespread availability of mats and props at Dick’s, Target and beyond. Thus, while Alter's work provides an important historical account of the modernization of yoga in India, it is De Michelis' situation of Modern Yoga in Western esotericism and New Age religion that allows a biographical understanding of how yoga inhabits different communities of practice (Strauss 2005) in North America. As Sarah Strauss argues in her 2005 ethnography on members of Swami Sivananda's Divine Life Society,

> the currently popular way of understanding the transmission of yoga as a unilineal trajectory from (traditional) India to the (modern) West does not permit the complexity of the production of yoga as an explicitly transnational project.... (13).

Strauss's book, *Positioning Yoga*, is a unique contribution to the academic literature on Modern Yoga as it was the first based primarily in participant observation. Since Strauss’ work looks at a “community of practice” (2005:113) associated with Swami Sivananda's Divine Life Society, of which the Sivananda Yoga Vedanta Centres organization is an offshoot, it provides

particularly important background to this dissertation. For situating the anthropological study of yoga in a transnational context, Strauss' words about her own fieldwork are also instructive. She notes that even though her research was concentrated mostly in Rishikesh, North India, it focuses primarily on a non-Indian community of practitioners made up of what she calls "cosmopolitans" (Strauss 2005:15). As she writes,

> because both Vivekananda and Sivananda were educated, middle-class professionals who used English as the primary medium for disseminating their teachings, their ideas were most available to a narrowly defined but internationally distributed population. Today, yoga seems to appeal primarily to the educated or professional middle classes of both India and the West, and as a result, the majority of my discussants are from socioeconomic and educational backgrounds similar to my own.... (Strauss 2005:15).

Strauss' ethnography attends to an educated community of mostly non-Indian practitioners, and the few Indian people she does profile in her book are men (2005:57). Other works on similar types of movements based on participant observation in India likewise focus on a cosmopolitan, English speaking, middle class (Babb 2000, Forsthoefel and Humes 2005, McKean 1996, Warrier 2005), and it is here that my research among individuals in the SYVC who are by no means middle class offers a unique contribution. [13]

Another of Kopytoff's prescribed questions for writing a biography of a commodity is: how does the thing's use change with its age, and what happens to it when it reaches the end of its usefulness? In a special yoga edition of *Asian Medicine,* Mark Singleton likewise asks "How much can an ideology or practice be transformed and added to before it itself becomes a new, distinct tradition?" (Singleton 2007a:i). While writing in the history of religions, epitomized by Mircea Eliade (Eliade 1990, 1975) has tended, as Singleton observes, to "ignore modern forms," the Singleton volume attempts to "consider such developments on their own terms" (Singleton 2007a:ii). Both Singleton's and Suzanne Newcombe's articles in this journal examine the development of strands of Modern Yoga in the West.

Newcombe's essay considers yoga's growing popularity in Britain in the 1960s and 1970s and describes how yoga became a means by which middle-class married women pursued their "desire for freedom and autonomy" (2007:50). Through yoga, these women avoided what one yoga teacher called "housewife syndrome" (Newcombe 2007:49), which manifested in "vague complaints such as mood swings, menstrual pains, or bowel difficulties" (2007:54). But as Newcombe points out, the popularity of yoga among these women also supported "the growth and popularity of yoga by providing… an institutional network that paid yoga teachers…" (2007:58).

Singleton writes in this volume about the influence of New Thought on contemporary forms of yoga, which have been interpreted by practitioners as the "perennial, exotic repository of [now] (re)discovered truths" (2007b:65). Singleton argues that influences originating in the West are responsible for many aspects of Modern Yoga considered to hail "from the cradle of Hinduism" (2007b:73). In particular, he highlights the practice of "autosuggestion" – a standard feature of any SYVC yoga class involving a mental repetition of commands to relax the body, part by part – as developed by Emile Coué in the early twentieth century. Still, scholars of the time, such as McLaurin, writing in 1933, continued to claim that Coué had only restated something that had "been practiced in India for countless generations" (Singleton 2007b:74). Sivananda himself, writing in 1929, called the practice "an offshoot of *Vedantic Sadhana, Aha Brahm Asmi…*[*sic*]" (Singleton 2007b:75), or the practice of repeating "I am one with Brahman (God, or the Absolute)." These comments illustrate the importance of this conversation to individuals on both sides of the relationship between India and the West and emphasize the transnational construction of globalized yoga that has been discussed in the work of De Michelis.

One can also read clearly here, as well as in Newcombe's work, that from its inception this yoga in its globalized forms has been largely if not solely the province of an educated middle class.

Newcombe elaborates on the development and reception of yoga by the middle-class in Britain in her 2008 dissertation, *A Social History of Yoga and Ayurveda in Britain, 1950-1995*. As Newcombe demonstrates through analysis of historical documents pertaining to the circulation of yoga at the time, "the development of [yoga] was not the introduction of an alien cultural activity into Britain. In this context, yoga was received as a subject among many that could be studied during leisure time for personal self-improvement" (Newcombe 2008:79). Her work engages with the scholarly discussion of secularization in Britain and points out that "LEAs" – Local Educational Authorities that offered evening adult education classes – "influenced the shape yoga took in Britain by encouraging yoga teachers to have a qualification and requiring that yoga conformed to the overtly secular expectations of government-funded adult education in Britain" (2008:80). Newcombe is interested in the mainstream practice of yoga and argues that "the focus on [counter-cultural] movements as the defining elements of social change in the 1960s may be over-emphasised" (2008:5). To this point, in Chapter Five, Newcombe lays out how individual health improvement was a national interest and that the middle and upper classes were better able to keep up with government-advised practices for improving health – showing why yoga was mostly accessible to the middle class. She acknowledges a second group of practitioners, whom she refers to as "so-called drop-outs, 'hippies' and young protestors" (Newcombe 2008:42), who were another factor in yoga's development, but one far less responsible for the institutional growth that solidified yoga's place in British history.

On the contrary, acknowledging the importance of the counter-cultural impetus in mainstreaming yoga and other alternative spiritualities, at least in the North American context, is

the volume edited by Jeffrey Kripal and Glenn Shuck, *On the Edge of the Future: Esalen and the Evolution of American Culture* (2005). A chapter by Catherine Albanese shows how what she calls "hatha yoga," referring to the practice of asanas and *pranayama* (breath control) so widely associated with yoga at the present time, transformed in the American imagination,

> from a thorough revulsion, in the early and middle years of the nineteenth century, toward anything remotely yogic… to a cautious acceptance… of certain aspects of meditation yoga, although there was continued distain for hatha (i.e., physical) yoga…. [Then later,] in the cultural revolution that the late 1960s brought – in the emergence of Esalen, the human potential movement, and the New Age… American yoga became a thorough celebration of the healthy body that was also sensual, sexual and beautiful (2005:45-46).

For Albanese and others in this volume, the Esalen Institute's distinctly counter-cultural presence was key in transitioning certain ideas into the American mainstream, acting as

> a cultural broker, a model of certain religio-cultural themes, and a broadcaster of the new-enlightenment message of the Self/self and its embodied blissfulness. Esalen gave the word to many Americans who otherwise might not have heard the news – or, at least, not heard it so clearly and authoritatively (Albanese 2005:70).

As Kripal and Glenn describe in their introduction to this volume, the Esalen Institute is another conversant in the long and vibrant exchange between India and the West. It was founded in 1962 by one man "converted to a global Hindu worldview" and another recently released from psychological treatment in a military hospital (2005:5-6) , crucially set in the context of the American "democracy, with its attending values of human equality, intellectual and religious freedom, rugged individualism and laissez-faire capitalism" (2005:5).

While Albanese historicizes an important transition in the American perception of the physical practices of yoga, she glosses these simply as hatha yoga, as do many present-day practitioners. Mark Singleton's book, *Yoga Body: The Origins of Modern Posture Practice* (2010), follows the same transition but makes the well-documented case for thinking of what he, following De Michelis, calls "modern postural yoga," as not hatha yoga, but an Indian form of

the world-wide physical culture of the turn of the twentieth century, which included body building and gymnastics. Singleton's major contribution to the field with this volume is in showing how Vivekananda's yoga of the 1890s, a philosophical system having almost nothing to do with the body, gave way, over the next thirty years or so, to the physical practices now so widely associated with yoga in the West. Despite contemporary Western practitioners' understanding of this yoga as something of ancient Indian origin, based on the hatha yoga of the Nath lineage,[14] Singleton demonstrates through analysis of "popular English-language yoga manuals from the late 1880s to about 1935" that the practices and postures in circulation today have their roots in the "international physical culture movement" and are

> the result of a dialogical exchange between para-religious, modern body culture techniques developed in the West and the various discourses of "modern" Hindu yoga that emerged from the time of Vivekananda onward (Singleton 2010:5).[15]

Singleton describes the emergence of a "modern nationalist physical culture… in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries" that strongly influenced modern postural yoga, in the context of "Scandinavian gymnastics… bodybuilding… and the various methods promoted by the Indian YMCA" (2010:22). From here, it is not such a stretch (pun notwithstanding) to arrive at the contemporary forms of postural yoga on display in the schedules of fitness centers, and indeed in the North American YMCA.

In her 2009 dissertation, Shreena Gandhi traces the history of yoga within the modern American religious landscape, examining its "translation, practice and commodification" (15) with a view to just these kinds of stripped-down iterations of modern postural yoga. Gandhi describes yoga as "rhizomatic," rootless, and "impossible to trace to one point" (2009:36), and because of this, she observes, it is accessible "by different groups in different ways and for different purposes" (2009:165). She argues that "the reasons yoga came to the U.S. and was sold

to American consumers by a parade of Indian yogis is tied up with the colonization of India, the need to raise money and opportunity to combat cultural supremacy" (Gandhi 2009: 17). But although "yoga has been translated from a religious practice, to a scientific process, to a fitness craze and now a prescription" (Gandhi 2009:21), one of the key dichotomies Gandhi identifies in the narrative about yoga in the United States is that it is "a hierophany, 'a manifestation of the sacred,' some thing that… came to be without human involvement" (213-214). As Gandhi observes, this very narrative is in fact shaped by yoga's embeddedness within a capitalist system. Yoga is marketed as a thing of eastern, sacred origins, and at the same time as something accessible to people of all faiths, elementally spiritual rather than religious (2009:209).

Through the writings outlined above, we gain a birds-eye view of the life trajectory of yoga, as it has developed in the western imaginary and in the overlapping histories of modern India and the West, arriving at its present-day status as a thoroughly globalized commodity, inhabiting spas, fitness centers, five-star hotels, ashrams, and, no doubt, also some secret caves. This is not to say we have the true history of the thing or can name it definitively as one concise object, especially given the flexibility of the term yoga itself. In addition to the above writings focused on yoga, Modern Yoga, and modern postural yoga, so-named, which comprise the loosely defined field of Modern Yoga Studies, there is also a substantial scholarly literature on gurus, guru movements, and what Lola Williamson (2010) has called "Hindu-inspired meditation movements." That literature is equally important for this study. The SYVC is a guru-led and guru-inspired organization that does not just encompass postural yoga but also mantra meditation, devotional chanting, and selfless service, all of which have been studied by scholars working on meditation movements and guru-devotion. I attend to this other important literature in the following section.

Guru Devotion and Meditation Movements

First published in 1986, Lawrence Babb's *Redemptive Encounters* (2000) offered an ethnographic account of what he called, in the subtitle, "three modern styles in the Hindu tradition." All three movements gave prominence to the guru-disciple relationship, marking an important and growing trend in contemporary, cosmopolitan Hinduism. Babb demonstrated an important through-line of Hinduism in these three organizations based in and around New Delhi, India, even though two of the three did not identify themselves as Hindu. Common and important themes he identified include the cyclical nature of Hindu concepts of history, the symbolic importance of intimate transactions, *darshan,* or seeing, as a way of interacting with and experiencing divinity, and realization or recognition as central to transforming the nature of experience – especially in the context of understanding and knowing a guru or saint (Babb 2000: 205-225). All of these, as we will see, are characteristics shared by the SYVC. Babb's work marks an important landmark in the study of contemporary and primarily urban movements, like the SYVC, that dwell in Hinduism as well as in a wider cosmopolitan and transnational framework, because of both the enduring "Western interest in Indian religions, especially charismatic gurus" and a growing Indian diaspora (Babb 2000:v).[16]

Kiran Narayan's 1989 book, *Storytellers, Saints, and Scoundrels* likewise provided an important foundation for much of the recent literature on gurus. Narayan explored both the concept of gurus and *sadhus* (wandering ascetics) and the context of their reception in India through a lively portrait of one *swami* (monk) and his folk narratives. In a later article, she reminds us "that accounts of Hindu holy men-called gymnosophists by the Greeks-have been circulating in the Western world since at least the fourth century B.C. (Narayan 1993:478) . More recently, work by Meena Khandelwal (2004) and an edited volume by Khandelwal,

Hausner and Gold (2006) explore gendered issues in renunciation, and Hausner's ethnography provides a contemporary take on the subject of sadhus, tracing "the cultural meanings of the material world for the Hindu renouncer community of South Asia" (2007:2), specifically Nepal and North India.

Other recent works on gurus and guru devotion include volumes on gurus in North America. Corinne Dempsey's 2006 ethnography portrays the life and work of a charismatic priest, transgressing gender and caste rules in his visionary temple in Rush, New York. Edited volumes by Forsthoefel and Humes (2005) and Copeman and Ikegame (2012) profile a range of gurus in North America and South Asia, respectively. An edited volume by Pechilis (2004) and a recent dissertation by Rudert (2012) both highlight devotion to female gurus.

In *Gurus of Modern Yoga*, Mark Singleton and Ellen Goldberg suggest that "to regard modern expressions of yoga only in terms of global forms of posture practice would be to ignore the massive popular growth of *bhaktiyoga* in modern India and the globalized world and to significantly underestimate its profound influence and widespread appeal (2014:9). This statement is especially true for organizations like the SYVC, grounded as much in the history and principles of *bhakti,* or devotion (about which, more below), as in the physical practices of postural yoga. The Singleton and Goldberg volume collects fourteen chapters on the role of the guru in the various paths and practices of Modern Yoga.

Although the field is growing rapidly with more new publications than can be accounted for in this study (e.g., Gleig and Williamson 2013, Lucia 2014), most pertinent to the current study are two ethnographies based in large transnational movements connected to Hindu gurus, Maya Warrier's 2005 study of the Mata Amritanandamayi Mission (MAM) and Lola Williamson's 2010 book on the Self Realization Fellowship, Transcendental Meditation, and

Siddha Yoga. These volumes contribute important insights into socio-religious trends in these contemporary devotional movements. Warrier addresses the modern, "urban, educated, and middle-class" "selfhood" of Indian devotees in a transnational mission (2005:2), while Williamson addresses non-Hindus (and non-Indians) who nonetheless adopt Hindu-inspired meditation practices and guru devotion. Both studies focus on growing trends of "individualism and rationalism [which] influence the style and ethos of these movements" (Williamson 2010:4).

While Williamson attributes these characteristics to Western traditions, Warrier attributes the appeal of guru movements to a modern "focus on the private and individual aspects of religious life (self-authorship and self-fulfillment) [rather] than on the public and collective (fostering a sense of community)" (Warrier 2005:15). As Warrier notes, this focus on the self is characteristic of "new religious movements… in the West" (2005:15)[17] but is also prevalent among the cosmopolitan Indians in the MAM. Warrier wonders whether

> the tendency to overlook the private, individual and interiorized aspect of modern guru-centered religious organizations in India has to do with the intellectual legacy bequeathed by scholars like Louis Dumont, which tends to see lay Hindu society as composed not so much of individuals as of castes, families and other social groupings which subordinate the individual to the imperatives of the collective (2005:15).

In *Homo Hierarchicus*, Dumont discounted most previous discussions of caste, saying that previous theorists had seen caste through their own modern privileging of equality as social model and the individual as key actor (1970). Dumont's theory of caste, instead, relied on an underlying metaphor of society as organic body. "The caste isolates itself by submission to the whole, like an arm which does not wish to marry its cells to those of the stomach," (Dumont 1970:41). He also worked to disentangle hierarchy from discussions of power, as such, believing that like in a body, all parts work together for the ultimate good of the whole. No matter that the feet march around on broken ground all day, supporting the weight of the body, the theory goes.

They are keeping the head up. And without the head, the feet wouldn't know where they were going.

Dumont argued that many previous theorists of caste, lodged in a modern perspective on equality, universalized the individual and saw hierarchy as a distortion of man's true nature. In Indian society, Dumont argued, hierarchy is the natural form of a social grouping which values the whole (Dumont 1970:20). After Dumont, Warrier argues, any scholar of Indian society has been hard pressed to prove the relevance of the individual, as Indians have for so long been represented as inherently more concerned with their relationship to family, caste and other groups than with individual identities. In Dumont's view, the realm of individual self-direction is reserved for the renouncer, who drops out of his position in the social sphere, renouncing caste and family life. Dumont refers to the renouncer as "an individual-outside-the-world," and views the renouncer as concomitant to the caste system, the exception that proves the rule in his structural-functionalist view of society (1970:184-185).

Warrier's observation that members of the MAM were focused on the self rather than the whole is especially relevant to my study of relations of inequality and the way privileged participants in the SYVC often fail to conceive their own privilege.[18] I identify characteristics of individualized focus similar to those Warrier observed in the MAM among cosmopolitan SYVC practitioners of both Indian and non-Indian backgrounds, and I see this as indicative of broader trends in new spiritualities movements (Heelas 2008) and of the wider context of globalized capitalism. As Shreena Gandhi observes, the shift of focus to the individual may also have to do with "the growing popularity of psychotherapy," and what she calls "the failure of the communal justice movements of the 1960s… as well as the triumph of capitalism" (2009: 12). I explore the implications of this shift in greater detail in Chapter Three. For now, I turn to the second

question indicated at the beginning of this section, the question as to the kind of yoga addressed in the current study.

The Sivananda Yoga Vedanta Centres (SYVC) Organization

In this section I introduce the SYVC organization and the kind of yoga dealt with in this study – the Integral Yoga of Swami Sivananda – and outline the aims of this dissertation project in light of the literature reviewed above. Building on the previous section, we can imagine SYVC yoga as an object born in India, in the second half of the nineteenth century, in a middle-class "family of disciplines," (De Michelis 2008:17), then reared in North America, among a generation of other Modern Yogas growing up abroad at that time, and finally resettled in India – a returned NRI (Non-Resident Indian), as it were, carrying all the wealth and cosmopolitan sensibility of that term.[19] With its thirty-year history as a host for international travelers in India (dating to the start of the first SYVC ashram in Kerala, South India, in 1978), the SYVC also provides a unique instance of Indian and non-Indian people working together to produce what the SYVC represents as a traditional Indian cultural practice. In this discussion, and with the previous section as background, I want to give a picture of the beliefs, practices, and activities that make up yoga in the SYVC context and to indicate the structural and relational particulars that gave rise to my research questions. Except for a few references in the scholarly texts on Modern Yoga, I draw this rendering of SYVC history from SYVC publications (a 1977 biography of founder Swami Vishnudevananda that he himself dictated to a senior staff member, a work published by a former staff member in 1995 based on collected stories of his senior disciples, and a 2000 edition of the SYVC's training manual for teachers). I also draw from interviews with long-term SYVC members and from my own participant observation in sites in North America, the Bahamas, and India beginning in 1997.[20]

SYVC: Biography of an NRI

Humble Beginnings: 1947-1957

The main visionary and instrument behind the SYVC organization at the start was Swami Vishnudevananda (Swami Vishnu or Swamiji, for short), of Kerala, South India. He established the SYVC in the name of his guru, Swami Sivananda, and always acknowledged Sivananda as the source and inspiration of his teaching. Born in 1887, in Tamil Nadu, Swami Sivananda was a well-known ascetic and part of the Neo-Vedanta movement in global Hinduism, originally framed by Swami Vivekananda (De Michelis 2004). Sivananda trained as a medical doctor before going to work for several years in Malaysia. He eventually returned to India to become a monk and later a recognized saint, based out of his Rishikesh ashram, under the rubric of his association, the Divine Life Society (DLS) (Strauss 2002:222). Swami Sivananda taught a set of ideas he called Integral Yoga, drawn from Vivekananda's formulation around the turn of the 20th century which is based on the integration of practices from each of four paths: Karma Yoga, Bhakti Yoga, Raja Yoga, and Jnana Yoga.[21] These are, respectively: the path of work or action, the path of devotion, the path of discipline based on the eight-fold philosophical system attributed to Patanjali, and the path of knowledge or wisdom. Though he never left India except for those few years in Malaysia, Sivananda's life is important to globalized yoga as he published over 300 books in English and had correspondence with several foreign disciples as well as sending some of his close Indian disciples to establish his mission abroad.

When Swami Vishnudevananda found his teacher, he was seventeen years old and employed as an engineer in the Indian army. According to legend, he came across one of Sivananda's pamphlets, "Sadhana Tattwa," sitting in a pile of papers in the trash. Encountering

this paper while looking for something he had earlier discarded, Swami Vishnu, then known as Swamy Kuttan Nair, read what became a world-shaking proclamation: "An ounce of practice is worth tons of theory" (SYVC 2000:1.9). This practical wisdom appealed to the young man who had little respect for what he deemed the religious hypocrisy entailed in the typical image of a holy man at the time "sitting on a tiger skin with ashes smeared all over his body" (SYVC 1977:7).

Swamy Kuttan was granted a short leave from the army to visit Swami Sivananda's ashram in Rishikesh, several hundred miles from where he was stationed in Jalandhar, Punjab (Krishna 1995:2). He had several transformational experiences with Sivananda, including what the SYVC organization refers to as his first lesson during a second visit, in 1945, a lesson in humility (SYVC 2000:1.9). Because it is typical in ashram contexts to prostrate at the feet of a recognized spiritual master – an act Swamy Kuttan was reluctant to perform – when he saw Sivananda headed toward him on the ashram grounds, Swamy Kuttan stepped out of the way, hiding himself – or so he thought – out of Sivananda's sight. Presumably understanding the young man's disposition and dilemma, Sivananda himself changed direction and confronted Swamy Kuttan. "He asked me who I was and where I was coming from. Then he bowed down and touched my feet!!" (SYVC 1977:7). This stunned the young man and convinced him he had much to learn from Swami Sivananda, particularly the art of humility. Swamy Kuttan was dismissed from the army in 1946 and officially joined the ashram in September of 1947, when he visited for the occasion of Swami Sivananda's sixtieth birthday celebration. Initiated into *sannyas* (celibacy) in March of 1948, he was given the name Swami Vishnudevananda and called Swami Vishnu for short (SYVC 1977:8). Swami Vishnu went on to become the first "Professor of Hatha Yoga" at the DLS ashram, claiming he obtained his bodily knowledge when

his “Master touched [him] and opened [his] intuitive eye” (SYVC 1977:10). His experiences teaching to thousands of both Indian and foreign students at Sivananda’s ashram over the course of the next ten years prepared him for his future work abroad. The contacts he established with students from abroad also paved the way for his first trip to North America, which was sponsored by a DLS student from Montreal, named Sylvia Heck (SYVC 1977:24).

Growing Up in America: 1957-1977

One of three disciples Sivananda sent to the West (Strauss 2002:235), Swami Vishnu left Rishikesh to establish Sivananda's teachings in the United States in 1957 (Krishna 1995:xvi). Swamiji was sent by his teacher, according to SYVC legend, with the phrase “People are waiting” (1977:23). It seems people were indeed ready for what he had to offer; Swami Vishnu found students wherever he went. After two years teaching in California and then New York, he founded the SYVC organization in 1959 in Montreal. Then, in 1963, realizing that student numbers in the Montreal center declined over the weekends when people wanted to escape the city, he established an ashram about an hour away, in the Laurentian foothills of Val Morin, Quebec, where he designed a program he called a “Yoga Vacation” (senior staff member, personal communication, March 12, 2010). The idea was that instead of a typical vacation, often involving excitement, drinking, and overeating, from which many of his students returned more exhausted than when they left, the ashram would provide a more deeply relaxing experience through the minimal and healthy diet, calm atmosphere, and regular practice of exercise and meditation entailed in ashram life (senior staff member, personal communication March 12, 2010).

In this new setting, Swamiji honed the SYVC’s schedule, mostly the same today throughout the organization’s international locations. In each ashram, there are two *satsangs*

(meditation and worship services),[22] two meals, and two asana and pranayama classes daily, with afternoon lectures and plenty of karma yoga in between. The four paths of Sivananda's *Integral Yoga* – Jnana, Raja, Bhakti, and Karma Yoga – each have their place in the daily life of the organization to varying degrees. Jnana Yoga is incorporated through lectures on philosophy and through individual study. While asana (postures) and pranayama (breath control) are only two of the eight limbs of Raja Yoga, they make up an important part of the daily practice of yoga in the SYVC. The other limbs, particularly the ethical principals embodied in the first two, *yama* (abstentions) and *niyama* (observances), are an important part of the organization's teachings and ideally the day-to-day governing of behavior, both by official rule and in personal practice.[23] Bhakti Yoga is practiced through the daily recitation of *kirtan* (devotional chants), prayer, and other formal devotional practices, such as *puja* and *homa* (tantric rituals usually performed by specially trained priests).[24]

Karma Yoga, or the yoga of selfless service, arguably occupies the most important place of all four paths in the SYVC. The SYVC's rural ashrams and urban yoga centers throughout the world are run almost entirely through volunteer labor, as a matter of spiritual principal. Karma yogis, also known in organization parlance as "staff," serve the organization as part of the discipline of yoga, performing all duties, including teaching classes, cooking meals, cleaning and maintaining SYVC facilities, and administration. This is common in contemporary guru movements (Forsthoefel and Humes 2005, Warrier 2005) and Hindu-inspired meditation movements (Williamson 2010) , and is often referred to as *seva* (also "selfless service"). The concept draws from interpretations of karma yoga in the Bhagavad Gita (Sharma 1986, Bhave 1970) as well as Mohandas Gandhi's appeal to the value of manual labor in his own life and work (Klostermaier 1994).

Overlaying the four paths of Sivananda's Integral Yoga, Swami Vishnudevananda created a 5-point system to simplify yoga for students in the West: 1). proper exercise, 2). proper breathing, 3). proper relaxation, 4). proper diet, and 5). positive thinking and meditation. He emphasized yoga's status as a set of practices that can be scientifically verified, setting up a formal research center at his first ashram in Val Morin, where meditators and other practitioners would be hooked up to monitoring machines, their heart rates measured and recorded to determine the effects of yoga on the body.[25] At the same time, he promoted his teaching based on notions of tradition and adherence to an ancient *gurukula* system, a system wherein students live in the ashram or literally home (*kula*) of the teacher (*guru*) for the purposes of extended personal tutelage (formally a period of twelve years). Swamiji felt his adherence to tradition was an important part of what he had to offer, and he publicly argued with the teachings and practices of his contemporaries for what he felt were excesses of commodification (Harpur 1977, Hellicar 1977, Holden 1977, Kapoor 1978, Meyer 1977, Montreal Star 1977, Ragi 1977, Regush 1978).[26]

In 1967, Swamiji established the second SYVC ashram, on Paradise Island in the Bahamas. Two years later, in 1969, he had a vision that precipitated the organization's larger mission and the founding of the Teachers' Training Course (TTC) and the institution behind it, his True World Order (TWO). He was immersed in meditation, when he experienced this vision "of a rush of people tearing down the walls and barriers that exist between nations and peoples" (SYVC 1977:38). Swamiji believed this vision was a sign of what was to come and vowed to work to erase these imaginary and man-made boundaries, and establish a True World Order. TWO "is aimed at promoting peace and understanding," (SYVC 1977:38). An "outgrowth of this," the TTC

> aims to train the future leaders and responsible citizens of the world in Yogic disciplines… [because] True Brotherhood and Peace can only exist where there are strong and self-controlled leaders to set an example for the masses…. Not until men have inner peace can they hope to establish global peace (SYVC 1977:38)

With the TTC, Swamiji began what is today a multi-national program of training yoga teachers in a month-long intensive residential program and the heart of the organization's activities and income. While the TTC covers many aspects of yoga philosophy as expressed in the four paths and five points above, the principal focus is to give trainees practical skills to teach yoga asana and pranayama classes. It articulates to Swami Vishnudevananda's mission as a tool in his vision of creating global peace through inner peace. Ideally, each individual TTC participant develops personal tools for quieting the mind and becoming a better participant in interpersonal relationships, and each participant then, in their future work as a yoga teacher, becomes an instrument in forwarding these tools to members of their home community.

When Swamiji began teaching the TTC regularly, he increased his following, and the initiation of new teachers also allowed the SYVC organization to spread to new cities and countries, all closely overseen by Swamiji, under the direction of his students. Three more centers in the United States and one in Europe were opened between 1969 and 1970. Swamiji opened a third ashram in California in 1971 and one in upstate New York in 1974, with city centers in Toronto, Vienna, Los Angeles, Munich, Geneva, Madrid and Montevideo opening between 1972 and 1976 (Krishna 1995:xvi). Next, he opened the first ashram in India, in his home state of Kerala, bringing this globalized yoga institution, with chiefly non-Indian staff and senior disciples, into a rural village that, according to a senior staff member, had no electricity or telephone service (personal communication, March 12, 2010).

The Return to India and the Globalized Present: 1978-2014

The SYVC's return migration to India marked a new phase in a now thoroughly globalized life. The ashram in Neyyar Dam, Kerala – 28 miles east of the capital city of Thiruvananthapuram (Trivandrum) – first opened in 1978, under the direction of Swami Mahadevananda, an Italian man who is now the senior-most living staff-member disciple of Swamiji. The ashram grew slowly, relying primarily on international guests and staff. Eventually, in 1986 a center was opened in Trivandrum, and the first TTC in India was held in 1987.

Today, there are two additional ashrams in India: a small ashram located in Uttar Kashi, started in 1991 that is only open a few months of the year, and another ashram founded in Madurai in 2005. In addition to these ashram-retreats, which are the sites for courses, workshops, and the SYVC's signature "Yoga Vacations," there are urban yoga centers in Chennai, Delhi, Madurai, and Thiruvananthapuram. The centers offer daily drop-in classes, courses, and satsangs to local residents.

Although Swamiji continued to live and teach primarily in North America, the sites in India gave him a reason to travel back to India frequently during the later part of his life. As recounted by several of his senior disciples, at least a few times toward the end of his life, Swamiji prepared for his trips to India by assembling his close staff and telling them that he was preparing to "leave his body" in India. There would be a very emotional goodbye, and then he would return after a month or more, only to do it all again the following year. Swamiji lived with diabetes beginning in 1986, when he was diagnosed after suffering "severe frostbite to his toes" during a stay in the Himalayas (Krishna 1995:xvii). In January of 1991, just sixty-three years of age, he suffered a stroke that paralyzed the left side of his body (Krishna 1995:xvii). Shortly thereafter, his kidneys failed, and he had to undergo regular dialysis for the remainder of his life.

So his promises that he would leave his body in India were not warnings to be taken lightly, but perhaps, in some interpretations, a way of preparing his staff for what eventually came to pass. The last years of his life were very intense for his close staff who also became his caregivers, waking up throughout the night to help with his dialysis, and caring for his every need, since he was unable to walk but still insisted on carrying out his extremely busy schedule of lecturing and teaching – even when he needed a translator since few people could understand his speech after the stroke. On what became his last visit to India, he achieved *mahasamadhi*, or liberation from the physical body, in November of 1993, in a hospital in Manipal, Karnataka.[27]

Shortly before he passed away, Swami Vishnudevananda left the organization in the care of seven of his close disciples, named as Executive Board Members (EBM), each heading up his or her own region of the organization's operations, and also known as the *acharyas* (spiritual authorities) of the organization. Of the original EBM, some have left the organization in the years since Swami Vishnu's passing. Vacating members have been replaced, some more than once, but at present there are only six EBM. During the period of my research there were four men and two women on the EBM, and as when Swamiji originally bequeathed the organization to them, all members were of European origin and Caucasian. This is probably so because Swamiji spent most of his time teaching in the West, and at the time of his mahasamadhi, most of his senior disciples were from outside India. However, in 2013 there was another important shift in the organization's leadership. At age 73, Swamiji's most senior disciple, the acharya in charge of the Indian ashrams and centers as well as the headquarters in Quebec and new branches in Japan and Thailand, went into official retirement. To my knowledge he is still supported by and affiliated with the organization and still living in India, but he no longer has any administrative or teaching responsibilities. After the EBM meeting in the spring of 2014, the

Board announced the appointment of a new member. This new EBM, a swami who was born in Vietnam, lived for several years in Montreal, and has for much of her SYVC career been director of the SYVC ashram in Grass Valley, California and the center in San Francisco.[28] Her appointment marks, at least potentially, an important shift in leadership, as she is the first Executive Board Member of non-European origin.

The organization now offers the Teacher's Training Course (TTC) in all of its nine ashrams worldwide. As of July 2012, the SYVC has trained over 26,000 yoga teachers with TTC courses ongoing at the time of this writing (http://sivananda.org/about).[29] With the rise in popularity of yoga, for which it is in part responsible, the organization has been offering more and more TTC courses in any given year, more than doubling the number of teachers trained in the past decade.

The highest enrollment for these courses is in the ashram in Kerala, where in the last eight to ten years, there have been at least three TTCs annually, hosting as many as two hundred people in each, and (as of February 2015) charging $2,185 per course participant (sivananda.org).[30] Increased awareness of ayurveda in the West has also added to Kerala's appeal as a destination for health and detoxification,[31] and this demand is being satisfied in the Neyyar Dam ashram with an increase of offerings in their Ayurvedic Sivananda Institute for Health, or SIH, which now features prominently on their website (Sivananda.org.in/neyyardam).[32] This situation makes the organization a venue for Western tourists to experience India for the first time in the comfort of an ashram served by both Indian and international staff.

The organization's Indian branches, particularly the oldest and most established ashram in Kerala, draw such a large enrollment in part because of the lingering mystique of spiritual India,

which attracts high numbers of TTC students as well as yoga vacationers. Since the cost of operations is significantly less than in other SYVC ashrams, but prices for courses are more or less equivalent (sivananda.org),[33] the SYVC in India participates in what has become an increasing global trend of transnational businesses and organizations doing business overseas with some benefits and advantages.[34] One senior staff member told me the organization in India may earn about one million dollars per year but spend just five-hundred-thousand, making it the most profitable region of the organization (personal communication, February 6, 2011). Other parts of the organization, particularly the Bahamas, may take in more money, but the cost of operations makes for a more modest profit.[35]

In India – the site of a long colonial relationship with the West, and also a place where the philosophical principles and foundations of yoga have a long, vibrant history – the SYVC is entwined in unique and complicated ways with the local communities surrounding its centers and ashrams. As an institution that is actively engaged in constructing and promoting ideas of a traditional Indian practice, the SYVC has a stake in contested imaginations of yoga's origins as well as its rightful heirs. As a transnational organization, the SYVC also participates in a wider global complex of relations between wealthy and poor nations, catering to students and guests from both India and the West, as well as managing both voluntary staff and paid workers from widely varying backgrounds. This makes the SYVC an important case for a study of the intercultural relations of globalization, even as Swami Vishnu's own mission for the organization was to overcome the divisions of nation, culture, and history.

The complicated cultural economic dynamic in the SYVC's Indian sites results from the same economic forces that contribute to outsourcing in other transnational businesses. The cost of operations in India is significantly less than in North America or Europe. Furthermore, the product has increased symbolic value if manufactured in India. It therefore makes

economic sense to offer more programs and courses in India than in other locations.[36] Yet, unlike businesses in the Free Trade Zones of neoliberal policies where cheap production is enabled by global political economic forces that encourage “a flexible approach to job structures” and decreased worker rights (Standing 1989:1078), the SYVC structure is situated in a spiritual economy[37] of karma yoga or selfless service, and peace is the stated goal. In the SYVC, low wage “flexible labor” contrasts with the work of volunteer staff with a spiritualized mission, whose cultural capital and/or greater economic flexibility allow them to give their time and labor for free. These two economies work side by side in the SYVC, an official non-profit, where all surplus income is funneled back to development, outreach, and infrastructure. In other neoliberal contexts, flexible labor generally contrasts with higher paid, “secure, regular employment” subject to greater regulation and workers rights (Standing 1989:1079). This transformed economy with a focus on the “spiritual” makes the SYVC fertile ground for consideration of ethical issues in our global political economy and an examination of the limits of cosmopolitan ideals. As part of a generation of Modern Yogas born in the mid-twentieth century, the SYVC serves as an example of a highly successful transnational operation that has survived into the contemporary age of a now thoroughly globalized yoga. For this reason, the dissertation will speak to phenomena that are widespread in globalized yoga and meditation movements as well as to broader issues of inter-cultural relations in the global cultural economy. In the following chapter I will give a detailed description of the SYVC’s structure and the roles of the various participants considered in this research. First, in the final section of this chapter, I describe the research that went into this study and then outline the chapters that will follow.

Summary of Research and Chapters

An Index of Official Research

Earlier in my academic career, in 2001, I wrote a Masters Thesis based on research in SYVC branches in North America, visits to the SYVC ashram in the Bahamas, and a three-month visit to South India, during which I learned about the organization's branches in India and some of its members there. After the completion of my MA, but before matriculating in the PhD program in Anthropology, I spent June 2005 to June 2006 in Tamil Nadu, studying Tamil at the AIIS program in Madurai, where I was a resident of the local SYVC center. During this period, I began to hone the broad research questions addressed in the current study and also began developing interview questions and the appropriate Tamil vocabulary to ask them.

During coursework at Syracuse University, I conducted a short exploratory study in Madurai, Tamil Nadu during May 2007, as part of an independent study course on "Gender and Power in South Asia." This was supported by funding from Syracuse University's South Asia Center to aid in preparing my dissertation research proposal. From June to August of 2007, I was a resident of the SYVC center in Trivandrum during Malayalam language studies at AIIS. I used this opportunity to build relationships with members of the SYVC community in and around Trivandrum and to reflect on the aims of my eventual doctoral project with SYVC members in India. I also conducted an exploratory study during July and August of 2008 at the headquarters of the SYVC organization in Quebec, Canada, supported by pre-dissertation research awards from the South Asia Center, the Department of Anthropology, and the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs at Syracuse University.

After advancing to candidacy, I spent eleven months, from May 2009 to March 2010, conducting part-time research at the SYVC center in Trivandrum, integrated with my Malayalam

language studies at the American Institute of Indian Studies. Finally, I conducted twelve months of full-time, multi-sited research from April 2010 to March 2011, with the support of a Fulbright-Hays Doctoral Dissertation Research Award. The year of my formal DDRA-supported research was organized so as to spend some time in all of the SYVC branches in India, though five out of the twelve months were spent in the largest ashram in Kerala. I spent April and May in the Trivandrum center, June and July in the Neyyar Dam ashram, August in North India (with a few days in each of two centers in Delhi, Swami Sivananda's Divine Life Society ashram in Rishikesh, and nearby the SYVC ashram in Uttar Kashi), September in the Madurai and Chennai centers, October through December in Neyyar Dam, January through February in Madurai ashram, and March in Neyyar Dam and Trivandrum.

Because of my long and public history with the organization, it would be impossible to offer any promise to obscure the name or location of the SYVC. I use the real name of the organization and the cities where I conducted research, and I made my aims in this regard clear as often and as widely as possible, throughout my engagement with this project, including as far back as 2000, when I first began work on my Masters thesis. Still, there are individual identities I am able to conceal through the usual conventions of anthropology.

Before all of my formal interviews, I obtained written consent and explained the general purposes of this study, in accordance with my university's Institutional Review Board. When I write of these interviews here, I use pseudonyms to protect the identity of the speaker, and I give only general information about the person's background.[38] Likewise, in my description of scenes from my participant-observation I use pseudonyms different from those in the interviews, and if sharing something spoken in confidence, I avoid reference to specific personal details that could reveal the identity of the speaker. Satsangs, other public events, and high-ranking members of

the organization are in a different category, because anyone who knows the organization well could potentially identify participants based on their role. Satsangs and some other events are by nature public and therefore quite different from my privileged participation in informal daily affairs. Even so, I have removed the first names of speakers in public events and created pseudonyms for SYVC directors and acharyas. However, I have not changed identifying information associated with these prominent individuals, because for the most part, their places of origin and some general details about their personal or professional backgrounds are common knowledge. Information revealed during private interviews with these individuals is treated the same as for other participants.

This summarizes the work that directly contributed to this dissertation. However, my personal history with the SYVC goes much further back and also overlaps with my official research. This requires some explanation, as it is integral to the research methodologies employed in this study, and will be discussed at length in Chapter Two. For now, I note that because of my own history in the organization, I, like many non-Indian participants in the SYVC, have a spiritual name given to me when I accepted a mantra initiation in 1997. Members of the SYVC in all locations know me as Kumari, so direct quotes from conversations in this dissertation where I am named will refer to me by that name.

Summary of Chapters

The following two chapters provide additional details and context on the SYVC and the scholarship informing my approach. In Chapter Two, I describe in detail both my own place in the study and the structural hierarchy of roles in the SVYC in India. This chapter sets up the complicated interplay of participants as well as the terms used to identify them in this

dissertation and also deals in detail with my own positionality. Chapter Three details the theoretical orientation of this study. Situating the global SYVC movement in wider patterns of global connection, this project understands relationships in the SYVC in terms of theories of cosmopolitanism and globalization, transnational feminism, and the postcolonial. The ethnographic chapters that follow are situated in the encounters made possible through the complex situation of globalized yoga. Each of these four chapters considers encounters in one or more unique points or nodes of these relations across difference. Chapter Four explores the organization's promotional image and formal rhetoric through the lens of a 2010 video about the Neyyar Dam ashram, the oldest branch of the SYVC in India. This chapter deals with relations between and among cosmopolitan participants in the SYVC, through the formal language of the film, the response of Malayalee (Malayalam-speaking, from Kerala) teachers in the Trivandrum center during a teachers meeting in which the film was discussed, and some one-on-one interviews with SYVC certified teachers. Chapter Five deals with paid labor and the karma yoga ethic through my participant observation in the kitchen of the Neyyar Dam ashram and the stories of paid workers as they were told to me. This chapter attends to direct relations of inequality between foreigners and Indian workers through my own experiences of difference and my attempts to forge friendship across these lines. I also consider the narratives of volunteers who often failed to conceive of the extent of their privilege. Chapter Six takes on the subject of animals, food, and shelter and aims to show how unequal relations and classed judgment played out, often indirectly, by way of relationships between humans and animals, or in indirect talk about taste and food. In Chapter Seven, I explore encounters between SYVC ashrams and their neighbors in three sites: Uttar Kashi, Neyyar Dam, and Madurai. This chapter presents these encounters both in official terms and in the experiences and imaginings of Indian staff and

teachers who inhabit a middling space as insiders to the SYVC's institutional sense of self and to an India that is often misconceived by the larger organization. I argue that Indian staff and outside teachers who identify with the organization's cosmopolitan sense of self face barriers from both inside and outside the organization to their full embodiment of this identity. In the Conclusion, I return to the vision of peace, health, and joy at the center of the SYVC's mission and analyze this mission in terms of Swami Vishnudevananda's symbolic and courageous work for peace and in light of the organization's contemporary structure. I return to my argument that the SYVC's vision of peace is a partial vision that obscures the important but seemingly peripheral others of its self-conception. As a way forward, I suggest that a focus on the self, while surely a natural product of wider cultural forces such as trends in new spiritualities movements and the cultural economy of globalization, is not enough. For real and lasting peace, the SYVC must move beyond this individual focus, to complete Swami Vishnudevananda's vision of world peace *through* inner peace. To do this, the SYVC must re-conceive its vision of peace and equality to incorporate the SYVC's workers, neighbors, and others in all its international locations. This work to broaden the vision of community in the SYVC would be a first step in creating a lasting and just peace.

Chapter Two
Roles and Relations

In this chapter, I offer a detailed picture of the SYVC's organizational structure in India, to articulate the various individuals and locations involved in the relational processes described in this dissertation. Because my own identity is intimately bound up with my research in the SYVC, I start with a discussion of my own positionality and how my research methods were shaped by my history in and with the organization. In the opening section, I clarify my personal history with the SYVC organization and how I undertook to research the more focused concerns of this study. Next, I detail the structure of the SYVC and the roles played by the differently situated participants in this hierarchical organization. In the final section, I describe how the structures in place brought about both community and a complicated system of inequality in the SYVC, and I show how my research both emerged from and negotiated these dynamics.

Autobiography of a Yogi

Because my history with the SYVC organization is integral to my perspective and to the research strategies and methods employed in this study, this chapter on roles and relations begins with my own positionality and history. The reflexive imperative of the project I undertake here calls for thoughtful consideration of my relationship to other participants in this study, and my eighteen-year long involvement with the SYVC is an important piece of this. This will also be necessary background information to understanding my place in the ethnographic chapters that follow. I consider this background to be much more than incidental. It is in fact essential to understanding the material presented here, as it speaks to the heart of how I was received by other members of the organization through all phases of the project. This autobiographical background also lays bare my loyalties and biases in choosing what to study and how to present what I learned.

Despite the nod, in the section heading, to Paramahansa Yogananda and his widely read autobiography (1975), first published in 1946, this project is academic in its concerns, its analysis and its primary motivation. It would, therefore, be disingenuous to claim that my insider status makes this project one driven by the goals or concerns of organization members or the SYVC writ large. In fact, some of my claims and my political or intellectual loyalties may be disagreeable or even offensive to other members. Yet, it would also be misleading to represent my stance, relative to the practices and beliefs associated with yoga in the SYVC, as one of disinterested observer. I do not confess my personal history out of concession to would-be critics who assume that any insider status in anthropological research is necessarily problematic. As an academic who came of age in the wake of the post-modern age of anthropology, I am a product of the feminist and reflexive turns in anthropological methodology and am committed to reflexivity and to a blurring of traditional lines between insider and outsider in all phases of anthropological research, including project choice, fieldwork, and writing-up (Abu-Lughod 1993 and 1991, Behar 1996, Cerroni-Long 1995, Narayan 1993, Oakley 2000). With this commitment, though, comes a responsibility for transparency, and this section aims to make clear my own history and place in the SYVC.

"The Mind Becomes the Body": On Ethnographic Listening and Insider Anthropology

Just three months into the longest formal research period for this project (2010-11), I woke with a terrible pain in my ear. The infection had been creeping up on me for a couple of days, but that morning it became clear that I would need to see a doctor. Nonetheless, I made my way to the six o'clock morning meditation and discourse that were a part of my daily life at the ashram in Kerala. After thirty minutes of silent meditation and about twenty minutes of group chanting, the

ashram director began to read from *The Daily Readings of Swami Sivananda*, a book frequently used as the basis for spontaneous short morning lectures. The book has a reading for each calendar day of the year. On this day, in 2010, the director began to read the passage for July 2nd, titled “The Mind Becomes the Body”: “The body with its organs, is none other than the mind” (www.dlshq.org).[39] The entry discusses the interpenetrating influences of the mind on the body, applying the yogic understanding of the manifestation of mind and matter. Further on in the passage, the director read: “The body is really our thoughts, moods, convictions and emotions objectivized, made visible to the naked eye.” Completing the reading, he offered a short interpretation before going on to list the day’s program:

> You speak to any general practitioner… [and they’ll tell you that] 90 percent of people who see a doctor are suffering psychosomatic [illness].[40] [The mind creates illness]. This also [implies] that if we want to heal disease [we can use the thoughts to do this].

At this point, seated in one of the front rows of the hall, scribbling quickly in my notebook, I began to laugh. “Ear infection,” I thought, having a hard time keeping my laughter quiet. “Ear infection.” Later, during staff meeting, when I told the ashram director that I would need to leave the ashram “to see a doctor about my ear,” he made the same connection I had, commenting: “I hope you haven’t been hearing too many bad things.” Indeed, hearing, and more importantly the ethnographic practice of listening, had become a problem (Clifford 1986:12) . I will give some background before coming back to the point.

I first became involved with the SYVC organization in 1997, when, on the recommendation of one of my college professors, I enrolled in the TTC in Grass Valley, California. I was a third-year dance major at the University of Michigan at the time and had been studying *Bharata Natyam*, one of the classical dance forms of South India, as an independent study for three years. To supplement this I took courses in Hinduism, Buddhism, Indian Poetry,

and eventually Tamil language. The professor who suggested I take the yoga teacher's training felt that it would broaden my study of religion and cultures of India as well as being a practical skill for a dancer to have. This turned out to be true, in both regards. Since that time, my studies of yoga have helped me to fashion a broader academic career over the long term and also have served me well in the short term, offering me a flexible income as a yoga teacher throughout my studies, and a rewarding spiritual practice and mental discipline. More than that, the SYVC has become a community and a home to me over the past eighteen years, a source of some of my most important friendships, and an anchor in a life of frequent travel and relocation.

In 1998 when I went to Los Angeles for graduate school, although I was a resident of the SYVC center for only the first few months, I continued to feel at home there for the next five years. I ate many of my evening meals there, celebrated Christmas, New Years and other holidays there when I was not with family, and also cooked a communal meal there most every week. I attended classes on most days and taught class one to three times a week. From Los Angeles, I also maintained a relationship with teachers and friends at the nearest SYVC ashram, in Grass Valley, visiting a few times a year for short stays, and eventually becoming volunteer director of the Children's Yoga Camp (from 2001 to 2004), offered for two weeks each June. During my MA program I went to India for three months to attend the SYVC's Advanced Teacher's Training Course in Kerala and to pursue further dance studies in Chennai, Tamil Nadu where I also taught and attended classes at the SYVC center. I worked as a volunteer in the kitchen during the 2000 summer Teachers Training Course in the SYVC headquarters in Val Morin, Quebec, and I also worked as a cook and kitchen manager during the TTC courses in spring 2001 and December-January 2001-02 at the Paradise Island, Bahamas ashram. After a return trip to India in February-March 2002, when I completed the SYVC's Ayurvedic Massage

Practitioner certification course, I was invited to work as a paid massage therapist during summers and Christmas seasons at the Val Morin headquarters from 2002-2004.

In 2003, when I had completed my MA and MFA degrees at UCLA, I moved from Los Angeles to New York City, where the SYVC was again a source of community in a new place. I attended and taught weekly classes at the center there and also created a relationship with the ashram in Woodbourne, New York, working as a paid massage therapist during the Teacher's Training Course in September 2003. I maintained my connection with the New York center and Val Morin ashram until returning to India in the summer of 2005 for Tamil language studies.

There again, far from home, friends, and family, I made my most important personal connections (not to mention gaining the all-important immersion language experience) at the SYVC center in Madurai where I was welcomed as one of the SYVC family, invited for meals, and recruited for regular teaching and other karma yoga. After three months, the director invited me to become a resident, and I moved from my AIIS-appointed host family to stay in the center during the remaining nine months of my studies in Madurai. In September of 2005, when the SYVC ashram in Madurai hosted an inaugural weekend, I went to help with cleaning and preparation and was asked to present an asana demonstration along with another teacher. That teacher, a former staff from Kerala, would become my husband. We married just six months after that inaugural weekend and moved shortly after that to Syracuse, New York, where I would begin graduate studies that led to this dissertation project. Although my long relationship with the SYVC across several different locations is not very common, it does parallel the lives of other outside-volunteers who are not staff but remain connected to the SYVC through regular participation in the organization's activities.

As an insider to the SYVC community, I occupy a precarious position that significantly affected the way other community members interpreted me and responded to my research. Often, among foreigners in the organization, I could simply blend in. I am a white woman of middle-class American upbringing and share many affinities and expectations with other non-Indian practitioners of globalized Yoga. Because of this, I felt an ethical obligation to make my position as a researcher clear. This was a stance that was not always comfortable in an organization that tends to frown on "egoism" and self-promotion. I felt embarrassed to emphasize my educational history and goals in this context and to risk drawing lines of difference where there was fluidity and fellowship. This was true, likewise, among low-income paid workers in the SYVC branches in India, but in some ways, my status as a researcher (as well as my marital alliance with a Malayalee family of similar background to their own) helped people to interpret me as more similar to them – just a person doing my job. Some workers told me plainly that they were happy to hear I was invested in a career path and advised that I not "get stuck" in the organization, but finish my work and then move on to other important matters, like having children. Still others – insiders to the organization of both foreign and Indian origin – interpreted my invitation to participate in this study as a conspiratory one, a request to hear the gossip or secrets of individual members or the organization at large. In this context, I was occasionally refused interviews. More often, individuals with critical perspectives to share jumped at the chance to tell their stories, so I heard about things that were troubling to me both personally and professionally. During the first few months of my formal field research, as I introduced the subject of my dissertation to would-be participants, this tendency of interlocutors using interviews to register complaints and share troubling but previously hidden details of the organization was the most intense, perhaps in part due to the recent resignation of an important and senior Indian swami.

This swirl of negative talk erupted eventually, if the reader will permit a slippage between scholarly distance and yogic world view, in a literal and painful ear infection, a sickness that kept me home in my Trivandrum apartment for more than a week, until my eardrum eventually burst. Call it psychosomatic or bacterial, the "ear problem" gave me (literal) pause.

Beyond Sympathy and Suspicion: What I Heard, How I Listened

In her 2012 dissertation on Anandmurti Gurumaa and her disciples, Angela Rudert describes her approach as "sympathetic; I engaged in a hermeneutics of trust… not one of suspicion" (38). In a footnote, she explains she "had abandoned other potential research subjects well before, because I felt no desire to spend years writing an exposé or to subject young children to research fields that I did not feel comfortable about…" (Rudert 2012:38 n.40). Although I now identify with this attitude, I would not describe my initial forays into this research as based in a hermeneutics of trust. My first inclination toward this project arose precisely from my discomfort with issues of cultural borrowing or appropriation, and the implied power relationship between people and places in the imagination of "Indian spirituality" by mostly non-Indian practitioners of Modern Yoga. This discomfort started as a small irritation – a recognition of my own participation in a problematic phenomenon, and a desire to correct, clarify and resist it.

Suspicion, then, rather than trust, framed my first engagements with this topic. Yet, this was an untenable approach, particularly in the discipline of anthropology, given the importance of participant observation and necessity of building rapport with a wide range of participants. As the project developed into one centered on labor, inter-cultural relationships, and issues of inequality in the South Indian settings of globalized SYVC yoga, my own perspective matured. I have come to know the organization more deeply through my personal experiences and through

witnessing the benevolence of the SYVC in the lives of volunteers, paid workers, and surrounding communities – donations of housing and health care to poor workers, for example – all of which make the picture more complicated than I originally imagined it to be.

Beyond the expected personal gratifications of the life experiences and relationships entailed in anthropological research, teachings and experiences in the SYVC organization and more than eighteen years of study and practice of yoga have improved my health, my relationships with family and friends, and my sense of well-being, thus also significantly influencing my approach to this research and to members of the community who became my interlocutors. Moreover, the practice and philosophy of yoga have given me a clearer (if still transforming) sense of my purpose on this earth and have formed a basis for some of my most important relationships – no small side effect or fictive kinship. As regards my research, I have always been treated with respect, welcomed, and been given access to individuals at every level of the organization who generously shared their experiences and life histories with me, often with surprising self-awareness and candor.

I have also seen the positive effects the organization and some individual members have on members of the communities surrounding the SYVC ashrams in India. I have witnessed tears of gratitude among workers who were granted loans or financial gifts in response to written requests. I observed the development and execution of a free medical clinic in the village surrounding the Kerala ashram in 2010. And I have listened to the life stories of many individuals who say they owe everything good in their lives to the organization and to yoga. Through this, I have come to see the organization and its goals as much bigger than any individuals and their inevitable human flaws and have also witnessed the complex motivations and multiplex personas of individual members.

This said, and probably inevitably, as in any religious institution, in the process of my research I have heard about and even confirmed some questionable behaviors, attitudes and even deviance among individual members, some of whom could stand in for the organization at large, given their seniority or power. Along the way, I made a decision, like Rudert, that I did not want to spend my life's work and energy in writing an exposé or creating negativity under the auspices of academic critique. Instead, I chose to narrow my practice of listening to a specific set of concerns about the inter-cultural relations of globalization. This does not mean that I closed an ear to rumors that circulated during the time of my fieldwork or literally shut off the recorder in the context of private interviews. I chose, rather, to allow some information to remain background noise, and to actively listen to the words and exchanges that I felt would amount to something meaningful and productive both in "the academic *loka*" (world), as Rudert calls it (2012: 22), drawing on Hindu conceptions of space, and in the international community of the SYVC.

During the course of my research in India, to take a very public example, a prominent, senior organization member who was formerly a swami got married to a woman who had been working as his assistant. This created quite a stir among some dedicated teachers, who look to senior swamis in the organization as examples and felt disappointed, even betrayed, by this seeming fall from grace. It unwittingly became a source of discussion in many of my interviews, in part because the former swami and his assistant are both foreigners, and when I asked about relations between Indians and foreigners or differences in their orientations to yoga practice, this incident often came to mind as a talking point – among foreigners and Indians alike. Conversations about this prominent relationship, thus, serve as important material for thinking about cross-cultural understanding and misunderstanding, and I will draw on them for what they

have to teach us about the way foreigners vs. Indians are conceived in relation to the organization's values, rather than engaging in debates about whether or not what happened was right.

There were other less prominent complaints and accusations I heard about staff members of all ranks – that they practice the opposite of what they preach, that senior teachers and administrators are greedy, money- and power-hungry, manipulative, and sexually transgressive. I was once cornered, for example, in a coffee shop during an out of town break from my language studies by a former staff member who wanted to make sure his experiences made it into my work. But in that instance (as in many others), I could not get the person to tell me any specific examples of the kinds of behavior he wanted me to be aware of. It was often the case that people told me that anonymous person-X, -Y, or -Z, or more likely "everyone in the organization" did "all the things they are not supposed to do." Prompts for more details or examples were usually answered only with shy innuendos – perhaps because even talking about some of these transgressions is considered rude, especially across gender lines, as were most all of these encounters. Because of my close personal connections with so many members of the organization, it was at first hard to separate the personal and professional dilemmas posed by these issues. How could I look swami so-and-so in the eye, let alone prostrate before him, as is common in some ritual settings, after hearing of a string of complaints of his transgressions from several different sources? It was worst when rumors I had long dismissed became publicly verified, because they forced me to second-guess other rumors I had previously given little weight. In this way, my own experiences were an important form of participant observation, and they helped me appreciate how other members of the organization contend with such issues.

Ultimately, the professional imperative to determine the boundaries of my study supported my personal conviction that no good can come in dwelling on rumors or scandals of this kind. There are other studies that deal with the complicated power dynamic of guru-disciple relationships, particularly when it also involves relations between foreigners and Indians, women and men, and sexual or moral transgressions in monastic orders (Cox 1977, Feuerstein 1990, Kramer and Alstad 1993, Williamson 2010). But the purpose of my study is to think through the cross-cultural relations of globalization, and so I will deal with these kinds of rumors only to the extent they are relevant to my academic concerns, as in the example of the swami who married, above.

For those who confided in me with hopes that my study would make public the perceived indiscretions of the organization or of individuals within it – a sort of justice in the airing of grievances – I hope that my work here will prove of some value in making these delicate issues appear more nuanced, and the individuals involved more complete in their full humanity. And yet, my own experiences with and in the organization, as a researcher, as a student, and as a person with my own flaws and shortcomings, compassionately revealed to me through eighteen years of sincere study and practice of yoga, have helped me appreciate the SYVC as an organization that does its best under complicated circumstances of global interconnection. The SYVC's flaws or shortcomings seem to me no more or less than any worldly institution or for that matter – to put it in terms more sensible to SYVC beliefs – any person or entity bound by the limitations of our manifest world of maya.

Yoga as Theory

This thought, along with the issue of the ear infection as metaphor both give rise to another potential raised by the insider dimension of my position. I endeavor, in this writing, to make use of the philosophy and practice of yoga as part of my toolkit for sociocultural analysis. Joseph Alter makes a masterful example of this in the final chapter of his *Yoga in Modern India*, wherein he argues that the yoga worldview can be used productively for a mimetic skepticism, exploring the anthropological convention of cultural relativity. He argues that

> doubt about the meaningfulness of Yoga as the embodiment of Universal Truth can be extended – through a consideration of the logic of relativism – into analytical skepticism about the claim, both anthropological and popular, that cultural reality itself is the defining basis of human experience (2004:213).

In the chapters that follow, I critically employ the philosophy and practice of yoga in the SYVC, which, as a teacher in the organization, I have studied, practiced, and, to a great extent, internalized. I view this background not just as a frame for the intercultural relations that interest me here, but as a way into their analysis. In other words, yoga philosophy can provide a theoretical framework for an analysis of globalization. I will draw from SYVC-related sources and experiences, like the lecture above about psychosomatic illness, as one tool for understanding the relationships and encounters I take as the primary material for this study. In this way, I privilege the modes of thinking that are shared by members of this community, and I give the teachings of SYVC gurus Swami Vishnudevananda and Swami Sivananda weight in interpreting the words and actions of their disciples and associates. In some small way, this move also responds to the Kerala ashram director's suggestion, in his lecture on psychosomatic illness: thoughts have a healing and transformative power. I use my words and work here to interpret and attempt to mitigate the problems of globalization represented in the spaces of this international institution. In the next section I describe the structure of the SYVC in India and the

circumstances that led me to pursue this project on intercultural relations of globalization in the context of the SYVC. In the process, I review terms relevant to the various constituents in my research sites, which will be important to understanding the rest of the ethnography.

The Karma Yoga Ethic and the Implications of Wage-Labor

As outlined in Chapter One, the general policy of the SYVC is that all staff should be unpaid volunteers who work for their own spiritual benefit. This basis in voluntary service lends credibility to the organization's claim to offer an authentic gurukula experience. In North America (and for the most part throughout the SYVC's non-Indian locations), staff members are volunteers who work all kinds of jobs, from answering phones and creating brochures, to cleaning toilets, mopping floors, cooking, and doing laundry, as well as interacting with students and guests, teaching asana classes, leading meditation, and administering courses. There are very few exceptions to this rule, though occasionally skilled individuals like carpenters, accountants, lawyers, and ayurvedic physicians or therapists are paid to help with specific projects or tasks.

In India, however, the proportion of volunteer to paid employees is much different, as shown in Figure 2, below. The SYVC employs a substantial force of low-wage workers, primarily for jobs not requiring significant specialized education or training. In the Indian ashrams, paid workers, usually from the surrounding villages, perform cooking, cleaning, and grounds work, and some serve as hired drivers for the ashram's vehicles. These workers are essential to the ashrams' daily functioning, as there are not enough volunteers to keep up with the volumes of mostly-foreign students and guests who visit the ashram throughout the year. In the urban Indian centers, which offer daily classes primarily serving the surrounding cosmopolitan communities, the situation is similar.

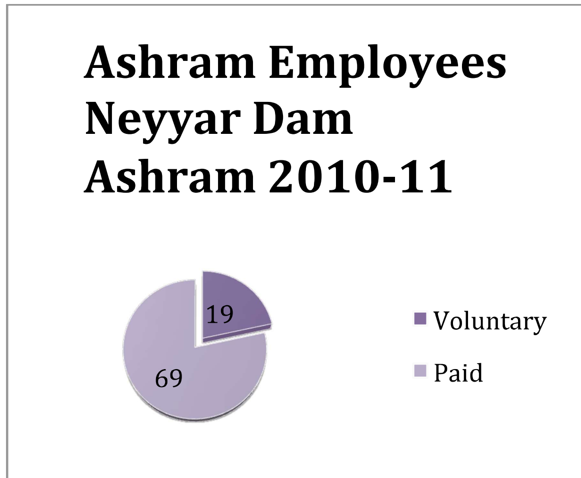

Figure 2

Additionally, in these centers and in some ashrams, there are some paid employees who do the work typical of voluntary staff – teaching, administration, etc. – in exchange for a monthly salary. Although these individuals are in fact paid (at rates often similar to the other paid workers, though sometimes considerably more), and some maintain families and households outside the organization, they are still classified in important ways along with volunteer staff. These paid staff are often more fluent in English and more highly educated than workers and thus have greater access to the international community of the SYVC. While the incidence of paid staff may seem to indicate flexibility in the set-up described above, to my mind it rather serves to define a line between the two categories of labor in the SYVC's Indian locations. *Staff*, whether voluntary or paid, conduct the more central and valued spiritual labor. They teach yoga, attend staff meetings and satsangs, and participate in daily asana and pranayama classes. They are occasionally taken on special staff excursions, and in the ashrams they attend regular staff movie nights. *Workers* conduct the peripheral and less-esteemed physical labor of cooking, cleaning, driving, and grounds work. They may be encouraged but are certainly not required to attend satsang and yoga classes, and since they usually live outside the ashrams and centers where they work, they do not generally participate in staff outings or movie nights. If workers

take an interest, however, they can and do move up through the ranks to become paid or even voluntary staff, often by using the TTC as a stepping-stone to more in-depth participation in the organization's work. Figure 3 is a graph of paid employees in the ashram (all of them Indian), with a sub-graph illustrating the category of paid staff. Proportions shown here are meant to convey a snapshot of the period of my research in Neyyar Dam (roughly April 2010-March 2011). Although most paid employees in the subcategory of "staff" shown in the second, smaller graph in Figure 3 (pie of pie) were TTC graduates, not all people in this category were actively teaching or attending staff meetings. Additionally, at least one of the paid drivers was also a certified teacher and had previously been more involved on the "staff" side. Last, Figure 3 leaves off the important category of paid pharmacy workers – those employed as doctors or therapists in the ayurvedic clinic. In Neyyar Dam these employees acted more as workers and did not as a rule participate in staff meetings or satsangs, yet, probably due to their special status, their names did not appear on the informal list of workers provided to me by the ashram to aid my record keeping. However, in the SYVC centers, people employed as massage therapists were, as a rule, active members of the staff and often taught classes or participated in administrative work.

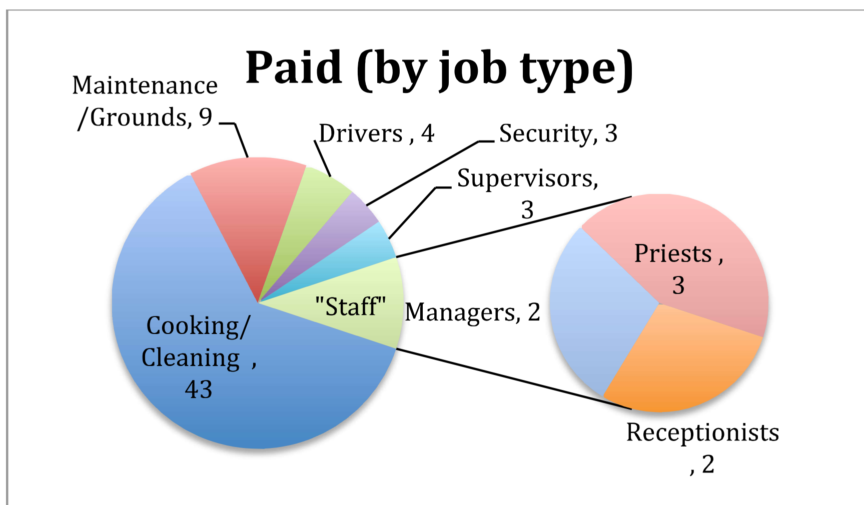

Figure 3

The complex hierarchical system of labor described above becomes more complicated when factoring in other participants in the SYVC community, like paying guests, students, and volunteer outside-teachers. Although no category of participation is completely closed or exclusive, for ease of description let us imagine the SYVC community as made up of three sets of participants: *workers*, *staff*, and *guests*. Each of these three groups may be broken into sub-groups, for example: paid vs. unpaid (Figure 4), male vs. female (Figures 5 and 6), and Indian vs. non-Indian (Figure 7), which become relevant depending on the context. Compare Figure 3 and Figure 6, for example. The women who make up the greater portion of the pie in Figure 6 also make up a nearly equivalent portion in Figure 3. The lowest-paid cooking and cleaning workers are women, while the higher paid categories – drivers, security, supervisors, and staff – are men, with the not-surprising exception of the two female receptionists whom I have classified as "paid staff," because they were TTC graduates, though they were not regularly teaching at the time of my research. Figure 4 shows the seven paid employees I classified as "staff" in Figure 3 alongside the unpaid or voluntary staff, for comparison, again of the specific instance of Neyyar Dam ashram during the period of my research. These figures are approximate, based on knowledge gained from interviews, as I did not do a systematic survey of who was paid and who was unpaid.

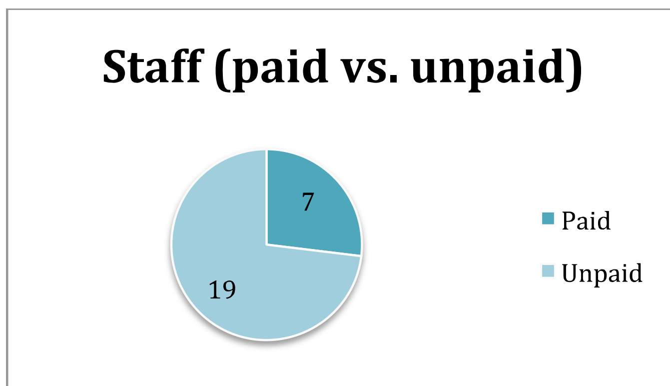

Figure 4

Voluntary Staff
(by gender)

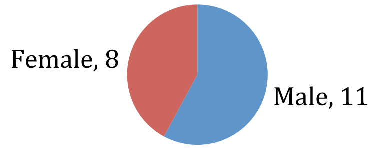

Figure 5

Paid (by gender)

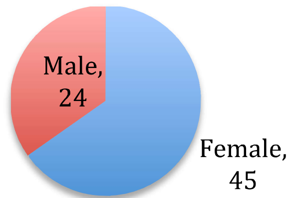

Figure 6

Voluntary (by origin)

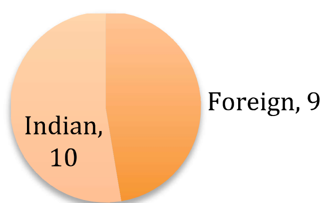

Figure 7

Finally, I should clarify that while the terms *staff* and *guests* are used regularly in the SYVC context, the distinction between the terms *staff* and *workers* is my own. Within the SYVC, even though these two groups are classified and treated differently (as I will describe below), they are often referred to by the same umbrella term, "staff," and distinguished by the adjectives paid vs. voluntary. These terms, however, leave out the ambiguous category of paid staff (Figures 3 and 4) whose work and insider status is similar to that of volunteers. For clarity, in this dissertation, *staff* refers to individuals involved in the spiritual functions of the organization. Staff are most often volunteers but in some special cases paid, a point I will return to below. *Workers* refers to paid employees who serve the ashram but are minimally or un-involved in the propagation of yoga. Workers almost always maintain a home outside the ashrams or centers where they are employed, though because of distance some reside in the SYVC for extended periods.

Some of these details about the SYVC are unique to the organization's particular international history. However, for the most part this structure is interesting precisely because it is *not* unique but rather has much in common with other international yoga institutions in India as well as with other non-yoga NGOs or nonprofits with similar altruistic aims and transnational structures, both in India and in other formerly colonized nations (Redfield 2012). More importantly, structures of both yogic and non-yogic nonprofits tend, in important ways, to echo and exhibit traces of bygone colonial structures as well as the structures of contemporary profit-oriented transnational corporations. This is precisely why relations across difference in the SYVC provide a useful lens onto broader patterns of relations across difference in the context of globalization. Below, I give some more details about each of the three categories of participants

in the SYVC, in order to spell out some of the differences between them and how they overlap and affect one another.

Workers

Among workers, those employed in the centers and those employed in the ashrams have slightly different tasks and vastly different pay scales, primarily because of being located in urban vs. rural settings, respectively. At the time of my research, a female cook in an urban center (responsible for preparing all meals for a small group of resident staff, washing dishes, and keeping the kitchen clean) could earn around INR 5,000 ($107) per month or more, whereas a female cook in the large Kerala ashram (responsible for prep-work like washing and chopping vegetables, as well as preparing salads and other side dishes, washing dishes, cleaning the kitchen, carrying water, and many other tasks) typically earned just INR 2,600 ($56) per month, or about INR 87 ($1.87) per day.[41] There were cleaning workers in both centers and ashrams, who typically earned the same amounts as the cooks, though their work and hours varied. Kitchen workers in the ashrams had longer days than cleaning workers and often complained about the intensity of the physical demands of their labor compared to other types of work.

The workload varied by season and location, and pay scale varied by location and gender. In the Kerala ashram, most kitchen workers (numbering between seven and fifteen, depending on the time of year) were women, but there was always one male cook who made the major decisions about what to serve each day and was responsible for putting meals together on the stove. During high season in 2010-11 (November through February), the ashram also brought in three men from North India to help in the main kitchen. They cooked food on the stove and assembled salads or side dishes but for the most part avoided the prep work customary of the

women. They also conducted their work in the main kitchen area, along with the head cook, rather than in the smaller attached washing and storage area mostly occupied by the women. I was unable to formally interview any of the male cooks in the Kerala ashram (the head cook because he politely refused, and the others because of a language barrier). However, I did learn from a longtime staff member that male cooks and drivers in the Kerala ashram were paid 3,500 ($75) per month (personal communication, January 2011) compared to the female cooks' 2,600 ($56). According to all who spoke with me about it (including Indian women and men who were paid workers, and senior voluntary staff), men in the organization earned more than women, as a rule, and without respect to hours or workload. This was common to all daily wage work in South India, not a policy unique to the SYVC, yet it was disheartening to see this culture of explicit gender inequality play out in an organization which, given its global cosmopolitan outlook, might have been expected to challenge or resist such norms. [42]

In the Madurai ashram, serving a much smaller number of staff and guests, there were between one and three men in the kitchen (depending on season), and the three female paid workers did only minimal and irregular kitchen prep work. While the women in the Kerala ashram were for the most part older, in their late thirties through late-sixties, the three Tamil women working in Madurai ashram were very young – two under age eighteen, and one in her twenties. This difference owes to the different locations of each of the ashrams and the length of operations. The Kerala ashram in Neyyar Dam is located in a small but vibrant town, on the side of a major dam, and this ashram has been employing workers since 1979. The nearest homes are just adjacent to the ashram property, and the area is also a popular local tourist destination, with a Lion Safari Park and other nature-based attractions. Madurai ashram is seated several miles outside the main city of Madurai, a long walk or short bus ride from the nearest residential areas.

The ashram only opened in 2006, and all three of the young women working for the ashram are related to the ashram's main architect, whereas the main cook is from Kerala, and his two assistants during the high season in 2011 when I was there were transferred staff from the SYVC ashram in Uttar Kashi.

Interestingly, wages for the young women working in Madurai were reported around INR 100 ($2) per day, or 3,000 ($64) per month, while male drivers and cooks earned 4,500 ($96) – in both cases more than their counterparts in Kerala. On average, daily wages in Kerala are higher than in Tamil Nadu, so the numbers are surprising. The fact that the director of this ashram from its founding in 2005 until March of 2010 was one of the few Indian swamis in a leadership role in the organization may possibly explain the difference, as many Indian staff and workers I spoke to told me that he was more supportive and understanding, as an Indian himself, of their needs.

Staff

Because the ideal arrangement is that staff will be unpaid volunteers who work solely for their own spiritual growth, most staff throughout the SYVC organization come from an educated middle-class population who have the surplus resources to afford "free work" and seek this opportunity for altruistic reasons. Throughout the international SYVC, voluntary staff are typically young, unmarried adults seeking knowledge and experience in yoga, who join the organization for a period of a few months to a few years and then go on to other careers and life paths. Many of those who stay beyond a few years take vows of renunciation and become swamis. There are certainly exceptions to both these patterns. Some older married couples join staff as a form of retirement in later life, and other individuals decide to serve when they become

unemployed or go through another serious life change. In the urban SYVC centers, there are also volunteer teachers who live outside and teach one or more classes per week. Although they, too, offer their work as karma yoga, they also receive free, unlimited classes at the centers where they teach. In many cities, this is a significant benefit, as yoga classes can be costly. While voluntary teachers usually have jobs, homes and lives apart from the SYVC, I interpret them as important insiders to the organization, as they are often the largest group of dedicated members in the urban communities where the SYVC operates.

Among non-Indian people, the opportunity to affiliate with the SYVC anywhere in the world almost always entails some sort of financial commitment. As a rule, individuals can join the ranks of the full-time voluntary staff only after first committing to between three and six months of work-study during which participants must pay for, at the minimum, their own room and board. This requirement is often waived if the potential volunteer is a graduate of the TTC, [43] though the TTC requires its own investment of time and money. However, for Indians or people from other countries whose currency is weak compared to the US dollar, fees for courses are, as a rule, reduced.

Volunteers from India as well as from a few other countries are often accepted as work-study candidates in the ashrams in India, with no requirement to pay. However, they are generally bound to a minimum length of service of one year. [44] In addition, after this year of service, most are given the option to attend the TTC at no cost. Because of this, Indian staff come from a wider variety of class backgrounds than do foreigners, and Indian staff with more limited economic and cultural resources tend to volunteer with the aim of attaining credentials as yoga teachers or for the opportunity to learn English. Even with these exceptions, Indian volunteers tend to be in shorter supply than foreign volunteers, as the opportunity to volunteer

rests on a certain level of privilege. Volunteerism in the SYVC tends to arise out of disillusionment with the pursuit of economic prosperity as a means to happiness. I found this attitude to be far less common among Indians than foreigners in the SYVC.

Staff are also classified as either temporary or long-term. People serving the organization for anywhere from a few months to a year are considered temporary staff. They make little to no formal commitment to the SYVC, and while they receive free meals, lodging, and yoga classes, they are responsible for their own health care costs and other personal needs. Long-term staff, who have made some greater, though usually indefinite, level of commitment, are often supported in other ways, though this can vary greatly from participant to participant depending on circumstance, length-of service, and need. Some long-term staff with medical problems and no other source of income are cared for fully by the organization, and most long-term staff have, at a minimum, their toiletries, clothing, and other necessities paid for. Many long-term non-Indian staff I interviewed had some external source of support, such as a pension, real estate, family support, or savings from a previous job. For Indian long-term staff, this varied considerably by the person, ranging from relatively equivalent to the middle-class comfort of non-Indian staff to staff who had come from very poor families and depended on the SYVC even for the travel funds and food required on occasional visits home.

What certainly varies throughout the organization, depending on rank, experience, and the number or years of service, is the quality of accommodation, individual freedom to pursue outside interests, class of travel, food, and other amenities.[45] The organization as a whole categorizes staff rather fluidly as either junior or senior, based on the number of years served as well as the number of courses completed. There is a further, though more flexible, hierarchy based on age and marital or monastic status. Older individuals, as a rule, fall under the more

senior side of the organization, even if they are newer staff members, but younger staff members who have donned ochre robes and taken vows of sannyas – often after an official novice period during which they are deemed *brahmacharis* (celibate students) and wear yellow – are generally accorded greater respect and responsibility than long-serving staff who have not taken these vows. There are exceptions to this, including some former monks who have relinquished their vows and married, but still maintain their higher status.

Many people (especially non-Indians) who visit SYVC ashrams for the first time are shocked at the rules of conduct, the rigorous schedule, and the simple dietary program with meals just two times per day. Equally shocking for those who stay longer and learn more is finding out that senior staff do not always subscribe to the hard and strict lifestyle advocated by the organization's official teachings, as evident from the outside. The acharya in charge of the Indian branches and headquarters had (until his retirement) his own home at the Kerala ashram, complete with a private kitchen where all his meals were prepared for him. These meals were rumored to contain ingredients not sanctioned in the ashram's official diet – for example, he regularly drank espresso – though at times he also underwent special medical treatments and took very simple food. The house where he resided also had a personal gymnasium, a television, and other entertainment luxuries. In addition, the acharya had his own luxury car and personal driver, separate from the organization's other vehicles. Other senior staff have private rooms, some with personal refrigerators, to store special foods like cheeses, jams, and supplements not offered as part of the ashram's meal plan. Following an addition to the ashram around 2007, when a hall of new staff rooms was constructed, most long-term staff, irrespective of rank, have private bathrooms with hot water, sometimes shared with a roommate or two.

Long-term staff I spoke to justified these discrepancies, especially among senior high-ranking staff like the ashram's acharya and other Executive Board Members, saying they "did their time" in their younger years and that their hard work and long hours would not be sustainable without these accommodations. Even Swami Vishnu, believed by many to be a kind of super-human, burned out at a relatively young age, probably in part due to his intense teaching and travel schedule. As we will see in Chapter Five, foreign staff also justified differences between local and foreign staff as based on their differing desires and expectations – rationalizing that poor Indians simply didn't need the same amenities as foreigners to be comfortable because they had grown up with so little.[46]

Though the quality of accommodations and opportunities in the SYVC did not, by any official means, differ by nationality or ethnicity, it often played out that way, as the most senior and powerful staff in India were foreigners. It was also noticeable that non-Indian staff in the organization tended to move up the ranks and advance to more senior positions much more quickly than Indian staff. This was partly due to language and educational advantages, though there were also some long-serving, educated Indians who told me they were passed over by less-experienced foreigners for leadership and teaching opportunities, including some who had since left the SYVC. Because of this overall pattern, foreign staff, on average, had better accommodations and some had more privileges within the hierarchical organization than did their Indian counterparts. Those Indian staff who maintained greater status and power in the organization tended to fall into the category of paid staff. In fact, by the time my research began there were no male Indian swamis remaining in the organization. Indian staff tended to fall into the category of young junior staff (some female, but mostly male) or else, if they were long-term,

they were typically men who had families outside whom they were supporting with a salary from the organization.

Though this practice of paying some members of the staff whose roles were otherwise similar to voluntary staff was common throughout the organization's branches in India, its implementation seemed to be based on private and individualized factors. In general the practice of paying staff seemed to be a strategy to retain individuals who felt strong pressure from family members and might otherwise leave the organization in order to fulfill these obligations. I interviewed some staff members (all men) who served for a number of years as volunteers, but converted to paid status at the time of their marriage, rather than leave to take on other paid employment. I also interviewed some unmarried paid staff who had originally joined on as paid employees. These were both men and women and usually hired because of particular skills, such as massage therapy, even when (especially in the yoga centers) they also served in other capacities such as teaching and administration. I know of at least one female paid staff member who was hired because of a center's need for a female teacher to reach out to female students. However, despite the prevalence of situations like these, there were other Indian staff whose situations looked from the outside quite similar to those of paid staff, yet who, for whatever reason, never asked or needed to be paid, including some whose own family members were actively serving as paid workers. Similarly, the rate of pay seemed to vary considerably across locations and to depend on need as much as experience. Some paid staff received the same as or even less than paid workers in the same or comparable locations, while others received two, three, or more times the monthly salary of the highest paid workers.

The centers in India were primarily staffed by Indians, generally young single people not yet settled into careers and family life. Centers tried to have at least one woman on staff, in order

to connect with female students and, if possible, to teach the ladies-only asana classes.[47] However, the majority of Indian staff were men. In Trivandrum, in Madurai, and in Delhi, during the time of this research, the centers were directed by young Indian men (mid-twenties to early forties), each supervising a team of a few junior staff, again mostly Indians, with the exception of a Japanese temporary staff member in one of the centers in Delhi. The Chennai center was headed by a relatively new foreign staff member, a middle-aged woman from Mexico, who had been advanced quickly to the role of director, though she had completed the TTC just two years before being appointed director. This same pattern happened in Trivandrum around 2007, when another foreign woman, a white South African, who had recently joined staff was appointed director of an all-Indian team. Both of the centers in Delhi as well as the center in Chennai were also headed in recent years by foreigners of European or Euro-American origin.

Although the pattern looks different now, earlier in the organization's history there were a significant number of Indian staff who committed as long-term staff of the organization and even became swamis – usually a sure line to a leadership role in the organization. Most left, however, in the years shortly after Swami Vishnu's mahasamadhi. One of the few senior Malayalee staff members who had travelled internationally in the organization and eventually became director of his own ashram, in Madurai, left the organization at the very start of my research in 2010. Some described his departure as a "forced resignation," and many Indian staff and former staff told me they felt it was difficult for an Indian to move up the ranks of the organization. One exception, a female Malayalee swami, is director of the ashram in Uttar Kashi. She somewhat mysteriously refused to speak to me in any capacity connected to my research. Another important exception is an Indian man married to a woman from Croatia. Together, they direct the Toronto center, and he has for many years played an active role in managing the

ashram headquarters in Val Morin. He also returns to India most every year to teach courses and consult on major projects undertaken by the SYVC in India.

Guests

Guests in the SYVC ashrams are either yoga vacationers or course participants. In India the majority of guests and course participants are foreigners from Europe, North America, and, more recently, Japan, though there are always a number of Indian guests and students, as well a scattering of guests from other countries.[48] Guests and course participants from both India and abroad are generally middle class, and many can probably be considered upper-middle class, as the costs of getting to India suggest considerable discretionary income, though the costs of staying at the ashrams vary considerably based on type of accommodation. High season yoga vacation rates in Indian Rupees for one night stay at the Kerala ashram are as follows: tent space, INR 750 ($16); dormitory, INR 750; shared non-AC twin rooms with common bathrooms (cold water only), INR 950 ($20); shared non-AC twin rooms with private bathroom (cold water only) INR 1,200 ($26); shared AC twin rooms with private bathroom (hot water), kettle and fridge, INR 1,700 ($37) (http://sivananda.org.in/neyyardam).[49] Based on an ashram map (Figure 8) and the description on the Neyyar Dam website, I estimate that in high season, the ashram can accommodate at least as many as 350 guests per night. In yoga vacation rates this would allow the ashram to charge as much as INR 314,000 per night ($6,280). Though the number of guests never goes anywhere near this high during purely yoga vacation periods (off season), courses during the high season bring in considerably more money than the basic yoga vacation rates.

Sivananda Yoga Vedanta Dhanwantari Ashram
Neyyar Dam, Kerala, India

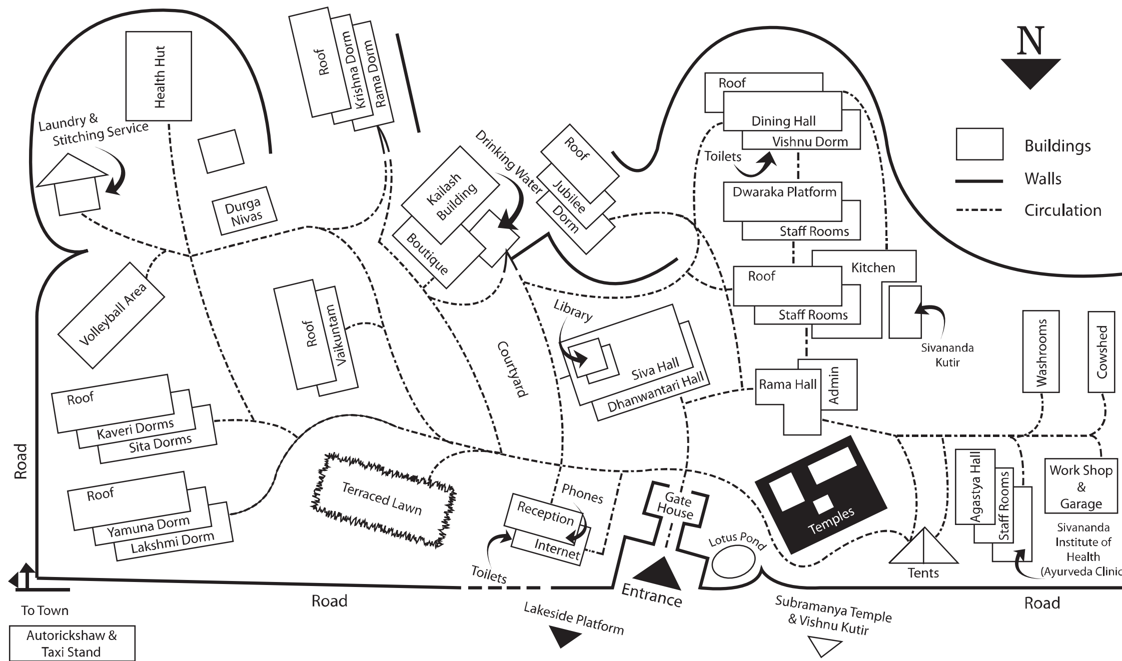

Figure 8 Map of Neyyar Dam Ashram illustrating structures and pathways existing in 2010-11 (used with permission from Sivananda Yoga Vedanta Dhanwantari Ashram)

In keeping with the organization's tradition of karma yoga, all ashram guests and course participants are asked to do one hour of selfless service each day. Staff assign and oversee this work, which generally includes food service, sweeping and tidying the ashram's several large yoga halls, cleaning bathrooms, and carrying wood to be used in the ashram's kitchen. Unlike in other ashrams and centers around the world, neither volunteer staff nor guests are recruited to participate in kitchen work or laundry, which are instead handled by paid workers.

The urban centers in India, as anywhere in the SYVC, mostly cater to a local cosmopolitan community. Guests (or students) in these centers are generally educated, English-speaking, and middle class, though the extent of this varies depending on the region. City centers are almost always frequented, too, by foreigners living in India for work, study, or volunteering. Students in these city centers mostly take yoga classes for health and to lose weight, though

some become passionate about other aspects of the practice and go on to enroll in the TTC and later serve their own community as voluntary outside teachers. The payment scheme for yoga classes in the SYVC centers in India tends to be on a monthly basis, with fees differing for members and non-members (an additional annual membership fee applies) and for foreigners vs. Indians. Monthly unlimited class passes in the Trivandrum center, for example are INR 600 ($13) for Indian members, INR 800 ($17) for Indian non-members, and INR 1400 ($30) and INR 1600 ($35) for non-Indian members and non-members, respectively (Sivananda.org.in/trivandrum/).[50] A monthly pass at the SYVC in New York City, for comparison, costs $75 (for members only), with an annual membership fee of $50 (sivanandanyc.org).[51]

Workers, Staff, Guests: Contact, Community, and the Anthropologist's Place

The differences described above create a unique space for cosmopolitan yoga practitioners (both volunteer staff and paying guests) to construct a community with volunteers and guests from poor or developing nations, including some Indians of meager means. This community also ideally includes the paid staff who are intimately involved in the daily operations of the SYVC, and to a more limited extent the low-income workers who cook, clean, and perform other kinds of labor. But the cohesiveness of this community is limited. Although meals, classes, and satsangs are ostensibly communal, the international ashrams in India are in fact partitioned, both physically and socially. Evidence of this is found in the activities of people and bodies at work, in leisure, and through the practice of yoga asanas, rituals, and religious activities. Language, and its indexical relationship to race and class (Urciuoli 1996), is a key element in this partitioning.

Global political economic flows that may be more readily associated with large for-profit transnational businesses also affect much smaller spirituality movements conceived as inherently

democratic (Heelas 2008). The SYVC's status as a non-profit organization with altruistic ideals means the financial benefits of this system enable some charity work and support for both staff and paid workers. Paid workers receive free medical care both through the organization's own ayurvedic clinics (established at the Neyyar Dam ashram and the centers in Chennai, Delhi, and Trivandrum) and through reimbursement for outside medical expenses. The organization also regularly donates and/or provides loans to long-term paid workers in response to requests for help with housing, educational expenses, marriages and other rituals and events. Yet, the system nonetheless exploits existing global inequalities by paying local workers what they are worth in terms of the local economy rather than factoring in the global value of their service. Ashram guests and long-term voluntary staff also live under circumstances considerably more comfortable than those of people in the surrounding villages, many of whom are employed by the organization. Whatever the reasoning behind them, these uneven conditions reinforce historically racialized, classed, and also gendered conditions of inequality (with female workers universally receiving the lowest compensation in the organization) and actively stage conditions of subservience and privilege that look uncomfortably similar to conditions of the larger global order. Considering that the Kerala ashram has for years financially carried the organization's expansion and development in other parts of the world with some of the extra income allowed by this system, the organization seems to rely on a set-up no different than most transnational corporations, outsourcing labor to so-called developing countries where resources are scarce and workers more willing to accept low pay and difficult working conditions.

Further, the paid-worker system is basically unique to the organization's ashrams in India, and the Bahamas, notably both places where local people of color provide services to mostly white, middle-class, foreign guests.[52] In these locations, paid workers maintain a busy

running pace and are occupied throughout their workday. Staff, on the other hand, tend to teach one or two classes a day and, unless they are senior staff with administrative responsibilities, have few other work responsibilities. Since there are paid cooks and cleaning workers, staff are often free throughout the day to nap, chat, or pursue extracurricular activities. Indeed, Indian staff often pursue some form of higher education during their free time, sometimes with financial support from the organization. In the ashrams, junior, non-administrative staff are also likely to spend their free time sleeping, browsing the internet, or chatting with guests in the "health hut" (canteen). This contrasts sharply, in my experience, with the life of staff in the North American ashrams and centers. There, probably because of their increased responsibilities for the maintenance, cooking, and cleaning (work that is outsourced to paid workers in India), full-time staff of every rank very often seem busy and overwhelmed – even ragged. During high season and TTC courses in the ashrams, or even during the ordinary course of events in some of the busier metropolitan centers, many North American staff even complain they cannot find time in the day to practice asanas.

When I asked about the system of having paid employees in India, senior voluntary staff members and decision-makers – mostly Westerners – told me that employing paid workers for cooking, cleaning, etc. in India is necessary given the significant wealth of the organization in relation to the local communities where ashrams and centers are located. Most imagined the SYVC's ability to offer paid employment to its neighbors as a benefit to the local economies surrounding SYVC sites in India and believed it was essential to maintaining good relations with neighbors and local governments. The practice of paying Indian staff – those paid employees who do the same work as volunteers – however, was more often viewed as a response to a shortage of local volunteers. Indian staff members who did not accept payment for their work

seemed to view themselves as morally superior to those who did. The few non-Indian staff who were aware of Indians being paid for work comparable to their own likewise disparaged the practice of taking money for what they constructed as spiritual work, though they admitted Indian staff often did this in order to help family and escape dire economic circumstances. This matter, however, was not openly discussed in the organization, so to my knowledge few foreigners were aware of the phenomenon of Indian paid staff.

By examining the relationships and interactions inherent to this complicated and hierarchical system of labor in the SYVC in India, this work aims to contribute ethnographically to our understanding of relations of power at work in the transnational practice and production of yoga. This offers an as-yet unconsidered dimension to the growing body of scholarship on transnational Modern Yoga, which has been largely inattentive to problematic representational strategies employed in advertising the people and places of globalized yoga (Urry 1990, Thompson 2006) and to historical and contemporary global inequalities reproduced within the relations of spiritual and under idealistic movements. Yet it is dramatically affected by my own place in the SYVC, both as insider and anthropologist.

At the outset of this project I had long-established relationships with insiders from many echelons within the organization. As a foreigner in India, I could relate to the many other foreign volunteer staff. I had known several of them for years, during mutual stays in the ashrams and centers in India and abroad. As wife of a Malayalee man who had come to the organization as a volunteer staff, but with a professional and family background similar to many of the paid workers, I also found it easy to connect with Indian paid and volunteer staff. My husband, Biju, had worked for two years as a driver for a lawyer who had close ties with the organization, and his first introduction to the SYVC came in 2000 when he was invited to travel with this man to

the organization headquarters in Canada. Biju travelled to Delhi to apply for a visa, and when his application was denied, he decided to stay for some time in the SYVC center in Delhi. This led to about two and a half years of service as staff, first in Delhi, and then in Trivandrum and Neyyar Dam. At the very end of this period, like many Indian volunteer staff, he received a scholarship to complete the TTC. During my husband's year and a half as a volunteer staff in Neyyar Dam, he had also served for some time in duties related to the kitchen (food ordering and managing the karma yogis in charge of food service), so there was a familial fondness between him and the kitchen workers that provided smoother access for me when I undertook participant observation in the kitchen. Finally, although I never lived for long at Biju's natal home in Idukki, our extended visits there had introduced me to aspects of village life in Kerala that prepared me in ways too numerous to acknowledge for my work and relationships with SYVC paid workers. Because of this complex history as well as my language training in Tamil and Malayalam, I had many opportunities to cross over the divides between various categories of SYVC participant. Nonetheless, my physical presentation, my experience, and my history firmly fixed me as a Westerner, a non-Indian, a woman, and a (temporary) staff and yoga teacher. Therefore, when I moved between spaces and conversed across difference, I did so as a person fully imbued with the kinds of privilege I critique in this dissertation. Part of that privilege includes my own preexisting insider conceptions of the SYVC. This does not negate the value of my work to appreciate and understand the experiences of SYVC paid workers and of Indian paid and voluntary staff, but it does acknowledge the limits of this endeavor. And more importantly, I hope it suggests the possibility that others in the organization, situated similarly, though likely without anthropological motivations, might do more of this kind of talking across difference, which I suggest throughout this dissertation as a possible way forward for peace.

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As I complete final revisions for this dissertation, four years have passed since the completion of my ethnographic research in India. The child who was conceived during my research year, and who appears in the form of my pregnancy in some of the chapters that follow, has just completed her fourth birthday. My daughter Anjali would more likely be taken for a foreigner in India than any kind of local, due to her coloring, though she can rightfully claim her status as an Indian, if she wishes. Her father, often mistaken during our many adventures together in South India as my guide or driver, now lives in India where he is more at home than he ever felt in the US. The end of our marriage after eight challenging but mostly happy years casts a shadow on any hope or optimism I may express in this dissertation, for peace, equality, and inter-cultural be-longing. Yet our spirited child, born of a particular meeting between America and India that was framed throughout by the SYVC and its international community, overrides any dampness of hope in my world.

An introduction to the volume on *Yoga in the Modern World*, edited by Mark Singleton and Jean Byrne, acknowledges that it is “imperative to take into account postcolonialism’s contributions to our understanding of the politics of knowledge and our aims and responsibilities as inquirers into Indian culture and tradition” but deflects that “there is no space to go into the matter in any depth here” (2008:5). Part of my aim in this dissertation is to contribute a needed ethnographic perspective on forces that affect and determine who has the power within globalized Modern Yoga to lead, to teach, to represent, to speak, to innovate, to interpret, and to resist. Another is to use this small study to reflect on patterns of inequality in the context of globalization more broadly. In the next chapter, I turn to these wider patterns and situate the SYVC in literature on globalization, transnational feminism, and postcolonial theory.

Chapter Three
Writing Inequality in Modern Yoga:
Theorizing Cosmopolitanism and Conceptual Blind Spots

Introduction

While recent scholarly writing on Modern Yoga has been crucial to our understandings of the historical processes that have shaped transnational yoga, it has to-date focused almost exclusively on middle-class, cosmopolitan practitioners. My work in this dissertation builds on this research, discussed at length in Chapter One, and considers how global cultural economic factors (Appadurai 1996), such as the availability of low-wage laborers to support the production of yoga in India for mostly non-Indian consumers, have contributed to gendered, racialized, and class-based power asymmetries in the production and representation of transnational yoga. I understand these asymmetries in the context of what I call conceptual blind spots on the part of cosmopolitans in Modern Yoga. Through a focus on individual spiritual practice and apprehension of India through the lens of spiritual tourism and other idealized portrayals of traditional yoga, these cosmopolitan practitioners often fail to see or concern themselves with their own participation in relations of inequality.

In this chapter, I expand from the previous chapter's focus on the particulars of the SYVC and my own place in it to consider how patterns of inter-cultural connection play out in the SYVC's global community. Some scholars writing about cosmopolitanism and global civil society (Appiah 2006, Keane 2003) discuss these in optimistic terms, imagining a new world of interconnectedness where all can meet in the transcultural civil space of globalized religious movements and cultural exchange. Yet others call into question the forces of global capitalism that in many instances heighten existing inequalities (Coronil 2000, Cvetkovich and Kellner 1997, Freeman 2007, Ganguly-Scrase 2003, Grewel and Kaplan 2005, Ramamurthy 2003,

Storper 2000). Here, I aim to problematize the middle-class oriented optimism expressed in theories of growing cosmopolitanism, including in recent writings on yoga, by considering how relations of class, race, and gender at work in globalization belie any universalizing and rosy-colored images of a shared world. In the first major section of this chapter I discuss in detail the theoretical orientations of this study, with examples of how the theories I employ here can be applied in the various SYVC sites and contexts of South India. In a shorter final section, I read the spiritual and idealistic orientations of the SYVC in terms of the above theoretical discussion and bring that into conversation with recent writings on contemporary spirituality movements. This sets the stage for the remaining ethnographic chapters of the dissertation, which explore, in detail, this tension between the idealistic and spiritual aims of the SYVC and its situation and participation in wider patterns of global inequality.

Theoretical Orientations

This study situates a transnational spiritual organization in ongoing, unequal global relations, building on the literature of postcolonial studies and the recent scholarship on the social effects of globalization, including attention to the gendering of inequality and the feminization of poverty. In what follows, as I set out the theoretical conception of this project, I review relevant scholarly writing which I broadly categorize into three sections: (1) theories of cosmopolitanism and globalization, including critical attention to new manifestations of both inequality and democracy that globalization makes possible; (2) anti-racist and transnational feminism and appreciation of the gendered and racialized dimensions of globalization; and (3) postcolonial theory and anthropological theories of location that destabilize ideas and practices of tradition and place, along with the modes of anthropological inquiry that have helped to constitute them.

Cosmopolitanisms and Globalization

Theories of globalization and cosmopolitanism provide analytical categories that have direct bearing on the complex cultural economy of the SYVC. This organization is immersed in a variety of cultural, social, and political-economic flows that affect SYVC staff, workers, and guests. Further, the very processes through which yoga has become globalized are connected to what Pollock et al. call "an older form of globalization" (2000:581) and "its most violent embodiment, European colonialism" (585). As Srinivas Aravamudan puts it, "the use of English was indispensable to the defining of Hinduism as a universalist 'spirituality' at the outset" (2006:9). Thus, the very possibility of the transnational spread of a Hindu-inspired practice such as yoga is related to British imperialism in India and to the privilege of a particular, English-educated, upper class, and cosmopolitan sect of Indian society. Aravamudan describes the processes through which a particular form of English, which he calls Guru English, became the means for an elite group of Indians to translate Hinduism to its others in the West. These processes are also deeply linked to Modern Yoga. As Elizabeth De Michelis and others have argued, the practices and meanings that converge under the name yoga today became solidified only in the early 20th century through explicitly transnational processes of exchange between Indian gurus and Western disciples (De Michelis 2005, Narayan, K. 1989, Strauss 2005).

When Swami Vishnudevananda, a member of the third generation of gurus conversant in Guru English, came to the West, he spoke explicitly of a peaceful and united world, in the form of what he called his mission of True World Order. Scholarship that reads globalization as cosmopolitanization is thus an appropriate tool for analyzing what is happening as a global middle class gains access to the techniques and philosophy of Sivananda yoga as taught by Swami Vishnudevananda. Cosmopolitanism refers to a sensibility of global citizenship, an

optimistic sense of belonging beyond the limited constructs of our local communities and kin (Appiah 2006:xiii-xvi). Yet, we cannot ignore the structural and historical circumstances supporting and deeply embedded in so-called cosmopolitan worlds, nor the violent history of colonialism and imperialism that paved the way for today's versions of global connection.

Cvetkovich and Kellner, writing in 1997, pose this critique of universalizing or liberal perspectives on globalization:

> Missing from … liberal models has been an understanding of how race, ethnicity, and nationalist sentiment might intersect with class to produce local, political struggles with complex causes. Indeed, since the late 1980s there has been a resurgence of nationalism, traditionalism, and religious fundamentalism alongside trends toward growing globalization (1997:8).

Swami Vishnudevananda's travel to North America and his eventual settlement in Canada owe directly to the conditions of history. His own social location as an upper caste male with access to Sivananda's global network allowed for travel fare and the necessary passports and visas, even if the mythology has it that he left India with only the equivalent of a few dollars in his pocket. His cosmopolitan reach for a True World Order is therefore tied to his location as a relatively privileged member of this world community and likewise strategically deploys notions of tradition shaped by his classed position *vis a vis* the Indian nationalist project (which itself produced a strong discourse of the spiritual superiority of traditional India), even as he advocates the transcendence of nation.

While some literature focuses on the potentialities of a global civil society and cosmopolitanism made possible through increasing interconnection (Keane 2003), many scholars recognize ongoing inequalities in the communities created through globalization. In a 2014 review essay, Lieba Faier and Lisa Rofel describe an emergent cross-section of anthropology they call "ethnographies of encounter," which bring "attention to the interactive and unequal

dynamics of power that shape culture making across relationships of difference" (364), offering a theoretical framework to address both community building and underlying inequalities in the SYVC. This points specifically to encounters between Indians and non-Indians in the organization and between middle-class individuals both Indian and non-Indian and the low-income Indian workers so integral to the functioning of daily affairs.

Not all participants in any globalized enterprise have the same opportunities to determine the terms in which they experience it, and so the terms of access and the various modes of articulation to globalized yoga at work in the SYVC make for a dynamic community of participants in this ethnography. My research is situated in the encounters made possible through this complex situation of globalized yoga, and each of the chapters that follow considers encounters in one or more unique points or nodes of these relations across difference.

Further, not all cultures are accessible to packaging, movement and global consumption. As Aravamudan (2006) observes, translation and the accessibility of English have everything to do with the possibility for global consumption. Swami Vishnudevananda's fluency in English and his upper-caste position allowed him to standardize yoga and India for a Western audience, representing the received traditions as universal science. But the extent to which the SYVC structure allows for universal access and legibility in India is quite limited.

Indian branches of the SYVC advertise in English, as well as offering classes primarily in English, while SYVC ashrams in France, Germany, and South America all operate websites and classes in local languages. This tells us something about the political and class location of the SYVC in India, and its relations with non English-speaking laborers. Given the language dynamics, there is also a marked divide between English-speaking and non English-speaking staff, falling mostly along class lines with non English-speaking staff socializing and dining

separately from the rest of the staff and guests, at some times, and under some circumstances, overlapping with Indian paid workers. That this predominance of English is possible, even in the South Indian ashrams and centers in Kerala and Tamil Nadu – where an overwhelming majority of the population does not speak, read, or write English –surely owes something to the historical precedent set by colonialism and the ongoing dominance of English in global business (Aravamudan 2006:3). But this dynamic stands out in the global SYVC against the case of both the Montreal center and the Val Morin ashram offering classes, literature and webpages in both English and French, where a greater number of people speak English fluently (if only as a second language) and thus would not need translation. It points to the primary function of the Indian ashrams as tourist destinations, which have questionable relations to their neighbors, even as the urban centers cater to a cosmopolitan, English-speaking middle-class.

Appiah's book on *Cosmopolitanism*, subtitled "Ethics in a World of Strangers," is principally a consideration of value and the challenging but worthwhile enterprise of maintaining principles as well as tolerance in the midst of unprecedented cultural contact. In one chapter on "Moral Disagreement," he muses on whether, as "some universalists" suggest, "we would all come to agreement if only we had the same vocabulary" (Appiah 2006:57). Here he suggests that this is not the case, yet, he does assume that we can indeed come to share terms, even if we disagree about how to apply them. The essay does not consider the possibility that some people may be left out of the conversation altogether, and indeed the examples Appiah cites to support his vision of a new global culture evidence a bias towards the world-traveling, educated classes, and consequently ignore whole categories of people who may have access to shared culture through ever-growing penetration rates of cellular technology and television (Castells et al. 2007), but little to no opportunity to talk back to a real, global community.

In the SYVC the extent to which this interaction between people of exceedingly different circumstances does take place is considerable. But the organization privileges the needs (including language needs) of the tourist community over those of the local population – of its customers over its laborers. In the chapters that follow I will consider how what Leith Mullings has called the "the global racial domain" (2005:674) impacts the conditions at work in the SYVC's Indian sites. I will look to both the official rhetoric of the organization concerning India and Hinduism as well as to exchanges between and amongst people of different positions within the organization.

Cvetkovich and Kellner observe that

> … a world market economy disseminates throughout the planet fantasies of happiness through consumption and the products that allow entry into the phantasmagoria of consumer capitalism. (Cvetkovich and Kellner 1997:6).

Fitting yoga into this notion of capitalism spreading "fantasies of happiness through consumption," I would argue that the SYVC produces an alternative fantasy of happiness. Here, a cessation of desires and the consequent stilling of the mind is the key to true happiness or, rather, peace. Practitioners are encouraged to simplify diet, dress, and daily routine and to pursue positive thinking and meditation as a means of experiencing peace. But to what extent does the SYVC actually operate in accordance with its beliefs, and to what extent does it operate as any other business, within the constraints of global capitalism? Even under the official non-profit status of the SYVC organization, yoga is, after all, a commodity for sale at a price. This means that it is primarily available and accessible to people with the economic and/or social capital to position themselves as consumers. But in addition to the material terms of the global marketplace, history also marks the discourse through which yoga achieves its value as a traditional spiritual form.

Richard King's analysis in *Orientalism and Religion: Postcolonial Theory, India and "The Mythic East"* provides a "geneology of 'the mystical' – that is, a history of the idea that pays specific attention to the power dynamic involved in the way in which it has been defined in various historical circumstances" (1999:8). Central to King's analysis is the historical context through which India is constructed in stereotypic terms, and "seen as inferior [to the West] in so far as is it exhibits" qualities that make it the West's opposite and alter-ego (King 1999:32). Fernando Coronil describes these dynamics, which

> continue to define the relation between postcolonial and imperial states…. Europe's colonies, first in America and then in Africa and Asia, provided it with cultural and material resources with which it fashioned itself as the standard of humanity—the bearer of a superior religion, reason, and civilization embodied in European selves (2000:357).

Coronil calls "colonialism… the dark side of European capitalism" (1999:358) and also points to globalization's dark side:

> Nations have become increasingly open to the flow of capital, even as they remain closed to the movement of the poor. While the elites of these nations are increasingly integrated in transnational circuits of work, study, leisure, and even residence, their impoverished majorities are increasingly excluded from the domestic economy and abandoned by their states (2000:368).

This holds true in a complicated way in the global cultural economy of the SYVC, wherein the volunteer staff, some of whom have taken vows of poverty as sannyasins or monks, nonetheless occupy positions marked by significant social and cultural capital – their ability to speak English, their capacity to network, their prior wealth or middle-class status, and (in many cases) their citizenship in Western countries. These staff not only hold control of the organization and speak for traditional yoga; they are also able to move freely through the organization's international locations whereas low-income wageworkers are generally bound to their home states. This pattern also mirrors the structure of the transnational non-profit, *Doctors Without Borders*, described by Peter Redfield as "the lightness of mobility" (2012:368) and is no doubt similar to

many such transnational institutions where the tracks and traces of the colonial are evident in the contemporary shape of things.

Ultimately, Coronil is optimistic that

> a critique that demystifies globalization's universalistic claims but recognizes its liberatory potential may make less tolerable capitalism's destruction of nature and degradation of human lives and, in the same breath, expand the spaces where alternative visions of humanity are imagined… (2000: 370).

I position my own research in relation to the SYVC along these lines. I aim to disturb or demystify the SYVC's claims of universality, even as I recognize its liberatory potential. The double resonance of both these terms feels appropriate, in that yoga's chief goal is liberation and yet this ethnographic study promises to bring some of the mysticism down to earth by attending to the non-transcendent realities of social relations. In critiquing the inequalities between people of different social locations in the SYVC, I also recognize the worldly potential offered by this access to a transnational community, especially for cleaning and cooking workers who might not have access to the kind of benefits attached to this international organization through other means. The SYVC frequently provides scholarships for its paid employees to attend the TTC and in recent years has begun to support families by offering small houses on or near ashram property to long-term workers and their families. I have also noted an increase in the numbers of Indian voluntary and paid staff who travel to North America or Europe, under the auspices of the SYVC, on religious worker or other types of visas as well as to new SYVC sites in Asia. The organization sponsors this travel and often also monetarily compensates paid Indian staff for their teaching and other work while abroad. No less important, the international spaces of the Indian ashrams provide the opportunity for young women and men of meager means to pursue alternative lifestyles under the family-sanctioned banner of traditional yoga, whereas access to other globalized phenomena, such as music, movies, and fashion may not be permitted. As such,

globalized yoga can provide an important way in to imagining and acting in a global community for people outside of the typically middle-class realm of the cosmopolitan, a liberation from the lower class. But if the alternative terms of global citizenship made available through this transnational spiritual organization are somewhat flexible in terms of class, the gendering of inequality in the transnational context is obvious.

Cosmofeminism and Transnational Feminism

Pollock et al. call into question debates on cosmopolitanism that strike them as masculine in "their properties of mastery, distance from experience, indifference to specifics, and concern for absolutes in human life" (2000:583). Posing a more grounded, situated analysis of global flows, feminisms (in the plural) contradict these theoretical and abstract visions of a cosmopolitan future (Pollock et al.2000: 583).

> U.S. mainstream feminisms have noted that the 'our' of our times is a noninclusive our that consists of able-bodied, white, heterosexual men. Asian American and African American feminists have pointed out the racialized nature of U.S. mainstream feminism itself, and together they have made an argument for the *constitutive* nature of gender and race in relation to each other. South Asian feminism has had to probe its class and cultural moorings in the world of the Hindu upper class with its attendant erasure of the lower class woman as well as the woman marked as Muslim, Christian, or tribal… (Pollock et al.2000:583).

Pollock et al. argue for a plurality of cosmopolitanisms and question the "subject of citizenship" in "the [cosmopolitan] concept of a 'citizen of the world'" (2000:584). They coin the term "cosmofeminism" to answer to a problematic issue of scale that arises when we try to think cosmopolitanisms and feminisms together. They ask:

> if cosmopolitanism seeks to take the large view, how can we think the intimate under its sign without restricting intimacy to the domestic sphere? Any cosmofeminism would have to create a critically engaged space that is not just a screen for globalization or an antidote to nationalism but is rather a focus on projects of the intimate sphere conceived as a part of the cosmopolitan. Such a critical perspective would also open up a new

> understanding of the domestic, which would no longer be confined spatially or socially to the private sphere (Pollock et al. 2000: 584).

This concept of cosmofeminism, along with theories of transnational feminism (defined below), provides a framework for analyzing patterns of relations I describe in this dissertation: how individuals of varied nationalities and varied social classes set and respond to complex and subtle standards of gendered behavior in the intimate spaces of the organization as home. The urban yoga centers in the SYVC are situated in houses in residential neighborhoods that operate as households, interpreted both through the official rules and regulations of the SYVC organization as well as through the understanding of the resident staff at any given location and time. Both in these centers and in the rural ashrams supported largely by women from the surrounding villages, the small scale of these sites and the interactions therein are not constrained to their local contexts but have much to teach us about wider processes of globalization, intercultural contact and the possibilities of cosmofeminism. The unique transnational nature of Sivananda yoga as a religious movement – grounded in notions of Hinduism, but developed in the cosmopolitan spaces of North American ashrams – makes for a complicated mix of expectations and negotiations around the daily work of food preparation, cleaning, teaching and administrative duties in India. I use transnational feminist theory, a critical and anti-racist approach to gender and power, to grasp the complex and overlapping power issues involved in the cross-cultural encounters of globalized yoga and to visualize new forms of alliance and "be-longing" across difference (Carrillo-Rowe 2008). Be-longing is a term coined by Carrillo-Rowe, who reimagines theories of location in terms of this notion of a less static politics of be-longing. Hyphenated this way, be-longing is a double entendre. It understands positionality as a situatedness in-relation – a belonging within community. And it also expresses an imperative – a command to *be longing,* to long or yearn for connection across differential privilege.

Feminist anthropologists have pointed to the fact that "female anthropologists may pass as honorary males in some societies, or as persons of higher status by virtue of their membership in Western culture" (Visweswaran 1994:20). The practice of reflexive engagement with this privilege (impelled by the longing Carrillo-Rowe calls for) may mute some of the problems of negotiating such relationships within the discipline of anthropology. But in a transnational project, and in the transnational spaces of the SYVC that are community, home, and workplace to people of a variety of national backgrounds, relationships based on the honorary status of foreigners, both male and female, take center stage. My own belonging, in relation to the various parties involved in my research, is thus called into question. In the SYVC because of both its own history and the wider global historical context, there are structures in place that make unequal relations central to much everyday interaction. While I work to describe those processes and structures here, I must also negotiate my own privileged status as both western female anthropologist and, in organization parlance, "foreign staff."

For example, in the spaces of SYVC yoga centers, where men and women from lower class or poor backgrounds are employed as cooks, cleaning workers, and paid staff, while middle-class (mostly male) outside teachers and foreigners of both genders serve as volunteers, gender roles play out in subtle but marked ways. In the South Indian centers, all paid cooks and cleaning workers are women, but some men and women of similar economic backgrounds do serve as paid staff or as paid massage therapists. Here, the organizational hierarchy between worker and staff works in concert with existing local gender norms to fix female paid workers in service roles. Cooks not only prepare meals but often stand to serve second helpings and collect plates from staff and invited guests, almost never consuming their own meals until all others have eaten. This fits with local norms about gender and food service in the home and was often

justified by participants as in keeping with practicing yoga in what they referred to as a "traditional" setting. Yet, alongside this, there were several examples of nontraditional or cosmopolitan influences on home life in the SYVC. Young, unmarried women lived and socialized as paid or volunteer staff with young unmarried men who were not members of their family. English was spoken daily, both in the context of asana classes and with any foreign or non-local Indian students or staff. Indian female staff also enjoyed the opportunity in this space, outside the protective gaze of elder family members, to dress in non-traditional attire – t-shirts and yoga pants, or more modern Indian fashions. In some cases and instances these same women leveraged the cultural capital of their training in yoga to opt out of gendered practices of hospitality such as food service. In others, they made choices to align themselves with paid workers or with traditional gender roles, serving food, clearing and washing dishes, and taking their own tea or meals in the interior kitchen spaces of the kitchen along with paid workers.

As a western woman, I consciously chose to respond to the subtle cues of women in positions of service and wage-work when I was able to pick up on them, participating in cleaning and serving work as and where possible, and working to create an open and reciprocal exchange of dialogue. In this capacity, I learned whose behaviors and actions were accepted and whose were objectionable, as I often became an ear for complaints about such matters. But I observed that other foreign women who passed through SYVC centers and ashrams were generally oblivious to these subtle dynamics due to language barriers and other communication differences, and their behavior likewise remained uncriticized. Foreign women thus often, though perhaps unwittingly, stayed on the sidelines with the men (both Indian and foreign), who assumed gendered privilege in the face of such tasks.

This positioned female paid workers at the very bottom of a gendered hierarchy, with foreign women's roles often indistinguishable from the roles of men, and local female staff in somewhat more flexible positions with at least the potential, under these constrained circumstances, to choose their roles. Local female students and guests were also conscious of these differences. Some asserted their classed positions in relation to paid workers with firm confidence, as they often had servants at home, employed for similar work. Others seemed to be more comfortable relating to servants in familial terms (with practices of affection and distance determined on the basis of age relations), and would enter the kitchen to receive tea and gossip, while remaining outside the material practices associated with its preparation or cleanup. In this way, class and gender relations in the SYVC often worked in concert to constrain opportunities for female wage workers, while male workers more often moved freely with Western and middle-class Indian men and women in the official (organizational) as well as the intimate (relational) structure of the organization.

Feminist scholarship concerned both with the physical and financial impacts of neoliberal policies and global capitalism (Hewamanne 2008, Wright 2006) and with theoretical issues in global feminism (Mani 1990, Mohanty 2003, Narayan, U. 1989) provides tools for investigating the complex social conditions at work in the SYVC, particularly for South Asian women employed in this transnational space, who are not passive recipients of the global but rather actors who respond in sometimes surprising and pleasurable ways to the conditions of their labor. Additionally, attention to the "politics of location" (Rich 1986) can help to situate contesting notions of appropriate gendered practice where class, gender, and nationality, but also very different conceptualizations of yoga, can inform these notions. Is yoga a practice best situated in the traditional structures of Indian home life, as some Indian staff suggested in regards

to practices around food service? Or is it a cosmopolitan and transnational thing of contemporary times, and a venue through which to push on the boundaries of traditionalism, especially concerning gender roles, as would seem to be suggested in the roles and opportunities for Indian female staff in the SYVC?

Writing of Virginia Woolf's claim in her 1938 book-length pacifist essay *Three Guineas* that "'as a woman, I have no country'" (blackwellpublishing.com),[53] Caren Kaplan points out that the author of these words, which have been used in the years since to push forward visions of "a global sisterhood of women with shared imaginaries," is also famous for her essay *A Room of One's Own*, an essay that articulated "the need for physical space" (Kaplan 1996:161). Space as metaphor, as Kaplan notes, is also linked to the imperial conquest, in "the expansion and contraction of colonial worlds" (1996:161). Kaplan argues that "Euro-American discourses of 'global feminism' have naturalized and totalized categories such as 'Third World women' and 'First World women'" (1996:162). And she asks:

> If such naturalizations have begun to be deconstructed in the name of an anti-imperialist and antiracist feminism, what conceptions of location replace Woolf's worlds and rooms? It is in the complex and often paradoxical practices of a 'politics of location' that the postcolonial and postmodern discourses of feminism emerge as intertwined subjects of criticism (1996:162).

My own approach draws on Carrillo-Rowe's concept of a politics of *relation* (2005), an improvement on Adrienne Rich's more static notion of "location" (1984). In Carrillo-Rowe's words, a politics of relation "gestures toward deep reflection about the selves we are creating as a function of where we place our bodies, and with whom we build our affective ties" (2005:16) . It suggests a process of placing "oneself at the edge of one's self and leaning and tipping toward the 'others' to whom you belong, or with whom you long to be" (Carrillo-Rowe 2005:17).[54]

By leaning into relation, shifting my figurative weight to ally and align myself with the

paid workers in this study, I aim to de-naturalize my own critical feminist position and to hear and attend to these women's conscious and resistive modes of meeting the global on their own terms. This committed flexibility allows me to respond to and analyze the everyday acts through which gender is negotiated, with respect for a variety of experiences and opinions, to which I am a partner in dialogue, even as I am positioned, by virtue of my status as both anthropologist and SYVC organization member, in specific modes of relation. As Lata Mani notes, it is difficult to achieve "an international feminism sensitive to the complex and diverse articulations of the local and the global" (Mani 1990:25). By engaging women of various positions in the organization in both in-depth interviews and more casual conversation, while working alongside them, often in chores dubbed women's work, like dish washing, food preparation and service, my research situates the diverse articulations of gender and the various aspects of globalized yoga in participants' own experiences. Through what Domínguez (2000) calls a "politics of love" (Domínguez 2000), I aim to unsteady my own moorings in liberal feminist convictions and favor instead a perspective gained from the shifting stance of relation across power lines (Carrillo-Rowe 2008). In other words, what does globalized SYVC yoga look like to its neighbors and others, who are often one and the same with the workers paid to maintain and run these ashrams on an everyday basis?

In the realm of cosmopolitanizing, low-income Indian women at home in the transnational space of the ashram often test familial or community restrictions, experimenting for the first time with dating or wearing Western dress in the ashram context. But the stakes of such experimentation in the global-modern may be high if the SYVC does not remain a permanent home. In the words of Sandya Hewamanne, who studied women employed as garment workers in a Free Trade Zone in Sri Lanka, "the social and political possibilities enabled by the modern,

urban transnational space… are limited to a certain space and phase in these workers' lives" (2008:240). Young women staff in the SYVC may be free to participate in the organization during the early years following their schooling, but it is rare that families will be flexible enough to forsake hopes of a promising marriage altogether, and most families will have a time limit on the freedom of unmarried daughters, wanting to see them married in most cases, by their late-twenties. Women employed as paid workers in the SYVC often take their families' fates into their own hands, working to support the education of daughters and the maintenance and new construction of housing that will push their own and the next generation into better life circumstances. At the same time, those who resist gendered restrictions in the spaces of the SYVC still remain constrained to them in complex ways, back in their homes and families, and some women described distinct tensions created in the process of shifting between different levels of freedom as they moved back and forth across the threshold of the organization. Nonetheless, as Hewamanne argues, women may still hold their experiences in these transnational zones "close to their hearts and exercise the oppositional consciousness developed there, albeit cautiously, in appropriate places and with appropriate audiences" (2008:240).

This speaks directly to the possibility of multiple cosmopolitanisms or local terms of globalization (Cvetkovich and Kellner 1997). According to Pollock et al,

> Just as feminist thought continues to struggle with the objections to universal discourse, so also cosmopolitanism must give way to the plurality of modes and histories—not necessarily shared in degree or in concept regionally, nationally, or internationally—that comprise cosmopolitan practice and history (2000:584).

Access to the global community of SYVC yoga may take different forms and fulfill different goals for individuals in different phases of life and of different class or ethnicity. Still, the global cultural economy and historical relations between people and places often unevenly constrain the lives of South Asian women in the SYVC.

Taking Mohanty's definition of transnational feminism as "a feminist perspective that encodes race and opposition to racism as central to its definition" (Mohanty 2003:253n), in the ethnographic chapters that follow, I will analyze how gendered relations at work in the SYVC participate in "the global racial domain" (Mullings 2005:674). As Grewal and Kaplan have noted,

> the impact of global forces such as colonialism, modernization, and development, and the ways in which these rely on colonial legacies for specific and historicized gendering practices have created new negotiations, inequalities and asymmetries (2005:58).

These new negotiations deserve careful attention in this study of the intimate spaces of globalized yoga, and I foreground them here, through a committed politics of relation. Whatever my political commitments, however, I acknowledge that in addition to my subjectivity as a white, Western woman, the wider context of the historical relationship between India and the West impacts both the site of my research and my ability, through the entrenched discipline of anthropology, to analyze it. The third theoretical strand I apply in this project is that of postcolonial theory.

Post-Orientalism and Postcolonialism

Recent literature on yoga (discussed at length in Chapter One) and on caste (Dirks 2001, Raheja 1988) has demonstrated that traditions and institutions long thought the essentialized property of one place are indeed products of larger, global processes, including colonialism and the idioms used by social science (Appadurai 1996). A central problem I identify in this study is that through the rhetoric employed by the SYVC and other constructions of traditional Hinduism and yoga, Hindu practice appears monolithic and undifferentiated. Indian people in all levels of the SYVC are called into question by the stereotypical images of Indian culture that circulate in

SYVC lectures and promotional materials. Yet, the context of transnational yoga also privileges a cosmopolitan positionality, which many of the low-income staff (and some workers) aspire to and attain. According to Cvetkovich and Kellner,

> … although global forces can be oppressive and erode cultural traditions and identities they can also provide new material to rework one's identity and can empower people to revolt against traditional forms and styles to create new, more emancipatory ones (1997:10).

For many individuals who join staff and for some (mostly male) members of the paid workforce, the SYVC is a site for entering the middle-class, and the transnational community presents the opportunity for cross-cultural romance and potential transnational migration. At a minimum, long-term participation provides upward-mobility through English, which can lead to other jobs in the tourist economy or in the growing industry of Indian call centers (Carrillo-Rowe et al. 2013). Indian participants in the SYVC are therefore situated in complex and contradictory expectations produced in the construction of globalized yoga with an emphasis on tradition that can best be analyzed through discourse analysis within a postcolonial frame (van der Veer 2001).

In their chapter on "Postcolonial Scholarship" for a 2005 *Companion to Gender Studies*, Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan write that

> Postcolonial Studies cannot be seen as a clearly defined, bounded area of study, but as a set of changing practices in academic sites that connect questions of modernity to colonialism, and which insist that current forms of power in financial, cultural, aesthetics, and media areas are linked to imperial and colonial practices (52).

Homi Bhabha (1994) and Robert Young (1995) both interpret contemporary notions of race and culture in terms of colonial histories. Drawing on Goethe's writing in a "Note on world literature," wherein he speaks of the ways that "'foreign ideas and ways… come to fill… previously unrecognized spiritual and intellectual needs'" (Bhabha 1994:11), Bhabha asks "what of the more complex cultural situation where [these needs] emerge from the imposition of

‘foreign’ ideas cultural representations, and structures of power?” (1994:12). According to this line of thinking, one might ask whether the circumstances in India that give rise to a perceived spiritual and intellectual need for yoga if not tradition itself, are not due to older patterns of exchange through imposition as well as lingering structures of power. As Ruth Frankenberg and Late Mani write, the term postcolonial evokes the “*twin* processes” of “colonization/decolonization” (1993:301). They describe how the postcolonial situation in Britain “stages contemporary encounters between India and Britain and between white Britons and their non-white Others,” (Frankenberg and Mani 1993:301) and argue that “location is …key in determining the importance of the ‘postcolonial’ as an axis staging cross-racial encounters” (1993:301).

Although globalized yoga is certainly a product of postcolonial processes, it is important to describe, ethnographically, how the fashioning of traditional yoga stages encounters that rely on relations between decisively colonially conceived subjects. Through training in this globalized version of yoga, men, in particular, can gain access to both the cosmopolitan worlds enabled through the SYVC’s global networks and to the spiritual cachet of an Indian yoga master, which they may sell or trade on the global market. New Indian yoga masters often privilege colonial and Orientalist notions of traditional India, even as they deploy these in service of advancing their own place in a global economy. Sometimes, no doubt, they do this with a sense of irony, but many seemed quite sincere, as was borne out in interviews I discuss in Chapter Four. Many SYVC-trained teachers go on to teach in touristic beach resorts in India or to travel abroad as certified specialists in Indian tradition. Through in-depth interviews as well as extended participant-observation, my research traces these notions of tradition and tracks the networks mobilized by both official and everyday discourse in the SYVC.

But what of the problem of anthropology's entrenchment in colonialism's legacy of making other? In an essay on "The Commitment to Theory," Bhabha critiques an un-theorized critical theory that

> engages with texts within the familiar traditions and conditions of colonial anthropology either to universalize their meaning within its own cultural and academic discourse, or to sharpen its internal critique of the Western logocentric sign, the idealist subject, or indeed the illusions and delusions of civil society. This is a familiar manoeuvre of theoretical knowledge, where, having opened up the chasm of cultural difference, a mediator or metaphor of otherness must be found to contain the effects of difference.

Not to despair of the impossibility of writing culture, he continues:

> What is required is to demonstrate another territory of translation, another testimony of analytical argument, a different engagement in the politics of and around cultural domination…. This can only happen if we relocate the referential and institutional demands of such theoretical work in the field of cultural difference – *not cultural diversity* (Bhabha 1994:32).

This is a move away from thinking in terms of multiculturalism, with the inherent reification of cultures that entails, towards interrogating the borders that have long defined the edges of culture and the history and politics of their making. Like Tsing (2005), I work here to think not in terms of culture as location, but in terms of what she calls "zones of awkward engagement" (xi). I also draw from what Mani and Frankenberg have described as a "feminist conjuncturalist" approach to multiple axes of difference (1993:303). Mani and Frankenberg argue that

> it is… necessary to view colonial/postcolonial relations as co-constructed with other axes of domination and resistance – that the 'postcolonial' is in effect a construct internally differentiated by its intersections with other unfolding relations (1993:303-304).

This attention to difference within India and among the participants of the SYVC can help to disturb the universalizing notions of tradition employed in the SYVC's official rhetoric and to conceptualize different axes of experience within the organization, each of them offering infinite possible articulations in these "zones of cultural friction" (Tsing 2005:iv).

Given the framing of this project, how do I account for the promises held out by this transnational organization for low-income laborers, while remaining critical of their unequal access to positions of leadership and authority and of the Orientalist legacies that inform relations between Western spiritual seekers and their interlocutors in India? Postcolonialism, situated with other scholarships of the post-variety (post-structuralism, postmodernism, post-feminism), is interested "in dissolving unities into more complex heterogeneities…. seen by some as undermining the legitimacy of the 'search for an identity' by oppressed groups" (King 1999:197). Frankenberg and Mani refer to this as the problematic path of

> … 'neo-relativism,' such that it is sometimes argued that 'we' are all decentered, multiple, 'minor' or 'mestiza' in exactly comparable ways. It becomes critical, then, to maintain a sharp analysis of the relationship between subjectivity and power, subjectivity and specific relations of domination and subordination (1993:305).

My work here aims to understand the complex histories contributing to notions of tradition in globalized yoga, and the dynamic forces of inequality that differently affect the variously situated participants in the SYVC in India: there is no single "Indian" subject to contrast to the India imagined in globalized yoga, nor is there a single vantage point through which that "India" is imagined. Indian people of various locations in the SYVC may legitimately search for their own identity not just in notions of tradition but also in the cosmopolitan promise of a globalized spiritual movement. As scholars of new spiritualities as well as Maya Warrier, writing on a contemporary guru movement in India have noted, the focus on self characteristic of contemporary spirituality is not limited to so-called Western subjects, but is a mode of religious expression shared by middle class modern subjects throughout the world. In the final section of this chapter, I turn to the SYVC's situation in the field of contemporary spirituality movements and to ideals and beliefs of this globalized yoga as they articulate to the theoretical models I have outlined here.

New Spiritualities and the Subjective Turn

Paul Heelas and Linda Woodhead have theorized the emergence of spirituality as a part of what Charles Taylor called a "massive subjective turn of modern culture" (Heelas and Woodhead 2005:2). This is "a major cultural shift [entailing]… a turn away from life lived in terms of external or 'objective' roles, duties and obligations, and a turn towards life lived by reference to one's own subjective experiences (relational as well as individualistic)" (Heelas and Woodhead 2005:2). Heelas and Woodhead term these dispositions "life-as" and "subjective-life" respectively.

While this turn can be seen as selfish, since it literally places the individual and his or her needs first, encouraging "consumptive self-interest" (Heelas 2008:4), Heelas and Woodhouse applaud the turn as life-affirming and composed of an "authentic connection with the inner depths of one's unique life-in-relation" (2005:4). In a later volume, Heelas directly counters criticism of New Age spiritualities, asking: "what, if any, are the capacities of New Ages spiritualities of life to make a positive difference to individual, social or cultural life?" (2008:2). Heelas answers this question by arguing "as forcefully as possible that holistic, face-to-face activities… can facilitate a 'current' of meaningful experiences. These flow through the lives of participants to infuse their outlook on life and their values," (2008:9) contributing "to personal and multicultural relationality" (2008:13).

Heelas identifies a potential conflict between the essential values of freedom and equality, which are characterized by expressivist values and "humanistic" ones, respectively, but argues that "New Age spiritualities of life," as he calls them, are often in line with a vision that "elevates virtues like honesty, justice, respect, fulfillment and commensurate pleasures, whilst devaluing the pursuit of things like riches, fame and domination and the pleasures they bring"

(2008 30-32). He therefore argues that rather than precluding humanistic values, these "expressivist" values should and do lead to a greater value for relationships and thus a greater attunement to the social suffering of others.

The virtues Heelas lists are certainly characteristic of the ideals in the SYVC, and I share Heelas' conviction that a subjective-life disposition can serve to cultivate and sustain commitments to equality, even social justice. At the same time, interlocutors in my study often responded to my questions about inequality with a characteristic turn to subjective and individual experience, disavowing any direct responsibility for enduring relations of inequality. In fact, several organization leaders used the same words, drawing from Swami Vishnu's metaphor of changing a cotton cloth to silk, indicating an organizational party-line on these issues. To one senior member and organization leader whom I'll call Pranavan, I phrased a key but at the time still developing question this way, very early in my research, trying to get a sense of the organization's official teaching on issues of social inequality:

> LKM: How do you balance the yoga teaching that most of what we experience is not real, because it's not permanent… so gender or nationality, these things…? I think that … a big part of Swamiji's… mission… was to help us to awaken to that. At the same time, if we live in the world, people experience … sometimes deep inequality or … social suffering.… How do you… answer that discrepancy?

Although this question could be seen as leading, my aim in asking it, at the end of a lengthy interview, was to be as clear and open about my doubts as possible, so as to give Pranavan the opportunity to respond to a real question, rather than a veiled or more open-ended one.

> PRANAVAN: Well, Swamiji put it clearly "Unity in Diversity." Before I want to change… people… I have to change myself. And if I change *myself*, and you change *yourself*… then society will change. It's not a revolution. It's involution. Swamiji used to say, if I want to change this cotton cloth into a silk cloth, I have to change each single thread… which is me and you. So, if we change, society will change.
>
> LKM: Yeah.

P: That's all… Unity in Diversity… Maintain your culture. Maintain your language, maintain your own religion… maintain your education, maintain your social status… but then get the peace of mind that yoga can provide…

LKM: Hmm… Um… and how do we deal with the – You know, the reality… sometimes, is that in order for me to have a… comfortable life… I'm an American. I grew up with every possible comfort and… luxury… In some ways, somebody had to be working hard in order for me to… you know have –

P: Right.

LKM: Half the clothes that I own [are] made from some factory somewhere, where a child is working… for very little pay.

P: Right.

LKM: Um, so in this sort of world – global economy, where we have such deep inequality… How do we resolve that? In terms of our own comfort…

P: How do we resolve that?

L: Yeah. Yeah, or… deal with it?

P: Well, we can't. We can't. Ok… that-that-that's what I said. It comes down… that before trying to see the inequality of the world, I have to see the inequality within myself… And it's no use in talking about peace in the world unless I do have peace myself. So *first* I have to find peace myself. And then if God wants… as a *mission*, can tell me go and save…. But *first* I have to find peace in myself. If I don't do that, I waste time. Without a good intention, I might bring more war – or more dissent in the name of peace… than those people who create dissent in the name of war, so… Just simply talking about peace does not guarantee that I can create peace.

LKM: No.

P: I can get pieces, but not peace. But if I have peace within myself, truly peace, abiding peace, then if God wants, and gives the call… can go, otherwise… keep quiet and continue what you're doing…. In other words, you can't change the world unless you can change yourself first.

Another long-time staff and SYVC center director, whom I'll call Rachel, speaking at length in response to an unrelated question, towed a similar line.

R: I think there is no message like uh… global thing. It's just individual…. Through individuals, you change the whole thing. But *many* individuals have to change. It's the same, like [Swamiji] was talking about peace [this way]… [To] change the cotton

> material into silk… you have to change each thread. We are the threads. [If] we change, the whole world will change. We don't change – no way! No way…. Maybe you can stop the pollution in the water, maybe you can… have all the food very healthy, but if you don't change inside, you pollute yourself with your thoughts. All the time. All the time!

A third example comes from a satsang in Trivandrum. The satsang leader, a senior teacher visiting from the ashram, was reading from *The Sivananda Upanisads*, a book of collected letters written by Swami Sivananda to his disciples. The caption under a photo of Swami Sivananda read "Commence your journey on the divine path from today. All your anxiety [and worry] will end there and then."

> LEADER: "What does it mean to start on the divine path? What should we do? Start practicing asanas, karma yoga...?"

There was a long silence, after which I ventured an answer.

> LKM: He's talking about anxieties and worries... So to me he's talking about something inner. It's about turning the mind towards God – an invitation to a commitment..."

> LEADER: "A commitment..."

An older Indian man in the crowd raised his hand and asked, "May I say something?" He spoke in the register of a discourse, formally, and with authority, saying: "Spirituality means related to the spirit, and so we have to connect with what others feel – we are all connected. We should do something for others."

The man then quoted a line from the Bhagavad Gita in Sanskrit and followed up with a famous Malayalam saying I did not catch in my notes, meaning, in his words, "all this and that are one." At the end, he summed up: "If you are enjoying, see that others are enjoying."

> LEADER: "We believe there is one universal spirit, as you say... Yes…. Practically, this means 'Be Good; Do Good.' That's what Swami Sivananda said. 'Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.' That's what Jesus Christ said. Even before taking any action we can surrender ourselves – surrender our egos." But we must also take ourselves out of the position where we think we are in charge.... We say 'I have to take care... of my family... my country... even myself.' When we say this we are trying to control life… life, which is ultimately so much bigger than our own limited minds can understand, let

> alone manage.... And no matter how technologically advanced we become – no matter what – something can come at any moment to pull the rug from under us."

Here, the leader gave the example of a volcano in Iceland that had grounded all planes in Europe the previous weekend. "Essentially," he summed up, "I should surrender my own will. Ultimately whatever happens is God's will…. I don't know. Ultimately I don't know anything, if I am honest. I think I know... but as long as I have that idea, I suffer... There is nothing but God here."

Scholars who theorize inequality in the context of globalization have argued, as I tried to articulate in my question to Pranavan, the absolutely intertwined nature of relations of inequality. One person prospers precisely because of an interconnected system that subjects another to hard work for little pay. In her article "A Global Sense of Place," Doreen Massey writes:

> Every time you drive to that out-of-town shopping centre you contribute to the rising prices, even hasten the demise, of the corner shop. And the 'time-space compression' which is involved in producing and reproducing the daily lives of the comfortably-off in First World societies - not just their own travel but the resources they draw on, from all over the world, to feed their lives - may entail environmental consequences, or hit constraints, which will limit the lives of others before their own. We need to ask, in other words, whether our relative mobility and power over mobility and communication entrenches the spatial imprisonment of other groups (http://www.unc.edu).[55]

But despite the interconnectivity of the effects of globalized capital, in all parts of the world there are blinders, geographical rifts, and language barriers (both literal and figurative) that prevent privileged people from perceiving the fact or the extent of their own privilege. As we will see in the ethnographic chapters that follow, SYVC members frequently justified their positions, in part, through a recourse to blindness or incomprehensibility, claiming not to see or understand the differences I asked about, or equating very different kinds of stress and suffering so as to construe their own lives as similar to those of the paid workers. But they also, especially in the case of senior organization leaders (as quoted above), very confidently expressed the

importance of keeping the focus on the individual, and overlooking wider issues until the fundamental goal of "inner peace" is attained. Here, it may be precisely the narrowed vision of spirituality – a focus on the self, with the aim of self-realization – that causes blindness to the interdependent nature of inequality in the SYVC.

In her study of the transnational Mata Amritanandamayi Mission (MAM), Maya Warrier writes about the experiences of the "urban Indian middle-class devotees" of the MAM (2005:2). Like the SYVC, the MAM is built on a system of volunteer service – here referred to as seva. The demographic of the MAM is primarily "Hindu, English-speaking, educated, well-to-do urbanites in white-collar employment" (2005: 7-8), and Warrier attributes the appeal of this movement to a modern "focus on the private and individual aspects of religious life (self-authorship and self-fulfillment)" (Warrier 2005:15). As Warrier notes, this focus on the self is also characteristic of "new religious movements… in the West" (Warrier 2005:15), suggesting a shared cosmopolitan sensibility of the spiritual across global networks, a spirituality of and for the middle class.

A passage from an email sent by the Neyyar Dam, Kerala ashram to a subscription-based listserv about an upcoming Teachers Training Courses illustrates the limited conceptual reach of the SYVC's imagined community:

> An international community of people like yourself converge at our Ashram for a month, and spend time living and working on practical yoga principles together. For those who want to take a break from daily routines, and seek physical and mental detoxification, the course offers a new perspective and a refreshing, and often lifelong change in daily living habits…. In our Ashrams, situated natural environments [*sic*], thousands of people have once again connected with fresh air and water, a pure and nourishing diet, the wonderful company of like-minded souls, and a discipline and education to live life powerfully. A connection, as it was, with our own inner nature, our divine Selves. (Email correspondence with the subject heading "You Can Make a Difference," February 2009).

The community invoked here clearly inhabits a middle-class non-rural landscape, and yoga is envisioned as a way to improve individual wellbeing by returning once again to nature. The title, "You Can Make a Difference," takes up Swamiji's vision of changing the world by training future world leaders in the TTC.

> Only if we are well, can we think of helping others. Only if we are inspired can we inspire others. Only if we are clear, can we remove the confusion that often surrounds others. Only if we have found a way can we show it to the generations that follow. ("You Can Make a Difference," February 2009).

The problems identified here are not those of inequality and injustice, but daily routine and unhealthy habits. The vision of helping others seems likewise limited to inspiring the like-minded and passing on a healthy legacy to future generations. This vision of peace, thus, overlooks the very real impact the organization can and does have on people who inhabit the organization's peripheries, both geographical and conceptual, in the present.

But this limited imaginary is not unique to the SYVC organization; rather it is a common one in the context of globalized capitalism. In fact as Heelas and Woodhead observe, it is not just new spiritualities movements that have seen an increased focus on the individual – there is also a wider commitment to spirituality and the inherent commitments to "life in relation" even in denominational religion (2005: 5-6). Shreena Gandhi, whose dissertation is a study of yoga in the United States, observes that "starting in the 1970s… we see focus turning away from groups whose mission it is to change the world and towards groups that instead wish to focus on changing the inside of the self (and then hopefully personal transformation will lead to societal transformation, but if not at least the self was changed)" (2009: 212). The SYVC, then, very clearly reflects the values of the surrounding culture of global capitalism. Yet, in light of the SYVC's longstanding peace mission, this limited imagination of what it means to "Make a Difference" seems to me to fall short of its own ideals. Still, the organization in India does

provide a fruitful context for the development of a much more comprehensive vision of peace, and I believe there are untapped opportunities for exchange and growth across difference. In the chapters that follow, I hope to shed light on some of these opportunities as well as to highlight the moments in which something like peace seems to be in the making.

Chapter Four
Yoga Bodies and Yoga Land:
Spiritual Tourism and the Situation of Globalized Yoga

"Gateway to Inner Peace" is the title of a 2010 promotional video for the Sivananda Yoga Vedanta Dhanwantari Ashram in Neyyar Dam, Kerala. Within moments, the mood is set. The film captures the glowing lights of temple lamps in a dark room. The dulcet tones of New Age chant music twinkle in the background "Om Namah Sivaya," as the narrator explains how yoga directs "energy, so we can spread light and positive energy to others, for the peace and wellbeing of the world." In the next moment, the chanting ceases, and we hear droplets of water, before DOM-DOM-DOM, we are greeted by the big booming sound of a hand drum and then the celebratory call of a conch shell, over a strumming sitar. We have shifted from the reverential glow of a vaguely Indian spirituality to the lush misty background and the unmistakably Indian tones of a Kerala location. A North American male narrator directs us to consider that our "fast paced world" requires the assistance of yoga, "more than ever," as the visual cycles through fast-forwarded scenes from an urban South Indian sidewalk. The next strokes of the sitar bring forth a tranquil lake, from which a young Indian man emerges, holding palms upright. A layered frame projects a round bulbous glow, so it seems as if the man is holding the sun in his upturned hands.

The scene transforms, and now a blonde woman with short hair is holding the same sun. Then, one after another, bodies – all recognizably Indian – are shown bending forward, arching backward, and balancing in unwieldy positions, to emphasize the "renewed strength and concentration" brought about by yoga. The narrator says:

> *We've inherited the knowledge of the yoga teachings from the ancient rishis, or seers, of India, who through their practice, prayers, and meditation saw this revealed wisdom.*

Now we come to a Buddha-like image of an East Asian woman, legs folded, meditating under a tree on the ashram property, and the narrator asks: "Where better to experience the transformational effects of yoga practice, than in the land of its origin, [reverberating] India-dia-dia?"

"Sa ni ga ri sa," a vocalist intones under this question, as the film zeroes in on the eye of the woman, then seems to traverse through it, passing through a cloudy sky, and landing squarely on a geographical map of the sacred India-dia itself. Now we focus on the lush, green land around the ashram… a dense tropical woodland scanned from the sky, and then the camera hones in on the building structures of the ashram seen from afar. We are introduced to this ashram in Southern India as "an abode of peace, sheltered from the pressures of worldly life… a place to retreat from the stresses of daily living… to spend time relaxing, learning, and growing."[56]

Introduction

In this short sequence, the video has promised its viewers much that seems out of reach in a fast-paced world: flexibility, freedom, tranquility. It also holds out the promise of the exotic, through the tropical atmosphere it projects and the mystical aura created through editing flourishes – the reverb on India-dia is one among many. In this chapter I will consider both the visual and verbal rhetoric of this promotional film and statements by SYVC members to think through competing claims on globalized yoga. The film, speaking to an international cosmopolitan audience from the conceptual space of spiritual tourism, draws on an historical discourse of tropical landscape as escape that tends to write over the bodies, lives, and hardships of those who call these places home (Thompson 2006). At the same time, it valorizes certain types of Indian bodies, particularly those associated with ritual or spiritual actions. Indian teachers in the organization spoke to me in a different but overlapping register, as they too emphasized the power of India as a place, and the inherited power present in Indian people, giving them an advantage over foreigners in yoga practice and understanding. Both views obscure the more mundane work activities and the bodies that support the day-to-day function of the ashram, and, as I argue below, both have implications for the SYVC organization's message of peace.

The film imagines the ashram threshold as a gateway to inner peace and suggests that a stay in this place can provide relief from common tensions. The film, like the organization's other promotional materials (brochures, posters, and websites), says that yoga is a way to transcend the problems of ordinary living and the ashram is a place away from it all. At the same time the film invokes an international community of guests and suggests that by coming together in this "safe space for… the pursuit of spiritual ideals," people from diverse backgrounds can

work together to transcend the problems of our contemporary world and achieve something more like world peace.

Inner peace for outer or global peace was one of Swami Vishnudevananda's core ideas when he began the SYVC organization and the Teacher's Training Course. In this dissertation I demonstrate that the ideal of inner peace promoted by the SYVC is one sensible to a relatively privileged population, for whom escape from the stresses of daily living is an attainable goal. As evidenced by my ethnographic research, the stresses from which most staff sought refuge in the SYVC were associated with the monotony of day-to-day chores and domestic relationships or crises of faith in their own culture's models of success and career, as well as physical and mental-health ailments associated with sedentary lifestyles. SYVC workers living in poverty faced comparably far greater problems of meeting basic nutritional needs, providing shelter, obtaining a reliable source of income, and protecting themselves from gender-based harassment and violence, which, though an issue faced by people (men *and* women) in all economic conditions, is one of many sources of social suffering exacerbated by life in poverty. In order to enjoy the escape of ashram living, visitors must suspend their own responsibilities for cooking, cleaning, and the like, availing themselves of the labor of others. This set-up complicates the notion of world peace or intergroup harmony because it is built on the grounds of escape for a very few, while day-to-day living for the rest is more or less unchanged.

The work of this chapter is to consider the problematic relationship suggested in the Neyyar Dam ashram's promotional video between a globalized spiritual practice and its land of origin, considering both the bodies and the land of globalized yoga, as imagined by the film and by SYVC participants. I ground my discussion in the Kerala ashram's promotional video described above and in the words of Indian volunteer teachers, mostly Malayalees, in the

cosmopolitan city center just a few kilometers away. The ashram in Neyyar Dam is frequented by foreign guests and supported primarily by the low-wage labor of people from the local village area. The Trivandrum center is attended primarily by local residents: mostly Malayalees, some Indians from other states, and a handful of foreigners living for various lengths of time in Kerala. The diverse group of people involved in the SYVC in India means that there are many differently situated persons implicated by images of the bodies and land of globalized yoga. I deal with two broadly conceived perspectives – that of the organization at large, expressed through the narrative voice-over and through the voices of various participants interviewed for the promotional video, and the perspectives of organization members in India, expressed through my one-on-one interviews and through a group discussion of the film at a meeting of teachers at the Trivandrum center.[57] I consider how Indian bodies and land are imaginatively employed in the film to create a fantasy of relaxation and escape for potential ashram visitors, and how they are employed among Indian participants to imagine a kinship that excludes foreigners from the depths of yoga. These two overlapping discourses emphasize particular aspects of the landscape and certain types of bodies, while other bodies and experiences are left out of the imagination of spiritual India. In the overlap between the two fantasies, I also note the missing worlds of the individuals whose labor supports the day-to-day operations of the ashrams and yoga centers in India.

In the first section of this chapter, I review anthropological literature on tourism to consider the broader context in which the ashram constructs its image as a site of tropical tranquility. Anthropologists of tourism have been critical of the use of certain kinds of images because of their perpetuation of stereotypes and the processes of racialization they engage. I draw on these critiques to examine the working of imagery and text in *Gateway*. In this context, I

analyze the SYVC's marketing of the ashram experience as embedded in larger politico-economic processes and histories. The ashram advertises yoga as an abstract leisure commodity, yet the labor supporting that leisure and the larger system that enables a steep inequality between hosts and guests is invisible (Smith 1989).

The imagination of place and bodies in the promotional film has what I call, drawing on anthropologists theorizing race and racism in globalization, "racial implications." That is, the use of racialized language and visual cues on the part of the SYVC is not necessarily an example of *overt* racism, nor is the voice simple to identify, because the video was directed, written and produced by a team including some professionals not directly affiliated with the organization, though overseen and approved by SYVC staff and directors. Still, it is important to consider how, in taking up the language of tourism, this video, as a representative of the ashram, engages with and perpetuates a larger context of unequal and often racialized social conditions in the global sphere.

In the second section, I share examples of how Indian teachers in the SYVC spontaneously invoked bodily and land-based claims to describe their connections to yoga and comment on their positions within this organization. Formal scholarship about the phenomenon of globalized Modern Yoga has emphasized its co-construction by transnational actors. This has provided a much-needed correction to essentialist understandings of yoga as belonging to a mythical, a-historical India. However, the scholarship remains relatively silent on the ways Indian people might be re-imagining themselves in the context of transnational yoga organizations and how they negotiate political economies that seem to value India primarily as a symbolic resource for marketing. While *Gateway* moves seamlessly from images of yoga as the domain of a world community to the allure of mystical India, many Indian participants in my

research described tensions between Indian and foreign people and between the "foreign culture" of the organization and its avowed connection to Indian traditional values. Frequently, in discussing these tensions, Indian people drew on notions of inheritance and embodiment to describe their own connections to yoga, imagining an extended kinship that would seem to exclude foreigners from direct access to yoga in its natural or true form, even as they echo the language of tourism, using Indian land and bodies as markers of the authentic. This is a sort of up ending of the symbolic realm of SYVC promotional materials, as it draws some of the same connections, while excluding foreigners from yoga, rather than inviting them to it. There is also an interesting contrast between the video's emphasis on superficial elements of the Indian environment – the trees, flowers, lakes, mountains, and coconuts – while Indians emphasized the more substantial elements of blood, DNA, *samskaras* (impressions or predispositions) (Radhakrishnan and Moore 1957:276n1), even soil, if we follow Daniel's argument (1984) about the relationship of a person to his home-land. The voices of these yoga teachers add an important dimension to scholarly discussions of Modern Yoga.

In the third and concluding section, I consider responses to *Gateway* referenced above, in a monthly roundtable meeting of teachers in Trivandrum. I use this discussion to articulate the implications of both the advertising rhetoric and the rhetoric of Indian yoga practitioners for the broad communities defined by globalized SYVC yoga. Most SYVC teachers present at the meeting are Malayalee residents of Trivandrum and many are engaged in a wider non-SYVC teaching network, offering classes to foreigners in upscale hotels in the nearby beach areas. Their perspectives on the film thus engage with a wider field in which they must position themselves as experts in a relatively competitive and lucrative market. At the same time, most of them look to the SYVC as a primary source of community. Teachers socialize with one another and with

students before and after class, stop by the center just to chat at mid-day or at tea time, bring family members to participate in Sunday satsangs, celebrate holidays and special pujas at the center, and generally feel the center and organization to be an important part of their lives. Their responses to the film speak to both these investments and also highlight how the field of globalized yoga in the context of the larger global political economy is a realm to some extent *dependent* on the association of Indian bodies with authentic yoga, even as Modern Yoga scholars argue that it is something explicitly transnational in origin.

Foreigners who have deep commitments to yoga have good reason to be invested in notions of yoga as something truly accessible to all. Yet, to some extent this very language of universality is incompatible with the ideas expressed in section two: that yoga is something innately Indian and therefore only truly accessible and comprehensible to people with "roots" in India (Malkki 1999). In the roundtable discussion about the film and an ensuing discussion about the role of the center in our lives, teachers made an engaged example of the way this community *can* and at times *fails to be* a stage for finding common ground across difference and cultivating peace. The dynamics of the meeting – who feels comfortable speaking, what they say, and the language they use – are in some respects a microcosm of the larger dynamics of the organization. This conversation thus serves as a lens for viewing the contested nature of globalized yoga, and discussing power relations currently under-explored in the scholarly literature. I will conclude by reflecting on the working bodies left out of formalized images of the ashram, and the effects of these dynamics on local bodies and communities, which will be elaborated in the chapters that follow.

Tourism, Representation, and the Global Racial Order

Tourism and Anthropology

According to the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), "in 2011, the travel and tourism industry overall supported 9.1% of world GDP and one in twelve jobs worldwide" (WTTC: 2011: 13) . Tourism, defined as "temporary travel for the purpose of experiencing a change," (Gmelch 2010) has a long and varied history in the world, for pilgrimage, recreation, health, and learning. Some work, like Graburn's (1983), suggests it may "even be a cultural universal" (Nash 2001b). Both Urry (1990) and Walton (2005) describe contemporary practices of tourism as tied to the development of European ideas of leisure. Changing practices and patterns of tourism over time have affected how humans view and understand ourselves and define others as well as how we conceive of landscapes and environments both near and far (Löfgren 1999, Thompson 2006). On the world scale, tourism, as leisure travel, is also tied to the history of colonialism, and to the development of anthropology as a discipline. Both are alternative modes of "being elsewhere" in the world that nonetheless overlap in some ways with tourist travel – sharing routes, patterns of access, and directionality (Clifford 1997). Because of these shared pathways, anthropologists often confront tourists or their traces in the places where they work. At times professional anthropologists have to work to define themselves as-against the tourist modus operandi in their interactions with residents in the places of their research. Thus, "anthropologists may be loath to admit any relationship to the sandal-footed, camera-toting legions…" (Stronza 2001). Tourism can, however, reflect some aspects of cultural exchange that are also integral to anthropological relationships. As anthropology has embraced more reflexive modes in recent decades, there is greater scope for examining these overlaps as well as

"refractions of the field at home" (Narayan 1993), and a substantial literature in the anthropology of tourism has developed.

Anthropological interest in tourism followed closely on an expansion of tourism due to the "rise of jet travel, in the 1960s," and also responded to a "major paradigm shift" in the discipline (S. Gmelch 2010:6-7). "Anthropologists ceased treating cultures as bounded in place and time, cut off from outside influences and change. They became more interested in processes and in the encounters that link people" (S. Gmelch 2010:7). This shift has allowed anthropologists to conceive projects that engage with transnational flows of people and capital, including tourism and the economies nurtured by tourism (Appadurai 1996).

Recent anthropological scholarship identifies tourism as an important factor in global economic networks and the power structures that accompany them. Since the beginning of the anthropology of tourism, some have questioned whether tourism is a new form of imperialism (Nash 2001) or neocolonialism, considering the ways that ongoing service relationships between hosts and guests in touristic settings in the Third World/South are reflective of earlier relations in colonial and imperial contexts (G. Gmelch 2003).[58] Of course, tourism literature also attends to imaginative constructions of and economic relations in such places as Paris and Niagara Falls, which are tourist attractions for locals (the French and the Americans) as much as for the world. However, given global economic inequality, many anthropologists have found it important to pay attention to how the juxtaposition of service and indulgence in the context of international tourism in the postcolonial world reinforces racialized conditions of inequality and actively stages conditions of subservience and privilege that look uncomfortably similar to (without exactly replicating) older and more violent systems like colonialism, or even, some would argue, slavery.

As George Gmelch points out in his collection of oral histories on "the working lives" of tourism in Barbados, there are principally "two issues" in the critique of tourism as "neocolonialism" (G. Gmelch 2003:35-36).

> One... is the social issue of Afro-Caribbean people... serving predominantly white guests, which some say is reminiscent of the old plantation system in which black slaves attended to their white masters and overseers. The second, an economic issue, concerns mastery at the national level in which the metropolitan countries of the North exercise control over the less-developed and dependent nations of the South. They do so in part through their domination in international tourism... (G. Gmelch 2003:36).

Compounding these layers of historical inequality, there is a basic premise of difference in the tourist economy, between tourists who are by definition on vacation and the local employees who, in the situations in which they encounter international travelers, are always at work. This situation of difference is not necessarily based on the personal racism of guests in their apprehension of the host society. Sally Ann Ness, for example, describes her work in an underground tour company in Seattle, where tourists Ness guided "tended to see themselves as relatively vulnerable characters vis-à-vis the city's more knowledgeable residents" (Ness 2003:xv). Given Seattle's status as a major city in a country that is a major world power, Ness's observation emphasizes that global hierarchy affects the experience of tourists in any particular space. But given the history of white dominance and an ongoing influence of businesses and governments of the First World/North in so-called developing regions of the Third World/South, tourism there is often a site for the uneasy reproductions of all-too-familiar relations. L. Kaifa Roland brings this to light vividly in her article on "Tourism and the *Negrificación* of Cuban Identity." Roland describes differential treatment she, as the only African American in a group of White Americans on a study tour, received on the basis of her skin color, which locals took to indicate her national identity as Cuban and (given her association with Americans) as a "*prostituta*" (Roland 2006:151) . In light of this, she "propose[s] that one of the consequences of

importing large numbers of wealthy foreigners to tour in previously colonized lands is a reinvigoration of notions of entitlement: Who is allowed where and what are they supposed to be doing in those spaces?" (Roland 2006:152). I explore this question in the following sub-section.

Tourism's Visual Rhetoric and Images of Spiritual India[59]

Part of the answer to Roland's question comes to us through advertisements for tourism sites and the way they visualize and invite particular subjects and activities. In the case of the SYVC we can see that the rhetoric of *Gateway* capitalizes on the trope of the relaxing tropical atmosphere. The depiction of the tropics and the use or absence of brown bodies to sell aspects of the vacation experience are well-known tropes in the tourism literature, particularly literature on tourism in the Caribbean, and can be demonstrated to contain subtle and, in some cases, overt racism. In *An Eye for the Tropics* (2006), Krista Thompson analyzes the history of images of the Anglophone Caribbean and processes of "tropicalization": "the complex visual systems through which the islands were imagined for tourist consumption and the social and political implications of these representations on actual physical space on the islands and their inhabitants" (Thompson 2006:5).

Thompson attends specifically to the power of absence. "The aesthetics of concealment, long a central part of picturesque aesthetics, provided a ready-made mask through which planters and the artists they commissioned [in the early nineteenth century] could disguise the conditions, violence, and brutality of the plantation" (Thompson 2006:39). Thompson details the rise of the Caribbean picturesque as explicitly tied to European fantasies of an untamed Africa, civilized under the colonial projects of plantations and accentuated by imported botanicals that enhanced the islands' tropical feel, while covering up some of the unsightly injustices of the global order.

Often, in Thompson's analysis, local bodies were left out of picturesque representations of the landscape. When people were present, they came to represent extensions of the natural world (Thompson 2006:41). Thompson's book contains several examples of postcards containing images of black islanders riding donkeys, carrying bananas, and conducting agricultural or household work amidst other elements of the tropical landscape. As Evon Blake, editor of the Jamaican *Spotlight Magazine*, wrote in an issue of *West Indian Review*, in 1944, images of "little barefooted black boys climbing coconut palms," gave the wrong impression to would-be travelers to Jamaica (Thompson 2006: 239). Blake criticized images of Jamaica in tourism because they "'never showed the self-respecting coloured man, of high social caste, enjoying the ordinary pastimes of civilized persons in his land'" (Thompson 2006:239).

In *Gateway*, in keeping with the image of ashram as escape, there are likewise no images of "ordinary pastimes," including the work of local people cleaning and maintaining the ashram grounds, or resting in public space, both of which are common sights on the ashram premises. Instead we see a clear depiction of the organization's cosmopolitan ideals and an emphasis on the spiritual resonance of the landscape, and (pace Thompson) by extension*,* the people, of India. Individuals speaking for yoga in *Gateway* represent a range of backgrounds. They talk about finding common ground with strangers and how the ashram frees them from the tensions and stresses of ordinary life. As indicated above, the audience imagined for this film is drawn from an international cosmopolitan community, but the location in Kerala is an important selling point.

One blonde, blue-eyed woman from Canada[60] mentions that "… to come and learn and to practice yoga … in Kerala is a very special experience, because [you] get to experience a little more of the aspects of traditional Indian culture and … it may be a little richer experience…."

For most of this statement, the camera is trained on the woman's face, but as she speaks this last line, we cut to a performance by a few members of a *Kathakali* (a traditional dance-theater from Kerala) troupe on the ashram stage. The woman speaks about excursions to temples and "pilgrimage points," as the visual scene shifts to a tour bus, with a tourist lifting a pair of binoculars to his eyes. This image is taken from inside one of the vehicles at the *Lion Safari Park* just across the lake from the ashram, where binoculars help see animals at a distance. However, combined with the ideas evoked by the speaker, it suggests a relationship with sacred spaces and traditional culture at some remove. We are also shown in quick succession images of statues, elephants, deer, peacocks, lions, and last, a stylized snapshot of three non-Indian tourists in front of a monument. Notably absent are images of foreign tourists interacting with local people.

Landscape is key in projecting the ashram's offer of escape. The narrator tells us early on:

> The natural beauty of Neyyar Dam… the forested surroundings and lake, the cool green coconut groves, and colorful flower-filled views, all offer an ideal atmosphere for the practice of yoga and meditation.

India, in the film's imaginary, provides the colorful, cultural backdrop and serene natural setting for the pursuit of personal growth and retreat from the everyday world. But what of Indian people?

Although the first sequence presents an array of bodies, some of which read as Indian, throughout the thirty-minute video, non-Indian bodies are also shown performing yoga asanas, seated in quiet contemplation, and walking the ashram grounds, along with a scattering of faces representing a range of ethnic and national origins. Indians are prevalent among these cosmopolitans but are particularly emphasized in the performance of ritualized actions – priests waving lamps at the ashrams temples, performing what are described as "ritual ceremonies, such

as the Ganapatti homa," and bending and stretching to the sounds of chant music, as described above. Indian people are on display as representatives of tradition, in the Kathakali performance. But the paid workers who provide most of the day-to-day labor supporting the ashram are nowhere to be found. In fact, according to the organization's website, they are "no one" at all, and in the same breath, they are described as "selfish." I refer to an online blurb about the central concept of karma yoga and the "staff program," which explains: "All teachers, helpers and full-time staff members in the organization are working on a volunteer basis. *No one* is here to earn money or derive any material or otherwise *selfish* advantages…." (www.sivananda.org/about/, emphasis mine).[61] The logic by which work-for-money becomes a selfish act, obviously operates within the privileged community of new spiritualities movements in North America and Europe (about which, more below) wherein a certain status is assumed, so participants are not expected to need money and can teach yoga and dedicate their time for purely altruistic reasons.

In another interview in the film a German man named Maheshwara tells us:

> When you're in the ashram, you're really away from the world. There's no disturbance whatsoever. There's no noise, no pollution, so it's a wonderful experience to be here… so you really can relax and get away from all your worries and all the problems you have…. You can just let them go. You take a swim in this wonderful lake and just wash all your things away.

Again, this perspective speaks to a particularly situated ashram visitor whose daily world is far from this simple living in Kerala. It overlooks the experiences of Indian people at all levels of the organization. Despite the fantasy of the tourism experience, the world and the relationships inherent in it are indeed present in and around the ashram for *all* participants. But for some at the top, the relations of inequality are so steep that these patterns seem to be invisible. As subsequent chapters will show, among the ashram's paid workers, worries and problems are a constant companion, and the work is long, hard, and physically demanding. The complaints, arguments

and power struggles I observed during months of participant observation among paid workers evidence circumstances squarely situated in the world. Moreover, the "wonderful lake," used for swimming by some of the ashram guests is the source of drinking and household water for people in the surrounding village. Most come to the lakeside to do their bathing in the morning and evening and then carry water back to their homes – not quite the leisurely swims Maheshwara implies. Further, this "lake," is by no means a natural feature of the landscape, as it is a reservoir formed by a large gravity dam on the Neyyar River that was constructed in 1959 (National Register of Large Dams 2009).[62] To this point, Faier and Rofel observe that

> landscapes do not fit binaries of local/colonial or natural/cultural. They are always both at once. Furthermore, both knowledge about place and spatialized identities emerge as much through the processes and dynamics of encounter as through any single agenda or genealogy" (2014:371) .

Even Indian people on the "volunteer side," as ashram members often reckon it, are engaged with a wider community during their stay, often interacting with paid workers much more than do foreign visitors or staff. This is partly due to shared language, but also happens with people from different language regions of India, because of shared experiences, tastes, and histories. At the same time, relations among Indian people of different status in the organization can be fraught with tension. Perhaps this is in some part due to competition for limited resources, and tensions between those who have recently arrived in the middle or lower middle class and those who are struggling to meet daily economic needs. As Purnima Mankekar writes of her research in New Delhi, "barely lower middle class or upwardly mobile working class [made] desperate attempts to acquire middle-class security… driven by their fear of sliding back into poverty – from which most of them were barely a generation away" (1999:114). Mankekar found that this created problems even within families between those who had "barely" made it, and those who had not. The idea that Indian people of whatever status are "away from the world" in

the ashram does not hold up. Foreigners, on the other hand, through both language gaps and other conceptual blind spots may remain blissfully ignorant of the vastly different qualities of life between themselves and the wageworkers who cook and clean for them. This will be explored further in the chapters that follow.

In this dissertation I argue that imaginations of spiritual India at work in the production of transnational yoga eclipse power relations that frame and support the situation of middle class Westerners' escape to a spiritual place while others (stereotyped as impossibly spiritual, Hindu, and simple) labor to make this escape comfortable. Critical analysis of tourism marketing sheds light on some instructive similarities between tourism and yoga. Both are advertised in the contemporary global market as ways to escape. In the case of most tourism, the escape is temporary and fundamentally superficial. We get away to another world (again, impossibly figured as somehow outside the real world of political and economic connections) and forget our cares. In the case of yoga, the escape is advertised as being deeper and more existential. Whether it is experienced in the local school gymnasium or in a foreign land, we have the opportunity, through yoga, to go beyond our ordinary existence, to realize the true nature of the self and ultimately to end suffering. Therefore, doing yoga in India is a doubly alluring escape.[63]

In the realm of what is known as "spiritual tourism," these two modes of escape merge. Scholars writing about religion in recent years have described a growing trend towards a valuation of the "spiritual" over the "religious" in the context of growing secularism in Europe and North America (Heelas and Woodhead 2005) . Although yoga has its own longstanding traditions in India, its spread to the rest of the world is very closely intertwined with the development of new spiritualities movements and the New Age (Heelas 2005 and 2008, Hanegraaff 1998). Often these new spiritualities movements place a value on the authentic,

usually idealized in the form of ancient teachings and traditional peoples, whether they are native peoples of the Americas or so-called traditional Eastern philosophies of China, Japan, or India. In addition to creating a forum for commodification of ideas, props, and spiritual accouterment (think New Age book shops, mantra chanting CDs, meditation gongs, and organic incense), the embeddedness of new spiritualities within capitalist systems (Lau 2000) has also created a market for spiritual tourism, a way of travelling East or to "native worlds," described and imagined as impossibly remote and/or as having a special, privileged relationship to the past.

There are several varieties of spiritual tourism. Private companies or individuals organize all-inclusive tours to holy sites and pilgrimage points (Herrald 2006), governments invest in development and education to support local businesses or individuals (Khandelwal 2012),[64] international organizations, even those founded abroad like the SYVC, build large retreat centers to accommodate international guests in "lands of origin." Local taxi drivers and certified guides tune in to spiritual explorers' desire to find pieces of authentic culture and ancient traditions. Guides can change and focus routes through even the most cosmopolitan places, emphasizing the old and the sacred, or simply engaging tourists in conversations of a supposedly spiritual nature, which become commodified at the end of a tour in the expected haggling over tips.[65] In Bodhgaya, Bihar, Geary observed that some local vendors "actively learned the languages of foreign pilgrims to capitalize on specific pilgrimage flows," in selling "Buddhist souvenirs" (2008:12).[66]

The Sivananda ashrams and centers in India are actively engaged in perpetuating stereotypes of spiritual India, and they benefit from some of the wider trends in spiritual tourism in the region that rely on these stereotypes. Although my ethnographic research shows that individuals in the SYVC apprehend one another across cultural and national differences in

complex and layered ways – not merely or always through stereotypes – the larger context of tourism, the history of images of the tropics, and ideas about spiritual India certainly inform the visual and verbal rhetoric of the SYVC's self-promotion as well as ideas expressed by individual members in the film. Though the film's authorship is somewhat ambiguous, the director is a Malayalee, Dr. Mahesh Kidangil, also director of several videos on the Kerala martial art form Kalari. At least one of Kidangil's other films shows very similar images to those described above, with figures in profile holding the sun in upturned hands. The use of surnames in crediting Kidangil; director of photography, Santosh Manacaud; editor, Sunil Chathannur; as well as two individuals on the "script/research team" indicates they are Indian or of Indian origin, while "Atmaram," the first credited on this team, is identified only with his spiritual name.[67] Atmaram, also the film's narrator, is labeled as Canadian at points in the film when he speaks as himself. While Atmaram is the only obvious foreigner credited here, it was clear to me in a presentation of the film to Trivandrum center teachers by the ashram's director that he (a European citizen born and raised in Zimbabwe) and the ashram's acharya (an Italian male swami) provided considerable oversight in the film's conception and final form. It is important, then, to emphasize that the portrayal of Indian bodies and land as essentially tied to the spirituality of yoga is not a language spoken only by foreigners who misapprehend these connections or simplify Indian people, but rather a much more complex combination of histories and discourses accessible in this global age to cosmopolitans from everywhere, and employed (sometimes strategically) by Indian people themselves. In the following sub-section, I elaborate on the larger global context of the film's rhetoric, and consider the "racial implications" of the imagination of place and bodies in *Gateway*.

Spiritual India in the Global Racial Order

Although individuals in the tourist economy may have nuanced and not merely stereotypical images of the people and places they encounter through the lens of tourism, it is important to consider the persuasive history of the very imagination that situates tropical places as longed-for destinations. In an essay on "transnational anthropology," Arjun Appadurai writes of "loops that tie together fantasies about the Other, the conveniences and seductions of travel, the economics of global trade and the violent fantasies that dominate gender politics in many parts of Asia and the world at large" (Appadurai 1996:39). I find his combination of words instructive for my attempt to figure imaginations of yoga in Kerala as particularly racialized fantasies. These ideas are, of course, also influenced by the work of Edward Said (1979) and countless scholars who have built on his theories of Orientalism. Taking Harrison's definition of racism as "a nexus of material relations within which social and discursive practices perpetuate oppressive power relations between populations presumed to be essentially different" (Harrison 1995:65), I imagine the "tourist gaze" (Urry 1990) in a nexus of this kind. [68]

"Such gazes are constructed through difference" (Urry 1990:1); and if the gaze on luxurious stretches of beach and tropical foliage as a newly emergent thing of beauty in the late 1700s and early 1800s was a result of European Romanticism (Urry 1990:20), we must also consider Harrison's observation that "Europe's very sense of itself depended on an oppositional relationship to an invented antithesis, primitive savagery" (Harrison 1995:51). In India, along with this, there is also the flip-side, supposedly positive stereotypical "antithesis": spirituality to the West's rationality. Richard King's analysis in *Orientalism and Religion: Postcolonial Theory, India and "The Mythic East"* provides a "geneology of 'the mystical'" (1999:8) as it relates to a stereotypical idea of "spiritual India." Central to King's analysis is the historical

context through which India is constructed in stereotypic terms, and "seen as inferior [to the West] in so far as is it exhibits" qualities that make it the West's opposite and alter-ego (King 1999:32, Said 1979). In his book *The Karma of Brown Folk*, Vijay Prashad expands at length on how India has been perceived in popular imagination in the United States, noting that "India does not emerge, in this discourse, as simply romantic and beautiful; it also comes across as hideous and barbaric" (2000:22). But it is not just that the imagination of the Third World/South is necessarily caught up in a history of racialized images of people who are imagined to live there. The very ability of the First World/North to be there at all is economically and politically owed to a world history that has not so freely allowed the travels of people of color to destinations of their choice.

While much work on tourism has thought through the predicament of tourism as explicitly tied to the historical construction of leisure grounded in the development of a European modern subjectivity (Walton 2005), the SYVC positions itself outside a critique of this kind of embeddedness in political economy because of its avowed commitment to tradition. Contrasting itself and its mission with more explicitly body-centered practices of yoga in the public sphere, the SYVC identifies as an organization whose goal is "to spread the teachings of Vedanta [one of the six main systems of Hindu philosophy] worldwide" (Sivananda.org/faq)[69] and explicitly ties itself to a tradition rooted in timeless India.

> In the Sivananda centers and Ashrams we teach Hatha yoga in its pure traditional form as it has been done for many centuries in the Himalayas around Rishikesh. Confusion arises when - in our modern days and in the West - many people think of yoga as just being a set of exercises, the postures. Also many modern or post modern schools of yoga have appeared in the last few years, many of them having little to do with the original yoga from India. (Sivananda.org/faq).

In this explanation, in answer to the "Frequently Asked Question" "Which type of yoga do you teach?" (Sivananda.org/faq) the website's anonymous authors construct a religious form that is

ancient and at some remove from modern history, even as the very site of that form (here, India) is connected in obvious ways to colonial history and its accompanying knowledge and power structures. The SYVC explicitly ties its claims of authenticity to India as both a real place and a fantastically spiritual imagination, but one that obscures its situatedness in the world.

In arguing that the ongoing use of the picturesque in advertising the Kerala ashram has racial implications, I speculate that the imaginations made visible in photos, and articulated in textual rhetoric on the tranquility of a tropical setting with only "like-minded people" around, indicates a complicity in a global figuring of race and place. This becomes especially evident through the invisibility of local working people in images of the ashram, in contrast to the high visibility of ritualized Indian people in the film's visual rhetoric. This resonates with subtle processes of racialization at work on a global scale that come into explicit expression in the social conditions of spiritual tourism. It is this interplay of tourist fantasy and real-world histories that I wish to extend into the following section, where I show how Indian people imagined their connections and the connections of Indian land to yoga.

Turning the Tables: Indian Teachers on the Embodiment and Embeddedness of Yoga

Modern Yoga Studies and the Origins of Globalized Yoga

Scholarship on Modern Yoga (discussed at length in Chapter One) does not disavow the connections between Modern Yoga and Indian and Hindu traditional practices but *denaturalizes* it, emphasizing important cross-cultural interactions between Indian gurus and their Western disciples. It also highlights the influence of Western philosophical and physical culture on some of the most dynamic Indian innovators involved in spreading yoga to the West. Building on this body of literature, in my early research I approached the study of the international Sivananda Yoga Vedanta Centres branches in India with a skeptical view of claims to authenticity made by

both the overarching Western-dominated organization and its Western members, as explored in the previous section. These claims seemed resonant with the kind of exoticism common in New Age movements and critiqued by Prashad (2000), linking yoga to a mystical and ritualistic India of timeless, traditional spirituality. They also conflicted with recent scholarly assessments of yoga's history.

Yet, as I began to interview Indian teachers in the organization, I found that they, too, drew heavily on references to yoga as uniquely Indian. For Indian people living and working in the organization, India is not only a backdrop but an essential, life-giving part of yoga. In fact, some of the Indian yoga teachers I got to know—many of whom first studied yoga in this transnational organization—drew on these primordial claims to legitimize their critiques of the ways Westerners do things within the organization. They thereby positioned themselves as privileged authorities in the context of an organizational hierarchy that otherwise silenced their voices.

Counter to images of relaxation and escape projected in *Gateway*, comments during my interviews with Indian teachers in the SYVC brought to light some cases of *increased* tension in the ashram context as Indian participants found themselves frustrated with the organizational power structure. During previous visits to SYVC branches in India in 2000 and 2002 my own observations of uneven representations of Indians in positions of authority compared with their prevalence as junior staff, were a major motivation for this study. But my scholarly training and biases probably predisposed me to consider any conflation of Indian bodies or land with spirituality as an act of outdated, orientalist essentialism. I was surprised, in 2010-11, to recognize the prevalence of these references in several of my interviews with Indian teachers.

These teachers' experiences and narratives also prompted me to reflect on how the move by Western scholars of Modern Yoga to claim yoga as a product of the exchange between India and the West may be yet another form of appropriation of this now-global phenomenon, which Indian practitioners and yoga teachers also wish to claim as their own. Of course the idea of appropriation does not stand up in the context of scholarly arguments that yoga was never fundamentally Indian to begin with. It is also out of sync with the current situation on the ground of a thoroughly globalized form, wherein many foreigners teach yoga to Indians or supervise their practice in the formal structure of ashram life, particularly in international contexts like the SYVC, a fact which counters Prime Minister Modi's recent attempts to standardize yoga as the official property of India, much as "champagne" is the property of France (theweek.com). Yet it does seem a sort of mental contortion to twist this practice with its deep roots in philosophical traditions of South Asia into something absolutely modern or transnational.

The issue of embodiment and the embeddedness of yoga in India and its people is also more fraught as yoga has become a global commodity. Expertise in yoga can be something of a career maker for Indian people with limited educational credentials. The SYVC contributes to this particularly by offering a course without qualifications, so that anyone, regardless of formal education, may enroll in and pass the course. This is unlike many courses in India that require a certain score on standardized tests taken at high school graduation. Yet, the reality is that a significant number of paying consumers of globalized yoga in India are foreign (in ashram, retreat, and hotel settings) – and this rhetoric of blood and land seems built at least in part out of a desire to capture the niche market, since people will pay a premium for presumed authenticity. Therefore, writing from my relatively privileged position as both foreign SYVC insider and Modern Yoga Studies scholar, I tread carefully in this debate, believing that the voices of Indian

teachers in this international organization add an important and as-yet unconsidered dimension to the scholarly corpus on Modern Yoga.

Body, Land, and Legacy

Although orientalism and its contemporary traces may have been thoroughly critiqued in academic circles, the issue of East versus West, or more often foreign versus Indian is a central and daily topic of reflection in the international SYVC. This occurs in both formal and informal settings and has done so from the beginning of the organization, when Swami Vishnudevananda was fond of comparing Western and Indian minds for the purpose of explaining yoga. Though foreign staff in the Indian branches of the organization are the minority (among a larger group of Indian volunteer and paid staff, paid workers, and outside teachers), the culture of this organization is one many of my Indian research participants referred to as "foreign" or "Western." They attributed this "Western" feel to the organization's founding and development in North America and Europe, and the fact that the six-person Executive Board is made up entirely of non-Indians. When asked about yoga's relationship to Hinduism in interviews, both foreign and Indian participants emphasized the universality and non-sectarian nature of yoga practices. This would seem to support scholarly assessments of the phenomenon of Modern Yoga as something that arises in dialogue with and to some extent for the West, rather than in a neat trajectory from an imagined ancient and insular (read: Hindu) India. Yet, in unprompted circumstances, many Indian members of the organization spoke evocatively of yoga as something beyond history and beyond culture. They spoke of yoga as bodily, essential, and natural to India and its people, even when they also expressed appreciation for the dedication and sincerity of some foreigners in the practice of yoga.

Sankara, a middle class business-man-turned-yoga-teacher in his forties, told me frankly: "…the thing is… a good, super yoga teacher – Indian yoga teacher is always better than a superb Western yoga teacher." He said this despite acknowledging that his own training in the SYVC was under an American disciple of Swami Vishnudevananda. He liked this American teacher, but compared him unfavorably, in retrospect, to an Indian teacher he had met in childhood. With this previous teacher: "Some vibration was there.… Hindu vibration… *Indo* spiritual – *Indian* spiritual vibrations…."

Another senior teacher, Sajeev, explained the allure of India, saying

> The air [in India] is very thick when we touch it…. When they undergo the training in this kind of atmosphere, maybe [people] feel something fulfilled.… So there are many aspects that [make] this place very unique… Basically, the country, its soil… (personal communication, March 6, 2010).

For Arjun, a volunteer outside teacher in one of the SYVC's urban centers, a biological tie to yoga was what destined him to find the center and start attending classes. "Because yoga is maybe there in my blood – so it has come" (personal communication, May 2, 2010). The center had relocated to the neighborhood near his family home.

In reviewing several transcripts of interviews conducted in English, wherein participants referenced blood, soil, or DNA, I began to recognize that these discursive moves are not benign. Rather, they create a framework for talking about underlying tensions between foreigners and Indians in the organization. Indian members drew on these claims of yoga's innate connection to their bodies and land in the context of discussions of organizational dynamics. Sankara, above, continues his earlier remark about superb yoga teachers by emphasizing the *difference* between Indians and foreigners, even those with much experience, and finally talking about how foreigners have pushed Indians to the edges of the organization. Putting his critique in the words of a foreign guest at the ashram, he said:

> One Spanish person… said… "What is going on here? I came here to have an Indian experience…" "One Indian is placed in that corner… another Indian is … placed here. That one… she is sitting like a statue, saying nothing. Another Indian is placed at the other corner. He is always sitting there as a statue. In the middle here are these people. And Indians are made to cook, clean, like colonial era kind of thing… is happening. There are Indian people – almost seems to be – it is like "yoga is done in India" is only the language… (personal communication, April 14, 2010).

The Spanish guest was probably taking his cues about the "Indian" experience from the ashram's promotional materials, most likely the website, since the film was released after our interview. During my research I observed a few cases like this, where foreign guests expressed disappointment upon arriving after long planning and saving to find courses taught primarily by Westerners, rather than Indians. Yet, overall, the SYVC's strong campaign emphasizing the traditional nature of their practice, the emphasis on the two Indian gurus whose words, images, and names are central to daily ashram teaching and devotional practice, the few Indian directors and teachers, and of course the physical location and cultural programs, seem to satisfy most foreign visitors and staff alike that they are getting an Indian experience.

This is not so for most Indian staff I spoke to. The majority adamantly described the organization to me as Western. One former staff member indicated that it is difficult for an Indian person with a sincere desire for spiritual growth to flourish in this organization. Why? I asked. "Because that's how our DNA is… our traits, our samskaras are" (personal communication August 8, 2010). This comment imagines a kind of honing work of the body's natural elements (here, "DNA") or samskaras (often defined in the SYVC as "mental grooves") so that the body itself can detect inauthentic yoga and gravitates instead to the real thing. Moments earlier he had spoken about the overarching Western culture of the organization and analyzed with some precision how foreign directors used fear to dominate junior staff. In contrast, he spoke of Indian people's ease of understanding so many of the features of ashram

life, saying. “It is all in their blood.” In his interpretation, this made for an uneasy relationship of Indian people with non-Indians in the SYVC context, and in the case of this participant, led him to pursue his yoga practice elsewhere.

While the soundscape and hue of the video aim to glorify the Indian location, this would seem to be, as Sankara put it, above, “only the language,” or just words. In short, while many foreign members of the organization find India to be a perfect escape from their ordinary lives and the struggles therein, Indian participants claim this place as home. As such, they often find foreign presence and leadership dominating and reminiscent of a colonial era. Although the overarching message of the promotional video highlights communication and understanding between cultures, in my research I encountered very few examples of direct and sympathetic communication about these underlying tensions. But the tendency to emphasize primordial blood- and land-based connections to the truth of yoga emerged as a strong overall pattern among Indian practitioners. This imaginative connection between bodies and land is not unusual, but rather builds on a pattern many anthropologists writing of India have found. Anand Pandian calls this “the living power of a natural imagination of development in modern India, binding the transformation of an ‘interior landscape’ of selfhood to the inhabited landscape of rural experience” (2009:17). We can also see such connections between the physical essence of the people and the land of their upbringing in the work of Daniel (1984), Gupta (1998), Mines (2002), and others, particularly as concerns the innate nature of caste. In the connection to blood and lineage, we also have a more obvious link with modern ideas of race.

> Whereas in previous eras, morality was defined in terms of virtue and correct behavior… in the modern period… people began talking in terms of stocks or breeds of humans people with engrained, *natural* qualities. Human identity and personhood became increasingly defined by a discourse of race, certain races became defined as non-rational or aesthetically inferior (lacking in the ‘natural’ balance of beauty and harmony) and race could define certain people as fit for slavery (Wade 1997:9).

For Indians, neither at the top of imagined racial hierarchies nor the brute bottom, there were other associations. Stereotypes associating India with spirituality and mysticism have long been employed by both Western interlocutors, including spiritual seekers, and by some Indians themselves, capitalizing on the image to underline their own spiritual authority. Vijay Prashad (2000) traces how Indians as a "race" have been imagined in the U.S., and he observes some subtle differences between U.S. and European versions of orientalism, which may have implications for how notions of inheritance are employed by Indian yoga teachers in the SYVC. Writing of Thoreau's *Walden,* Prashad shows how

> for Thoreau, as for much of U.S. orientalism (… here… distinct from European orientalism), the east was not a genetic inheritance unavailable to the West. That is, the cultural wealth of India could transform the alienated American into a spiritual and yet material being. The solution to modern alienation, for Thoreau, lay in the East… a metaphor that represented the spiritual in general, whereas the West represented the material" Prashad 2000:18).

In Prashad's view, it was this American notion of the East's wisdom as translatable to a Western audience that allowed Thoreau to claim his own status as "a yogin" (Prashad 2000:18), whereas a European notion of inheritance would tend to fix yoga in the Indian bloodline. "The European orientalists felt that the twain (of East and West) would never meet; the U.S. orientalists, on the other hand, hoped for some transfer of values to benefit their new republic…" (Prashad 2000:13). Following Prashad, we may ask whether English-speaking SYVC participants who deployed these notions of inheritance were influenced by British-style orientalism or by indigenous notions of space, place, and bodies as may be suggested by anthropologists of South Asia (see above). I would argue that SYVC participants who made use of these notions were pulling from both of these influences, and beyond.

Rendering yoga as "a genetic inheritance," now not just in terms of blood, but in the contemporary and slightly differently evocative language of DNA, positioned Indian members of the SYVC as privileged authorities in the context of a global movement that tends to foreground the international community. While clearly entangled with a history of racialization, these renderings make important claims on something of global value, and thus should not be dismissed as mere (European-style) orientalist imagination. Interestingly as well, at least one speaker moved smoothly between the contemporary and global imagination of inheritance through DNA and the older Indian notion of samskaras, while others spoke of blood, land and "nature." To me this plurality of vocabularies underlies the cosmopolitan influences on these claims, situating Indian yoga teachers squarely in the transnational field of Modern Yoga Studies. To date, scholarly attention to transnational flows in the development of Modern Yoga is an important corrective to earlier essentialist formations of yoga as ancient Indian artifact. Still, it is important that the academic debate take stock of this globalized yoga in India and begin to imagine the ways and reasons that it is imagined by some Indian participants as essentially, bodily, Indian. In the concluding section, below, I explore how the slippages and possibilities of communication across cultures in the space of globalized yoga came to life in small, even interstitial, ways in a discussion of the film at a monthly meeting at the Trivandrum center.

SYVC Teachers Discuss *Gateway*: Voice, Silence, and the Unseen Bodies of Globalized Yoga

Although the promotional video for their main Indian ashram capitalizes on the exotic allure of practicing yoga in India, the intended audience for *Gateway* is primarily a non-Indian one, even if it is technically accessible to an English-speaking elite in India. Made in English, the film is translated into five other languages, but not into Hindi or any regional Indian language. As

evidenced by the response of Malayalee SYVC teachers in Trivandrum, even those with the strong English-language skills and broad views characteristic of cosmopolitans, the symbolic language of the film was not only unappealing to them, but in some aspects even offensive to their sensibilities about what and how an ashram should promote. For these teachers, assembled for a monthly teachers meeting in May 2010, the choreographed performance of yoga asanas and the range of international bodies and spokespersons further drove home the Western or foreign bias of the organization's leadership. In fact, the leadership seemed to have no formal intention of eliciting the responses of the Indian teachers. This supports the idea that the organization's internal culture, while valorizing India and Indian-ness, is not concerned about how this resonates for actual Indian people. Further, Indian members of the organization themselves do not necessarily confront these inequalities and contradictions, even when they observe them with some clarity. This meeting was thus a rare moment of direct confrontation. As such, it offers a window into the larger institutional culture and the possibilities and limits of communication across difference.

The meeting began as most I attended during the year and a half I lived in Trivandrum. Teachers gathered in the florescent-lit satsang hall, on the ground floor of the center's newly constructed building. Of the teachers present for this meeting, three, including myself, were foreigners. In total there were eight Malayalee men, two Malayalee women, one Italian woman, one white, male Italian citizen raised in Zimbabwe, and one white American woman (myself). The number of regular teachers at the center is closer to twenty, but the remaining teachers – also mostly Malayalee men – were not present, due to other commitments or priorities. Long woven mats had been spread out on the otherwise bare glossy tile floors to make a rectangle in the middle of the room, and each of us chose a place on one of these mats, facing each other. Rajan,

the ashram director, visiting for the evening to conduct this meeting and the satsang that would follow, took the privileged spot at the front of the room, with his back to the altar, and opened the meeting by adjusting his posture, closing his eyes, and droning out three "Om" mantras, before beginning the longer *gnanaslokas* (special mantras recited at the beginning of all classes or meetings in the SYVC). The group joined him, and then, after the chanting quieted, he introduced the group to an elderly Indian man who was visiting from out of town, a graduate of the Teacher's Training Course, whose daughter was enrolled in the kids camp. Seated next to me, a friend I will call "Natalia," an older Italian woman who has lived in India for a number of years and only recently completed the TTC, was having trouble hearing. "What? We can't hear you…" she cut in, frowning in my direction for acknowledgement. "What?" There was noise from the street outside and some guests were talking in the lobby area. I got up to close the door to the satsang hall. Again, Rajan spoke, and again she couldn't hear, so she stood up and went over to sit next to him.

Now Rajan continued, saying that he would like to get some feedback about the promotional video he had shown us at the previous month's meeting. After that, he said, Kumari is going to lead us in a discussion. Then, he asked if there were other things people wanted to talk about. The group was silent. In satsangs, meetings, and courses in these Indian centers, whenever an open-ended question like this is thrown out to the crowd, it will invariably be met this way. But after more than twelve years in India, Rajan has learned how to get people to talk by putting them on the spot. He now went around the circle, checking in with each person. "Do you have anything to add?" Rajan's idea was to find out if anyone wanted to add to the agenda for the meeting, and he even said so softly at one point, but people seemed confused. Several

said simply that they would add to what I said – "I will come there also..." or "It will come out with Kumari's part." I swallowed hard, my stomach in a knot.

Rajan had called me a week ahead of the meeting to ask if I wanted to make a presentation on my research. Although the formal period of my research grant had begun just two months before, I had been living in Trivandrum for an entire year and had conducted interviews with most of the teachers present, as well as attended daily classes, held a regular teaching slot on Sunday mornings, and been a relatively stable fixture of the center, particularly in the last two months, since my language program had concluded.

So much had happened, I told Rajan, after thinking about it for a couple of days, that I wondered if it might not be better to open the floor for a discussion. In recent weeks, one of the last remaining Indian swamis in the organization had left his post as director of the ashram in Madurai under mysterious circumstances some described as a "forced resignation." To fill his place, the Trivandrum center's director had been sent to Madurai, and his younger brother had moved from Neyyar Dam to become the new director of the center in Trivandrum. The changes had taken place two months earlier – almost the exact time my official research began – but the shock waves had not yet settled. Outside teachers and staff alike seemed disillusioned about the departure of this beloved swami, formerly posted for a number of years first in Trivandrum and then in Neyyar Dam. He had been a teacher to many of us, including on a recent visit to teach an advanced asana class filled to capacity. During that visit he also led one of these monthly teachers meetings – the only one conducted in Malalayam during the year and a half I attended, despite the fact that until today's meeting I was the only foreigner teaching at the center and fully able to participate in Malayalam. Many lamented that there were "no more Indian swamis," though in fact there are three female Indian swamis living in the SYVC in India – two elderly

women who stay at the Neyyar Dam ashram, and one middle-aged, director of the Uttar Kashi ashram. Once, when I questioned someone on his assertion that there are no Indian swamis left, he told me sharply, in English: "Swamis with power!"

Although addressing these issues directly didn't seem likely from either side – the Indian teachers or the foreign director – I suggested that in the wake of these transitions, it might be helpful to have an open forum for discussion. I told him one thing that stood out in my research was people's personal investment in the center, how much the center and the community of teachers and students means to them. Rather than my sharing the preliminary results of my research, which would be problematic given the confidentiality of my interviews, I suggested perhaps we could invite teachers to share with one another as they had shared with me – how they came to the center, why they continue to come, and what, if anything, the center could be doing better to meet their needs. I also suggested that it might be helpful to allow some time to give feedback to the film. I had heard some critical responses and hoped people would have the courage in the space of a meeting to speak openly about what troubled them. In anticipation of making this suggestion to Rajan, I mentioned this idea to a few teachers, and the response was good. Now, as I scanned the room, I hoped this "presentation" wasn't going to be greeted with more silence, especially given the tight-lipped responses in this first go-round.

Rajan suggested we start with the video. I scribbled notes during the discussion and captured direct quotes to the best of my ability, indicated by the single quote marks. Words not appearing in those on-the-spot notes, but reconstructed the following day in my field journal, appear in brackets. Aside from the foreigners (noted), all present are Malayalees, and I identify them only as "staff" or "outside teacher."

Speaker One, an outside teacher began:

> 'I didn't like the video. [It] seemed like [a] resort... [I] didn't feel any spiritual energy. The intention may be not so [to advertise it like a resort]... [and yet that is how it came across]. Why not in any Indian language – it sends out a message that it is not for Indians – we have thousands of people here – even if you put it out in Hindi that would reach out.'

Speaker One clarified that Malayalam may not be necessary, since it is a regional language.

Rajan responded immediately, objecting that it was not created with that intention: 'Some teaching was included... We described the five points....'[70]

Speaker One indicated that despite whatever teachings were included, 'the feeling created ... was ... a different kind of energy.'

Speaker Two, another outside teacher then took his turn: 'The gradual transformation [that takes place in an ashram] was not conveyed. [The video gave the impression that one just goes to the ashram and suddenly one is in touch and in tune with all these things.]'

When Rajan asked something to clarify that Speaker Two didn't like the film either, he said it was 'good, but...' and then simply trailed off.

Now Rajan responded again: 'I don't think it was trying to convey the height [of the] experience but to give a general idea of the ashram life.' He now looked to the next indicated person in the circle.

Speaker Three, a young staff member, barely looked up as she said: 'Nice visualization.'

'Did you enjoy it?' asked Rajan.

'Yes,' she answered, smiling as she looked only at him, then back at the floor.

When it came to his turn, Speaker Four, another outside teacher, attempted to contain his emotion, gripping his mouth as he pronounced: 'I do not want to comment about that.' But then, as if the light touch of those words tipped the cap on a pressure cooker, he burst forth: 'Because I don't like it!' and proceeded with an emotional critique. I was so stunned, I stopped writing as he spoke. He had never said a critical word about the film to me, so I wasn't expecting his sharp

anger. When I regained my wits, I quickly jotted that he had echoed the idea of the 'glossy feel' and the 'wrong energy.'

Speaker Five, an outside teacher who has some experience as a graphic designer seemed to try and steer the critique away from Rajan, who was looking a bit deflated. 'The director didn't know,' he said softly. 'He has no idea about spirituality so he did [this] as a promotional thing.'

Rajan put in: 'The director is Dr. Mahesh.'

Speaker Five came back immediately: 'That's the mistake.'

> 'He's actually a Yoga teacher and he's involved with Kalari [a martial art from Kerala]' Rajan said. 'He's into full production [and we knew that]. He showed us one other film. He does good technique. He spent some time... maybe three days at the ashram.'

Now Speaker Five declared that the technique might have been good, but 'it just had this commercial feel.'

Rajan jumped in 'What does it mean commercial? If we're trying to make something interesting?'

At this point, Natalia, who was sitting to Rajan's left seemed to think aloud: 'At the end of the day many people do come to the ashram.… [If the ultimate goal is to bring people to Yoga, then maybe that's ok.]' She had at first declined to speak in this first round of discussion saying she only saw a four-minute excerpt of the film. She had not attended the teachers meeting the previous month, because she was a recent graduate of the TTC and had only just begun teaching at the center.

Rajan mused that maybe the visual effects made the presentation seem out of sync with the way things are done at the ashram. He said that when the senior acharya in charge of the ashram first saw asanas being performed in formation on the ashram lawn in the film, he said: 'That's not the way we do it.'

By now the round-table discussion seemed like an argument, with Rajan offering a rebuttal after each person's turn. When Natalia, to his left, cut in again, I got her attention and suggested that it might be better to continue around in the circle. She apologized, and Rajan, too, realizing he had been speaking out of turn, said he was sorry.

The circle continued around, including my own turn, when I attempted to articulate that we may be responding to the subtle language of the film that seems out of step with ashram values – the editing flourishes mentioned above as well as the gaze of the camera, for example when it zooms in close on a woman's chest as she performs a backward bend in a form-fitting t-shirt. I reiterated what the first speaker had said about the lack of Indian languages and suggested there are other clues that this is not directed to an Indian audience.

Speaker Seven, another staff member seated to my left, sat hunched over, as if to make himself disappear. He swallowed his words, smiling nervously, and barely gulped out: 'It was ok,' and then looked to his left to indicate he did not want to say more.

When the circle came back to Rajan, taking in everything he had heard, he declared:

> 'It makes me think about some things I didn't hear before. Essentially our initial intention was … to not only attract people, but I wanted to make people familiar with what we're doing [so they're not shocked when they get here]. Most people [when they first come] they're... not shocked, but not used to... the things like chanting. We wanted to...

Rajan trailed off at this point, and then I, also speaking out of turn, said that even as I heard him say this, it sounded to me like the people imagined as the viewers are not Indian people – who would not be shocked or surprised with ashram conditions. Indeed, compared to many ashrams in India, this one is quite luxurious, with internet, foreign currency exchange, and even rooms with air conditioning and hot water available. I tried to go back to what Speaker One had said about people in India... who may have been interested if the film were made in a language accessible to them.

Speaker One cut in:

> 'India is what is projected – because the Indian experience [that is what is key to this ashram.] [There are ashrams all over the world in this organization, so what is unique about this one is its location in India, which is ultimately being sold and displayed and romanticized here] – an ashram which is situated in India is not being put in any Indian languages. There are many people in India who can pay double [what] you [charge foreigners]. There are thousands of ashrams that are touristic [here, and not even those ashrams are doing such touristic videos as this.] 'Resort director speaks... one nice image [is shown] then…. That's a directional *blunder,* it is, [to do it in the very same stylized way as the latest resort videos.] An Indian mind – [to an Indian mind this will be offensive].

Speaker Five immediately joined in:

> We expect sannyasis will come. [The acharya for the ashram was only shown for a few moments], but to an Indian mind watching a video about an ashram, we expect to see many sannyasis.

This comment may have touched the nerve of another major recent change, with its own after-effects, no doubt strongly affecting the responses to this film. In September of the previous year, Rajan, who had been wearing orange robes for a number of years and was beloved and respected in his role as swami-director of the ashram, shocked many when he married his former assistant, a brahmachari or monk-in-training. Now, the scarcity of swamis of *any* nationality had become a source of frustration for many of the teachers. Several talked privately about how they not only looked to senior swamis as guides in their own spiritual lives but also felt their own reputation as teachers was threatened by the bad name that could come to the organization if swamis went back on their vows. Many were put in the position of having to explain to students, who asked them "what happened to Swamiji?" Many also used this as the stepping stone, in interviews, to move into a discussion about the differences between Indians and foreigners, often progressing into ideas like those discussed above – yoga comes more naturally to Indians, because it is "in their blood."

'At the same time, there were other senior people,' Rajan responded, brushing off any

sense that this may have been a criticism directed at him. Now he took the general consensus: 'You don't think it is good to promote the ashram... If you had the same video in Hindi?'

Speaker One came back immediately: 'The same video in Hindi will not work!' With this, the conversation about the film came to a halt.

What seemed important to me in this meeting was not just the problematic nature of the film, which seemed obvious to me from my own first viewing, but also the ways that ideas moved around the space, and especially what went unsaid, and by whom. A few key points illustrate this well. Though there were just three foreigners present, each in our own way played a central role in the meeting. From the opening moments of the meeting, Natalia made her inability to hear known to the group, first by interrupting and then by physically placing herself next to the director, with her back to the altar. This positioning also allowed her proximity to speak one-on-one with the director at times when others were speaking. Rajan, as director, responded to each of the other speakers, sometimes arguing with their points or defending the position of the ashram. For my own part: not only did I suggest the topic of discussion and thereby encourage participants to be open about their critiques, I also made efforts to keep the discussion on track, by suggesting to the other foreigners that they give due time to each speaker in his or her order.

When asked individually for their comments, some outside teachers were reluctant to speak – 'I do not want to comment about that,' or it was 'good, but...' – even when they had important things to say. The two Malayalee staff members, clearly in more vulnerable positions, as employees of the organization, were visibly uncomfortable being put on the spot and deferred all but the most vague and neutral comments – 'It was ok,' and 'nice visualization.' As such, they seemed very much like the Indian "statues" referred to in the speech of the Spanish ashram guest

brought out in Sankara's interview above– officially on the organization's "inside," but marginalized by their inability to speak in the available forum.

When the critiques did come to light, it seems important that two people couched their responses in the idea of an "Indian mind," drawing a clear distinction between themselves and the foreign leadership of the organization, even though members of the production team were known to be fellow Malayalees. There is a contrast here between the ideal of what an ashram should be and should convey to a general public who would view this informational video versus the actual film which came across more like a resort's advertisement, by and for a Western mind. The discomfort with this among Indian teachers may be heightened, too, because of their other work in resorts where they do have to market yoga in a touristic way and are subject to the rules set by resort managers who may have "no idea about spirituality."

Although these comments are clear and important ways of talking about subtle and inherently cultural responses to the film – an aversion to the "tone," "feel," or "energy," as incompatible with the values of Indian yoga – they also reckon a kind of dividing line similar to the biological ones drawn in private interviews (discussed above) – between Western minds and Indian minds. A teacher who was not present at the meeting, told me as we discussed some of the same issues: "no matter what language problems" Indian teachers have in teaching yoga, people will always "feel something better from an Indian teacher." Now that there were "no more Indian swamis," he said, the organization would "go down."[71] In the very same conversation, he elaborated that when someone was a swami and then "comes back from" that position (reversing their vows) it is very hard. Speaking in Malayalam, he said "all Hindus" will feel disappointed and get a bad feeling. I voiced that not only Hindus but foreigners also would feel disappointed and that we would lose faith. To this, he repeated, with emphasis "*all Hindus*" – correcting me

that he did not mean only Indian Hindus – there are Hindus in "all places. Not only India, but all over the world," he declared. I am confident he was not referring to Non Resident Indians. This individual, like most teachers I spoke to in my research believes that foreigners can become Hindus or like Hindus, and in so doing, behave more appropriately as yogis and members of the organization. Ultimately, this view opts for a vision of a globally shared community, even if that community does not exist in practice at the present time. It is also important to note that many Indian participants in the SYVC (including some whose voices contributed to this chapter) speak openly and appreciatively about their impressions of foreigners' disciplined and whole-hearted approach to yoga practice.

During the second part of the teacher's meeting, teachers spoke about what they get from their participation in the center, and what, if anything, they need. Speaker One, despite his criticism of the ashram's video and its choice not to speak to an audience of Indians said plainly: 'I basically come here because I like it. It makes me happy. When I spend some hours here, I leave feeling better.'

Speaker Four, who attends class daily before heading to work in the morning said: 'Sometimes in the evening I'm tired and I say "tomorrow I won't come," but then I wake up at four, have my bath and all, and I am here by 6:05.'

Speaker Five, too, stated emphatically: 'Totally, I am getting happiness from here. [I have so many problems at home, but here I am getting happiness and am able to forget.]'

When Natalia presented herself, she spoke about the difference between being at the ashram versus being at the center: '[In the ashram, the majority] of the people [are] Western so I felt more….' Now, she gestured two hands moving together, and said, in the absence of the right words "blah-blah."

Rajan ventured: ‘One of the group?’

She continued, seeming satisfied with his translation:

> ‘I feel the way I am treated here... I am treated well. [But] I feel a small – I have to work on this. It is on my side and it is on their side. But I challenge myself to be part of this place. Really, really a part, as in *for real* – not always “the Italian lady.” I would like to be accepted.

Speaker One, at her left, responded, meeting her eyes and then mine: ‘You are. It is the fear [of] each other....’ He told her the ‘imaginary curtains’ were ‘flowing down’ as she spoke. ‘It’s a fear [of] each other. How we will accept each other....’

But Natalia, dropping those ‘imaginary curtains’ a bit further, said:

> I don’t *feel* a foreigner – sometimes people *make* me feel a foreigner. I choose to stay here [in India] because I love this country. I sometimes I don’t love it – like I don’t love my own country…

Overall, Natalia communicated that she wants to be part of this community and sometimes feels her foreignness keeps her out. ‘It is on my side and it is on their side.’ She recognizes that she plays a part (“I have to work on this”) in the obstacles to feeling a true community, ‘*for real*,’ or, what Speaker One describes as a ‘fear [of] each other....’ Yet, her actions, even within this short meeting indicate little self-reflection on the subtle power differentials in which she is a participant. Her comfort voicing strong opinions, interrupting the director when she couldn’t hear, and even physically shifting to the second-most powerful spot in the room are all complicit in this, despite the fact that she was the most junior teacher of the bunch, attending her very first meeting, while teachers with ten to twenty years of experience were also present. On the contrary, the staff, who should by all rights voice their impressions of a film made to represent them and their home, seemed to almost cower at the invitation to speak.

These subtle shifts, silences, and postures are not incidental. During my research stays in this and other centers and ashrams throughout India, I observed these same types of dynamics on

a daily basis. In Neyyar Dam, I became fascinated with sketching out small diagrams of daily morning staff meetings, indicating the way that staff seated themselves around the room. Invariably, foreigners took places of equitable power – seats at locations around mats spread to make a rectangle shape in the center of the room. Rajan and his wife, a British woman in a management position, just beneath his role as director sat at the "head" of this space, and occasionally, a staff member – inevitably a Westerner, often one disgruntled for some reason with management –would disrupt the focus by sprawling on the couch outside the circle or sitting above the group in one of the chairs at a nearby table. Many of the Indian staff joined in the same equitable way around the mats, but each day there were several Indian staff members (both paid and volunteer) and a few paid workers – drivers and maintenance workers who were required to attend these meetings – who made themselves physically marginal. One would sit behind a pole that cut in to the normal layout; then a second person would join him in that background space, despite a free space ahead of him on the mat. Thereafter, several others would join in, creating what I once described in my notes as "a lump leaving the room," sitting in rows of two or three, gradually closer and closer to the door. Some faced into the main meeting area, and some sat with backs to the wall, so that they had to turn their heads to join the discussion.

Figure 9 Staff meeting in Neyyar Dam, with some participants beginning to form a back row, November, 2010

Figure 10 Another image of the same staff meeting, November 2010

If these kinds of physical presences among Indian staff in the SYVC are quite different from those of the ritualized Indian bodies in the film, so, too, are the bodies of the organization's paid workers – bodies which perform hunching, stooping, lifting, and carrying, rather than bending, arching, balancing, and stretching. Even in the space of the meeting discussed above, two bodies remained invisible yet served important functions. Behind the scenes, one woman

was responsible for preparing the gleaming floor and cleaning the other common areas of the new center building, and another prepared tea and brought packaged snacks for the teachers to enjoy. Their bodies and activities seem entirely disconnected from notions of an embedded or embodied yoga, and as other chapters will bear out, Indian staff often distinguished between themselves and the workers in terms that distinguished types and levels of people – implying that spirituality is not merely a matter of having Indian blood.

Figure 11 SYVC worker mops one of the asana halls in the Trivandrum center

If the voices and silences in the space of this open forum call into question the video's vision of peace and the figure of India represented there, the unseen bodies that literally "make the space" for globalized yoga to happen pose additional questions that will be explored, in turn, in the chapters that follow: What is the meaning of selfless service in the context of low-paid labor? How do ashram hierarchies support and how do they challenge the status quo of the global order, and how does the ashram facilitate or obstruct communication across difference? What are the subtle and not so subtle ways that inequality plays out in the context of the SYVC's international community? And how does the SYVC organization relate to the larger social and

geographical worlds it inhabits in India?

Chapter Five
Wage Work and Kitchen Hands: Paid Laborers and the Karma Yoga Ethic

The whole Maya is in the kitchen.... A kitchen is the best training ground or school for developing tolerance, endurance, forbearance, mercy, sympathy, love, adaptability, and the spirit of real service for purifying one's heart and for realising the oneness of life. Every aspirant should know how to cook well. –Swami Sivananda

Introduction

In this chapter, I explore the working lives of the SYVC's paid workers – particularly, the women employed for food preparation and cleaning – in the large, international ashram in Neyyar Dam, Kerala. Most SYVC ashrams and centers around the world are supported by volunteer staff who conduct their work as karma yoga or selfless service – an integral part of their spiritual practice. However, ashrams and centers in India maintain an additional and substantial force of workers who perform cooking, cleaning, maintenance, and agricultural work in exchange for minimal daily wages. In this oldest branch of the SYVC in India, the paid workforce numbers between fifty and seventy-some people, while the volunteer staff list numbers around ten to twenty-five, during the low and high seasons, respectively.

By participating in a part of the daily life of paid kitchen workers at this ashram during five months of my fieldwork, I gained perspective on the realities of the hard work performed by these women. Through their stories, I also came to understand some of the struggles and difficulties faced in their lives as members of Kerala's large population of working poor. Because of an obligation to follow the scheduled program for volunteer staff – a requirement of my stay in the ashram – I was able to participate in only a fraction of the workday of paid workers in Kerala, and even that was curtailed by the workers themselves, who set protective limitations on my participation, revealing an affective labor of love as well as the effects of historical relations of inequality in India, both those based in caste and class, and those between

Indians and Westerners. Through structured interviews as well as informal conversations, I learned about the much longer workday that exceeded the frame set by my own participation.

While the ashram situates these women in the back rooms and damp spaces of an otherwise vibrant and lush setting, here I work to bring their labor and lives to the foreground. I place the kitchen at the heart of this chapter, to bring to life the difficult and often monotonous wage-work that sustains this part of the organization. As a person of comfortable means and relatively privileged background, I found the relational work in this setting to be rich with theoretical and ethical implications, which are also central to this chapter. I highlight these here to think through problems particular not just to ashram relations but to relations across power lines (Carrillo-Rowe 2008) in the context of contemporary globalization more generally. My own position as a foreigner in India parallels that of many voluntary staff in the SYVC, and so I share in some of the same misapprehensions and communication obstacles, not to mention the power dynamics. But because of both my anthropological training and my knowledge of Malayalam and Tamil, I was situated to perceive some aspects of relations in the SYVC that may not be obvious to other foreigners. I privilege these here, through accounts of my own encounters and the words and actions of women who befriended me across difference.

In this chapter I observe that the division of work at the ashram creates a classed system of labor in an organization that in principle strives to include all members in every kind of work. Rather than being a problem particular to the SYVC, this structure piggy-backs on prevailing relations of inequality determined by a long colonial and postcolonial history in India, existing global inequality, and local poverty and job scarcity in the Indian locations. Yet, the nature of the unequal division of labor between paid workers and volunteer staff contrasts with the organization's commitment to selfless service and seems in conflict with the stated goals of

peace and wellbeing for all – goals invoked not only by the organization at large in formal literature and teachings, but by individual members in one-on-one interviews. Understanding the encounters and missed opportunities behind this contradiction, I argue, can help us to understand the processes that make inequalities invisible and tolerable to people of privilege in our global condition at large and may help us to increase opportunities for meaningful exchange across power lines.

In what follows, I give some background on the Neyyar Dam ashram's history and how it came to be that an organization with a strong ethic of karma yoga, or work without reward, now employs such a large force of paid workers. Next, I bring into focus a few scenes from my months of kitchen work at the Neyyar Dam ashram to offer a picture of the working lives of ashram workers and the way they invited me into relationship. I theorize these relations building on the insights and advances of feminist ethnographic literature and literature on domestic service. Following this, I describe a day in the life of a paid ashram worker, whom I call Maya, to give a clearer idea of the workday as a whole. Finally, I turn to interviews with volunteer staff in the Kerala ashram for a deeper understanding of how relations of inequality are justified and sometimes simply overlooked in the Kerala ashram. These narratives have something to teach us about the way that both a spiritual movement focused on the individual and the larger cultural economy of global capitalism allow members in positions of privilege to circumvent problematic ethical questions. This invites concluding thoughts about how the ethic and structure of karma yoga and the employment of paid workers at the ashram create opportunities, as yet mostly untapped, for meaningful exchange across difference.

Paid Workers in a Voluntary Ashram

The SYVC organization at large foregrounds a commitment to the principle of karma yoga and emphasizes that "[a]ll teachers, helpers and full-time staff members in the organization are working on a volunteer basis," (https://www.sivananda.org/about).[72] Even so, in the Indian branches of the SYVC, all ashrams and centers are supported by paid workers, who do cooking, cleaning, washing, gardening, maintenance, and other work. It's been this way, in part, from the beginning of the first SYVC ashram in India, in 1978. The Italian acharya of SYVC's Indian branches was sent by Swami Vishnu in 1979, just months after the ashram opened, to develop the Neyyar Dam ashram on the site of this newly donated land. There were just a few buildings, which had been the structure of a medical clinic run by the land's former owner, Gopala Vaidyan, an Ayurvedic physician (senior staff member, personal communication, March 12, 2010). The acharya told me that when he arrived, there was no electricity, no telephone, and very limited accommodations. A few members of Swami Vishnu's family were there to help with cooking and general running of the ashram, but since the acharya had to put most of his energy towards developing the programs and following the ashram routine, he needed much support with the infrastructure. In those early days, they ate simple food mostly obtained from ashram land. All grinding and preparation of spices, rice, and coconut, so integral to the cuisine of Kerala, had to be done by hand, as were the planting and harvesting of many food items, which were also a primary source of income for the ashram at that time. The acharya and his small team of volunteers took in a few local workers to help with cleaning, cooking, agriculture, construction and other daily work, a natural course of action in a country where both foreigners and middle class Indians commonly employ domestic servants. In those days workers were paid only thirty rupees per month, a wage so low people described it to me as a period "without

salary," though it was likely comparable to the prevalent daily wages of the time. Workers did receive meals at least once a day, which sustained them when food was otherwise hard to come by.

In more recent years, since the ashram and its income-drawing courses have grown and expanded, it has also continued to expand the force of paid laborers and their salaries, partly in response to demands from the local community. There is a persistent problem of underemployment in Kerala (Chua 2014), and ashram authorities feel it is important given the ashram's growing wealth, relative to the community, to support the local economy in some way. Located in Thiruvananthapuram (Trivandrum) District in the southernmost region of Kerala, the village of Neyyar Dam is part of the panchayat (municipality) of Kallikkad, which had a total population in the 2011 census of 9,413. Of this population, 4,318 are defined as workers, and about two thirds of these are male; 5,095 are non-workers (censusindia.gov.in).[73]

Paid workers at the ashram now number nearly seventy (about two thirds of them women; see Figure 6), but many of the current workers are employed only during the ashram's high season, from November through March, and struggle to make ends meet during their time off. Many also have requests in for members of their family to gain employment, and in practice, hiring is often done by way of these personal and family networks. A few of the women I got to know were children or grandchildren of former workers and had taken over when their elderly relatives attained pension age or passed away, a practice that is typical for this type of work in India.

The income and other benefits provided by these jobs positively impact the village community around the ashram. In addition to salary, the ashram helps workers with medical expenses, regularly donates funds or grants loans for marriages, builds and donates houses to

workers in need, and supports small infrastructural projects (for example a public waiting shelter at the bus stand down the road from the ashram's main gate and a local nursery school owned and overseen by the ashram under the guidance of one of the elderly female Indian swamis). During the time of my research the ashram also began offering a free monthly medical clinic, open to everyone in the village, regardless of whether or not they were affiliated with the ashram. Also relatively recently, the ashram has been compelled to participate in a government program called the Provident Fund, which requires employers to contribute to a pension plan for eligible workers, ensuring improved quality of life even beyond official employment. But the institution of a paid work force has also created a subtle class system within the ashram, allowing volunteer ashram devotees to reside at the ashram without taking on jobs – like cooking and cleaning – that would normally be essential to daily life and which are central to the work of volunteers at other ashrams in the SYVC system. The bulk of the work done by paid workers is often gendered in households both in India and abroad, so it could be argued that what this division of labor really does is spare middle-class, largely foreign women from women's work. Yet, in the SYVC system, worldwide, there is at least some success at putting both women and men in cooking and cleaning roles, so that most volunteers I spoke with in the North American headquarters denied any gendered influence on who does which jobs. Still, it was clear that the Kerala ashram's female wageworkers worked long, hard hours, for less pay than their male counterparts (who tended to be employed as security guards, drivers, or grounds keepers), and also absorbed a far greater share of household labor during their time off than their male family members. These conditions reflect and are partly a product of a global political economy that has similar consequences for women throughout the world but is often compounded in the lives of poor working women of color (Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2002).

Cooking and cleaning workers (all female, except for the head cook, and during high season his male assistants) during the time of my research started their workday as early as six-thirty in the morning and ended as late as six-thirty in the evening,[74] for a daily wage less than one-fourth the cost of a night's stay at the ashram – about R86 (at that time $1.90) per day.[75] This figure is just under the World Bank's definition of poverty. According to Joseph E. Stiglitz, poverty is defined "as living on less than $2 a day, absolute or extreme poverty as living on less than $1 a day" (2006:10). But of course it doesn't account for the fact that these wages often went to support an entire family – the worker him or herself, plus two or more children and often an unemployed spouse or aging parent.

This kind of differential between workers and visitors in the tourist economy is not uncommon. Further, as the brief summary I have given here indicates, there is an unequal distribution of work and resources even within the paid work force. Not only do female kitchen workers work harder and longer hours for the same pay as women who clean, but all women at the ashram earn less than men, no matter what their jobs or responsibilities – in Neyyar Dam, usually 2,600 per month to men's 3,500. In today's world system these kinds of inequalities in proximity are commonplace, if problematic. What is unique in the ashram is that this differential exists in a setting where the very core of spiritual practice is karma yoga, defined as work without reward, which prompts an exploration of how an idealistic spiritual organization with such goals as "unity in diversity" (the organization's slogan, a refrain first made popular by Gandhi) and peace finds itself in a situation that is ethically similar to that of many large-scale transnational corporations – taking advantage of low rates for local wage work, to outsource less desirable labor. In addition, the large volumes of guests, students, and staff residing at the ashram, particularly during the tourist season, also put a strain on local resources, particularly

water and electricity, both in short supply in this dense state and region.

Karma yoga, or selfless service, is an important principle in the SYVC organization, and many volunteer staff and senior teachers say this work without reward is (sometimes begrudgingly) their primary spiritual practice. Several non-Indian volunteer participants working as staff in North America told me that they originally joined the organization with expectations of spending their days engaged in serious *sadhana* (spiritual practice) such as prolonged meditation, fasting, and other inner disciplines, only to discover most of their time is spent working – on the computer, balancing the budget, teaching, cooking, cleaning, etc. In India, senior staff may feel overworked, but because of the classed system created by the addition of wageworkers, their main responsibilities are teaching and administrative. Apart from senior managerial staff with administrative duties, most volunteer staff members escape the harried pace common to SYVC ashrams elsewhere, particularly during the burnout-inducing TTC seasons, due to the unique set-up of a divided labor force.

More than being spared from undesirable or time-consuming work, volunteer staff in India also miss out on the avowed spiritual benefits alluded to in the epigraph for this chapter. Swami Sivananda emphasizes kitchen work in particular, but he also mentions some important virtues developed through any act of selfless service: “tolerance, endurance, forbearance, mercy, sympathy, love, adaptability,” and the potential for “realising the oneness of life” (Sivanandaonline.org).[76] In my estimation, these qualities, particularly developed in relationship across economic, cultural, and other forms of difference, are precisely the opportunities offered by the ashram setting in India. Yet the current set up does not allow for many real and intimate challenges to the global status quo. As we will see below, foreign volunteer staff have few opportunities to even recognize the differences between their own standard of living and that of

workers.

It is partially due to cultural and language differences that mostly-foreign volunteers have been kept isolated from jobs reserved for paid laborers. However, there are a few occasions in the ashram when foreign and Indian guests are paired with local supervisors who speak English for simple, occasional chores like carrying firewood or outside sweeping. This work as well as some of the other less desirable jobs, like cleaning toilets and mopping floors in the main halls, is usually done by guests of the ashram who must offer just one hour of karma yoga per day as a requirement of their stay. The absence of routine kitchen work in particular and physical labor in general from the lives of volunteer staff is more conspicuous but seems mostly an accident of history – both the history of the ashram and its growing reliance on paid workers and the historical traces of colonial, postcolonial, and neoliberal India which have created a substantial population of workers willing to work for low wages. There are also strong class norms in India that influence expectations about who does which kind of work, and foreigners have long been incorporated into these expectations as members of the elite ruling class. Yet this pattern seems to go against both official and individual claims about the main spiritual purpose of karma yoga, and the value of doing all kinds of work.[77]

In many cases the difficulties faced by paid workers and the differences in lifestyle and amenities are invisible to volunteers, most of whom have not ventured much beyond the ashram walls and are often unable, because of language differences, to communicate with paid workers. I believe that investigating the gaps in understanding in such a setting may help us to understand – beyond pure economic factors – how relations of inequality are produced and reproduced. In what follows, I aim to make visible both the realities of kitchen work[78] and the subtle dynamics of relations across difference that became important in the course of my participant observation

in the kitchen.

Gender, Pain, and the Embodiment of Difference

On a typical day, it is eight in the morning by the time I head over to join the kitchen workers, just about an hour and a half after they have reported to work. Meditation and staff meeting are over, and I cut through the inside hallway of the ashram's main building to the kitchen. More often than not during this rainy season, there is a large puddle halfway down the first staircase, where the water has found its way inside. I tiptoe alongside it, taking in the musty smell of a damp burlap sack that has been used to partially mop up the drip. Treading carefully through the staff dining room past remnants of food left over from last night's dinner, I am careful not to slip as I make my way to the next set of stairs and descend into the warm kitchen. Arun-Chetan, once the ashram's head cook but now seemingly retired or semi-retired, sits on top of a table against the wall, drinking tea, and Shyam, the main cook, is standing, as usual, next to the wood burners under the large blackened chimney. He stirs the rice as a long hose attached to an outside sink gushes water for drinking into a pot already set over the flames. "Good morning! *Sukham-aanno*? (Are you well?)" I call out.

"Mmm," he murmurs, as I round the corner to greet my *chechimar* (plural form of *chechi,* a term to address respected older women, literally elder sisters) – all paid workers from the local village area who are graciously allowing me to join in their morning kitchen work as part of my research. The women are seated, facing one another, on burlap sacks scattered around the edges of the room – a naturally lit space about five feet by eight feet at the short end of a narrow L that forms the path to the main kitchen. During this low season at the ashram, there are six or seven women in the room, though at the peak of the tourist season the space is crammed with thirteen

or more women, who occupy every bit of the floor. Adjoining the longer side of the L is a tile basin about two by fourteen feet – large enough for workers to climb inside and scrub the large pots and pans used to cook for the ashram's high-season populations. The short end of the L is rimmed all around with deep shelves, which at week's beginning are filled to overflowing with fresh vegetables and at week's end contain just odds and ends, often in various states of decomposition due to the heat and humidity.

Figure 12 Kitchen workers pose for a picture (with author, third from left) during an afternoon break, June 2010

Figure 13 Workers wash dishes after preparing breakfast, July 2010

Nirmala-chechi, round-faced and smiling as usual, has her back to the open door at the corner of the L but is scooted further from it than usual because rain occasionally slants inwards and has wet the floor behind her. Her legs, which consistently pain her, are stretched out awkwardly in front of her, and she balances a tray between them. Maya-chechi and Bindu-chechi huddle together on a shared sack, with their legs folded neatly under them. The two of them turn their heads up, in unison, as I come in.

“Hi,” we greet each other. “Have you had tea?” they ask me, a standard greeting in this context. “Yes, and you?” “We did.”[79] Shyamala-chechi, the oldest and longest-employed of the group, probably in her mid-sixties, swiftly spreads an extra sack over a damp patch of floor between herself and Meena-chechi, then tosses me a slightly hard kunnyappam, a lightly sweet fried dough ball leftover from last night’s *prasad* (consecrated food), which I eat.[80]

“Where’s Kumari’s knife?” Maya-chechi, rail thin, and just past forty, stands up stiffly as she says this, looking for it on the shelf behind her. Her back is clearly in pain after an hour sitting bent over her cutting board. Once she finds the knife, she tosses it, clanging, onto the floor

in front of me and then nimbly gathers her legs under herself as she sits to continue her work. Today they are whacking away at some *kappa* (tapioca/cassava). They first peel the rough brown skin and then, holding it steady in the palm of one hand, they hack into the hard tuber up to the thick cord that runs through its middle, taking off chunks about the size of a section of orange. This is later boiled and then mashed with coconut, tumeric, cumin, and salt. Most families who eat kappa would also include some green chilies and garlic, but these are omitted here at the ashram because of dietary rules that prohibit garlic and discourage spicy food.[81]

On this day I have been working with the ladies in the kitchen for four weeks and am still not adept at all the chopping and peeling techniques they use. After some debate, they decide to let me peel some of the kappa and pass me one. I try, but find I'm unable to do it efficiently and suggest I can probably figure out the chopping instead. I try to follow Maya-chechi and set about it for a while, until Sharada corrects me "No, like this." Kappa is so tough and brittle that it's hard to know how much strength to apply with each swing of the wrist. Several times I cut all the way through the cord, or just to it, then have to pick around it, whereas the others seem to end up with ragged but distinct cords, chipped away at in odd and disproportionate pieces. Suddenly, with one hit, I manage to arc the knife up and slice through the kappa to my finger. I hit the tip of my left index finger, on a sharp diagonal going up and partially through the nail. The room stops, and the people nearest me crane their heads to inspect the damage. Even Shyam comes in from the other room, and all of them urge me to apply some turmeric powder, a natural antiseptic that is readily available in the kitchen. I get up and rinse my finger in one of the outside sinks but decide to forgo the turmeric in favor of an antibiotic cream. I have one with anti-sting medicine in it that I think will take away the throbbing that has already set in, and I'm afraid the turmeric

won't have the same pain-dulling quality. Even so, I am self-conscious about rejecting the medicine most of them use regularly.

Maya-chechi accompanies me to my room, since I need two hands to undo the lock. When we return they insist I sit and rest for the next ten minutes or so, being in any case ineffective at the skill of the moment. "*Paavam*," they all look on. "Poor thing." Sharada brings me a cup of water to sip. Later, I peel and slice beets, carrots, and cabbage for a salad. When it is time to clean up, I get up to empty my tray into the compost buckets outside, but Shyamala doesn't allow it. "You'll slip and fall," she says, protective as usual. "It's raining." The rest of them go back and forth, in and out the side door, and a couple of women tie scraps of old cloth over their heads topped with shards of plastic carry-bags, to protect their heads from the rain as they go out to start their sweeping.

I am allowed to help with putting away the dishes, while two chechis sit inside the large basin, squatting on three-inch high stools, surrounded by tea kettles, dirty dishes and pots, which they scrub in turn. One washes. One rinses. Again, I walk gingerly in my bare feet over the tile floor as I put the still-dripping steel vessels in their assigned places – a large storage closet at the far end of the long part of our chopping-room L and a bigger food pantry that also holds some of the nicer vessels and utensils, inside the main kitchen. Once in a while, I slip on an unseen patch of water or a food spill, and then catch myself, feeling my back stiffen as the muscles grip to keep me upright. Pain is common fare in this work.

On another day, when Shyamala cut her own finger, I brought her some tea tree oil and a bandage, since there weren't any within reach. As I came down from my room, joking "Ok, here comes Dr. Kumari," wounds came out of the woodwork. Maya-chechi had what could only be described as a hole in one of her fingers, in the process of healing, but certainly infected. Jaya

had cuts on her ankles and another bad one on her knuckle, each extended out to me, in turn, for the application of tea tree oil. Shyamala's wound of the day sat between two older ones on different parts of her hand. One of Maya-chechi's toenails was black with a painful fungus and often caused her to suck her lips or hobble in pain. None of these cuts or scrapes ever had time to heal, because of the continuous work, which kept their hands wet and active. Most days, the conversations in the kitchen were punctuated with talk of aches, pains, illness, and hardship. Once I asked Maya-chechi about her back pain, and she conceded it's "ok now." But Shyamala-chechi cut in, "Our *lives* are pain-alone, Kumari!" (*Nammodaya jiivitham veedanai-taan!*)

And mine, it became clear through our interactions, is not. My hands were soft and unmarked until this work, and I became fascinated with the daily changes brought about by it. I got small slits up and down my index finger, which I used as a cutting surface when slicing vegetables for salad or curries. The beet root and green plantain that are staples in the ashram diet stained my hands in dark, patchy blotches, and many slight misses with the knife cut grooves into the palms of my hands and up and down my thumbs and fingers. Despite my many requests to do so, they would not allow me to sit and wash dishes. "This work is not for you," they said.

I reflected on this in my notes the night I cut my hand, chopping kappa. "One has to wonder why *my* hand is so important…." The next line of my notes recounts how I came back from my room, newly bandaged, and told them in response to their concern that yes, the finger was still in pain. To this, Radha said that I would understand the *real* pain later. All but one of them are mothers and have borne not only the pain of childbirth, but the daily pains of living in poverty, with little support from husbands or former husbands. They have come to this work because they need the money to feed and clothe their children (sometimes grandchildren), and almost all have experienced abandonment in one way or another. Suicide is common among men

in their economic bracket in Kerala, and so are alcoholism, emigration for work, or simply fleeing when the going gets rough. As Jocelyn Chua reports in her 2009 dissertation, Kerala has some of the "… highest levels of registered unemployment, underemployment, and educated unemployment in India; the highest per capita consumption of alcohol in the country; and high and continually escalating divorce rates" (Chua 2009: 51). According to an article in The Hindu,

> [w]ork participation rate of Kerala in 2001 [was] 32.30 per cent as compared to 31.43 per cent in 1991.... Female work participation rate in 2001 [was] 15.38 per cent as compared to 15.85 per cent in 1999 (2004).

Later, as I listened to the women's stories one-on-one, I learned of husbands who fled when a second or third daughter was born, some who took their own lives when unemployment lasted too long, others who worked out of state but never sent home the money, and a few who were physically present but could not find work or else "drank everything they earned."

Radha recanted her allusion to childbirth pain almost immediately after she made it, saying I'd get what she meant after some time. When I indicated that I'd understood, she said: "You should remember us when the real pain comes," a statement that reached right into my heart. I had already expressed to them my desire for a child in response to their many questions during our initial days together, but I found it hard to explain concerns about money that made my husband and I want to wait at least until my dissertation research was over. In fact, I often worried that my words seemed dishonest or else uncomprehending of my significant resources and privilege. This was one of many subjects that forced me to consider the limits of our mutual understanding: it felt out of place to speak sincerely about my own fears, worries, and desires in the context of the kind of hardships they faced on a daily basis. Yet, to answer them honestly as a friend, those were the only words I had. Despite my significant access to resources, education, and many luxuries, I still felt poor by my own family's upper-middle-class standards, a problem

of perspective that is all too common in the middle-class worlds of globalized capitalism. Over time I came to interpret this very relativity of feelings connected to issues of financial security as one of the key problems facing a globalized spiritual organization. Often, dedicated staff members on the volunteer side conceived of their own socio-economic status as one of renunciation and austerity, even as they maintained a quality of life quite a bit more luxurious than that of many paid workers who service the ashram. Nonetheless, I was welcomed into friendship and grew to consider these women as dear and treasured loved ones. Radha's words made us all grow wistful for a moment, imagining how I would remember this moment during one of the most important experiences of my life, yet to come. I told them I would surely remember them when the pain came. As it turned out, I gave birth to my first child about one year later, and they were among the first people I called with the news.

My inexperience, at that time, with this valued rite in the lifespan of a Malayalee woman surely informed the protective doting of some of the chechis who are closer to my age but have nearly grown children of their own. This gap in experience probably made me seem much younger than I was. Later, when I became pregnant, they rejoiced and also expressed relief that I was pursuing this important life experience (perhaps some had still doubted my desire to do so). Yet they told me often that the small, sharp pains I experienced as my body stretched to accommodate the baby were just the beginning of a life set aside for someone else. Hereafter, they said, there will be much pain. Still, they seemed more tender with me, even before my pregnancy, than with the few childless young women among the workers at the ashram, indicating another complex impetus behind their protective distance. My very expectation to manage my fertility, deferring conception until I had advanced far enough with my educational goals to ensure completion of my degree, marked a classed privilege that rendered fragile any

notion of a shared struggle on the basis of being women. Yet, so many of our daily interactions revealed our desire to connect across certain shared experiences, which were often gendered.

During the first part of my stay at the ashram, a young unmarried woman, Lakshmi, was among the group in the kitchen. On days when we had peeled and cut green plantain for *avial* (a mixed vegetable dish in a thick coconut cream) or another *koothu* (thick vegetarian stew), Lakshmi would go to the back sink and scrub her hands with the pieces of coconut fiber we used to clean dishes. I asked about it – whether everyone does it, and whether it's necessary – worrying I had missed a cue and would be seen as inappropriate for leaving my hands a mess. The plantain skin leaves behind a sticky black residue that doesn't come off easily in water. You can, they said, but it's not a problem for us. I was equally unworried and indicated this with a shrug. Radha, in typical bawdiness, told me that it was because Lakshmi was not married yet. Before marriage they worry about keeping their hands clean and pretty, she said. "But now we all have dirty hands, right Kumari?"

"Oh, isn't that right!?" came Prema's exclamation, and we all laughed.

But in Lakshmi's absence, some women also complained about her lack of discipline, saying she "conducts running, not working," spending her time flitting between different work stations at the ashram, to chit-chat with other workers. In my observation, she *did* tend to disappear for extended lengths of time, particularly right before the end of a shift, when it was time to do the less desirable work of washing dishes and outdoor sweeping, the exact jobs they never allowed me to perform. When I wondered aloud if they wouldn't resent me for not doing these jobs, they said it was different because I have a good character. They called me "paavam," a word with many meanings, but here, unassuming or innocent/harmless (Osella and Osella 2000:127). "You are [willing] to work," Maya-chechi commended me. "You never say no to us,

whatever we say."

It was true I would do almost anything they asked – in fact I was forever asking to do more than they allowed – but the terms of my participation were my own. I had come to this work out of interest, not obligation. However surprised and appreciative they were at my eagerness to sit among them and learn their work, they spared me from its rougher aspects. I appreciated their doting and kindness, but their protective affection seemed to be at least partly informed by a longer history of relations between people and places that were broadly represented in our encounter. There were bonds of affection between us, but these were also colored by the steep inequality between our life circumstances and by a prevailing hierarchy at the ashram as well as in the wider order that encompassed our relationship.

A long-time worker, Sharada, clearly and repeatedly articulated the power inherent in the affection regularly demonstrated to foreigners at the ashram. Interviewing her in the cool shade of the main dining hall one afternoon, where she and several other cleaning workers had been lying down to rest and chat after their mid-day meal, I asked: "Have you talked with or made friendships with any foreigners who come here?"

"Oh, yes!" she and another worker who was listening in on our interview answered enthusiastically.

Laughing in surprise, I asked: "How was that, given the language barriers?"

S: "They'll say 'How are you?' We'll say 'Ok, *sukham*' [Malayalam for well]. '"Fine," [English]' we'll say. That much is good, right?"

Sharada's friend in the background started to explain that even if most workers can't respond, they understand much of what foreigners say to them in English, an exaggeration I didn't question. Sharada cut in.

S: "It's because of their coming only that we have jobs and are eating, right?

Isn't it only because foreigners are coming: our getting money; our buying food and our getting money? So, that's why we should behave towards them with much love/affection (*sneham*). And towards us, too, there will be much affection (from their side). 'This year we came. Next year we should come again with them,' they'll think. Like that, when they have a good experience…"

LKM: "So, for you that's why there's affection – by way of them only you're…[pauses, thinking] living."

"Living!" The two joined in this immediate response.

LKM: "What about you? Why are they affectionate towards you?"

S: "They love us like brothers and sisters. We love them so that they'll come… give money…. Swami gives us a salary, and gives us food. If they don't come, we won't have a job. We and our children will starve. *Only* if they come can we live."

LKM: "Ah, I understand. That's why you show them affection… but do *they* also show affection towards you?"

After the last go-round, I worried that Sharada had not understood me or that my phrasing was incorrect, so here I emphasized the case endings, to be sure she understood. Sharada nodded and acknowledged, "When they see [when we pass or meet], there will be affection [smiling]. That's it…." But again she moved back to what she wanted to communicate – the way that her own affection was tied to her job stability and ability to provide for her family.

S: "But see, if we show that affection only, they'll come back. [They'll leave with a good impression.] Then, having gone home, worked hard, and made money… they'll come back. The next year, they'll come back. They'll spend money. We'll take on work. Swami will give us money and food. We'll raise our children… [She says all this is a matter-of-fact way – a list of cause and effect.] Isn't it? Isn't that the fact? Swami builds us houses, no? When we get sick, he gives us money for medicine, right? See, only if they come all that happens, right? … See, so only if we cook them nice food, make everything ready, serve it with happiness, then only when they go back to their country, they'll say: 'In that Sivananda Ashram in Kerala, there are nice people, food…. Everyone there is nice…' they'll say to their friends, and then the next year they'll come back with their friends."

When Sharada did speak of affection coming her way, it was through the person of the ashram's acharya. He was equivalent, she told me in no uncertain terms, to the ashram itself. In fact, both Sharada and her friend vehemently emphasized that they did not wish to

contemplate what the ashram would be without this senior-most disciple of Swami Vishnudevananda, who had just completed his seventieth birthday.

> S: "Even if we die, he should be here. That is… only with him can poor people like us live…. He should live to be 150 years old! That is, even if we die, those poor people who come in the future will also need Swami."

In their recent study of domestic workers in Kolkata, Raka Ray and Seemin Qayun observe that what they call "domestic servitude" confuses and complicates the conceptual divide between

> family and work, custom and contract, affection and duty, the home and the world precisely because the hierarchical arrangements and emotional registers of home and family must coexist with those of workplace and contract in a capitalist world (Ray and Qayum 2009:3).

SYVC branches in India share many characteristics of homes and are, for all intents and purposes, home to the people – both foreign and Indian cosmopolitans – who reside there as voluntary staff, particularly those long-term staff who serve in supervisory and managerial roles, like the acharya and the directors and managers under him. Therefore, the roles and relations characteristic of those between non-resident paid workers and resident volunteers share something in common with relations between domestic workers and their employers in the home – roles that entangle the issues and entities of "family and work, custom and contract, affection and duty." In their book, Ray and Qayum describe what they call a "culture of servitude," which "is akin in some respects to Pierre Bourdieu's *habitus*… not only does habitus organize practices and their perception but also converts these perceptions and practices into internalized dispositions" (Ray and Qayum 2009:4).

The women in the kitchen carry vegetable scraps to and from the compost piles down a slippery hill twice a day, scrub cooking and serving vessels and dishes from guest rooms, then scrub the large sink and mop the floor, carry large vats of boiled drinking water to different parts of the ashram, stand over hot burners frying pappadam (crispy thin cracker-type dish to

accompany rice) or making prasad, and slouch over cutting boards for hours at a time, feeling back, knee, ankle and neck pain. But it is work to which they are accustomed. Most grew up in homes with minimal conveniences, where cooking is done over wood stoves, water is often carried from some distance, and all of this still needs to be tended to before and after work each day.

My inexperience with all this during my time in the kitchen showed in ways I was not even conscious of, much as an accent when speaking a foreign language, a patterning or habitus that is embodied in everyday actions, and fluency in routine motions, as described by Mauss in 1934 (2007) and updated by Bourdieu in 1972 (2006). After my marriage, my in-laws, constantly told me to "be careful," "don't slip," or prohibited me from helping with cooking work, saying "your hand will go." They framed my body itself as simply unequipped for the daily work of living. This is a habitus of non-doing, a habitus of in-experience, or leisure, sprung from a lifetime of access to the technological apparatuses of household labor – washing machines, blenders, and the like. And it is a habitus that gets read in terms of the classed position that honed it (Bourdieu 1984). Moreover, the culture of servitude that informs the structure of relations at the ashram constrains interactions across difference such that workers must assume an enormous physical and affective burden in relation to volunteers, a caring and doting work that is part and parcel of the service relationship. Even if I wanted to show affection and solidarity by joining in their work, it was often not a line I was allowed to cross.

In their co-edited volume on domestic service in South and Southeast Asia, Sara Dickey and Kathleen Adams present essays illustrating "the ways that identities are constructed through everyday negotiations" (2000:12). These essays present "relational images of identity – notions of self and other that are constructed in relation and opposition to one another within hegemonic

social systems" (2000:2), otherwise known as "'we-they' distinctions" (2000:10). Dickey's own essay in the same volume shows these through an analysis of narratives of both employers and domestic workers in Madurai who each construct themselves as morally superior to the other group. Dickey argues that

> these images [of self and other] are intriguingly complementary, often very nearly the reverse of one another, suggesting that actors feel parallel stresses that are perhaps rooted in the class system as a whole. But these images also arise, crucially, from the negotiations of individual and intimate contact (Dickey and Adams 2000:55).

In the SYVC context, these we-they distinctions likewise seem to arise from the everyday face-to-face negotiations produced within the service relationship, and in this context they are often waged in terms of foreigner versus Indian, bringing echoes of colonial relations to bear on contemporary dynamics. But relations in the ashram are further complicated by the existence of several tiers of participants (as detailed in Chapter Two). There are foreign and Indian guests, foreign and Indian voluntary staff, a handful of Indians who do work similar to voluntary staff for pay, and many paid Indian workers. While I did not conduct research among guests, the attitudes and expectations about servitude likely would differ according to the position of those being served and their relative familiarity and comfort with domestic service.

As Sharada's narrative makes clear, the culture of servitude between workers and paying guests echoes that in the broader tourist economy, with workers aiming to please paying customers in order to encourage repeat business. Yet, actual interactions with guests are sporadic and limited. Durable bonds of affection are more clearly felt from the senior most acharya, who is seen as a benefactor, protector, and provider. But not all senior staff had the same level of appreciation as the acharya for the struggles of workers or even much opportunity to cross the divide, perhaps owing to the habitus of inexperience I described above.

In my experience and observation, foreign staff in the ashram were often given the kind of

deference one would give a child – excused from difficult or unfamiliar work because it was easier for local people to assume the burden than to wait as foreigners struggled to handle tasks basic to living in Kerala. An essay by Louise Kidder in the Dickey and Adams volume describes a similar dynamic between expatriates and their domestic workers in Bangalore. Expatriates relied on Indian servants because they "were ill-equipped and inept in varying degrees at managing the practical necessities of living in India" (2000:210). Kidder argues that this created a circular power dynamic wherein the masters were in effect dependent on those who served them. Yet the power relationships suggested by history and by the roles of the individuals concerned in the ashram fall more readily into roles of client to patron than parent to child (Tellis-Nayak 1983), as can be heard in Sharada's testimony about the ashram's acharya whom she called just Swami, signaling deference and respect. Indeed, long-term volunteers in administrative and leadership roles sometimes spoke in paternalistic tones about paid workers, as we shall see below. This is much closer to what Rachel Tolen saw in her research on servants and the railway workers who employ them in a government-provided bungalow colony in Chennai, Tamil Nadu. Tolen observed that "[w]hile together the railway colony forms a kind of community, it is in many ways one that is bifurcated by class. Officers' families and servants' families form two distinct classes in this community, and in some respects, two distinct social worlds" (1996:1-2) . Further, the extent to which the labor of paid workers contributes to the lives and leisure of volunteers in the SYVC is considerable and seems out of proportion to foreigners' actual ineptness with the skills of every day living. Most could easily learn to care for themselves, especially in today's India, where many of the appliances foreigners are used to are much more readily available than they were during Kidder's research in the 1970s.

One day during my first week in the kitchen when the supervisor, Rabindar, was watching

us cut small pieces of green mango for a pickle, I told him I was still not very fast at chopping. At home, with a cutting board and chef's knife, I am quick and skilled in the kitchen, but in the ashram kitchen, the majority of dicing and slicing happened on an upturned knife. We balanced the handle against a small block of wood and secured it under an ankle, keeping one knee flexed to achieve this, then grabbed handfuls of green beans or individual chunks of larger vegetables and pressed them down into the blade, allowing the cut pieces to fall into a large square tray with rounded sides.

Rabindar was quick with his reply. "Don't worry – after one or two months you'll be fast. When they all came in they were all very slow. They were like this." Here, he picked up a piece of mango from my tray and braced the knife awkwardly over it, wobbling as he sliced through it.

"No!" They all protested. "He's just saying that." I countered that they must have learned from the time they were young, to which Rabindar doubled back. "Yes, it's true.... I taught them all."

I replied, perhaps with a bit more defiance than I should, that it was more likely their mothers who taught them, and the ladies all joined in: "Of course it was!" Maya-chechi, quickly becoming my closest ally among the group, remarked, "See? She understands," and the others nodded agreement, responding, I think, both to my solidarity as a woman, resisting the male claim of responsibility for their skills, and also to my expressed longing, as a relatively privileged foreigner, to understand their struggles.

The complicated nexus of relations I describe here, the incompatibility of our struggles, needs, and difficulties, and the mutual affection that underlies our efforts to connect and build a friendship across difference has been described and critiqued with considerable nuance by feminist anthropologists. To be sure, the theoretical advantage of feminist anthropology lies not

in its suitability for writing women, as such. Men and the category of gender itself are equally important to the field. The advantage lies rather in the ability of a feminist anthropological approach to reflect critically on the representation of gendered fields and to problematize the assumption of gendered authority in the positioning of any researcher (Moore 1988:6). This positioning muddies the waters of discursive generalization with the particular and intimate details of individual experience (Abu-Lughod 1993). Such details may indeed call attention to shared histories and shared experience, the generalization of which helps to figure coalitional resistance, but the production of this generalization remains always forefront as an imaginative construction.

As Henrietta Moore articulates in her essay "Feminism and Anthropology: The Story of a Relationship," "[t]he privileged relationship between female ethnographer and female informant depends on the assumption of a universal category of 'woman'" (Moore 1988:7) and that overlooks the ways that gender articulates with other aspects of identity such as class and race. Kamala Visweswaran, building her case for a feminist anthropology calls

> for a critical feminist epistemology that finds its stakes, as with other interested and subversive epistemologies, in limited location, and, as Haraway puts it, 'situated knowledge.' This feminist way of knowing sees the process of positioning itself as an epistemological act. (Visweswaran 1994:48)

Likewise, Martha Macintyre's experience recalled in the essay "Fictive kinship or mistaken identity?" carries a warning about assuming proximity on the basis of gendered experience. Macintyre writes of her initial discomfort on learning that Depo-Provera injections, which had been banned in her native Australia, were being given to women in Tubetube Island where she was conducting research. During her research, she tried to find out about the side effects these women experienced, and they "'laughed heartily and made jokes about pregnancies that had been 'unexpected and additional results of some particular activity'" (Macintyre

1993:50). These were the kinds of side effects that concerned them! “But behind their mirth,” Macintyre observes,

> lies the grim difference between their life expectancy and mine, and their realistic views of the possibilities for dramatic change in their generation, or even for their daughters. Faced with the choice between contraceptive pills, inter-uterine devices and sterilisation, some women on Tubetube believed that the risks were minimal compared with the risk of another pregnancy. In a country where women still die in childbirth as a result of minor complications, their views were well founded. The discomforts of fluid retention or headaches, for example, are ludicrous in a population where malaria is endemic and people are accustomed to living with the debilitating effects of chronic illness. (Macintyre 1993:50-51).

Macintyre’s lessons in fieldwork serve as a useful caution against gendered assumptions of solidarity, even if transnational feminist coalition building is an important goal. Because I read Carrillo-Rowe’s work on be-longing as I struggled, in the beginning of my fieldwork, to make sense of my place among these very poor women and of our growing mutual affection, her idea of a feminist politics of relations as a “process of leaning and tipping toward the others to whom [one] belongs” (2010:26) became an important metaphor for reflection.

“She *gets* it!” Maya said, in response to my sharp reply to Rabindar. Her teasing was friendly, but in affirmations of understanding like this, she articulated a suspicion – tentative and permeable though it may be – that I did not, could not understand. I too worried about being misunderstood and sought to make clear to them that I am no stranger to hard work, mostly because of the palpable value placed on discipline and work in Kerala, which, resonated with my own gendered experiences growing up in a Protestant middle-class Midwestern family. In both official research sites and other social encounters in South India, I have observed the way that foreign women who sleep late, don’t know how to cook, and appear unkempt are regarded with a fascination bordering on disgust, and my own inner impulses compelled me to avoid this association.

"In our ashram in Canada" – I told them more than once – "I usually cook for two hundred people with just two or three other staff." My own arms are marked with two deep scars I earned during summer and Christmas seasons spent in that hot kitchen. That work is familiar, even routine. But in Kerala my technique was at first as wobbly as Rabindar's caricature. I longed to connect with them and to be recognized as a woman, experienced in managing a kitchen and a home. But even as our friendship developed over the months that followed, I never escaped most of the protective limitations set during my first weeks in the kitchen. Later, my pregnancy became an added excuse for their care and doting. But I felt it was ultimately the pervasiveness of difference that imposed the limitations on what work they would allow me to perform.

Tellingly, Jillu, a woman with whom I had slightly awkward relations – she seemed to mistrust my research and often responded to my attempts at clarifying speedy dialogue with simplifications that felt condescending – asked me one day when I was trying once again to get in on the dishwashing routine: "How would it be, Kumari, if we asked you like that, to sit and do this work? How would it look, and what would [they/you] think?"[82] Her question revealed a rift, imagined and real, that divides these paid ashram workers – these kitchen and cleaning workers – from the mostly-foreign volunteer staff and guests of the ashram. The rift has been allowed to stand un-breached for so long that it looms, real and important in our expectations about who does what and who serves whom. Jillu's question made it clear, at least from her perspective, that my place was on the side of the rift that did and should not concern itself with scrubbing heavy dishes. At the same time, I also felt their longing across that rift to me, especially in contexts where I became an intermediary in their exchanges with other foreigners.

One morning when I got to the kitchen, I brought a stack of dirty cups from the morning staff meeting. I approached the sink to wash them, and Maya-chechi saw I was coming and

called out to me in greeting. As I finished the dishes and came in, there was the usual scramble to find me a knife. The only one available was dull and awkward, but I used it until one of the women moved on to another section of the ashram for cleaning work. That morning, when I arrived they were finishing up chopping an assortment of vegetables for avial, and since it was unclear what was needed, I just watched until it was time to move on. Soon it was time to start the beets. There was a short discussion, when Shyam stuck his head in and asked if we hadn't served beetroot yesterday. We ascertained "no; cabbage," and then proceeded. I set about peeling beets along with one other woman, while the rest picked up some that had been peeled on an earlier shift, beginning the tedious work called "*kotti-ariyuha*," (to cut with a pecking motion) effectively mincing beets with a staggered ex-ing move of the knife. First you must quickly chop several random lines across the top of the peeled beet, with a hacking motion of the wrist – the beet held in the palm of your other hand. Then you turn the beet slightly so the knife hits at another angle and do it again, and then again at yet another angle. The harder you swing the knife, the more efficient you'll be, since your strokes go deeper into the vegetable. Then, in very fine slices, you cut perpendicular to the grid of X-shapes you've made in the first part of the process, slicing off tiny bits of beet which are later added to a *thoran* (a stir-fry of vegetables with fresh coconut*)*, or in this case with small red beans to go with the coconut-rich avial. As with much of the work, this mincing is a bit dangerous, and on this day it was Shyamala who cut her hand pretty badly. She yelped in pain, then promptly went out to rinse and medicate her wound before returning to work.

At some point in this process, I looked up and saw that a woman "from foreign" (as I recorded it in my notes, thinking in an apt but non-specific Malayalam-English) was standing outside the door to the kitchen drinking tea. Usually this part of the ashram is relatively reserved

from contact with guests, who keep to the main grounds and buildings used for classes and meals. But occasionally someone will wander by and notice the room. At first this woman watched passively, but suddenly I became aware that Nirmala-chechi needed my attention. The woman was speaking to her with a look of concern, and Nirmala had no idea what she was saying.

"What did you say?" I asked. "She didn't understand you."

"I told her the skins will come off a lot faster if you boil them."

"Yeah, but then they'd be boiled," I said. I explained that we were chopping these for a stir-fry and it was important they be raw.

She seemed frustrated now, as she repeated that it would be *much* faster to take the skins off if we boiled them. She watched for a short time more and then moved on, most likely summoned by the bell for the morning asana class. When the woman left, the kitchen ladies asked what she had said and my response: "We know!" It was clear from her body language and tone that she was feeling frustrated by our seeming ignorance as to how to skin a beet or my stubbornness in not accepting her advice, and they wanted to know what it was all about.

When I repeated our exchange, they laughed and commended me, "Kumari is a Malayalee!" Then someone ascertained: "You're on our side, aren't you?" I came back with an emphatic "Yes!" and Maya told me I always have to stay on their side and not go to the other side. I promised as such, happy to have the opportunity to formally declare my allegiance.[83]

The space between these two communities, the rough edges that form its borders, and the gnarled roots of servitude, hospitality, and privilege that form their structural ground were the primary terrain of my research work. I tread daily across this uneven space, "leaning and tipping" to one side and the other, in the balancing work of forming and maintaining relations, but it was often clear that I leaned from the opposite side of a gulf defined by privileges that

were embodied and obvious to all. In fact, even if, as the above scene tells it, I was often called "a Malayalee," or "one of us," I was also marked clearly, though endearingly, in other conversations as an "in-law," a *natthu* – family but not quite family. My husband, who barely knew their names, though he did share a long history with some of the older workers because of having spent two previous years as a volunteer in the ashram, was the "blood relative" in this case. After consistent efforts to be part of their work and lives, my ability to speak and understand Malayalam in combination with my status as a foreign national did allow me some level of interiority to their group which would not likely have been granted to another foreigner or to a Malayalee of markedly different class standing. Nonetheless, my continued sense of distance and privilege shows what a difficult rift this was to breach. In the next section, I tell the story of Maya, to bring home the daily reality on the workers' side.

A Worker's Day

Maya-chechi has worked for the SYVC in Kerala for seven years. She was first hired as a seasonal employee, not long after her husband left in the wake of the birth of their third daughter. Kerala has one of the highest sex ratios in India – 1058 females to every 1000 males, according to the most recent census (www.censusindia.gov.in) – but girl children are still a burden for most families because of expectations that the girl's family will contribute a substantial dowry of land, gold, and other goods to that of her spouse at the time of marriage. Shortly after Maya started work at the ashram, her father, who had been helping her to care for the children, passed away suddenly, and she became solely responsible for her three daughters and aging mother. Maya's mother, elderly but healthy, took on some side jobs cleaning people's homes, and she also

brought in what she could, but mostly it was just enough to buy a little fish for the evening meal, perhaps a packet of milk, or some vegetables.

When Maya's husband left, he more than doubled her burden, because she went from being at home full time to full-time work and also had to assume all of the responsibilities of planning, saving, and worrying that go into being a single parent (Hochschild 1989) . No doubt her emotional burden was greatly expanded also by the stress of fending for all kinds of needs as a woman without the protective power of a husband or father to back her. Many households in Kerala are divided such that men do the shopping for provisions and most work outside the house, and women do the cooking, laundry and indoor work. It can be challenging to go out after dark, particularly by bus, and most women consider it improper to be out in the streets after sunset, so that just attaining basic provisions after working a full day can be impossible without some help. Even so, some workers, like Sharada, who spoke at length above about affection, find their workload just as great even when their husbands are there at home. When I asked Sharada to describe for me a typical day, she told me that she wakes at five thirty to prepare tea, breakfast, and also the main midday meal for her husband before she goes to work as a sweeping and cleaning worker at eight. When she gets home a little after four, she sweeps the house and prepares the evening meal.

"You do all of this with no help?" I affirmed, and when she agreed, I asked: "What does your husband do?" She had already explained that he has work only a few days a month, though in those few days he earns about half of what Sharada makes at her full-time job.

"Husband… if there's no work, he'll just sit idle/alone saying 'Hara-hara, Siva-siva,'" she joked, clapping her hands. The allusion indicates he seems to think he has nothing better to do than sing (devotional) songs, though to be sure, he does not actually spend his day in prayer.

Maya's day, like Sharada's, starts in the dark. She sleeps with her two oldest daughters on the floor of the second bedroom in a small house, newly built and loaned to her by the ashram, just down the road from the main gate. Her mother and youngest daughter sleep on a single wooden bed frame without mattress in the front bedroom. The bed, she explained when I first visited, came to them as a birthday gift for her youngest daughter from a family that sponsors them in America. This daughter attends a school run by a Christian organization, and through the school, she was matched with a family in the United States who send small amounts of money and exchange letters in English with the girl and her family. When I visited the house that first time and spent the night, in addition to being given the bed to sleep in, I read the letters and saw pictures of the family, saved in an album, as part of a typical routine with overnight guests. In homes with married children, the albums are often professionally created ones showcasing wedding rituals, but here Maya's book contained a few snapshots sent by former guests at the ashram and these letters from a family in Minnesota.

Before the sun comes up, Maya and her daughters walk to the nearby dam to have a bath. They had washed and returned, carrying water for the day's cooking and other uses, before I was conscious at about five. When I went out into the hall, Maya's mother had started the main fire under the wood stove for rice and prepared tea using powdered milk over a small gas burner – Maya had explained the night before that they get fresh milk only in the evenings, because there are no shops nearby. I can't be sure whether they have this milk-tea every day, since I was no doubt offered the very best as their guest. Morning activities were hurried, as Maya needed to be at the ashram gate, just a few minutes' walk away, by six thirty. We dressed and made our way there, where Maya signed in with the security guard and went straight to the kitchen, while I went to my room to change and shower before staff meeting.

On another day, when I was given permission to miss part of satsang so I could join the kitchen staff early and leave with them for a wedding, I arrived at six-thirty, just as Maya was starting work for the day. She was the first to arrive, and she started in right away washing *paruppu* (pulses/lentils) for the day's *rasam* (a spicy broth or pepper water). I asked what I could do, and she directed me to get the tomatoes, which needed to be chopped in quarters, also for the rasam. I asked her how many, "twenty?" and she said "No, up to here," pointing high on the big plastic basin we use to measure vegetables. She led me in to the main kitchen and showed me to take only the good tomatoes, not the ones that are bad.

"Like this," she said, gesturing at some in the pile that were basically melting. I sorted through them carefully, by hand, but later noticed that a few bad ones had ended up in my pile, nonetheless.

The other women started to stream in, and we quickly chopped tomatoes. Then they brought in pumpkin for a koothu. Someone dropped a half-rotten one on the floor and it gushed its juice, to great alarm and fanfare. Eventually, Maya picked it up and put it on her board. She also tended to some large gourds that were rotting on the shelf behind her and disturbing her with their stench. She continued to complain about the smell even after she'd moved them out to the compost, but I didn't notice it until later when I moved to where she had been sitting to do the salad. It was so bad I couldn't stand it and had to find another place to sit.

As we started to chop the pumpkin, some asked about my coming early, and Maya explained that I got special permission so I could leave early along with them to the wedding and also help them to finish on time. Sharada asked if I was really fine about missing the meeting, and I told them I was very happy. "My one doubt," I ventured, "is don't you all drink tea in the

morning?" Upstairs we have tea promptly at seven, as we sit for staff meeting, and by now it was nearing seven thirty.

Maya made a face of playful shock. "Of course we do. Oh, poor thing, she must be used to chai and wondering if we're not having – no, none of us could get by without it. If you're used to it, you have to have it, otherwise you don't get any energy. Don't worry Kumari. See, here's the chai."

Just then, Sangeetha came in with the tall stainless steel pitcher of tea. Someone else carried a plateful of day-old *chapatis* (whole wheat flat breads) and a second plate of fresh coconut mixed with sugar. We cut pumpkin for a little while longer while cups were organized and chai poured. Maya endearingly went through the motions, showing me how to make a chapati rollup. "See, you spread the coconut like this, and then you fold it like this. Yes, yes," she said, approving of my technique.

We chewed hard and took big sips of tea to help the stale chapati go down, but it fueled us, and our talk grew warmer as we continued chopping until an hour or so later, when the pumpkin was piled high in two or three large plastic basins. Next, we shredded cabbage. First we had to cut the ends and bad parts off, which work Shyamala started before the rest of us finished with the pumpkin. I helped her continue as the others got going on the shredding. With cabbage, like kappa and beetroot, it is challenging to manage the knife without cutting one's hands, especially as the pieces get smaller and smaller towards the end. Maya had shown me that very morning how all the skin on her fingers was breaking and hurt when it got wet. But we managed to get through this shift without any major cuts.

When we finished the cabbage, Bindhu and Nirmala started the washing, and I peeled cucumbers for the salad. The others hurried to finish the sweeping, while Maya went and

fried pappadam in hot oil for more than an hour, and we managed to get everything ready on time to attend the wedding of the son of one of the paid workers. The entire ashram staff, both from the paid and volunteer side, was invited, and most did attend, but I saw them only in glimpses during the meal, which was served at long tables set in rows. The women from the kitchen traveled together by bus, and I joined them, while the volunteer staff went in an ashram vehicle. It's a fifteen-minute walk to the bus stop past rice paddies and open fields, and on the way some pointed out their houses or gestured down roads to say their children go to school at such and such a place or their natal home is that way. We arrived in perfect time, arranged an impromptu row out of some disorganized plastic chairs, and we didn't have to wait long before the *nagaswaram* (a wind instrument used in classical music) and drums began, signaling the start of the ceremony.

During the wedding, I sat next to a young worker I didn't know, whom I call Lila, and I took the opportunity to get to know her a bit. "How long have you worked here?" I asked. Lila said four years. "And how old are you?" a common and matter-of-fact question in Kerala, since understanding someone's age helps to properly address them (as elder sister, or just with their first name).

"Twenty-five," she said.

"Oh, so then you're not married?" I asked, taking note that she was not wearing a pottu, the spot of *kumkum*, a red powder married women place at the center part of their hair. She was just young enough to give me pause, though the story turned out to be quite different than I imagined for that split second. Lila answered that she had indeed married and has two daughters. Now I asked about the missing pottu. He died, she said. "Oh, I'm so sorry. When?"

"Four years ago." Now it dawned on me. That must be why she'd come to work so young,

with two small children at home, I verified.

Taking in her age and the two children, my head spun, realizing she had been through so much in such a short time. I asked how he died, and she quietly put her hand to her chest in a slow, tapping gesture, closing her eyes as her hand reached her chest, to convey a death at his own hand. “Oh, how awful,” (*kashtam-aayi poyi*), I said, reaching to put my hand on hers as I asked “What happened?” She simply shrugged. I felt sad amidst the loud sounds of the drums and the flood of expectation and excitement in the air, and I let my touch linger a moment on her hand.

Later, just after the wedding ceremony, Maya-chechi took my hand and placed it again in Lila’s, saying that Lila would look after me. We headed around the back of the building to line up at the entrance to the staircase to the upstairs hall, in a ladies-only line. “If you want to eat, you have to be ready to push,” one of the older chechis, Meena, told me, and despite my years of experience in India, I was truly surprised by what followed. A gate at the top of the stairs opened, and the response was a true stampede. We pushed the people in front of us, because we were in turn being pushed by the people behind us, as we slowly, slowly piled our way up the stairs. As we neared the top, a woman in front of us nearly fell as someone trampled the edge of her sari, and she had to forcibly grab her *pallu,* the decorative end piece that hangs long over the shoulder, with two hands to untangle herself. For a second, Maya stumbled as well, and I almost went down with her. We paused, in shock, but in the meantime the stampede was pressing us, so we freed ourselves just as the room opened up before us, and we made our way to seats behind one in a row of long tables, where banana leaves had been spread and servers were already making their way around the room with rice.

In our row there would have been plenty of room for all of the women to eat

together, but somehow once we sat down Maya and I realized we were the only two. Maya was mystified, as was I, and we scanned the room for our friends. We spotted Bindhu across from us, and she held up a finger and made a pouty face, showing she was alone. Others were scattered in groups of two or three. Maya was attentive during the meal, instructing me what to eat first and making sure I had plenty of what I liked. The Kerala *sadhya* (traditional feast) follows a particular order and contains varieties of the same dishes each time. I have eaten this traditional meal several times, but it was still nice being treated with such care. I teased Lila later, that she'd lost me in the crowd, and from this day I nicknamed Maya my "friend-chechi" – our bond solidified in part through the experience of being nearly run over by a hungry crowd.

That day we returned to the ashram stuffed and everyone was a bit tired as we attended to the rest of the day's work. Normally the workers eat only a small amount at the ashram's ordinary brunch time at ten in the morning. Some have *kanji* (rice with water), or just *kanji-vellam* (the water from the cooked rice) and a bit of the hot vegetables that have just been prepared, with leftover chapati or *dosa* (a type of sourdough crepe) if there are any. But even if they have had a small meal at brunch time, most eat again around one o'clock, accustomed to having their main rice-based meal at that time. The ashram itself serves only two meals at ten am and six pm. On alternate days the evening meal at this ashram is chapatis, which call for hours of intensive and hurried work, rolling out enough for each person to have four or five pieces of flat bread. Thankfully, the day of the wedding was not one of those days, but a Thursday, when dosa is served.

Of course, it meant Maya-chechi, who makes the *maavu* (batter), was hard at work the day before, in between chapati rolling. The large grinder she uses to make the batter is finicky and requires prodding to do its work. Once or twice during my research, Maya received small shocks

from the electricity flowing through this grinder, so she always approached it with some trepidation. While it ground on, the rest of us (six or seven, because it was low season) sat on sacks in the main kitchen. Our talk was frustrated, because the loud background noise, coupled with the heat, some annoying flies and the hunched posture suitable to rolling chapatis made us irritable. The work is difficult and thankless, especially since chapatis are not a typical food of Kerala and on top of that they are prepared in such large quantities that the quality suffers. Each afternoon of chapati rolling, workers suffer heat and backaches, bicker with one another, and with the flies and mosquitos that linger in the main kitchen as they crank out piles upon piles of flat bread to cook on the big griddle, and each night volunteer staff complain as they chew long and hard on the stiff cakes of wheat. Dosa nights are better all around.

After the wedding, Maya turned dosa batter onto a hot griddle in the main kitchen while the rest of us sat chatting on sacks in the cutting room. I trimmed the ends off of *amarakka*, a type of flat green bean also called broad bean, for the next day's thoran, and others hurriedly cut vegetables for *sambar* (a soup made with a type of brown split-pea and vegetables) and then made a salad. When we finished, I went on to the next part of my day – a lethargic Yoga practice after so much food, followed by dinner, note writing, and bed.

For the rest of the workers, it was a schedule as usual. Empty the compost, carry boiled water to fill vessels positioned at key places throughout the ashram, scrub the main sink where dishes are washed, sweep and, if necessary, mop the main kitchen and cutting area, then finally have a cup of hot tea prepared with fresh milk from the ashram's cows at four o'clock, before checking out, early during this low season (during high season there is often work beyond six o'clock). Workers who are not on kitchen duty sometimes gather for chanting for half an hour between three-thirty and teatime, but kitchen workers remain busy throughout that time.

On the way out, workers have to check out with a security guard, stationed at either of two main ashram gates. All guests and volunteer staff are likewise asked to sign out when leaving for a short time, stating their destination and time out. However, wageworkers are given a bit more inspection. On a few occasions when I gave small gifts of clothing or extra toiletry items or medicines, the women asked me to walk out with them, so that the extra bags would not be suspect. Workers are asked to show the contents of any large carry bags when leaving the ashram, in part because of a relatively new policy prohibiting ashram guests from making donations to individual workers. Guests are instead asked to donate unwanted items to the ashram, which will distribute such goods according to need. The policy gestures at fairness, but I once was privy to a heated discussion among workers not directly involved about a worker who was accused of stealing when leaving the ashram with some leftover fruit. In this context, the daily inspections of workers' bags felt like an unfair exercise in suspicion, especially when guests were allowed to leave with their huge luggage, purses, or whatever they wished, without any question as to whether what they carried rightfully belonged to them. Although my own gift giving may have violated the ashram's policy, I felt that it was important to share in a direct and personal way with individuals who had become friends and who contributed significantly to my research. I helped Maya often, both because of her steady affection and support with my research, and because of her significant need. In fact any time I offered to the group in general, I was told to "give to Maya-only," perhaps a gesture to our friendship, but most likely due to Maya's limited support at home. All workers' families were quite poor, but some, like Maya, with three daughters and no male member of the household, faced particular challenges.

Maya gets off at four during low season and often heads directly to a house nearby to help a young woman with her household chores before dinner. The family doesn't pay her

exactly, she told me, but because she helps out most every day, she can count on them for small favors and a kind of family bond. “For example?” I asked her. She told me that recently a pair of her daughter’s shoes broke and they had gotten her another pair. Most people in this area wear a cheap type of rubber flip-flop usually costing at most R200 or as little as R50, and these are generally worn until they break or, if they don’t break, until the rubber is worn through completely.

Maya may spend an hour or two at this family’s house during the low season, she told me, and then head home just before dark, around six, where she can rest a bit. Fortunately, Maya’s mother is healthy, and after she does some light cleaning work for people in the village during the day, she brings provisions home and also helps with the cooking, as do Maya’s daughters, who are old enough now to tend to some minor housework. When they return from school, they wash clothes, sweep the house inside and out, and then tend to their studies while Maya can rest her body and watch television. Then, as most families in this area, they eat a late dinner, and go to bed around ten.

This is their life now, in the sparkling new home provided by the ashram. Maya had received a home as part of the dowry for her marriage, but without the funds to make necessary improvements, the house fell into disrepair. The ashram’s senior acharya, who is revered by all the workers I spoke with for his loving nature and keen ability to perceive the needs of the local people, went to visit this house at some point a short time back, during part of an outing for another purpose. Maya reported that he immediately offered to build her a new home. The ashram has built more than twenty houses as donations for workers and their families.

Usually decisions about this kind of large donation are made based on seniority, but in Maya’s case, it seems to have been more a factor of need. Originally, they planned to build a

new house for her on the same land, but later the plan changed, so that Maya and her family were invited to live inside a small new home built just down the road from the ashram. This home is owned by the ashram and not in Maya's name, so the situation is not ideal. Her old house is now far away, and lying vacant is not doing it any good. Yet, the situation provides temporary and needed protection and amenities for her girls. During my research, Maya was applying for a special fund made available by the local panchayat and received a large rupee donation to help rebuild her home. This work was just getting under way as I finished my research.

In the description above, Maya is not meant to stand in as an average worker, and although some of the activities I observed and described are typical, some, like the wedding, are specific to the occasion. However, as short excerpts from conversations with Sharada and Lila evidence, the hardships Maya endures are by no means unique, even if her particular circumstances are. I experienced all of these women as remarkably strong, resilient, and enduring, and I hope that in sharing some of the details of their work and lives, I can bring into relief the considerable extent of inequality between the two sides of the ashram, which was not always evident, as we shall see below, to staff on the voluntary side.

Voluntary Staff Discuss Paid Workers

During the course of one on one interviews, I asked most of the volunteer staff about how it came to be that the Indian branches of the SYVC employ such a substantial number of paid workers.

> "Cause there's not enough *volunteers,*" Govinda's answer came quickly.
>
> G: There's not enough Karma Yogis – to… maintain the place for as many people that come here. *The place has grown*, and you need a lot of voluntary staff to do all… to… maintain. Um… if we didn't have people from outside, we wouldn't have had this growth. Well – I'm *presuming* that."

Govinda, a foreign senior staff member, admitted that the major growth in the ashram came

before he arrived. Still, his answer was consistent with many people I asked, who said the ashram simply has more work than can be done with the number of volunteers present.

I asked another foreign senior staff member in India: How do you understand the reason this ashram employs so many people [for pay] – as opposed to HQ [headquarters, in Canada] or California?

She answered:

> I suppose there's a historical precedent. Swami Vishnu took [the ashram/property] over from Gopala Vaidyan… so he probably paid people at that point. I think there are still some people connected to that time. Secondly in the early days, the ashram was mostly running on agricultural income (rubber trees, rubber tapping)… so no doubt they needed some laborers to help them do that. Thirdly, and probably most pertinently is that … yeah, it's um… it works for us and it works for the community. There are many people in the community that want work … and there are many things that need to be done that require workers to do it. Certainly the number of [volunteer] staff we have now we wouldn't be able to do it.

It *is* hard to imagine the ashram running without the hard work of the paid workers, who currently are responsible for all cooking, most of the cleaning – particularly laundering of guest linens – and agricultural work (milking cows, harvesting foods, and maintaining the grounds). However, the reality is that numbers of volunteer staff during high season are not particularly low when compared to the ashram in Canada, an ashram that serves (at capacity) roughly three-quarters the number of guests. What may be a more important factor is the *nature* of work in Kerala. In Canada, laundry, to take an example, can be handled by one or two dedicated karma yogis and two machines, whereas it takes a whole crew of ladies in Kerala to wash guest linens by hand and hang them to dry. Certainly, kitchen work is labor intensive in the absence of food processors, but the ashram does own a large electric grinder used for making large quantities of the batter used for both dosa and a steamed dumpling called *idily*, both South Indian staples served regularly at the evening meal. Electric mixer-grinders are also very common these days in

Indian middle class homes, and kitchen workers in SYVC ashrams and centers make use of these too.

Perhaps the issue is one more clearly pointed out by another senior staff:

> "Part of it… Part of it is *skills*! I mean, [the acharya] was on his own with two, two-three members of Swami Vishnu's family type-thing… who were *not* in the position to be climbing coconut trees and harvesting the tapioca sort of stuff. So it's not… That's not the sort of thing that they would be expected to *do*. Or didn't have the skills – and [the acharya] wasn't going to start climbing coconut trees (laughing). You know? He planted some… trees, but… I'm sure he did *some* work, but – but there are *skills*, you know, certain skills are needed and… so on. And… and although I'm sure Swamiji's sister was pretty capable, she probably wasn't going to be cooking for *large* numbers of people on her own. They were grinding *everything* here, before. Collecting the firewood here. … So partly is… One is skills – certain skills are needed that maybe voluntary staff don't have.

The speaker here emphasizes *skills*, but her explanation also seems to hint at a presumption that not all people can be expected to take on some of the more gross physical labor, perhaps also a reference to a caste-based division of labor. She laughs as she pictures our now seventy-year old Swami climbing a coconut tree. But at the time, he would have been thirty-seven, certainly no older than some of the local men who do such climbing every day. Having tried my hand at developing the skills needed to work in the existing kitchen set up, I certainly appreciate the dangers of inexperience, but this sentiment seems to go against the principles of karma yoga espoused by both Swami Vishnudevananda and Swami Sivananda, who both emphasized that all people should do all kinds of work. Bharata, a long term volunteer staff who served under Swami Vishnu in the early days of the organization, summarizes his understanding on the biography page of the website for his Yoga center in Lake Worth, Florida:

> Swami Vishnudevananda taught that all staff should be able to do everything within the ashram and Bharata, like everyone else who stayed long enough, had his turn at cleaning bathrooms, maintenance, housekeeping, office work and a myriad of other chores which are necessary to keep an ashram running - each task giving a little different perspective on the real meaning of karma yoga or selfless service, the foundation of real spiritual discipline. (http://www.yogapeace.com)[84]

In fact, *most all* volunteer staff from the early days of the organization whom I interviewed in North America described being thrown into work for which they lacked experience and qualifications, including cooking Indian-style dishes in the Canada ashram for large and often unpredictable numbers of guests, as well as maintaining a large-scale budget for an organization run by a self-described "minus-millionaire." The SYVC organization during Swami Vishnu's time was consistently in debt, and Swami Vishnu was famously enthusiastic in his pursuit of large-scale projects for which he usually lacked proper financial backing. Accounts work was, therefore, quite stressful for anyone selected for such a task.

One foreign staff member, Karuna, whom I interviewed in Canada in 2008, spoke at length on the issue based on her many decades of experience in the organization:

> Karuna: At the beginning, it was just more… more open. In that sense, you know like the way we have a lot of like… you have Swami [Vishnu] and all the staff. And all were the same. *All* the staff were the same. There was no difference. And something that Swamiji trained us very very well that I think I really love from him, and unfortunately, we don't have that in the organization anymore… So all the staff had to go through the kitchen. Doesn't matter your position. Even the director. So they had to know how to cook. You know? And we all were doing everything…. I did everything. Maintenance, toilets, kitchen, teaching, translating… I don't know – you name it [laughing]. All of us had to be ready to do anything. So now we don't have the same thing…. and then – train and detach. You're in the kitchen, but then tomorrow you're on the toilets. The next morning you're teaching. It has to be the same… [None of this:] no, now I'm—upgrade, you know? [laughs] I'm doing the toilets. Or upgrade, I'm doing the class… It doesn't – if not, you create… a certain pattern in your mind…

Later on in the interview, I asked if she felt that things were easier during Swamiji's time.

> K: No! With Swamiji, you could say worse! [laughs] Yes! Because you know, now I feel like uh… you know, sometimes uh… the staff they… they say, oh, I need my practice, and I need my sadhana… With Swamiji, it was Karma Yoga. [From] six in the morning, until midnight… Karma Yoga was your sadhana. No time for asanas, no time for meditation. Just work, work, work, work. … constructions on all those buildings. And no place to sleep. You had to be in a tent outside, or in a room with 20 people together. And it was only – and then to eat, there was peanut butter and bread. [laughs] It's true. It was not more than that…. So somehow… improves… but some others, you know… [became] a little more lazy… in a sense… I don't do this, I don't want to do this. I just teach. Oh, no I just cook… Oh no, I just answer the phone.

LKM: Yeah.

K: It was not like that. From [answering] the phone, you go to the kitchen, from there to teach, from there to the toilet, from there to … whatever.

Karuna was speaking about the situation in North America, where volunteer staff continued to be responsible for most all the work happening at the ashram. Even there, she observed, because of more clearly designated roles and perhaps more efficient management, staff could become set in their ways and attached to the types of jobs they would and would not perform. In India, the divisions between tasks and the people who undertook them were even more clearly delineated.

The senior staff in Kerala quoted earlier, talking about skills, further regards the provision of wages and benefits as a form of charity. Continuing her answer about the reason for paying local workers, she says

> that's obviously … the main reason – is that maintaining a place like this without having enough voluntary staff… you need *outside* help. …And then uh… And then of course it *does – does* serve the community. I mean a lot of our staff here… I don't know how easy they would find employment outside, 'cause they're not that fit… strong and healthy and so on...

With a simple turn of phrase, the provision of low wage labor to workers living at the very edge of poverty becomes, here, a form of charitable donation. It would seem that this woman's primary contact with these workers, as a non-Malayalam-speaking member of the ashram, is through her knowledge of their requests for medicine and other donations, rather than observing the back-breaking labor and hard life conditions that have made them unfit, as she puts it. Likewise another senior staff member's response to a question about how he makes sense of inequalities between staff and paid workers indicates some ambivalence about their management of money. I quote him at length.

> It's a different form of payment, of course… [there are] many unseen payments like housing, etc. Basically, I know that 2,500 [per month] is a very small amount to support a

> family. … As I say this seems to be the local norm that I think we're fitting into, but at the same time, we are contributing in other ways… um… And basically there is a great disparity to standards of living in the West and in the East or underdeveloped countries. Now, how are you going to balance that scale? It's not something that the ashram's going to handle single handedly. I think basically people should have enough [to] eat, shoes and clothes to wear… which is basically what they're coming to the ashram for.… [but] I find that the maturity is not often there… I suppose… But understandably they go into debt because they don't have enough money to manage their expenses. I don't think they're wasting money, or gambling money away, or wasting money at all, by any means. I suppose it's an evolution. The ashram has evolved. I suppose around the time I came here – in the last [number of] years there's been an increase in people coming in… and in what the ashram has been able to – able to channel to people here… Mmm… and I think it seems to me that people who are working here are enjoying a better standard of living here… And certainly there's always people who are willing to come here – we can't take as many people who would like to come. So… it essentially comes back to our main focus of support is housing, education and medical….

Here, encouraged by the questions I have raised, he is reflecting on his own participation in an unequal system, and he continues to do so elsewhere in the interview. But he resolves this, here and elsewhere, by talking about the different "standards of living" for people of different backgrounds. His comment, immediately withdrawn, about a possible lack of maturity positions him, one of the few people charged with reviewing requests for donations or loans, in a paternalistic role, as someone with greater maturity and experience, though his personal history gives no indication of having had to fend with financial crises the likes of which many of the paid workers face as a routine part of living.

I asked another woman, Gita, faltering in one of my earliest interviews with an admittedly leading question that no doubt responded to her casual attitude to these issues: "So how do you make sense of… the *extreme* economic differences… between… most of us who are here as voluntary staff and the… the people who come here for work?"

Gita reacted with surprise: "In what respect? I don't know that I really…"

"Well, uh…." I stuttered, caught quite off guard.

Gita broke in: "Because of where you've come from, or? Where *I have* come from?"

LKM: "Oh… or, how we're living now."[85]

G: Right [said doubtingly]. You mean that I – we have four *solid* walls and a solid roof and they're not…?

LKM: Um…

G: We're eating the same food! [This comes quickly and in what seemed to me a defensive tone, but then she softens and pauses to think.] … More or less – Well… some of the – some of the permanent staff here are… technically voluntary permanent staff, maybe you get some bread and some jam and stuff…

There is another pause, in which I wait, before I begin again.

LKM: Well, ok… so to me it seems maybe self-explanatory… that there are certain … comforts or… privileges that um… most of us who are here as – particularly from the West, uh, foreign voluntary staff… um

G: Such as?

LKM: Like how much we spend on shoes… how much we spend on shampoo… uh… clothing….

G: I don't know. Because I don't know what they buy. I don't know what they buy. Do you know what they buy? I think some of our paid staff here buy more expensive shoes than I buy. Actually.

LKM: Huh…. Huh…. [I falter again here, collecting my thoughts and hoping to salvage the rapport we'd established in the earlier part of the interview.]

G: Really [said as in "as a matter of fact"]. I mean, the shoes I bought to take to [another country] – I didn't buy shoes, cause I knew I wasn't gonna wear shoes. You know closed shoes. So I bought a pair of 250 rupees… like a… you know, like nice chappal.

LKM: Yeah.

G: … which looked ok. They don't look quite so good now, actually… How are they now? I mean that's another thing, isn't it… is buying stuff which is gonna be thrown away quite quickly. Anyway. So… I know some of these paid staff [buy shoes] I think even more expensive than I would buy. Some. Not all. I think maybe the laboring and maybe the kitchen… maybe be a bit more careful…

LKM: That's who, I guess, I'm talking about.

G: But I don't know what they buy. I don't know.

LKM: Ok. Ok. Yeah, most of them can't afford basic um… necessities… on their salary… in the sense that – if a pair of shoes breaks, it's a family – crisis. [Here, I am no doubt remembering the look on Maya's face and the tension in her voice as she described the recent incident when her daughter's shoe broke but was replaced by the family she worked for after-hours].

G: Hmm.

LKM: Like, they have to reorganize finances… Which is very different from how most staff live in my experience. Like most of us…

G: Well, it depends which staff you're talking about. I mean I… I don't know – cause there are different temporary staff – there are different voluntary staffs here. I mean myself, [name of other staff] and .. I don't know… [name of other staff]… there's a few who've been you know, long term… I mean we rely on the ashram. And personally, I have always tried to be fairly reasonable… not… not be extravagant, but I don't know how it compares to… But I don't know– Yes. I wouldn't say I'd be under the same stress that they may be under…

I include this long excerpt here to demonstrate the level at which issues faced by paid workers are nearly invisible, even to those who have a long relationship to the ashram and are in supervisory roles. This woman seems reflexive, as she considers how she selects her own clothing, attempting to be frugal and yet a smart consumer (buying goods which are made well enough to last). Yet, she really misses the point of what it might be like live without those options. Her trip abroad a few months before our interview required only inexpensive shoes, because she was careful, not "extravagant," but what about the cost of her ticket, the meal she must have eaten en route or at the airport, or the fact that the trip she mentioned, for organization business was followed by another trip to visit family elsewhere? And while she admits a liking for some special foods like jam, she overlooks the abundance of ashram food, snacks, and drinks to which she has free and unlimited access, while many workers during the time of my research struggled with the rising costs of basic foods, just to make sure their children had enough to eat.

Many are so poor that they qualify for charitable schools that provide food other durable goods to students' families through partnership with families living abroad, as in Maya-chechi's story.

Concluding Thoughts

Much has been written about the larger spirituality movement of which the SYVC is a part, exploring the ways in which this movement involves participants primarily as consumers in a capitalist system (Carrette and King 2005, Heelas 2008, Lau 2000). Paul Heelas, in a volume sympathetic to what he terms *Spiritualities of Life*, argues that contrary to what the critics say, these new spiritual movements "can contribute to personal and multicultural relationality," and particularly to the values of "life, equality and freedom" (2008:13). My fieldwork was in part informed by Heelas' kind of sympathetic perspective, and I sought in my interviews to give volunteers and other members of the SYVC an opportunity to explain in their own terms and in the terms of yoga as they understood it, how they made sense of disparities like those I discuss in this chapter.

As described in Chapter Three, SYVC leaders and senior staff consistently gave answers that supported a focus on the individual and minimized the importance of working to achieve equality. The answer came to me in various forms from most of the senior teaching staff I asked. Whatever the outside problem, the answer is the same. Focus on your part. Do your own sadhana, and as the problems of the individual subside through dedicated spiritual practice, the problems outside will likewise disappear. One long-time senior staff member born in India, Sajeev, told me at the end of our frank discussion about my research:

> S: [It's] very important to understand. Swamiji's mission is *not* to bring everything equal. It's impossible. So… But… to accept… to undergo. To be comfortable in it.
>
> LKM: Yeah. Like an asana.

> S: The pain will be there. That will come anyway. Doesn't matter how many asanas you do… it will come anyway. But, the person who does Yoga … has a passion… graceful, greatness to accept it… The person who doesn't do Yoga… feels pain, attached, everything. That's the only difference.

These answers were often persuasive. The alternative implied in these comments – that we each should take it upon ourselves to fix the problems of the world – sounds exhausting, and yes, as Sajeev puts it, impossible. Certainly the focus on the individual seems much more manageable.

And yet, I often turn, in the face of these kinds of dismissals of my focus on inequality to a story I have heard told a number of times in SYVC satsangs. It's about a novice *Vedantin* who goes to a restaurant and orders a lavish meal, devouring course after course of expensive dishes. When the bill comes, he refuses it, saying that he has realized God, and therefore a bill is meaningless to him. The restaurant manager then sends two bouncers to carry him outside and clobber him. When he begs them to stop, they say that since he has realized God, his body should also be meaningless. The moral of this story is that to the extent we are still attached to our body, to our family, and our name and position in this world, we should also follow *dharma* (righteousness, moral law; Radhakrishnan and Moore 1957:674).

Perhaps it is true, in a yogic sense, that a true absence of inequality is impossible in this world of duality. Eliade explains the metaphysics of duality this way:

> The creation, and the becoming that arose from it, represent the shattering of the primordial Unity and the separation of the two principles (Śiva-Śakti, etc.); in consequence, man experiences a state of duality (object-subject, etc.) – and this is suffering, illusion, "bondage" (1990:206).

For the most part, yoga philosophy emphasizes what the individual can achieve (to end this suffering, illusion, "bondange") through control of the mind and senses and purification of the body. However, also implied in Swami Vishnudevananda's metaphor about changing the cloth is this idea of individual responsibility for societal wellbeing. What if the silk cloth we aim for is a

harmonious world community that values the work and lives of all its members? Would not karma yoga – often defined as the yoga of action – be a method for undertaking to refashion that cloth? Perhaps through the very practice of karma yoga emphasized in other parts of the SYVC, foreign volunteers could learn to engage with paid workers across difference, to share in work and grow in understanding, as I did, during my limited time in the kitchen. What if, instead of turning inwards through meditation, we turned outwards through active service, involving ourselves in work and relationship alongside people of vastly different backgrounds and experience? To me, this is the untapped potential in a transnational organization operating in India. If the kitchen is indeed the best training ground for developing the spiritual virtues celebrated by Swami Sivananda, why not train junior staff in India in "tolerance… sympathy… love… and the spirit of real service," by inviting them to work alongside local paid workers?

Chapter Six
Animals and Ambivalence:
On Cat Palaces, Servant Dwellings, and "Poor People Food"

Sorrows are like hunger, caused by spiritual starvation and will be relieved only by spiritual food. – Swami Sivananda

What is divine life? To shed the animal in man and to sublimate the human in him to the divine; to express the sublimation in his daily life, in his hourly life, in thought, word and deed. That is divine life. – Swami Sivananda

Introduction

"The servant destroyed my cat palace!" This was the voice of six-year old Meena, moments after a children's yoga class I had taught in the shaded courtyard structure at the SYVC's Chennai center. The previous day, Meena, a resident of Chennai whose mother was also a regular student at the center, had caught my arm and led me at a running pace around a short path to the courtyard in front of the main house. There she showed me how she had spread a newspaper, propped a palm frond for shade, and decorated the edges of the structure with flowers. She proclaimed this a "palace" for the cats – former strays who were now de facto residents of the center. Although Meena's indignant reaction the next day, when she realized the palace was missing, speaks mostly to her age, her words touch on a prevailing dynamic between cosmopolitan participants in the SYVC's classes, yoga vacations, and other programs and the paid workers who cook and clean in the spaces where they are held.

The narrative or the situational dynamics of this event were echoed, with variation, in numerous situations throughout the course of my research. In an unguarded moment of frustration and anger, Meena expressed affection for the center's cats and disdain for a woman she referred to as a servant. A moment of interrupted play became an opportunity to assert classed authority over a woman old enough to be her grandmother. In several instances

throughout my research, relations between people of different status in the SYVC were likewise played out via the byroads of relations with animals and conversations about sustenance, food, and home. These exchanges reveal much about underlying dynamics that was not expressed in direct person-to-person communication.

Animals on SYVC property came in some variety. A bird made a nest on a high kitchen shelf in Trivandrum, a dog and her puppies found refuge from the elements in a storage closet in Neyyar Dam, and cats befriended staff in the dining area on the roof of the kitchen there too. In Madurai, monkeys from the nearby protected wilderness area invaded staff and guest dormitories daily, stealing food and leaving behind disorder and excrement. Rats invaded the outdoor rubbish in all places with some regularity, and roaches, mosquitoes, and ants, all feasted on the sugary crumbs of prasad scattered after satsangs or staff meetings. Some sipped directly from human hosts, without regard to status or occupation. People in the SYVC responded to these creatures, be they “pests” or “pets,” quite differently, and, as I demonstrate below, human dealings with the animals can be understood to reveal much about relations between the different groups of people who share space in the organization.

This chapter takes up with relations between SYVC staff, guests, and paid workers through a set of encounters across animals, food, and shelter. Because animals are, as Levi-Strauss once succinctly observed, “good to think” (1963:89) I collect here a series of vignettes loosely related to the theme of animals. I look to these vignettes as moments that bring to light underlying feelings and can help us understand how people conceive of one another and of their differences. In conversations, comments, accusations and asides about food and animal matters, I argue, SYVC participants revealed their underlying attitudes, values, and beliefs about one another. I begin with a story about a dog named Shanti.

Health and Home for Shanti

One day, in mid-November, as I stood chatting with a Malayalee friend outside the dining hall at the Neyyar Dam ashram, a guest approached me for help. She had heard me speaking Malayalam and hoped I could aid her in communicating with three of the ladies who sweep and clean the ashram common areas.

“Sure,” I said. “What is it that you want to tell them?”

The guest, a white-haired but young-looking European woman I call Irena, explained to me that Shanti (meaning Peace),[86] a stray dog who had just given birth to a litter of puppies, was in need of some help. To protect her puppies from the recent rains, Shanti, a friendly and mild-mannered brown dog who regularly, but unobtrusively lay down at the edges of the satsang hall during asana classes, had been hiding out in a broom closet where most of the cleaning supplies were stored. The closet was under a set of stairs that led from the lower level of the ashram’s newly constructed main hall up to the staff quarters on the side of an older structure housing a small meditation room, offices, and the kitchen downstairs. The women responsible for cleaning the ashram’s large halls and common areas feared Shanti would bite them when they came for buckets, squeegees, and brooms.

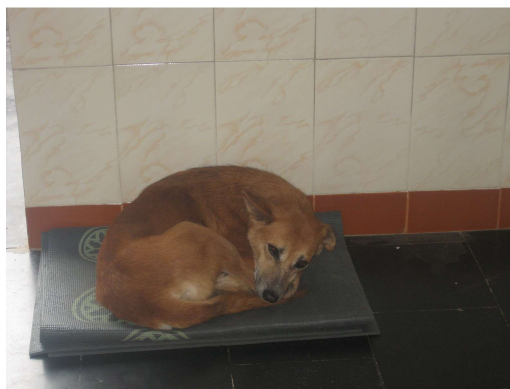

Figure 14 Shanti rests on a yoga mat, during author’s return visit to Neyyar Dam, August 2013

“The dog trusts me,” Irena said, “so I am able to help her relocate the puppies if needed, but I need to know where.” I followed her to where the women were talking just a few yards away from the storage closet. Irena did not make clear whether she had moved the dog to the closet or whether the dog had found the closet on her own. Either way, the women, especially Rajini, who pleaded with me to make this understood to Irena, were quite afraid of the dog and therefore needed her to vacate the closet.

Irena asked me to explain to them that the dogs needed protection from the rain. Just until the puppies could walk on their own, Irena said, they needed to be kept dry in order to survive. The women talked excitedly over each other’s voices, saying that this situation would not do. “The dog will bite if she feels threatened, and we have to come in and out of this closet frequently,” Rajini insisted. Irena countered that Shanti is very docile, but she said she was willing to help relocate Shanti if the women could tell her a suitable place. Finally the women suggested a patch of ground sheltered by the stairs leading up to the main dining hall, across from where we were standing. All of us walked over to the proposed spot to take a look. The area did not have a door that closed and so was still vulnerable to the rain, but the ladies assessed it was enough – “for a *dog*,” they emphasized. Irena was compromising, but not happy. Now one of the women, Sharada, asked “What about this closet?” pointing out another similar broom closet near where we were now standing. “This also keeps brooms,” I pointed out, stumbling between Malayalam and English constructions, but Nalini, who came over then to take a look, said she was not afraid of the dog, and since she was the only one using brooms from this area, it would be okay. Irena said she could relocate the dog and puppies, and she later did.

Figure 15 Shanti's new closet (picture taken August 2013)

A week later, Irena, who was concluding her stay at the ashram, approached me with a hand written letter that she hoped I would translate. It read:

> Dear [Nalini],
> Thank you for caring about the dog "Shanti" and her puppies. You clean her bed and give her food! Many thanks. "Shanti" goes on the 3rd of December to the animal clinik to get steriliseied and the dog babys go with her. (She is not allowed to have more babys at the ashram). After 4 days she will come back and look forward to see you again. The puppies should stay with [their] mother "Shanti" at least till 24 December, better till end of December, so they have a lot of mothermilk, will get strong and healthy and learn a lot [from their] mother. The puppies get free vaccination and sterilisation in April 20[11] at the ARC (Animal Rescue Center) Kovalam Junction. Also transport is payed.
> With kind regards, [Irena and Zelda]
> and a lot of ashram guests

Irena wanted me to translate this letter to Nalini, but because I was in an interview when she came to find me, my husband Biju accepted the note and conveyed the majority of it to Nalini. However, because he did not expect her to pay attention to the dates, he did not bother translating all the details. Later I caught up with Irena and said that I hadn't seen Nalini, but when I did, I would give her all the information. I told her that both my husband and I doubted that they would follow up on the vaccinations for the puppies. Now she explained that she had left the money with the ARC and that it also paid for a vehicle to take the dogs there – a taxi charge of several hundred rupees. Irena was hoping that one of the workers would agree to keep track of the dates and escort both the dog and her puppies to Kovalam, a tourist town about one

hour away, when the time came to be treated. However, the ARC had been instructed that if no one came from the ashram to vaccinate the puppies, the money could be used for the shelter's other purposes.

The note and the incident in question hint at some significant points of misunderstanding. While Irena and the other ashram guests approached Shanti as a pet – a being with the right to be protected and cared for – some of the workers seemed to resent the dog's invasion of the space they were using to conduct their jobs. Given the prevalence of stray dogs in India and the association of these animals with disease, workers were rightly hesitant about approaching Shanti, especially when she had puppies to protect. The World Health Organization reports that "[r]oughly 36% of the world's rabies deaths occur in India each year" (http://www.who.int). Irena acted as sort of cultural broker, both in the encounter I helped translate, and in her more formal letter wherein she tried to explain the dog's needs. From Irena's perspective, she seemed to be educating these women in compassion for animals. Yet from another perspective, Irena's own assumptions seemed to lack compassion for the workers themselves. One question worth asking is: since Irena and the other guests had money to give and a desire to help, why was their good will directed at the dog and her puppies rather than the workers whom they instead enlisted as unwitting assistants? My assessment, based on multiple interactions during my time in the ashram, is that the guests simply did not conceive of the disparity between their own and the workers' life circumstances.

In an essay called "Being with Animals," Veena Das argues that "the figure of the animal is important in the Vedic texts for understanding the violence that joins life and death" (2013: 25). In this essay, she develops the idea that animal sacrifice is "a dramatic expression of the ambivalence that surrounds the idea that life feeds upon life—in order to live, we must inflict

some violence on the world" (2013:19). This point about life and its inherent violence, though not necessarily about sacrifice as dramatic expression, seems key to understanding the positions of privileged SYVC participants who spoke to me with resignation about inequality in Chapter Five and will be taken up again in the Conclusion. For the current discussion, a point Das makes along the way is more important. Discussing the Vedic texts and their "anxiety" over "violence inflicted on animals" (2013:18), Das writes:

> Despite the melancholic sense that pervades these texts, some respite is offered in adjoining texts through the notion of 'noncruelty' (anrhamsya)…. The word has more than a negative connotation; it signifies good-will, a fellow feeling, a deep sense of the other. A word that occurs often with anrhsamsya, therefore, is anukrosha, to cry with another, to feel another's pain" (Das 25-26).

Later on, Das theorizes "that noncruelty is generated from within the scene of intimacy and is hence perhaps to be distinguished from compassion as an impersonal virtue that is to be extended to all beings" (2013:25). Das is making a point altogether different from my own, about how humans conceive of their own mortality through animals, yet her observation that noncruelty and sympathy must develop in conditions of intimacy seems to bear on how Irena and other guests' feelings of good will were more readily translated to Shanti, a dog seemingly no more or less conceptually distant from strays in their own countries of origin, than on workers, given the language and cultural barriers that would obscure workers' life experience from ashram guests.

To Irena and the guests she helped mobilize, who each paid between four and fifteen hundred rupees per night of accommodation at the ashram, depending on the type of room (five to almost nineteen times what these women took home in a day), the donation to the Animal Rescue Center, perhaps equal to little more than one hundred euros (I was never told the exact amount but heard that it was several thousand rupees), must not have seemed excessive. No doubt each guest had spent well over a thousand euros on this vacation to India. Yet, for the workers, the amount was comparable to the wages they would receive for about three months of

labor. At that time they earned eighty-some rupees a day, or around 2,600 rupees (forty-three euros) a month.

The subject of Shanti's health care was a topic of discussion among the women in the kitchen one afternoon, as we sat rolling chapatis for the evening meal, hot, as we slouched over our boards, and swatting at mosquitos and other small biting insects. At the mention of the arrangements being made for Shanti's sterilization and injections, the room rang with chirps of disbelief, a high-pitched "hmm!" and some outright laughter.

"Chhh!" said Veena-chechi. So much money… for a dog!" She smiled, but it seemed as if she also forced back tears. She turned her head quickly over her shoulder, and seemed to redirect her swatting from the mosquitos to this unwanted thought. "Chh!" she repeated. Her face registered both puzzlement and pain, as she voiced a deep one-syllable laugh.

Irena and the other guests meant well in trying to protect Shanti and provide funds for the vaccination and health care of both the dog and her puppies. They imposed on ashram workers to comply with their plans, but they lacked the intimacy and togetherness to recognize that these women themselves lived in less than ideal accommodations and suffered a litany of health problems associated with their poor living conditions and hard labor. During the rainy season, I heard of workers' homes that were being flooded by runoff directly downhill from the ashram, making for an ugly metaphor that was not missed in the conversation about the problem. Knowing that most poor families in the area do not sleep on raised beds, but on woven mats placed directly on the floor, the circumstances seemed to me very dire. I asked if the ashram was doing anything to help, and the women asked back to me: "What will they do?" Eventually the ashram might loan or give money to build new homes, they told me, but in the meantime, the families would have to fend for themselves, removing as much of the water as they could, and

hoping the rains would let up soon.

Workers met most of their own health care expenses through donations from the ashram. Just a few months earlier, around the middle of 2010, the ashram had begun offering a free medical clinic once a month, and also regularly reimbursed workers for routine medical expenses accrued outside for both doctor visits and medications. Perhaps their own children received recommended childhood vaccinations, given widespread awareness and accessibility of biomedicine in Kerala and the fact that these are provided by the government free of cost. Nonetheless, worry about children's futures and wellbeing was a constant subject of discussion.

I asked one cleaning worker, whom I call Leena, towards the end of our interview, "What do you envision for your future?"

"My future?" Leena repeated. "However fast I can die, that's enough. There's not that much future for me." Leena was in her early forties.

"What?" I asked… and she laughed but then regrouped.

> "Then… my children should become happy. For [my] children, a good future – they have to get good work (*toḷil*). They should live well. In their mind/heart (*manas*) there is some desire (*āgraham*). God should grant that. If only [my] children are happy, that's enough – that's my only prayer. Once my [children are settled], you [God] can take my life… that's my only prayer. Then, my children should grow up in a good way… they should *live* well. They should get good work. That's all. They have to live well.

Earlier in the conversation Leena had told me a bit about her life. Born "on the road side," as she described it, in a hut that housed her parents and three other children, Leena faced many difficulties in childhood, and those continued when she married in her late teens. The first of her three children died just days after he was born, and now the future of her other, now teenaged, children was also a major concern, since she was too poor to plan for their education. The small plot of land her father had given as part of her dowry was the site of a very small hut, similar to what she had grown up in. But at some point it flooded and became uninhabitable, so she put a

lien on the deed to the land to get a loan from the ashram for some simple repairs – hanging tin or asbestos sheets as a roof, instead of woven palm fronds, for example. With that and some other loans, Leena now gives about a third of her monthly salary back to the ashram, making it quite impossible to save or plan for the future. As we talked more, she repeatedly assured me that she was truly willing and ready to die. "Life has become enough," she said, and I countered: "No."

Leena continued, unabated: "With all these miseries upon miseries (*kashṭapadinṭe kashṭapāṭu*), I'm fed up (*mati-ayi*)…. It's true. If I die now, it's good."

It was shortly after listening to Leena's story that I returned to my room to find the note from Irena. Leena was among those approached by Irena in the matter of Shanti and her puppies. Truly, in this encounter, Irena's compassion struck me as misdirected if not ludicrous. Yet, it also reflected a sincere spirit of caring. Since Leena never talked to Irena or the other guests about her own home and her family's subjection to the same elements that threatened Shanti and her puppies, they did not know or imagine Leena's hardship. Given the prevailing dynamic of the culture of servitude (Ray and Qayun 2009), Irena saw only a smiling face, and a willing worker, happy to serve and help out with "the Shanti's problem", a problem created by the peculiar and partial vision of Irena and the other guests. Given the distance enforced by the language barriers and very separate realms of the ashram set-up, Irena would have little opportunity to imagine what lay behind the smile (Gmelch 2003).

Unfortunately, secure and protective housing was something many workers struggled to provide for their families. Mariamma told me the story of her own childhood home, donated by a local institution where her father had some contact. It was an "ordinary mud house," she said, built to replace an inferior hut several years ago, and now it too had begun to fall into dusty

disrepair through the normal course of time and the seasons. Recently married, Mariamma was nonetheless staying back at her family home to escape a drunk and violent husband, so her life was, as she put it, a "sadness you can't/shouldn't know" (*duḥkhaṁ aṟiññu kuṭaa*). These mud-brick homes in Kerala are often covered either with palm thatching or with a ceramic tile, but even the tile can be leaky and insecure, regularly invaded by rats, snakes, and other creatures. I have heard many people complain about the difficulties of living in this type of dwelling. "Everything is dust," (*poṭi*) said Mariamma, echoing a phrase I had heard countless times, referring to the way that powdery mildew and debris cling to clothing, linens, and anything else stored in these homes over time. In the humid and often rainy climate, everything is white with this "dust."

With all these miseries upon miseries and unknowable sadness, could these women be expected to add dog-care and scheduled vaccinations to their workload? Moreover, with worries about their own children, dwellings, and safety, could they be expected to add these stray animals to their circles of care? The expectation that they would do so was based in a misunderstanding that was both classed and cultural.

Several writers in addition to Das have engaged the subject of relations between humans and animals cross-culturally (for reviews in anthropology, see Mullin 1999 and Shanklin 1985). Most pertinently, in a chapter for an edited volume on "animals in religion, science and ethics," Lance Nelson (2006) discusses the way that Hindu worldviews engage with "nonhuman animals." Nelson gives particular attention to the dog, often equated with the lowest form or manifestation of *atman*, or the universal soul, that nonetheless pervades in all life. Both in scripture and in practice, Nelson observes, "[n]onhuman animals are embodiments of the eternal Self that is universally present in all beings" (2006:190). Yet Nelson also reminds us of the strong tendency

for a hierarchical characterization of all life within Hindu worldviews, such that even in scriptural assertions of unity, there is an implied valuation of certain life forms as lower than others – the dog being one of the lowest.

> Particularly interesting in this connection is *Gītā 5.18,* which reads: 'The wise see the same [reality] in a Brahmin endowed with learning and culture, a cow, an elephant, a dog, and an outcaste (or 'Dog-Cooker,' śvapāka) (Nelson 2006:181).

Here, Nelson points out that in the very assertion of sameness, the *Gita* reifies the natural order of things, with the dog and the so-called outcaste clearly the least likely suspects of containing this "same [reality]." Likewise, in numerous stories and teachings about the spiritual potential of animals that Nelson pulls from the *Gita*, the *Ramayana,* the *Puranas*, the *Upanisads*, the *Laws of Manu*, and stories of contemporary saints, the narratives seem to emphasize the extraordinariness of instances of divine or spiritual power seen in nonhuman animals. As Nelson puts it,

> animal spirituality gets more surprising, in the Hindu context, the 'lower' on the conventional scale we go. By the time we get to the dog, the orthodox Brahminical system of values and symbols – as decreed by Manu – is challenged, as if by a parable that see[k]s to overthrow the established order of things. The despised species may become a profound, if unorthodox and potentially antinomian, symbol of the inbreaking divine" (Nelson 2006:188-89).

Further, Nelson demonstrates, in the view of the philosopher Sankara, a key authority for the teachings of yoga as practiced in the SYVC, the underlying spirit may be the same in all life, but because of the veiling power of the *gunas*, the three dynamic qualities (*sattva, rajas* and *tamas*) that make up all of nature, or *prakriti*, according to *samkhya* philosophy and yoga, not all have access to this underlying potential (Feuerstein 1998:75). Nelson quotes the *Bhagavad Gita*:

> In a Brahmin, in whom *sattva* predominates and who has the best latent mental impressions (*samskāra*), in an intermediate being like a cow, which is dominated by *rajas* and is without [such] impressions, and in [beings] such as elephants, which are wholly dominated by *tamas* alone – those wise ones are "equal-visioned" whose habit is to see equally the one immutable Brahman (Nelson 2006:185-6).

Nelson's text-based assessments of Hindu worldviews do not claim to speak for all Hindus in all

time periods, nor certainly for Indian people of other faith backgrounds, but they do lend some weight to a general aversion to dogs and other perceived lower animals in a setting strongly informed by these Hindu worldviews. If, even according to high-minded scripture, it takes an unusually wise person to perceive the divine in a dog, it seems that ordinary people can be excused for not rushing to provide palaces and medical care to even the most docile and deserving of stray animals, particularly in the context of their own financial insecurity.

Although Irena's concerns seem to indicate she overlooked or, more likely, could not conceive the disparity between her own life and that of the workers who serviced the ashram, Meena, the young girl in the episode that opened the chapter, seemed keenly tuned to the class relations that are standard to relationships of servitude in South Indian middle class homes. Formal relations within SYVC ashrams and centers during the time of my research suggested a complexity that depended to some extent on the degree of removal from class relations in India, and Meena, as a young person in a cosmopolitan and middle-class Chennai family (her father was Malayalee and her mother's family was Malaysian), was very much embedded in that world. Foreign volunteer staff, on the other hand, were often ambivalent about the roles of paid workers. In the best cases, having spent longer periods of time in India than most guests, they recognized workers' financial and other hardships and paid appropriate respect through gifts, loans and displays of affection. In other cases, as we saw in the previous chapter, they seemed blind to differences in quality of life and tended to ignore or overlook their own privilege. Middle-class Indians and even some who had come from poor backgrounds but now found themselves on the privileged staff side of the ashram were often more accepting of the class divisions that marked paid workers as separate from staff, perhaps due to concerns about slipping back into the lower class themselves as well as the fact that having servants is commonplace among the Indian

middle class. But even where ambivalence prevailed on the part of non-Indians, a failure to conceive of paid workers as servants, perhaps because of the uncomfortable power dynamics suggested by the term, did not seem to improve their lot. Rather, it masked relations of inequality that were nonetheless played out, often explicitly, in everyday encounters. In the next section I consider narratives both in the context of everyday relations and formal interviews that deal with the issue of having and naming servants.

Conceiving of Servants

One night, after a public Wednesday evening satsang, which we had missed due to a personal errand, Biju and I came downstairs to have dinner. Six-year-old Meena, her mother Ambika, and Angel, a foreign woman living in Chennai who was a regular student at the center, were all in the open foyer that served as a yoga and satsang hall, chatting with staff. When she saw us coming, Meena brought over the tray of prasad – a simple offering of dried dates –and offered it to Biju and then to me.

Next, all the staff sat down to eat the dinner that had been prepared and set aside for us in the kitchen. There was a small plastic casserole thermos filled with idily, a very small pot of sambar, which turned out to be not quite enough for the group, and some coconut chutney. Meena was hungry and decided to join us while her mom and Angel spoke outside. Seated side by side on a straw mat laid out on one edge of the floor, we ate in silence until Meena, deliberate and precocious as usual, asked: “Who prepared this?”

“Rani,” I said, offering the name of the woman who was employed in the center’s kitchen and had now gone home for the day. Rani was a middle-aged woman who was a relatively new employee of the center at this time, sharing responsibilities with Jaya, who looked after all the

cooking and cleaning work in the center on her own for many years but had scaled back her duties as she aged.

"The servant," Meena clarified.

Rajesh, a relatively new staff member from Kerala, who had recently graduated from the TTC replied: "No. We don't have a servant here."

Maria, the foreign and newly appointed director, a woman in her late fifties, who was also relatively new to staff and had graduated the TTC only two years before embellished: "She is our *karma yogi*."

"No," said Meena. "She's a servant."

But Rajesh explained, "In Sivananda we don't have servants."

Biju chimed in his support, and they explained to Meena the concept of karma yoga. While they talked, I wondered if I was the only one feeling a bit awkward. Rani is, after all, a paid employee, not in any sense a "karma yogi," either by her own or the organization's official reckoning of the term. In fact, her work at the center is one of two jobs as a domestic worker that Rani holds. She keeps part-time hours at this center, in part, because the amount they pay her (INR 3,000/month) is not enough to support her in this relatively costly city. Rani arrives at the center at seven in the morning, prepares tea and breakfast, then leaves around nine to go to her next job. She returns again at four, to prepare afternoon tea and dinner, before again rushing off.

Now Maria asked Meena: "Do you have a servant at home?"

Meena answered that yes, they have two.

"To do what?" Maria asked.

"One does… this:" Meena gestured a mopping or sweeping movement, her two fists clenched, jarring back and forth in unison. "And the other cooks." It sounded the same as the center's arrangement.

Now Rajesh asked "What about looking after you?"

And Biju added, teasing: "That's a big job!"

"My mother does that, only!" Meena defended.

After this, the conversation became less focused. Meena took offense at the comment and proceeded to tell the two men who accused her of being such a big job that her mother was a very kind person. "Much kinder than you!" she threw in Biju's direction. Maria came to his defense.

In the SYVC ashrams and centers in India, paid service workers were generally managed and conceived of in a category distinct from the staff. Although some staff were also paid, including in the Chennai center, the nature of the work they did and their connection with the organization's mission due to experience in the TTC or other courses classified them on the staff side. Paid cooking, cleaning, and maintenance workers were clearly marked on the paid side and were not associated with the spiritual affairs of the ashram, such as teaching students or attending satsang. There was, however, some crossover. Paid workers, especially young unmarried men (and potentially, though I did not observe it, also young women) could move over to the staff side after demonstrating an interest in the organization's teachings. The organization regularly granted scholarships to workers who requested to take the TTC course, and since teaching yoga was seen as a very marketable skill, it was often an inviting prospect for young people without more promising career paths in mind. Once they completed TTC, workers could maintain their position as ashram drivers or cooks while perhaps also taking on some teaching. Other times,

they might be promoted to some other type of work conceived as more instrumental to the organization's mission, even to management and other supervisory roles, all without renouncing their monthly wages.

I saw this upward mobility happen several times with (male) ashram drivers and also with a couple of male cooks, but to my knowledge, no women who started on the worker side ever crossed over in the same way. A few times during my research, some of the cleaning workers or cooks in city centers attended asana classes, but this was very rare. And even when they did take an interest in the limbering and health-promoting practices in the asana classes, most of them did not feel themselves connected with the organization's mission or the principles of spiritual selfless service that informed karma yoga. Additionally, most female workers were responsible for children and families, so could not take the time for the month-long TTC even if they were interested. When I asked about what it was like to work for an ashram, or how working for an ashram might differ from working for another business, a typical response from the paid worker side was about the potential for more benefits (free clothes once a year, medical help, and housing donations). The charitable mission of the ashram was something most paid workers saw flowing towards them in the form of these goods, services, and gifts, rather than being a cause they took up themselves. Workers' distance from the ashram's mission likely contributed to the way that staff interpreted workers' roles.

An interview with Ram, an Indian volunteer staff, makes clear his straightforward classification of paid workers as servants. I asked him: "What is your understanding of why the Indian ashrams and centers have this opportunity for paid workers [as opposed to North America, where it is] more rare…."

I think… you can afford more!" Ram laughed, then continued:

> [In] North America it's not very easy to… *have* this system… basically. In Indian houses you can have … afford more servants. But in North America, you cannot afford that [many] servants as the Indian people. So… It's the system, basically… the society… financially… [It] doesn't mean that people need to live in poverty, because… um… *system* basically that one I can say. Yeah. Or if you have plenty of million-million-million monies in the West also, you can afford more servants.

Ram's observation also points to another contributing factor in the dynamics among Indian vs. foreign staff or guests in the SYVC. For Indian people raised in middle class homes, having some kind of servant to help with cooking, cleaning, or washing was relatively commonplace (Ray and Qayum 2009), whereas in the US having a servant, especially a live-in servant or regular cook, has generally been reserved for the upper echelons, though that is changing to some extent within the context of the new economies of globalization (Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2002).

Another long-term volunteer staff from India, Binoy, himself from a background similar to that of many paid workers – a rural, daily-wage-earning family with six children – disparagingly conceived of the "local people" as "below gear level," or unable "to get into the gear of… something like Yoga to change their life." Binoy also doubted the premise of my research project. When I told him I planned to interview paid workers, he said:

> You can do it. You can go do it, you know? So… there's nothing wrong. But I don't think any local people – I can [imagine] when you interview the locals, they may say oh, he got a camera, I did not get a camera [here he laughs, imagining workers resorting to base-level gripes about available resources from foreigners]. He's not going to think like that [he laughs again, his "like that" probably (mis)imagining a "higher" purpose for my research, perhaps oriented to yoga philosophy]…. Like uh… I tell my mother, or somebody was telling, you know the mosquito drink[s] blood from the udder. It doesn't know there's milk inside. You understand. The mosquito enjoys just [to] drink the blood from the udder of the cow.

Here, Binoy relies on the hierarchical worldview described by Nelson (2006), wherein cow's milk occupies a particularly high status and the mosquito an obviously low one. Binoy draws an analogy between the "below gear" workers and the mosquito, both missing the value of what to a

more wise or learned person would seem to be more obvious (milk, as a stand in for yoga).

In interviews like these, and in many casual conversations as well, I frequently heard paid workers referred to as servants and their positions justified in terms of financial need (on their side) and affordability (on the side of the ashram), as well as, as in Binoy's case, innate qualities – the latter particularly among Indian staff who seemed to affirm the class divisions separating them from paid workers. In this context, the Chennai staff's insistence that the SYVC, as a rule, does not employ servants was, however, not a contradiction. Rather, this denial seemed to be part of a complex system that kept class relations in place. The reluctance to conceive of cooking and cleaning workers as servants on the part of some cosmopolitan volunteers did not take away from the steep inequality of relations nor, certainly, from workers' perception of the divide. It only seemed to erase or deny the system, so that it became a non-issue for examination or discussion, at least on the volunteer side.

As we saw in the last chapter, workers thought and spoke articulately of the ways that their lives and livelihood depended on behavior and attitudes that conformed to a culture of servitude. In one informal interview with a worker I call Sheeja, I asked about the nature of her relationship to ashram guests. Sheeja declared flatly: "We don't have the status (*sthānam*) for that. We are not allowed to have contact with them," though she said this sense of being "not allowed" was implicit rather than explicitly mandated. In the next section I describe how one person of status conducted herself in the space of the kitchen, as an example of the subtle ways that inequality of status was played out in the (minimal) contact between the two "sides" (as they were often rendered by organization members) of the organization in India.

Cooking for God

One day, during our hurried morning kitchen work, Saraswati, a non-Indian voluntary staff

member came in through the side door and made a beeline to a pile of chopped amarakka, grabbing a handful and placing it on a tray she found empty on the counter. To do this, she had to stand and reach over the women cutting vegetables on the floor. She grabbed some cut carrots too, and a handful of mixed vegetables, again already chopped and set aside to be cooked. I asked for whom she was cooking. Sometimes in Canada, volunteer staff members get assigned to cook for swamis or other special guests who have particular dietary restrictions or preferences, but here in Neyyar Dam I hadn't seen this happen. The main swami in charge has a private kitchen in his residence (a large, comfortable home on the ashram grounds) where VIP guests and staff (generally guest speakers and teachers for special programs) are sometimes invited to eat. Another house for senior teaching staff, usually occupied only during courses by senior staff visiting from abroad, often with their families, also has its own kitchen. When there are special needs, workers are generally assigned directly to those kitchens.

"I cook for God," Saraswati said. Then, without missing a beat, she clarified: "I cook for myself. And for anyone who wants to eat for type A [blood]. Anyone is welcome," she ended, opening the invitation in my direction. I told her my blood type was not A, and I promptly received an unsolicited lecture on the foods I should be avoiding, given my own blood type.[87]

The situation was unusual. Normally guests and staff are not encouraged to enter the ashram kitchen unless they are on karma yoga duty of some kind. Volunteer staff whose karma yoga involves considerable interaction with guests often retreat at meal times to the semi-private rooftop of the kitchen, so they sometimes enter the kitchen towards the end of cooking time to serve themselves and get plates or utensils. Paid workers often come and go, as well, through the common areas where kitchen workers sit chopping or preparing food. Women who cook in other parts of the ashram for swamis or special guests often come in to get provisions or utensils, and

will generally stop for a while to chat or even lend a hand for a few minutes if work is busily being conducted. Men who work on the grounds or who drive ashram vehicles sometimes need to eat during off times, so they often come in, quietly serve themselves, and then perch on the step of the main wash basin, chatting with workers while they eat. Saraswati's entry in the middle of the frenzied early cooking time, without so much as a deferent tiptoe, or a salutation of any kind was, in this context, irksome.

"Now," Saraswati said, "I need a knife."

I told Saraswati that there was a shortage of knives, and that there were not even enough for each of us working today. But she said she just needed it for two minutes, and proceeded to pry the one I was holding out of my hand. I surrendered the knife, saying something out loud in Malayalam, to the effect that she "needed the knife," an unnecessary explanation, but one that came to my lips, perhaps to soften the rudeness of the gesture, as if I were somehow Saraswati's representative because we both spoke English. Now, Saraswati was taken aback.

"You speak Sanskrit?!" she exclaimed.

At this point, I was more than mildly annoyed. I told her it was not Sanskrit and then snapped: "No one speaks Sanskrit here. People in Kerala speak Malayalam."

Saraswati nodded, and then went into the main kitchen to prepare the "Type A" food. I made a face, to register my discomfort, and some of the women snipped about the vegetables she had taken. Each day, when we prepared food, we measured the chopped food into basins based on the number of guests. Even though the amount Saraswati borrowed was slight, it was hard not to be annoyed that she would take food we had already washed and measured instead of borrowing from the piles of unwashed and uncut vegetables on the shelves, especially since she did not ask permission to do so.

After a while Saraswati came back to the room where we were sitting and barked that it was amazing that even though she does not speak the language, she understands what they say about her. Still fueled by the energy of my annoyance, I shot back that it really *was* amazing, because she did not even know what the language was *called* until today.

"I get the energy!" she said, then sucked her teeth and walked over us to stand by the back door, holding one of the ashram's stray cats, who was crying and whining loudly, almost over my head, as I sat chopping vegetables for a salad. All of us squirmed a little, at the feeling of being underneath the cat with food that was bound to serve two hundred guests. Informed by all the warnings related to cats and pregnancy, I felt particularly, although perhaps not rightfully, vulnerable. Saraswati was apparently passing time while she waited for her food on the burner. She went back to it again a few moments later, and then she returned, wanting salad vegetables and some lemon.

Sapna, who had just retrieved four lemons from the storage pantry and was in the process of squeezing them onto a basin of thinly sliced beets, carrots and cabbage for today's salad, became the next of Saraswati's victims. Against Sapna's protests, Saraswati removed a lemon directly from her hand, to use for her own salad. Perceiving Sapna's annoyance, she told me "They need to understand that it's not a loss to the ashram. Whether it goes in my pot or the ashram's pot, it's all the same." Now she told me that some "of them" do not like her, but "most of them love me," so it's okay. Although she said "them," and "they," her tone conveyed that she felt on the defensive with me as well.

When Saraswati left after this last incident, Prema remarked: "When she speaks to us, she hits us. She *hits* us when she talks!" Here, she gestured with the back end of her knife at her lower back.

In the evening I saw Saraswati again and she told me: “Make sure to tell those ladies tomorrow that it’s not good to do what they do. You should send positive energy to everyone, and even if the person can’t understand you, they still get the meaning of what you are saying.” It was hard not to think of the knife in Prema’s back.

Weeks later, when Saraswati left the ashram, she made a donation to each of the workers, a small package for each person, consisting of a bar of soap and some other cosmetic and toiletry items, something she had done during her stay in the ashram the previous year as well, I was told. The woman who reported this to me said that Saraswati purchased the things from “Big Bazaar,” a supermarket chain in Trivandrum that sells foreign and upscale goods and groceries. “Pears!” she exclaimed, citing the brand name of this luxury soap. They were obviously quite impressed with the kindness. I thought about Saraswati’s comment: “Most of them love me,” and wondered if she was partly assured of this because of her reputation for giving gifts at departure. The gifts seemed to indicate some level of caring and compassion and served to soften (if only slightly) my own feelings toward Saraswati, as no doubt they did and were meant to do with the workers to whom she gifted them. Although the gifts were mere trifles, they at least marked her awareness of the hard and often thankless work contributed by these people. Many more guests and staff left the ashram each day without any display of gratitude.

Although this incident with Saraswati was by no means typical, my telling here is meant to convey something more about the rift I described in the previous chapter, demonstrating the kind of entitlement that volunteer staff sometimes displayed in ashram spaces occupied by paid workers – walking through common spaces without the usual salutations or greetings, and even in some cases borrowing workers’ kitchen tools or prepared foods without asking. It is not incidental that this scene, brought forward here as an example of fraught relations between

foreign staff and Indian paid workers in the Neyyar Dam ashram, also illustrates the privileged status given to some ashram animals. In the next section I return briefly to the theme of compassion or noncruelty towards animals and the way this overlaps with issues forefront in workers' lives.

Leftovers and Undesirables

In addition to Shanti the dog, there were also a handful of cats associated with the ashram community, and favored in particular by the foreign voluntary staff. As in the scene above with Saraswati, foreign volunteer staff often carried the cats through the kitchen as they helped themselves to food or prepared plates for the animals themselves. Cats were frequently present during morning staff meeting, on the laps of one or another staff member, and despite being fed separately, they also made their noisy presence known during meals, when they cried for their share.

While guests of the ashram ate their meals in a large dining hall, seated side by side in silence, and served by a combination of karma yogis (mostly yoga vacationers, with one voluntary staff member and the main kitchen manager – a paid worker – supervising), staff and workers ate separately. Most workers not employed in the kitchen ate in a small hall just upstairs from the kitchen, where daily rice, curries, and buttermilk were all kept aside for the brunch-time meal. Kitchen workers tended to take their meals right in the small room where they worked. Some volunteer staff ate in the workers' dining area, particularly during inclement weather, but many went out to an adjacent verandah, where they could absorb the sun at brunch or watch the sunset during the dinner hour. For my own part, I moved around. I sometimes ate with workers in the kitchen, other times in the workers' dining room, and other times outside with staff. With the exception of my first few days in the ashram or special feast days, I did not take meals with

guests, since the required practice of *mauna* (silence) did not lend itself to participant observation. Without fail, I took my evening meals (when workers had gone home) with staff.

While they ate, many staff on the rooftop threw morsels of food to the cats, who had become accustomed to being served and would conduct intrusive and sometimes angry begging during mealtimes. Often, on nights when chapati was served, cats were the recipients of extra treats. On many a Monday or Wednesday night, when I arrived at the rooftop after a shower, feeling quite exhausted and spent from an afternoon rolling chapatis, I listened, only half-amused, to the jokes and complaints of Indian staff in particular about having to chew rocks. Admittedly, the chapatis we turned out were nothing like the soft, airy breads with the same name that I have tasted in homes as well as SYVC centers in North India, and even in this very ashram when a crew of North Indian cooks came down to help out during high season. Absent their help, our chapatis were hard and chewy, and usually by the time we ate them at six or six-thirty, they were also fully cold. Kitchen workers, aware of the problem, blamed it on the large quantity and the difficulty of maneuvering such a large mass of dough, a task handled by Shyam, the ashram's head cook. Shyam would mix all the dough and then leave it aside in a bowl for Nirmala-chechi to measure out into ping pong-sized balls to be rolled by a group of seven or more of us, each at a small round board in the noisy main room of the kitchen. Several times I watched as the results of our hard labor were torn and tossed to the cats, who made no complaints about their chewy texture.

Figure 16 Kitchen workers roll chapatis (author second from left) July 2010

Nonetheless, on days when there were leftover chapatis, kitchen workers not only spread the day-old flatbread with a coconut-sugar mixture to have with their morning tea but also divvied up whatever remained at the end of each day to take home. I asked Meenakshi one day what she would do with the chapatis, and she told me how her daughters would run to collect them when she came home, hungry after returning from school. "They'll heat them up, spread ghee, and eat," she beamed, happy to have some to take home on this day. Many times I witnessed the careful sharing and distribution of leftover food or prasad, which workers carried home in scavenged bits of plastic bag or clean used paper. Often at the end of a shift, a senior worker could be seen counting individual nuts or pieces of dried fruit to be sure resources were shared equally. Despite now having regular employment (at least during the high season), many paid workers had known hunger and few had any savings to guard against experiencing it again in the near or distant future.

Figure 17 A worker divides dates and almonds at the end of a shift.

If some volunteer staff, as Gita in the previous chapter, seemed oblivious to the extent of workers' poverty or the part that ashram meals and leftovers played in the sustenance of their families, it was clear from other comments that Indian people on the staff side were more conscious of differences and in fact saw them as of indicators of class and status. Although the matter of the chapatis does not apply, since most staff and workers agreed these were not the most appealing foods at the ashram, there were other dishes that were met with a less universal response. Kappa (the locally grown root vegetable that was cause for my cut hand in the previous chapter) was one of these. On days we went through the painstaking work of chopping and mashing kappa some workers ate more than two meals, relishing the savory flavors of this traditional dish. They did this even despite what they considered sub-par curries or gravies that did not contain fish, meat, or enough chilies to completely satisfy their palates. Staff did not always feel the same. For non-Indians unaccustomed to it, it can be hard to digest, and for Indians it can carry important connotations associated with poor laboring and farming families.

On the rooftop, one day, I sat eating with my husband on a rare dry morning, with a bit of sun (most of our time in Neyyar Dam was during the rainy seasons – there are two monsoons in this area of Kerala, and we managed to catch both). Krishna, a South Indian who had been on

staff for a couple of years, came with his own plate and settled down near us, observing, in Malayalam: “We’ve become poor people.” I didn’t understand the implication at first, and Biju hesitated a moment, then told me. Because kappa is a staple in poor households, especially those that farm (it is a cheap and easy to grow starch that is slow to digest), Krishna felt the meal a bit of an insult. I had grown to love kappa, in part because this was a staple in Biju’s own home in Idukki. There, kappa is often served as a pre-dinner snack around teatime, accompanied by spicy fish curries or, on rarer occasions, chicken or beef. Kappa is also a breakfast food and will be served as soon as it can be ready, usually around ten in the morning. Biju remembers this as a comfort food of his childhood and we always looked forward to kappa on our returns to India, since it is not easy to acquire or prepare in the US.

Later in the same meal, Krishna noticed a small pile of green chilies at the side of my plate, which I had been privileged to because of my work in the kitchen. The ladies there knew where to find the small plants that grew on the property and doled them out sparingly to a few individuals in the know. “People here talk a lot of high morals,” Krishna said. “But the truth is, at the ashram everyone gets corrupted.” He seemed to think I had developed a love for chilies from the corrupting influence of my association in the kitchen. I told Krishna I personally did not believe there was any moral virtue in avoiding chilies, but I did take his point.

The SYVC dietary guidelines are based in an understanding of the three gunas, alluded to above in an excerpt from Nelson (2006). Feuerstein (1998) explains: “*Sattva* is regarded as buoyant and illuminating. *Rajas* is stimulating and mobile. *Tamas* is inert and concealing” (1998:78). These qualities abide in all nature and all life, and are influential on physical, mental, and psychic levels, so that sattvic food, sattvic company, and sattvic music can bring about a sattvic nature. SYVC principles encourage cultivating sattva-guna, avoiding tamas and

entertaining rajas only sporadically and with purpose. For example, a bout of tamasic dullness brought on by a heavy meal, receiving bad news, engaging in a tamasic or dulling activity, or depression can best be escaped with the aid of a rajasic activity or rajasic food: upbeat physical activity or intellectual competition, even a cup of tea. Once the transmutation from tamas to rajas occurs, sattvic activities, like quiet study, devotional chanting, asana practice, or meditation can have a calming effect on the active motion of rajas.

Following these principles and also the principle of *ahimsa* (nonviolence), SYVC ashrams and centers ban meat, fish, and eggs from the diet, as they are considered tamasic or in some cases rajasic, but nonetheless violate the principle of ahimsa. Chilies are not outright banned in most SYVC branches, but extremely spicy food is discouraged because it is thought to stimulate the mind and body too much in the direction of rajas. In Neyyar Dam, senior directorial staff had recently made a sweep through the kitchen to remove all chili powder and asked that fresh chilies no longer be used in any amount. However, my experience of the new rule was informed by my long history in this and SYVC's other locations where chilies and chili powder were regularly used. I interpreted the new prohibition as one based on the taste preferences of this ashram's foreign leadership and the many foreign guests, rather than an outright spiritual law, and I agreed with my husband who argued passionately that the food, especially slow, starchy kappa, would not digest properly without chilies. Sneaking a few chilies on the side did not feel like an act of corruption to me.

Krishna articulated a classed sensibility to which he and other cosmopolitan Indians were more keenly tuned than many foreign staff in the ashram. He understood the sattvic dietary choices advocated by the SVYC in terms of their class- and caste-based origins and everyday practice in India, such that non-sattvic foods were associated with lower people, of poorer nature

and upbringing – chilies were not just unauthorized but corrupting; eating poor people food made one "become poor people." Foreigners, on the other hand, could easily remain ignorant of these subtleties, especially since the organization formally coded its dietary guidelines and other beliefs in terms of "traditional India" more than Brahminical Hinduism. Therefore, from some of what I have portrayed in this and the previous chapter, it could seem that foreigners were simply blind and ignorant of the ways their privilege operated in the context of relations with workers and likewise blind to the micropolitics around food choice and dietary restrictions and their history in India. Thus, it would seem to be Indian people on the staff side of the staff/worker dividing line (whether paid or not) who enforced this line – a situation not unlike the colonial context when English-speaking elites shaped British conceptions of religion and the caste system, thus closing out interpretations from subaltern perspectives. That is a part of what I have argued. And yet, as I argued in Chapter Three, the blindness on the part of foreigners seemed largely based in a willful focus of attention on the individual spiritual and health-promoting benefits of "doing yoga in India," rather than on the interpersonal and inter-cultural opportunities presented by the encounter with Indian people. Moreover, in some cases, it became clear that there were clear valuations and suspicions operating in the context of the encounter between foreign staff and Indian people across difference – not accidental blindness but a more directed mis-seeing or prejudice, the result of a particular kind of focus. Although I was privy to articulations of this kind of bias only on rare occasions, I do not doubt that it was more common than I was able to elicit in recorded narratives. As one strong example, I present the following story.

Noncruelty and Its Lack: Concluding Thoughts

On one of my last days at the ashram in December, a foreign volunteer staff member I will call Paul came to my room when I was in the middle of an interview. It was past eight at night, a time

when staff were required and expected to be present at satsang. Normally, I did not schedule interviews at times that conflicted with ashram activities, but since this was my next to last night and the woman ensured me she would not go to satsang in any case, I went ahead with her suggestion that this was the best time to meet. Still, I was surprised to find Paul, too, had opted out. During most of our time at the ashram, Biju and I had stayed in an outside room usually reserved for senior staff or VIP guests, but during the last few days the ashram had needed our room, so we had shifted to a smaller room inside the newly constructed corridor of smaller staff rooms just above the kitchen. Here, I was more privy to the comings and goings of other staff and also more available to their observation of me. Paul, seeing my light on, seized the opportunity to approach me with a concern.

Paul said he wanted to talk to me, and I invited him in, but he said it had to wait until later, because it was private. When I finished the interview, I was tired and had much to write about from a very full day, but I went and checked in with Paul anyway. Without pausing for an invitation, Paul walked across the hall into my room and shut the door, so as to protect the information he was about to share. Now, he proceeded to explain to me his theory about what was happening with the ashram cats. In the past few days, several cats had sickened and two had died. When this was discussed at staff meeting, the implication was that they were sick with something unknown that was spreading from one cat to another. Paul had another theory. He believed that the cats had died from poisoning at the hands of kitchen workers. He wanted to know if I had heard anything about it and whether I would agree to ask around, surreptitiously, and find out who knew what about the suspected poisonings.

A comment I had made in the staff meeting a few days earlier was part of Paul's reason for suspicion. In the meeting I had pointed out that the cats seemed to be getting very

comfortable in the kitchen, and that perhaps we should reinstate or work harder to enforce the rule that animals are not allowed in the kitchen or temples of the ashram. My comment was informed by a number of years of experience and training under directors in different SYVC locations who had taught me that even Swami Vishnu who had a great fondness for animals, was quite strict about where and when their presence was appropriate in ashram facilities. Working around food, I also felt concerned for the safety of all ashram inhabitants, given that staff often handled animals absent mindedly in the presence of cooked food or food that was to be served raw. If there was a touch of ulterior motive in my comment, it was related to my own fears of being exposed to something dangerous during my pregnancy.[88]

I had weighed my decision to bring up the matter in the meeting carefully, especially because as a researcher I tried to remain a bit in the background. But in the end I decided that it would be beneficial to all – staff, workers, and guests alike – to have this rule enforced. I never imagined that the cats would soon become sick and that my comment could be interpreted as representing the opinion of anyone other than myself. I now told Paul that workers in the kitchen had nothing to do with my comment and that I thought his suspicions were misplaced. He seemed unconvinced and was even considering leaving the ashram, concerned that the poisoning of animals might indicate a level of immorality that would put his own life in jeopardy.

Although I was quite certain that Paul was wrong about his suspicion, the imagined incident bears a striking resemblance to one described in an essay by Robert Darnton (1985) about a workers' revolt in Paris, in the late 1730s.[89] In Darnton's opening words, "The funniest thing that ever happened in the printing shop of Jacques Vincent, according to a worker who witnessed it, was a riotous massacre of cats" (1985:75). In the essay, Darnton describes an account by a worker in the shop named Nicolas Contat, who recounted the favorable

relationships that the master and mistress of the house at rue Saint-Séverin had with the household cats.

> The master's wife adored them, especially *la grise* (the gray), her favorite. A passion for cats seemed to have swept through the printing trade, at least at the level of the masters or *bourgeois* as the workers called them. One bourgeois kept twenty-five cats. He had their portraits painted and fed them on roast fowl (Darnton 1985:76).

Meanwhile, "the cook secretly sold the [masters'] leftovers [meant for the workers] and gave the boys cat food – old, rotten bits of meat that they could not stomach and so passed on to the cats, who refused it" (Darnton 1985:76). At some point, fed up with their treatment, some of the apprentices staged a midnight howling fest, pretending to be stray cats, not belonging to the household. The howling went on for several nights outside the mistress's bedroom, keeping her from sleep, so that when she finally could take no more, she ordered the apprentices to get rid of the stray cats but not to touch the household cats, particularly her favorite, *la grise*. The apprentices then staged a ritual trial and slaughter of the cats (actual cats of the household), leaving their dead and beaten bodies in the courtyard where the mistress could find them. Darnton observes that Contat, in his telling

> set the event [of the cat killing] in the context of remarks about the disparity between the lot of workers and the bourgeois – a matter of the basic elements in life: work, food, and sleep. The injustice seemed especially flagrant in the case of the apprentices, who were treated like animals while the animals were promoted over their heads to the position the boys should have occupied, the place at the master's table. Although the apprentices seem most amused, the text makes it clear that the killing of the cats expressed a hatred for the bourgeois that had spread among all the workers: "The masters love cats; consequently [the workers] hate them" (Darnton 1985:78-79).

Though it is doubtful Paul had been exposed to the story of the Paris workers' revolt his suspicions did articulate with the relations inherent in Contat's story, suggesting that Paul was well aware of the class differential between staff (cat lovers) and workers (supposed cat haters). Perhaps he even believed that workers had a reason if not a right to commit such a crime against

the privileged animals. It is difficult to say, given that his remarks caught me quite off guard. There was no time for follow-up, since I was leaving the next day. What *is* clear is that Paul felt a greater loyalty to and affection for the cats than for the workers, whom he mistrusted enough to suspect them of intentional killing and conspiracy. And while Paul's suspicions were certainly remarkable within the context of encounters and relations I observed overall, they do drive home some of the points I have raised in this chapter.

Though relations between the staff side and the worker side of the SYVC branches in India were overall sparse and seemingly of little consequence (remember Sharada's description of her encounters with foreigners in the previous chapter: "They'll say 'How are you?' We'll say 'Ok, sukham'"), contact via the byroads of relations with animals and conversations about sustenance, food, and home revealed a more complex set of underlying attitudes, values, and beliefs about one another. While Irena's sense that workers needed to be educated about caring for animals seemed innocuous, if naïve, Paul's suspicion signaled a greater depth of mistrust for workers' innate goodness that was nonetheless parallel to Irena's convictions in many ways. Likewise, if Rajesh and Maria denied relations of servitude at the core of the SYVC's division of labor, Krishna's articulation of difference on the basis of taste, sliding easily into a judgment about morality (Bourdieu 1984) made clear that he, like other Indians on the staff side had a keen awareness of workers' social position. Saraswati's sense of entitlement and self-righteousness in the kitchen and Ram's easy description of paid workers as servants further underlined a culture of servitude that was subtle yet ever-present in the context of these relations. And if there was any doubt, Leena's insistence that she was ready to die, so fed up with the hardships that had plagued her since childhood, drives home the hard reality of workers' lives.

In the next chapter I consider the local sites of the SYVC's global mission at the edges of three different ashrams in India. In a meditation on the theme of neighborliness and specifically Appadurai's description of globalization as having brought about a "neighborliness, even with those most distant from ourselves" (1996:29), I think through the ways SYVC insiders, both Indian and foreign, conceived of the organization's others in and outside the ashram walls.

Figure 18 Workers stop for a photo after sweeping ashram grounds, August 2013

Chapter Seven
Real Neighbors and Imagined Communities

Raghu Pati Raghava Raja Ram Patita Pavana Sita Ram
Sita Ram Sita Ram Sita Ram Jaya Radhe Shyam
Radhe Shyam… Jaya Radhe Shyam

Ishwara Allah Tere Nam Sabako Sanmati Te Bhagavan
Jesus Moses is thy name, Love thy neighbor as thyself[90]

Moses Buddha [is thy name, Love thy neighbor as thyself]… Buddha Allah……
Allah Krishna [is thy name, Love thy neighbor as thyself]… …. Krishna Rama…..

The paths are many but the Truth is one
Love thy neighbor as thyself
The names are many but God is one
Love thy neighbor as thyself – Kirtan (Sivananda Chant Book)

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to present further evidence of the frictions and divides between groups of participants in the SYVC. While previous chapters have described relations among various levels of SYVC insiders, here I seat these frictions within the larger frames that contain them, expanding the circles of relation under consideration beyond the self-contained organization to the communities outside the SYVC's walls. The SYVC in India has several local sites, each of them interfacing with the ideas and actualities of the surrounding country in different ways. As described in Chapter Four, the urban centers are a space where cosmopolitan Indian students and a smaller but more invested group of certified teachers can intersect with and impact upon images and imaginaries of Modern Yoga and bring their own understandings to bear on what this yoga is about. The ashrams more often maintain an arms-length distance from the local communities, or when they do interact, do so either in charitable terms, or in terms of employer-employee or even patron-client relations. They maintain at once, from the perspective of the mostly-foreign leadership and guests, a fascination with ideas of India or more likely

"traditional India" or "traditional Hinduism" and a distance from actual local people who are not usually part of the organization's sense of self, as shown in Chapters Five and Six. But there is also the middling category of the paid staff, who trouble this basic set-up in some important ways. Their status as paid employees does index their lower economic status, thus positioning them differently from voluntary staff, whose cultural capital and/or greater economic flexibility allow them to give their time and labor for free. However, their insider position in their roles as teachers and administrators, makes paid staff central to the organization's sense of self – a contradiction, in some ways, to the dissertation's overall argument, but perhaps also a contradiction that proves the rule. Paid staff seem to play a key role in enforcing the separation between the two sides, even as they themselves straddle the two, as I argued in Chapter Six. At the same time the centrality of a few long-term Indian staff, both paid and unpaid, suggests an exception to the system of inequality I have critiqued here, allowing for some movement between and across spheres of belonging in the SYVC, at least for a small subset of (mostly male) Indian participants.

In this chapter, playing on the central lyric to a popular SYVC chant, "Love thy neighbor as thyself," sung to the tune of a Gandhian classic "*Raghu Pati Raghava Raja Ram*," I examine the SYVC's relationship to its neighbors in India, both in and outside of the organization's gates. Arjun Appadurai observes that "with the advent of the steamship, the automobile, the airplane, the camera, the computer, and the telephone, we have entered into an altogether new condition of neighborliness, even with those most distant from ourselves" (1996:29). But with this possibility and fantasy of connection comes a "rootlessness, alienation and psychological distance between individuals and groups" that Appadurai calls "the central problematic of cultural processes in today's world" (1996:29). We may feel or fantasize a proximity and sense of shared community

with what the SYVC calls “like-minded souls” (email correspondence, “You Can Make a Difference,” February 2009) far from our own country of origin – a sense of neighborliness with spatially distant others, akin to Anderson’s “imagined communities” (1983). But in forging a sense of self in solidarity with a vision shaped by the contemporary global, we also participate in outlooks that can bring about a sense of isolation from those most proximate to our homes and origins (people who may share some of our social and biographical history but not our globalized vision of peace through spirituality). This is true for Indian staff and outside teachers in the SYVC as much as for foreigners. Further, our very vision of this global community and identity can create blind spots that obscure the intimate peripheries of our globalized projects – those who remain outside the walls of the locally bounded sites, such as the ashrams and centers of the SYVC, or outside the imaginary of our transnational sense of self, the “like-minded souls” of globalized yoga. Privileging the global (in this case the SYVC and it’s globalized vision of yoga) and the individualized focus of new spiritualities has consequences in our everyday and localized encounters. I aim to demonstrate these consequences in this final ethnographic chapter, through the words and experiences of Indian staff in the SYVC and through examples of how SYVC ashrams in India conceived of and encountered their neighbors.

Whereas previous chapters demonstrated more subtle processes of understanding and misunderstanding that did not often result in direct conflict or confrontation, in this chapter I show that the SYVC’s attitudes and practices towards local people were often quite direct and explicit. The SYVC’s policies held staff accountable to its own modes of engagement with local communities, often constraining the stance and relationship of Indian participants or would-be participants vis-à-vis their own neighbors. Furthermore, this failure of the neighborly goes both

ways. I found that there was mutual distrust between the SYVC and the surrounding communities, and I bring that tension to light below.

"You're More Local Than Me!": Gradations of Locality in a Global Vision

It's the end of our daily staff meeting in the Madurai ashram, one morning in January, 2011. The in-season group here is relatively small but surprisingly international. There are just a few senior teaching staff, some of them seasonal. There are also a handful of temporary staff who have not completed the TTC but participate in administrative jobs like running the reception and gift shop. Additionally, there are a few paid workers. Unlike in Neyyar Dam, the number of staff plus workers here never gets much above the low twenties. The ashram's director, a volunteer staff, is a young Malayalee man I will call Anand, whose father was the long-time head cook in the Neyyar Dam ashram (now semi-retired). For about two years Anand directed the SYVC center in Trivandrum, but he was transferred to Madurai after the former swami in charge resigned from the organization. His younger brother now directs that center, and Anand is learning the ropes of running this ashram, with intermittent support from senior staff in Neyyar Dam. At different points during my stay in Madurai from January through mid-March, the ashram had staff and workers from Karnataka, Kerala, and Tamil Nadu, from Delhi and Uttar Kashi, and from Canada, France, Germany, Hungary, Japan, and the United States.

This morning we have been talking about a problem with mice invading the dormitories. Staff seek a good solution for catching the mice, and Anand, when questioned, says that indeed they have caught some mice with the live traps we are currently using. "What they usually do," he says, referring to an unnamed "they," that stands in for Indian members of the staff or perhaps local paid workers is "…catch and then put in the water [to drown]." He shrugs and looks embarrassed, adding "I don't do it."

Now, switching gears, an older and long-serving temporary staff from Germany – I'll call her Shanta – hands Anand a piece of paper and asks "Are you going to write the name and some nice description of the temple.... Of the trip?"

The ashram is organizing a field trip to some local temples, and Shanta wants the temple names and a brief description so that she and other staff can announce the trip in classes and satsangs. A curious conversation ensues.

> ANAND: You've been many times, no? [He implies she would be just as qualified to write the description.]
>
> SHANTA: Yes, but you're the local person.
>
> A: I'm not local! [Indeed, Anand moved to Tamil Nadu just shy of one year before this conversation, and although he is South Indian, he has probably not been to any of the temples on this trip more than Shanta. He and his family speak Malayalam, whereas the people in this area speak Tamil.]
>
> At this point, another foreign woman, a new and temporary staff from France, charges Anand: You're more local than me!

Although they may rightly claim insider status to this internationally envisioned organization, foreign members, especially those new to India, recognize and are recognized for their status as non-locals in the Indian context. However, as this scene indicates, they may misinterpret the location of their Indian counterparts on the staff side of the organization, who often see themselves as equally non-local to a given site. As I have argued in previous chapters, differences between and among Indians within the SYVC often go unrecognized by foreigners in the organization, a pattern consistent with other transnational settings (Salazar 2005).

Shekhar, a paid staff who previously served for a number of years as a volunteer in a SYVC ashram in his home state, reflected on this distance from the local in his own sense of self, during a private interview. I asked Shekhar if he felt he had learned much about other cultures through his experience in the SYVC.

He responded: "Yes, and even when I am with Indians, I feel like I'm different…." Shekhar described how others in the surrounding community responded to him after he had spent some years as a staff in the ashram, indicating he had not just learned from but begun to emulate some of the foreign ways he had been exposed to in the SYVC. "I don't have the same feeling as [others]…" He said he made more eye contact with authorities and was comfortable talking to people of all ranks in his community, so that even if he didn't perform well (in this case, in a classroom setting), "they appreciate my behavior."

Another sense of locality, which Anand may have been rejecting in his remark to Shanta, came through in a number of larger-scale encounters between the organization and its neighbors. This was a sensibility of "local" people as less spiritually evolved, less educated, and less sophisticated, or "below gear level," according to Binoy, quoted in Chapter Six. This type of sensibility seemed to influence the formal boundaries between the ashrams and their surrounding communities, including who comes in, who goes out, and how these ashrams were conceived by community members themselves. In the following subsections, I build this argument using examples from three different ashrams, each illustrating a different layer of the boundary between ashram and surrounding community: first, the issue of who comes in, second, the issue of where and under what circumstances ashram guests can venture out, and third, what happens when the ashram (or in this case a small group of ashram staff and guests) goes out on a tour of the local area.

"Out, You Thieves!": Ashram Impressions of "Local People"

The most striking set of examples became apparent during my visit to Uttar Kashi, site of the organization's smallest and most remote ashram, some two days journey by bus and private car

from Delhi, in hilly and lush landscape right on the banks of the *Ganga* (Ganges River). My husband and I undertook this journey in August during another rainy season, when frequent mudslides often made the roads impassable. We stopped for two days on the way, in Rishikesh, to break up the trip and visit the SYVC's parent organization, the Divine Life Society. However, both of us were feverish and suffering with a stomach bug during the journey, making the trip quite arduous and our disappointing reception in Uttar Kashi all the more crushing. Still, the lessons learned in and around Uttar Kashi proved important to my thinking here, as I will describe below.

Although my research in the SYVC positioned me in important ways as something other than a visiting staff or former staff, for the most part my reception in the centers and ashrams in India was as if I were simply another karma yogi. I did need to clarify special permission to conduct research and also had to make sure my time would be my own, given the usual hourly requirements on work-study participants and karma yogis, but this was never a problem. Both my husband and I were welcomed into all the centers and ashrams we visited during the course of my research, with few if any restrictions. Because of this, I was quite surprised after writing a formal email requesting to stay at the Uttar Kashi ashram, when the reply came back in the negative. An email reply signed by the director, one of the only senior Indian staff members remaining in a leadership position, and a rare female Indian swami, informed me that the ashram was full during the time I had planned to come. Still, rather than change my plans, senior staff I consulted in South India suggested that it would be relatively easy to find accommodations near the ashram in Uttar Kashi. I should continue as planned and could easily attend classes and satsangs while staying outside. Later, the director of the Neyyar Dam ashram wrote an email and, after getting no reply, made a phone call to Uttar Kashi on my behalf. However, when I left for

Delhi, there was still no clear answer other than what seemed to be a form letter regarding overbooked accommodations at the ashram. To my happy surprise, I later came across the name of a TTC graduate who had recently opened a small guesthouse just a stone's throw from the ashram gate. We immediately booked our accommodations, and on the very day we arrived in Uttar Kashi, I took a walk over to the ashram to introduce myself. Biju, whose fever was still high, stayed back in the room to rest after the drive.

My notes from the day recount my arrival at the ashram gate. It was latched but not locked, with no security post or sign directing towards reception. A man and woman, both foreigners, just inside the gate were finishing up some cleaning work, so I asked them which way to reception and then followed the man around a short path to a door that said "Office." Inside was a young Malayalee man, Praveen, seated behind the desk. I introduced myself and said I would like to meet Swamiji, the ashram's director. He asked: "You came alone, or did you come with...." but then faltered. "You came alone?" I told Praveen that I had come with my husband, who was sick and resting. Praveen informed me that Swamiji was also resting after her morning meal but then picked up the phone to dial her. In Malayalam he announced my arrival and then told me to wait. She would come momentarily.

After a few minutes, the swami, a petite woman in her early forties, entered and I stood up. She told me to sit, so I sat back down on the sofa where I had been, while she sat on a nearby chair. Now she began to ask about where I was staying, and upon hearing the name of the new guesthouse, she gave a meaningful glance to Praveen, and said "See?" She looked upset, and demanded to know who had given me the recommendation. Unnerved by her strong reaction, I gave only a vague reply, fearing I might get someone into her bad graces. I then clarified that we were not attending yoga classes at the guesthouse but only hoped to be close enough to the

ashram and were happy to stay with a fellow Sivananda teacher.

She cut in here, saying: “He’s not a Sivananda teacher. See, he’s taken the TTC here with us... But, that doesn’t mean…. He doesn’t have any association with the ashram.”

I began to wonder if there was something I should be concerned about, so I asked if there was something wrong with this man or his behavior. She shrugged it off, saying only: “There are so many politics.” She told me this ashram is not like others in the organization, because everyone is competing in the area. “The local people are all trying to do some business.”

Indeed, the surrounding area was mostly farmland, with little opportunity for gainful employment. It did not surprise me that industrious people in the area would seek out opportunities to profit from the international presence of the ashram. In the previous week I had talked with two men working as paid staff in the centers in Delhi, who had first made contact with the organization through this ashram and whose families were benefiting significantly (with improved homes and marriage opportunities) from their work.

The swami told me she had been a staff member here for eight years, and that she was in the Neyyar Dam ashram from the mid-nineties and was originally from Kottayam, a town near where my husband grew up. I told her a bit about my own background and then about my husband’s. Now she added that for many of the local boys a primary motivation for taking the TTC course was to meet up with “foreign girls” and go to America. Each time she said “local,” it felt to me as if she were pronouncing a dirty word, the very utterance of which left a bad taste in her mouth.

When the subject came around to my hope while in Uttar Kashi, to be part of the ashram community and routine while simply sleeping nights at the guesthouse, the swami

expressed that this would not be possible. Coming and going like this was not good, she said. I was surprised. After some more discussion about my research project, which she claimed not to have heard of before now, she declined both to be interviewed and to allow me to talk to or interact with any of the ashram guests for research purposes.

"What about the staff?" I asked.

"Who are the staff?" she asked me. "There are not many staff here."

I knew the name of only one young man from Kerala besides Praveen, whom I had just met. This other young staff, a volunteer, was the son of one of the Neyyar Dam workers I had gotten to know well. But the swami again declined, saying "He's only been here for nine months. What does he know?"

Finally I asked about the workers. "You want to interview the kitchen people?" she asked.

I said that I would like that very much, and she made a sour face, asking "What are they? They have nothing to do...."

I was getting a clear picture now about her impression of my research and began to realize that no matter what I said in this meeting – despite my attestations of support from a senior staff member (to which she had asked "Who is he? He's not my boss!") and my claims of insider status (I also think of myself as a "Sivananda teacher"), she felt this was a matter having nothing to do with and potentially disruptive to ashram affairs.

Resigning myself that the research as I had anticipated it would not happen here, I asked what I hoped would be an easy question about our simply attending classes and satsangs. At this point, she made absolutely clear that it was a strict policy that people from outside were not allowed to come for classes or satsangs. She suggested that if she allowed this of me, others would get the impression that this kind of coming and going was allowed and perhaps want to do

the same. This would seem, from my experience in Neyyar Dam, to be a policy aimed at foreign guests, who might prefer the more laissez-faire accommodations of a guesthouse to the strict ashram schedule where they would be monitored carefully and expected to abide by ashram dietary guidelines, including the avoidance of caffeine, meat, alcohol, and illegal drugs. This made sense to me, although I felt it might be simple enough for her to explain to anyone who asked that as a teacher and longtime member of the organization I had gotten special permission. But I later came to understand that she also had an exclusive policy barring local residents from entering or participating in ashram activities.

In the end, the swami made a final offer. Space had opened up at the ashram now, she said, so if we wanted we could come and stay, but research would be explicitly forbidden. To me, this seemed untenable. I already knew I wanted to meet several people in the area outside the ashram – two former staff members who were direct disciples of Swami Vishnu and were among the important early cohort of Malayalee staff and swamis in Neyyar Dam, one former associate of Swami Vishnu's from the Divine Life Society, and a current staff member from the Bahamas ashram who was staying on retreat with a fascinating old woman sadhu from Britain settled here. Besides, I felt there was no way I could avoid conceiving of my experiences in this moment or any future experiences at this ashram as participant observation, which would seem to be against her orders if I were staying as a guest. I also felt bad for our host who had already purchased foods and other items to accommodate our stay. I politely declined, but asked if I might look around the ashram once before leaving.

"There's nothing to see," she said, but she allowed that I might, after which I cautiously took a quick look at the simple asana and satsang halls, with lovely views looking over the Ganga. Before leaving, I talked for a short time with two Indian staff members, who were now

standing outside near the gate. I had met both of them briefly in Neyyar Dam. They asked me if I had eaten, and both tried to insist I eat something before leaving, as would usually be customary when visiting the ashram of one's guru. I declined, since food or tea had not been offered by the director. Finally, they insisted I must drink at least water, so I found a spot to sit and enjoyed a quick tumbler of the ashram's boiled water from a nearby canister while we chatted. I left through the small gate and walked up the road to the guesthouse.

Later in the day, after lunch, Biju was feeling better, and we were invited by the teenaged nephew of the owner of our guesthouse to walk with him to his family home a few kilometers away. We sat on their porch drinking fresh mint tea, communicated in a make-shift sign language and simple English with the children of the house, and enjoyed a peaceful walk by the Ganga, which raged in its mid-monsoon glory just outside our guesthouse room and diverged into smaller pockets of bubbling brook as we made our way up to our friend's home. On our way back, we met a man out with his buffalo, nearby our guesthouse, and our host told us he was the father of one of the paid staff we knew well from Delhi. We talked a bit and told him his son had asked us to find and visit him while we were here, so he asked if we would come now. We enquired after the number of people in the house and then promptly went to our room to retrieve some of the snacks we had brought from Kerala. We were then received for tea in the courtyard of his home, along with his wife, mother and son, plus the son's wife, their two children, a niece, and a neighbor girl.

Figure 19 View of Uttar Kashi Ashram and Ganga from a nearby bridge, August 2010

Later that night as we debriefed about our day with our host at the guesthouse, Ganesha, he told us a bit of his own story and clarified some of my doubts about the issue of coming and going at the ashram. Ganesha himself was an English teacher in a local school – a good and steady job, providing a modest income. His investment in this property was meant to build on his international experience at the ashram, providing the opportunity to meet and host new people and learn about far off places. When he took the TTC, he told us, he made a conscious decision not to apply for a scholarship, though he likely would have qualified, because the scholarship would only have been available in Neyyar Dam. Instead, he wanted to pay his own way and thus forge a stronger connection with the local ashram here in Uttar Kashi. He envisioned a future as a volunteer outside teacher and also hoped to continue attending regular satsang services, perhaps on a weekly basis.

At the ashram during TTC, Ganesha met a senior staff member from the Canada ashram, originally from Lebanon, whom I will call Narayan. They got along well, and Narayan invited Ganesha to go and stay for some time in the new Lebanon SYVC center as a teacher. Unfortunately, Ganesha's passport already had an Israeli stamp, and so he was eventually denied entry to Lebanon. Some time later, when Narayan was back at the ashram, and Ganesha had returned to teach his first class, he said, the swami in charge of Uttar Kashi saw him talking to

Narayan. She became upset, and later accused him, in his words, of trying to "make friendship" with the people. She later forbid him from attending satsang and declined his offer to continue teaching asana classes. When I remarked with surprise about the accusation of making friends, Ganesha defended himself, asking "Why would I want to make friendship? I am married. I have a family. I have a good job." I suggested I could think of plenty of reasons to make friends other than to secure a mate, a family, or a job. Many of my own close friends, including Narayan, whom my husband and I had met during a previous summer in Canada, were people I had met in the SYVC. As an odd coincidence, Narayan and his family were part of a unique category of participants in the SYVC headquarters in Val Morin who lived and worked outside, but had built homes just outside the ashram on property meant for this extended community of householder devotees. Narayan himself was very much like Ganesha, a professional who owned a restaurant in Montreal but had for years served as outside volunteer teacher and community member in Val Morin. Only in recent years, after moving into semi-retirement, had Narayan begun to travel more regularly to India as a teacher in the TTC.

I told Ganesha about the ashrams in North America where I had spent time – particularly the Val Morin headquarters, which regularly welcomed local residents for daily classes, satsangs and special programs. I understood, I told him, that the people here might not be very profitable to the ashram, if they wanted to charge for classes, but I had assumed because of my conversations with the paid staff in Delhi who got their start here that there might be some kind of charitable relationship with local children or others who wanted to learn yoga. "No," he said, and then gave me a stunning example of the extent of the barrier between the ashram and the local people, at least under the direction of the current swami in charge.

One day when Ganesha was at the ashram, some kids – he gestured at his own son, around seven years old, as he said this. "Kids half his size," he said, "were coming from school in the heat." Ganesha put his hand on his head, showing where the sun was beating down. "They were thirsty!" so they came inside the gate and helped themselves to some water.

"Now Mataji [as the north Indian people called her] saw this and came running out with a stick. 'You thieves!' she shouted, and chased them out, locking the gate behind."

"Thieves!" he yelled, recalling his surprise and horror in the moment. "These so-small children!" he exclaimed. "This is the state of our ashram's charity."

This swami's rather extreme reaction to the unauthorized entry of local children, as reported by Ganesha, seems harsh, if true. But the swami's comments to me on another subject did make Ganesha's story seem plausible. The ashram maintained a cave, a small modestly furnished retreat in nearby Gangotri. Swami Vishnu had used this cave for periods of solitude and intense practice, and it was now used as a retreat for staff and a pilgrimage site for Swamiji's devotees. When talking about the cave during my second and last meeting with the Swami – we had wanted to visit, but the roads up were closed due to rain – she explained to my husband and me that it was necessary to keep a staff member posted at the cave throughout the season of good weather and to lock up the cave carefully before closing for a few months. "See, we are an international place," she said, so the facilities are a bit better than in surrounding caves. "Those guys up there are Nepalis – coolies – and they'll break the bars and take things…." In her mind, it seemed, local people were thieves and opportunists, seeking "friendship" and profitable opportunity through any and all contact with this international place.

Although my time at the Neyyar Dam ashram bore out no such blatant examples, the sentiment expressed in this Swami's words is not altogether unfamiliar. To my knowledge, there

was no incidence of outside teachers or others from the local area who wished but were not allowed to participate in ashram activities. In fact the Neyyar Dam ashram provided many charitable services to the local community, including a free monthly medical clinic and a nursery school. But there were provisions in place to discourage guests from interacting with local people and businesses. Though the ashram gave the official explanation of problems with drugs and local police (see the Prologue to this dissertation), there were other aspects of social distance that seemed to go hand in hand with this measure, as the following subsection shows.

Figure 20 Neyyar Dam Ashram's medical staff serve in a monthly free clinic, November 2010

Avoid Tea and Communists: Regulating Relations with Local Communities

It was morning staff meeting in Neyyar Dam, in July 2010, and I had recently gotten settled in the ashram, during the first major phase of my research. Unfortunately, on this day, just a few days before I was to succumb to the ear infection discussed in Chapter Two, I accidentally slept through the morning satsang. Upon waking to realize my mistake, I showered and quickly slipped in to the staff meeting shortly after it had begun, only to find out that the staff were in the midst of a crack down from senior directors. Attendance, always taken among yoga vacationers and course participants, would now be instituted among the staff, the director informed us, to verify that all members were present for two satsangs and one daily asana class. In this first part of the meeting, the main director now went around the circle, asking each person in turn about

how they had spent the previous day. After each item they listed, for example "at ten o'clock I had food," the director prompted with a repetitive "and then," making many of us giggle and steal sly, embarrassed looks at one another. We were also asked to share our planned activities for the upcoming day. It was certainly a bad day to have missed morning satsang, and I was forced to answer with a weak excuse: I simply overslept. This was rare for me, so I assumed my body needed the extra rest and was not upset, though the inquisition was slightly embarrassing for all.

As the conversation opened up, we moved on to another sensitive topic. A Malayalee woman who was serving as a temporary staff, teaching and working in the reception, raised a question: Do visiting swamis (independent or from other organizations) need to secure out passes from the reception when they leave? The director answered, yes.

New to this system, I realized I was not sure was what was expected of me with respect to rules and out passes, so I asked, "Do staff need out passes?" He said, no.

Next, one of the ashram's long-serving paid staff spoke softly to the director from nearby, and the director then announced that some staff had been going to the tea stall just down the road from the ashram. This is not encouraged, he said. The meeting soon came to a close, after a brief discussion about the need to lock the back gate, near the car shed, where some local men who were currently ashram guests were keeping their motorcycles. The director instructed the supervisor of the paid workers, who was present in this and most staff meetings, to make sure a guard was posted at that back gate.

I kept silent during the discussion of the local tea stall. However, I myself was guilty as charged. During my first visit to the ashram in 2000, course participants and guests, unrestricted by the current out pass system, used to frequent this chai shop daily. I had fond memories of the

sweet man and his wife who used to talk with us on our visits and who proudly showed me, when I visited in 2002, a well (bearing water) that he had dug nearby the road. I was eager, during this return trip, to go back and finally have a chance to communicate in Malayalam. The previous day, unaware of the ashram's new policy, I had paid the chai shop a visit on my way back from Trivandrum. In fact, I had returned, along with my husband, through the unguarded gate at the back, since we had arrived by motorcycle. I was quite sure that the staff member who mentioned it to the director must have seen us at the shop or as we returned.

In my meeting later that day with the director, I decided to talk to him about it and find out why visiting the tea stall was prohibited. I felt confident that it was not because of the chai itself. The director himself had shown me during a walk-through of the ashram on my first day where I could find tea bags and an electric kettle, in the staff office room where our meetings were held, to make tea any time I wanted. So what was the source of the ban on visiting this shop, and why now?

We want to discourage frequenting such chai shops – especially this one, he told me – since relations with them are not good.[91] When another senior staff member entered the office where we were talking, she joined in the conversation. The tea stall owner is a known member of the Communist Party, they told me. The ashram is aware that someone has been feeding information to the communist paper, which has been giving bad press to the ashram, and so because of his affiliation they assume it is he.[92] In addition, the other staff member added, there is a need to help guests, who are new to yoga, by having more strict policies in place. Without strict rules, guests may not get the full experience they came for. I asked if something had happened to prompt the recent discussion, and she answered that this is the usual order of things. The rules tend to get harsh in response to an incident of some kind, she said, and then over time

the memory of the seriousness of the incident fades and they “swing back the other way” in terms of enforcement, until it gets out of control. Apparently my own absence from morning satsang joined in with a wave of other behavior that had become cause for a tightening of the reigns on all fronts – schedules, gates, and contact with the community were all to be monitored carefully from here forward.

When I asked about the specific issue of relating to the people in the local area she responded simply that “foreigners are seen as money.” It is a “tough one,” she said, because on one hand some see the ashram as a spiritual place and show respect. On the other hand, of course, some may outwardly be showing respect, but “it’s just buttery. You know,” she said, “because they want to stay on our good side,” and then she mentioned how the ashram is also seen as a potential source of donations.

I reflected on the conversation in my notes that night. Keeping distance, as the more strict policies of the ashram suggested, would probably help foreigners avoid harassment in the form of solicitations for money or business if this was indeed going on. Likewise, if the policy was to ensure that guests maintain the ashram schedule and diet and also avoid getting into trouble with drugs, asking guests not to frequent local businesses may help deter the connections that could lead to drug trafficking. But I wondered if this resistance to engage with local people might not just signal something else. When foreigners assume they or the international organization are “seen as money,” this very construction also seems to conceive local people in very limited and opposite terms, as potential charity cases or worse, “thieves.” Moreover, it seems to me that these stereotypes and misunderstandings are only bound to be increased by the enforcement of distance, whereas an occasional visit to the local chai shop or exchange with a neighbor might just open up avenues of increased understanding and the breakdown of stereotypes between

ashram participants and locals. The ashram cannot help but be a symbol of wealth to the greater community, but conversations across difference among individuals – perhaps over a cup of tea, or the purchase of a cup of tea – might just be one straightforward way to break through to something beyond symbol and stereotype. This, of course, is easier said than done. If we recall Shekhar's words about no longer feeling quite at home among Indians even in his own state, after spending some years in the ashram, we can easily imagine the gaps that would prevent the easy melting of stereotypes across language and cultural differences that extend beyond a few years training in an ashram environment.

Figure 21 Author's daughter at the chai shop in question, on a return visit, August 2013. Ashram head cook is second from right. Other individuals are unknown to author.

For Anand, who insisted in the Madurai staff meeting described above that he was "not local!" the ashram temple trip turned out to be an important demarcation of just how "local" he was, from the perspective of greater Madurai and its security and police force, as I describe below. In the following section, I describe this incident to demonstrate how Indian people affiliated with the SYVC are often forced into relationship with outside communities under terms constrained by their affiliation with this international organization. This is true even when, like Anand, they are marked as "local" by foreign members of the SYVC.

“He Is Not Your Friend!”: Local Limits on Global Identities

One morning, just before six, as satsang was starting in the main hall, a group of about a dozen ashram guests and three staff members (Anand and Shanta from the staff meeting described above, plus myself) set off in the ashram’s van with our driver Jai Ram for a local tour. We would visit two large temples – *Thirapurankundram*, a temple outside the city, devoted to Lord Murugan, and the city’s famous heart, a temple to the goddess Meenakshi. We would also climb some six-hundred steps to a small Siva shrine, have brunch in a local vegetarian restaurant and spend a couple of hours shopping in the city’s downtown, outside the main temple. As the van set off, all were in good spirits, chanting a sleepy but joyous round of *Jaya Ganesha* (salutations to Lord Ganesha, our “Daily Chants” in the SYVC), as we opened our windows to the morning mist, to reduce the condensation that had begun to build up on the front windshield. Anand asked me to lead, since he was losing his voice.

After a long day of step-hiking, prostrations, haggling with temple priests over the cost of “offerings,” and with stomachs full of masala dosa and strong, sweet South Indian coffee, our group finally arrived at the center of town, the *Meenakshi Amman Kovil*, or temple of Goddess Meenakshi, where we would have two hours, Anand told us, to explore on our own. Those who wanted to enter the temple left our shoes together at the temple cloakroom, and we established a meeting place for later. However, as we moved on into the temple after passing through security, everyone had the same destination, so the group was more or less intact. We passed through a long exterior hall next to the temple tank, which was dry, and I briefly stopped to wait for Anand who had been approached by a man wearing a small badge, indicating he was a government-certified guide. I assumed he must have been known to Anand, so did not pay much attention at first, but I later realized he was offering his services. Anand firmly told him “We do not want a

guide, and I am not a guide. We are here with a group from Sivananda Ashram." He shook the man's hold off the back of his shirt and looked straight ahead, on his way in to the temple.

When we reached one of the inner rooms of the temple, most of the guests were still following us. We passed a large orange-colored sculpture of Hanuman and then approached a small shrine to the nine planets said to govern over human fortunes and opportunities. These are not equivalent to the planets in the Earth's solar system as understood by astronomical science, but rather nine major Vedic astrological *grahas* (influencers): the sun, moon, Mars, Mercury, Jupiter, Venus, Saturn, and two lunar nodes (Rahu and Ketu). As we approached, I began to explain to the ashram guests near me the tradition of walking around this shrine, clockwise, either three or nine times, in order to balance the effects of these planets on our lives. We made our way around, planning for three circumambulations, but suddenly I looked up to see Anand was being led away from the shrine by two angry looking temple guides, with Shanta following. I kept my focus on finishing my round of the shrine, but when I came back to the front, a group of guests had gathered and one got my attention and said, "They are making so much trouble."

I looked in the direction he had pointed, but could not see anything. Then he said "Over there, where the fighting is!" I walked further away this time and pushed my way through a crowd of people who had gathered around Anand and the guides. In the middle of this group, Anand had been forcibly dragged by the arm to a temple pillar with a sign indicating a charge of fifty rupees for foreigners to enter this area. None of us had noticed the sign as we entered, and in fact though I had visited the temple many times, I had no memory of ever paying such a fee. Anand, who had been badly bruised by the men's grasp on his arm, summoned a nearby police officer, and we tried to explain that we were unaware of the donation and were ready and willing to leave.

The guides said that it was too late. We had already come inside. Yes, we said, but we did not see any sign when we came in; otherwise we might have paid or chosen to go out. "Still," I said, "he is not responsible."

"Yes, because he [Anand] is acting as guide," said the guide, "and this is not allowed." Shanta and I insisted we would take the group and ask anyone who did not want to pay the fee to leave. The guides said it was too late. Now Anand scolded them for having such a system. "The sign should be at the front and you don't allow people to enter if they don't pay. Now you are saying you won't allow us to leave?"

"We are just going," Anand said, finally, pulling away from the police officer's grasp. The officer now became very rough with him and spoke in disrespectful and demeaning language. "*Po da*" (go, you), he said using a diminutive form reserved for the very lowest of the low.

I stepped up now, speaking in Tamil, and asked if it was a crime to have foreigners as friends. Obviously they were not accusing Anand of being a foreigner, so why were they upset with him and not the rest of us, who perhaps should have paid better attention to the signs?

The officer came back in English: "He is not your friend, but a guide-only."

Shanta and I repeated firmly that Anand was not our guide, but that we were all members of a local ashram. Guests had come with us, but we were not acting as their guides in the temple. As we spoke, Shanti and I instinctively put our own bodies, mine some six months pregnant, between Anand and these men, at times quite forcefully pushing, since we took for granted they would not lay a hand on us and saw how roughly they were treating him. Although I only witnessed the bruises and his disheveled shirt and hair afterwards, several of the guests said later that the men had started the scene off by not just dragging but also hitting Anand. I was tremendously impressed at Anand's steady, cool response in the moment.

Finally the guides and officer spoke to one another quietly, and the officer then turned to me and said we could go. But as we started to walk away, the officer put his long arms in front of Anand, as a gate, saying “Not you. With you there is another case.” I asked what the case was, and he said it was the case of being a guide without permission. Now I was beginning to lose my temper. I told the officer “If he is a guide, I am also a guide.” I had, after all, been the one to explain procedures and all as we travelled with the guests through the temple, while Anand was more silently absorbed in his own thoughts. The officer then invited me to come along and be charged with my “friend.” Apparently we called his bluff, though, because after another moment, he finally dismissed us all, escorting us (again with forceful hands on Anand’s clothing and body) all the way out of the temple. When we reached the shopping area just outside the main temple, he said to continue and get out.

Outside on the street, after we spoke with guests and suggested they continue their shopping and meet later, as planned, Anand wanted to make an official complaint. There were three more police officers at the front, so we went over and I made our case, in Tamil, to one of them, who immediately gestured over my head to Anand, whom he took to be my representative. Once Anand retold the story – his Tamil is fair, but non-native, like my own – the officer took us back inside the temple to the office where we found the guide who had started the harassment. After several more minutes of arguing and Shanta’s and my own loud objections to the guide’s assumption that Anand was our paid guide, we did receive an apology from the guide, but Anand’s spirit was visibly deflated after the humiliating scene in front of ashram guests, and I too felt disheartened. Anand was a close friend, known to my husband and me for many years. We knew his parents and siblings and had shared home life with Anand for months at a time during his tenure at the SYVC in Trivandrum and also with his father during a summer in

Canada. It seemed in the eyes of the law, and of the general public, if the guides may serve as a stand-in for this group, our relations would always be conceived in terms of a commodified cultural exchange, just as the assumption on the part of the swami in Uttar Kashi was that “local boys” only joined the SYVC to find “foreign girls” and go to America. Here it seemed that even when the ashram wished to extend itself into the surrounding area, creating some opportunity for staff and guests to encounter local people and places, our status as foreigners would not only isolate us from local people but would thrust upon our supposedly “more local” members a separation from the organizational sense of self. Indian members of the SYVC were figured, by this outside public, not as our friends and fellow staff members, but as “locals,” by some definition, certain to be profiting from their position as spiritual guides, and not subject to the esteem and deference shown to the SYVC’s foreign members.

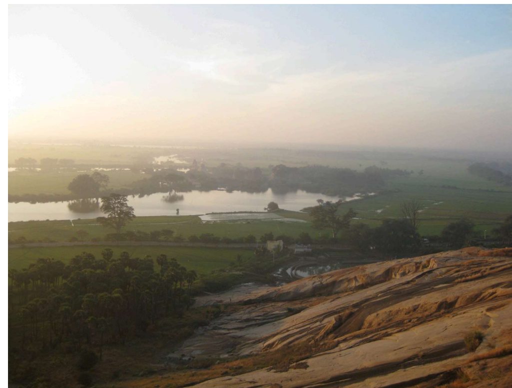

Figure 22 View of Madurai from atop a hill near *Thirapurankundram*, January 2011

Concluding Thoughts

Taken together with the other examples above, this final vignette underlines how Indian people in the SYVC are, regardless of the extent of their own identification with the organization’s mission and sense of self, positioned both by other SYVC insiders and by outside community members as somehow separate from the group. In Chapter Three, I argued that Indian people of various locations in the SYVC may legitimately search for their own identity not just in notions

of tradition but also in the cosmopolitan promise of a globalized spiritual movement. In this chapter, I have presented examples of staff and outside teachers who identify with the organization's cosmopolitan sense of self alongside examples of the barriers to their full embodiment of this identity.

Ganesha, like myself, considers himself a Sivananda teacher because he has been initiated into the gurukula lineage under Swamis Sivananda and Vishnudevananda and certified in their teaching tradition. Despite this insider identification, as a "local person" to the Uttar Kashi area Ganesha is regarded with suspicion and excluded from the organization's activities. Though I was also shut out from participation in the Uttar Kashi ashram, due to my research aims, the impact on my relationship to the organization was minimal. When I moved on to other SYVC sites, I continued undeterred in my insider status. For Ganesha, his embodied locality (demonstrated by his outside employment and family life, and constrained by his inability to obtain certain visas) marked him as ineligible for full membership in the SYVC community, even as it also framed him as an individual seeking to profit from the international space. His attempt to "make friendship" was not accepted as a cosmopolitan reach for a global community but was seen by the "less local" Indian senior staff member as a grab for power or drive to escape his (to her mind rightful) position.

In Neyyar Dam, the policies limiting contact between organization members and the local community reinforced this split between the SYVC and its surrounding localities. Once inside the ashram grounds, staff and guests were asked to remain disconnected from outside businesses and individuals who may not have the best intentions or impressions regarding the ashram. This policy cannot but have influenced people like Shekhar who felt that his indoctrination into the institutional culture of the SYVC had created a split between himself and other Indians. The

sensibility also seems to have impacted Binoy (from Chapter Six), who, upon growing into membership in the SYVC began to see local people as ignorant and "below gear level" even though his own family background was markedly similar to that of many such local people.

For Anand, this feeling of separation was marked from both sides. Foreign ashram staff interpreted him as local, or at least more local than themselves, thus holding him responsible for interpreting and presenting the local religious culture and tourist sites. Temple guides likewise assumed Anand was acting as (unauthorized) guide. But Anand was neither local nor a guide. He spoke the local language as a third language (after Malayalam and English), and he had only spent a few months in the city where the ashram was located, most of the time secluded in the ashram's strict daily routine and remote rural location. His own service as voluntary staff in the demanding role of center and then ashram director marked him as a committed and devoted member of the organization. His distance from at least some of the local staff members and workers, expressed by his embarrassed shrug and protest, "I don't do it," as he described how they killed the mice also demonstrates his own identification as a cosmopolitan SYVC insider. To my mind, Anand's comment is not all that different from Paul's suspicion, at the end of Chapter Six regarding (imagined) cat poisonings.

In Chapter Four, I described Indian SYVC member's claims on an inherited power present in Indian people, giving them an advantage over foreigners in yoga practice and understanding. For Indian people living and working in the organization, I argued, India was not only a backdrop but an essential, life-giving part of yoga. Nonetheless, as we saw in the ethnographic vignettes above, there is some tension between this claim and the claim of insider status in this transnational and cosmopolitan institution. Previous scholarship on Modern Yoga has remained relatively silent on the ways Indian people might be re-imagining themselves in the

context of transnational yoga organizations and how they negotiate political economies that seem to value India primarily as a symbolic resource for marketing. In this chapter I have offered one small window onto this imagining and onto the obstacles faced by Indian participants in the transnational communities of yoga, even for those who share in the globalized cosmopolitan vision of organizations such as the SYVC. In the final chapter, I return to the SYVC organization's mission of world peace through inner peace and argue that a focus on the self is not enough. For true peace, we must learn to talk across the various frictions and divides I have described in this ethnography, engaging across difference, rather than turning within.

Chapter Eight
True World Order and a Global Vision: Putting Peace in Practice

Introduction

Peace, health, and joy. These are the three words at the core of the SYVC's mission. As shown in the preceding chapters, SYVC organization members articulate these aims in terms of a focus on the self. Drawing from the teachings of organization founder Swami Vishnudevananda, SYVC staff and outside teachers see society as a cloth, with each individual representing a thread. To change the cloth from cotton to silk, the analogy goes, you must change each thread, one by one. "You can't change the world unless you can change yourself first," said one senior staff member, quoted in Chapter Three. Another observed, "[If] we change, the whole world will change. [If] we don't change – no way!"

This may be true. Yet, as I have argued in the preceding chapters, drawing on my ethnographic data and employing anthropological theories of inequality, this focus on the self obscures some important features of the surrounding landscape – a landscape of global inequality, in which the SYVC, as a transnational institution with a global agenda, is an active participant. Swami Vishnudevananda's teaching may have been correct. Focus on the self through yoga can improve health and peace of mind and can bring about greater happiness in the individual. But closing the eyes in meditation does not make the outside world go away. It merely makes that world recede into the background of one's concentration. In the transnational spaces of the SYVC in India, this partial vision, a conceptual blindness that neglects the SYVC's immediate neighbors and local workers, is an impractical approach to peace. It fails to fully conceive how the organization and individuals within it impact the local community. It overlooks the sharp inequalities staged in the context of any transnational institution employing low-wage workers in the service of an international cosmopolitan elite. Moreover, I believe it falls short of

Swami Vishnudevananda's inspired mission of world peace *through* inner peace, leaving his vision incomplete even inside the organization he founded.

In this final chapter, I will begin by returning to Swamiji's mission, describing both his seemingly practical approach, a focus on the self to achieve inner peace, and his heroic missions on behalf of world peace, demonstrating his fierce and empowered concern for peace beyond the individual level. In the next section, drawing on work by anthropologist Daromir Rudnyckyj, I describe the concept of a spiritual economy, arguing that the SYVC operates in an important node fusing the wider political economic context to a contemporary focus on the spiritual. Not unlike other transnational institutions with a spiritual or humanitarian bent, the SYVC is embedded in and to some degrees embodies the surrounding cultural economy of globalization. But as a longstanding transnational institution with an expanding global reach, the SYVC is poised to substantiate its vision of peace, if only it can shift its focus to incorporate its less privileged workers and local neighbors into this vision. In the following section, I return to the set of questions that defined this study from the start and propose a way forward for peace, drawing from scholars of inequality whose theoretical framework has shaped my thinking on relations across difference in the SYVC. I suggest that realizing Swami Vishnudevananda's vision of world peace through inner peace means turning out from the self to engage across the vast rifts of difference that I have described in this dissertation. This would require a practical application of the tools developed through yoga to engage with the neighbors and others of the SYVC community, as currently conceived. Finally, I contemplate the broader reach of this practical approach to peace, in light of recent media events closer to home, which help shed light on the implications of my findings for a wider vision of global peace.

Swami Vishnudevananda and His True World Order

At the Subramanya temple in the Sivananda Yoga Vedanta Center headquarters in Val Morin, Quebec, a photo of the organization's founder, Swami Vishnudevananda, hangs in the main room. The plump, graying renunciate from the South Indian state of Kerala is wrapped in a pale orange dhoti up to his mid-chest, with another small piece of cloth wrapped over his head. His arms are aloft, caught in wild gesturing, and his gaze is distant and unfocused. According to one of his long-time disciples who led a satsang in the Val Morin temple during the summer of 2008, this photo illustrates a classic case of Swami Vishnu mocking his disciples' expectations of Hindu holy men.

Although himself a major part of the 1960s trend of Indian gurus inspiring sometimes-misguided Western devotees to new forms of spirituality, Swami Vishnu also spent a considerable amount of time and energy working to peel back the mysterious veneer of spiritual authority projected onto, and sometimes willingly assumed by Indian masters. "I want you to stand on your own… your own…?" he asked, in one recorded talk (Vishnudevananda 1986) , pausing dramatically to allow students to erroneously complete the common phrase: "Two feet!" And then he shouted, in an admonishing tone: "Your own head!" (Vishnudevananda 1986). Swamiji wanted not only to teach students to practice *sirsasana*, or headstand. He also hoped to shake up their worlds, turning their preexisting expectations, including those about spiritual leaders, upside down.

Swami Vishnudevananda's first encounter with yoga, the foundation of his SYVC organization in North America, and the SYVC's global spread, including back to India, are detailed in the introductory chapter to this dissertation. This trajectory is similar to that of other modern yogas, guru movements, and Hindu-inspired meditation movements (De Michelis 2004,

Forsthoefel and Humes 2005, Williamson 2010). Swamiji's explicit concern with peace (especially his unusual modes of staging this vision) may have been unique amidst globalized yoga movements, but it was certainly not outside the frame of what was conceptualized as the goal of most contemporary spiritual movements, including yoga.

Swami Vishnudevananda's concern with world conditions and his call for peace both draw from the larger socio-political climate of the time. In 1957, the year Swamiji set out from India for North America, the world was divided by the Cold War. The United Nations had just set up their first emergency peace-keeping force, in response to the Suez Crisis (un.org),[93] and nuclear war was a threat on the minds of many. The *Journal of Conflict Resolution* began publication in that same year, and another, the *Journal of Peace Research* began in 1964 (Cortright 2008:2). In June of 1968, the UN General Assembly approved the first Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons.

According to SYVC legend, one day in 1969, perhaps prompted by fear circulating about impending nuclear devastation,

> Swami Vishnu-devananda [had] a vision of the world being engulfed by fire and people fleeing in all directions, oblivious of boundaries. He [saw] national, political, and other boundaries as limitations of the mind, which must be overcome for there to be world peace. Swamiji [began] his world peace mission, calling it the "True World Order." Its first programme [was] the Yoga Teachers' Training Course…. (Yoga Life 1994:27).

Swamiji believed that this month-long intensive Teachers' Training Course could help establish the physical and mental discipline and healthy lifestyle he felt were the necessary foundations for a peaceful mind. Largely, the TTC course functions by shaping a strong routine – early morning wake-up and fully packed schedule during all waking hours – for each of six days per week, with just a portion of one day free each week for rest or personal errands. Graduates of the course learn that in a heavily structured life, accompanied by uplifting activities like self-study, prayer,

meditation and devotional chanting, the mind has little time to turn downwards, become distracted, or feel depressed. This highly structured daily discipline, together with Vedantic teachings about the illusory nature of all change or sense of separateness, is the SYVC's platform for inner peace. Through a variety of practices, TTC students are taught to control the mind and thoughts, in order to come to a true sense of the all-pervasive Self and thereby relieve pain and suffering that, according to Swamiji's teachings, stem from a false sense of identity with the limited self or ego.

Transcending this individual application, Swamiji extended the teachings of Vedanta to other senses of identity, like nation, country, ethnicity, and religion, arguing that these too are temporary, manmade, and therefore illusory boundaries that should be discarded in favor of a True World Order of universal brotherhood (SYVC 1977).[94] To demonstrate that "man is free as a bird" (YogaLife 1994b:23), Swamiji began a Round-the-World Peace Mission in August of 1971 (YogaLife 1994a:22). Swamiji held a pilot's license, and in 1970 he had purchased a twin engine Piper Apache, which was then painted by Peter Max in bright rainbow colors and uplifting images and dubbed a "peace plane." Swami Vishnu's first flight was to Belfast in Northern Ireland, where he marched with actor Peter Sellars and "handed out leaflets with the message of love as expressed in all the religions of the world" (YogaLife 1994:22). Next, he flew from Tel Aviv

> across the war-ridden Suez Canal. When Israeli jets realized what he was doing, they buzzed the small plane, knocking it about with their powerful jet exhausts. Swami Vishnu-devananda bombed them with flowers. On the other side of the Canal, this scene was repeated with the Egyptian Air Force. The small plane was almost shot down, but Swamiji retaliated, dropping flowers and pamphlets calling for peace (YogaLife 1994:22).

In later years, Swamiji conducted more such flights, including one "from West to East Berlin in an open, ultra-lite aircraft," in 1983 (YogaLife 1994:26). On these missions he claimed to carry

nothing but his self-fashioned "Planet Earth Passport," emblazoned with the symbols of major world religions and declaring the following pledge:

1. I shall love all.
2. I wholeheartedly pledge to respect everyone's religion, nationality, faith, culture, language, etc.
3. Never shall I cross a border to conquer or impose an ideology.[95]
4. In no way will I take part or interfere in government politics, but will assist in every way possible to bring better understanding without creating any conflict.
5. I shall not use this passport to seek a job in another country, to do business, to exploit other people or obtain any material gain.
6. I shall never engage in any form of smuggling or import-export of any object. (Sivananda Yoga Vedanta Centres 1971)[96]

Swamiji also conducted a bus tour in India in 1984 that included a stop for talks with Sikh leaders to help them broker peace with the Indian government after devastating violence over the movement for Sikh independence known as the Khalistan movement, and the Indian government's violent efforts to subdue it. As a part of his peace gatherings, Swamiji organized demonstrations of yoga asanas as well as firewalking ceremonies, designed "to demonstrate that if we follow God's law of Universal Love, fire will save us from destruction" (Yoga Life 1994:33).

It would be hard to argue for or against the effectiveness of Swamiji's peace missions in real or political terms. Yet, his missions are of obvious symbolic value to his students and disciples, who continue to tell the stories of his missions and vision at the start of every Teacher's Training Course as well as in other programs at SYVC ashrams and centers around the world. Notably, one of the chief principles of peace emphasized today in the SYVC is in the matter of peace between different religions, no doubt an important message of inter-cultural peace, but one that would seem to have already been heard by the cosmopolitan members of this organization. Most of the international participants in the SYVC are of non-Hindu faith backgrounds, and even Indians in the organization, by nature of their attraction to this

transnational movement rather than any of the other Hindu or yoga-based religious movements available in India – for example, the famous televangelist yogi, Swami Ramdev (swamiramdevyoga.org)[97] – have already demonstrated some amount of religious tolerance simply by setting foot in the SYVC. Thus, when ashram inmates chant Swamiji's lyrics to a tune made famous by Gandhi, intoning the names of various deities, and then repeating the line "love thy neighbor as thyself," the incantation of peace through inter-religious tolerance would seem to be preaching to the choir, as the phrase goes. Meanwhile, other more difficult practices of inter-cultural understanding and social justice are rarely discussed, thus creating a limited and limiting view of "peace." The inequality inherent in the SYVC's partial vision is not unique among transnational spiritual institutions, nor is its situation in the structural inequality shaped by global capitalism. In the following section I describe how the SYVC articulates to a concept of spiritual economy framed by contemporary forces of globalization and neoliberalism.

Spiritual Economies in a Neoliberal Context

As shown in the previous chapters, the problems identified by the SYVC in their official correspondence and in the words of staff interviewed for this project are not those of inequality and injustice, but of daily routine and unhealthy habits. The SYVC's vision of helping others seems primarily limited to inspiring the like-minded and passing on a healthy legacy to future generations, characteristics shared by many contemporary religious movements, perhaps most particularly those that emphasize spirituality over a strict sense of religion, as such (Gandhi 2009, Heelas 2008, Warrier 2005). This partial vision of peace, however, overlooks the very real impact the SYVC organization can and does have on people who inhabit the organization's peripheries, both geographical and conceptual, in the present. While this particular and limited imaginary of peace may be unique to the SYVC organization, the structural inequalities at the

core of an altruistic institution demonstrate that even institutions with spiritual and humanitarian aims are embedded in the contexts of globalized capitalism that shape and surround them. In this section I explore this embeddedness through the notion of "spiritual economies."

In the process of revising this dissertation's title, toward the end of my writing process, I settled on the term "spiritual economy" to encapsulate the altered framework this project offers on the term "flexible labor." This framing is meant to indicate the double resonance of the notion of flexibility in the context of globalized yoga. I interpret SYVC workers as a form of flexible labor common to today's global cultural economy, wherein transnational businesses often locate their enterprises in poorer countries to circumvent the higher wages and workers rights demanded in wealthier nations (Ganti 2014). However, it is not as if the SYVC located itself in India to avoid the costs associated with running the institution in North America and Europe. Rather, India is one of many international locations, tied in important ways to yoga's origins, and thus connected to the institution's sense of home and history. Yet, in India as well as in Latin America and the Caribbean, SYVC branches do operate differently from those in North America and Europe, employing low-wage workers for jobs that would otherwise be handled by volunteers. The organization privileges a spirit of volunteerism in its central operating structure, asking staff who are not paid to serve without reward, in the spirit of karma yoga, another type of "flexible labor." Yet, in regions where it is affordable to do so, the SYVC, like any other global business, takes advantage of the low cost of help, outsourcing the time-intensive and physically draining work of cooking, cleaning, grounds work and some other tasks to a local population of wage workers, many of them seasonal. This creates an opportunity for the premise laid out in the dissertation's title, "flexible labor in a spiritual economy." Having settled on the term, I searched

to see whether this or similar ideas had a scholarly precedent, and I came across the work of Daromir Rudnyckyj (2009).

Rudnyckyj's research, based in Indonesia, looks at a program of spiritual training being implemented in 2002 in a steel company in the province of Banten. The company had once been a site of national pride but was suffering under increased transnational competition (2009:104). Rudnyckyj writes:

> The concept of spiritual economies… reveals how individual religious practices are conjoined to broader projects of economic transformation as workers are enjoined to compete in an increasingly global economy. I argue that spiritual economies consist of three interrelated components: (1) objectifying spirituality as a site of management and intervention; (2) reconfiguring work as a form of worship and religious duty; and (3) inculcating ethics of individual accountability that are deemed commensurable with neoliberal norms of transparency, productivity, and rationalization for purposes of profit (2009:105-106).

While not entirely applicable to the spiritual economy of the SYVC as I describe it above, Rudnyckyj's work is directly relevant to my findings here, as it demonstrates some key articulations between the wider cultural economies of globalization and neoliberalism and more focused religious revival movements centered on the individually focused notion of "spirituality" (Heelas 2008). The three components he describes as characterizing spiritual economies can certainly be applied to the SYVC's management and understanding of karma yoga. Also similar to the SYVC, the category of "spirituality" is emphasized in the Indonesian context. Rudnyckyj observes that this term conveys a global relevance and universality different from the more specific notion of "Islam" as religion (Rudnyckyj 2009:121).

Rudnyckyj's argues that "a hallmark of contemporary neoliberalism is that it seems to enable assemblages of religion and economics that certain strands of social science theory have held a part" (2009:108). This notion that religious movements are directly embedded in the surrounding political and cultural economies of their time has direct implications in the SYVC,

supporting my argument that organization members are not individually responsible for the patterns I identify here but rather are acting in terms of the surrounding culture of global capitalism. Again, the structure of inequality in the SYVC is not unique but rather has many elements in common with other international yoga institutions in India as well as with other non-yoga NGOs or nonprofits with similar altruistic aims and transnational structures, both in India and in other formerly colonized nations (Redfield 2012). Writing about the organization Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF, or Doctors Without Borders), Redfield observes differences among different categories of personnel in MSF similar to those I found in the SYVC, with "international volunteers" occupying a privileged and more mobile position in the organization than "national staff" who tend to be more fixed in place (2012:360). In MSF, like in the SYVC, volunteers tend to be motivated by altruism, yet they also must make their own calculations about how and where to spend their time as volunteers, factoring in such concerns as the cost of repaying debt for medical school (Redfield 2012:374), demonstrating that there are economic calculations and influences behind even seemingly selfless choices.

In a 2014 annual review article, Tejaswini Ganti historicizes the concept of neoliberalism and observes four distinct but related uses of the term. Neoliberalism can refer to a set of economic reform policies, a development model, an ideology, and a mode of government, all placing value on a self-regulating free market (Ganti 2014:91). In anthropological approaches to neoliberalism, Ganti argues, "neoliberalism represents a structural or ideological force that has a tremendous impact on people's lives, life-chances, social relations, and ways of inhabiting the world" (2014:94). One of the key features of subjectivity under neoliberalism she identifies is the value of individualism, an observation not unlike Maya Warrier's findings, attributed to modernity, in the MAM (Warrier 2009), Paul Heelas' description of values in contemporary

spirituality movements, attributed to what he calls "consumptive capitalism" in the New Age (2008), and Shreena Gandhi's observation that a focus on the individual coincides with both the increased popularity of psychotherapy and the "triumph of capitalism" (2009:212). Thus, while senior SYVC staff attribute their emphasis on self-responsibility to the teachings of Swami Vishnudevananda, it is clear from all of the above that Swami Vishnudevananda's own ideals were formed in the context of his time – responding to wider political and cultural movements and inspired by the escalating conflicts going on around him. And while Swami Vishnu did teach his students to focus on the self first, his own example did not leave off there. Instead, he sought to use the strength of mind developed through the practice of yoga to inspire others, to break barriers, and to achieve real political changes in some of the most fraught and dangerous conflicts of his day. Today, instead of world peace through inner peace, members seem to speak of inner peace as the end goal. This individualized focus as well as the accompanying limited vision of community, which fails to conceive of the organization's many paid workers and other neighbors in India as meaningful insiders, leads to a failure to talk across difference and a perpetuation of inequalities. In the following section, I return to the questions that have guided this work throughout and summarize my findings in light of these questions, then propose a way forward, drawing on other scholars of inequality.

Shifting the Vision of Peace

As articulated in Chapter One, some of my questions at the start of this study were: how can an organization founded on ideals of peace and intercultural harmony look so similar to institutions globalized on the premise of enhanced profit margins and economic efficiency? Is the organization's mission of peace simply a spiritual-cum-moral veneer designed to manipulate altruistic participants to devote their time, energies, and financial backing? Do disparities in the

treatment and position of Indian vs. foreign participants in the SYVC represent corrupt influences at the top of the organization, or are they a result of routine submission to the status-quo rather than an overt exercise in discrimination? More importantly, what are the real and perceived benefits to the people who serve the ashram as low-wage workers in the Indian sites? And how do low-wage workers perceive and relate to the organization's overall mission and the people who work as the organization's committed volunteers?

As my analysis in the previous section shows, I have come to see the SYVC as deeply rooted in the social and political culture of global capitalism and neoliberalism, a product of its time and political climate that consequently echoes and mirrors the problematic structures of inequality common to our contemporary world. Therefore, I interpret the processes and patterns of relations I document here as symptoms of a wider problem rather than overtly corrupt or deceitful intentions on the part of SYVC staff or leadership. Inequalities between economies, nations, and the subjects who inhabit them in our contemporary world have allowed SYVC insiders to set up several branches of the institution in India, run multiple TTC courses and yoga vacations each year, and have a successful institution that continues to expand into other parts of Asia using financial resources drawn from the Indian locations. Should the SYVC put a stop to this? No. It is quite clear to me that workers employed by the SYVC would prefer to have their jobs than not, are grateful for the medical help, housing loans, and other services provided by the organization, and for the most part enjoy their work. Propagating yoga may not on its own bring about world peace, but as Joseph Alter observed in his discussion of the "Maharishi Effect" – a claim by members of Maharishi Mahesh Yogi's group that what they called "yogic flying" could save the world – the sheer fact of greater numbers of people spending their time in the practice of

yoga could “produce a global culture that could inhibit many things, including, perhaps, violence” (2004:17).

Nonetheless I think the organization could do better, especially concerning the final question above, regarding workers’ sense of the SYVC mission. Workers whom I engaged in conversation about the SYVC’s mission and its meaning in their lives had very little sense of the organization’s purpose, except that as a charitable institution, it seemed to be inclined to make regular donations to improve their wellbeing. Even the asana classes that happened twice per day seemed, to the kitchen and cleaning workers I got to know, at best mysterious and at worst absurd. But a sense of intercultural understanding, peace between differently situated and differently privileged communities, and interreligious harmony did not come through in any of the workers’ interpretations for me of what it means to work for an ashram.

The practices for inner peace that are the heart of yoga in this institution are valuable. Learning to control the body, quiet the breath, and still the mind can have positive effects on physical wellbeing, mental health, and a sense of spiritual connection. As Swami Vishnudevananda argued, I believe these practices can and should be the foundations for any work for peace across difference; they may indeed be necessary foundations for outer peace. The problem is that most SYVC insiders seem content with this work on the self and do not assume any sense of responsibility for practices of social justice that would reach beyond this individual frame. One senior staff member, lecturing a satsang group (cited in Chapter Three) said:

> Essentially, I should surrender my own will. Ultimately whatever happens is God’s will…. I don’t know. Ultimately I don’t know anything, if I am honest. I think I know... but as long as I have that idea, I suffer... There is nothing but God here.

SYVC insiders seemed to see political outrage or the outrage that comes in the face of unexplainable loss of human life, whether through natural disaster, senseless violence, or

political strife, as a form of egoistic ignorance. We cannot control the happenings around us, the explanation holds, therefore we should focus on what we can control – our own breath, our own bodies, and the turbulence of our own minds – which is a difficult feat in itself.

Again, this lack of control over outside forces may be true. Even so, my experiences with the communities of the SYVC, demonstrating the ways that staff and workers' lives are intertwined, and how staff and other SYVC insiders often fail to conceive of the way their own practice of yoga in India impacts on the local community – suggests that we can and should find ways to put a more interpersonal understanding of peace into practice. If the problem I have primarily emphasized in this dissertation is a problem of vision – a conceptual blindness that obscures the others of the SYVC's cosmopolitan sense of self – the answer, I imagine, is in a productive re-visioning of both community and peace, building on the notion of what scholars in the interdisciplinary field of peace studies call "positive peace" (http://kroc.nd.edu).[98] That is, the notion that peace must incorporate a commitment to justice and equality, and cannot be simply defined as the absence of war. One simple way to focus this re-visioning is through the principle of karma yoga at the heart of the organization's operating structure. Karma yoga, the yoga of selfless service, is also glossed in the SYVC as "the yoga of action." Staff are instructed to do their work without expectation of reward, and without regard for the outcome. Mostly, the work of karma yoga is focused on the practical running and administration of the organization – not service to the less fortunate, but service to the organization, envisioned as the feet and home of the gurus, Swami Vishnu and Swami Sivananda. Re-visioning this yoga of action as action across difference – creating opportunities to reach across broader gaps of understanding than are usually bridged in the cosmopolitan communities internal to the SYVC organizational sense of self – poses the potential for a renewed practice of peace appropriate to Swami

Vishnudevananda's mission in the present day. Yet, as recent scholarship on practices of "everyday peace" (Ring 2006) have made clear, the maintenance of peace involves "effortful, relentless and creative labor" (Williams 2011:248). In the rest of this section, I look to scholars who have examined the problem of unequal relations across difference to propose a way forward, through more engaged commitment to peace in community in the SYVC.

Scholars writing about relations of inequality in the context of globalization, including transnational feminist theorists and postcolonial scholars have provided useful terms and concepts for analyzing and perhaps alleviating some of the problems of inequality characteristic of relations in enterprises like the SYVC. Aimee Carrillo-Rowe (2008) and Chandra Talpede Mohanty (2003), who theorize alliances between people across power lines give us helpful metaphors for imagining improved understanding across difference. Carrillo-Rowe's "politics of relation" is a coalitional politics based on "a relational notion of the subject," embodied through "a leaning and tipping towards the others to whom she belongs" (Carrillo-Rowe 2008:26). Mohanty writes of "feminism without borders," stressing "the emancipatory potential of crossing through, with, and over… borders in our everyday lives" (2003:2). Judith Butler, writing in the wake of the terrorist attacks of September 2001 in the United States, one of the most central symbols for the waging of both war and peace in the contemporary time, considers "how certain forms of grief become nationally recognized and amplified, while other losses become unthinkable and ungrievable" (2004:xiv). Butler asks "How do our cultural frames for thinking the human set limits on the kinds of losses we can avow as loss?" and "if someone is lost, and that person is not someone, then what and where is the loss, and how does mourning take place?" (2004:32). Butler's work invites us to extend "our capacity to mourn" (2004:12) and to feel beyond the limits of our "imagined communities" (Anderson 1983) .

Although Butler writes about grief and mourning, I believe her philosophy of compassion, or what Veena Das calls "noncruelty… generated from within the scene of intimacy" (2013:25) can be productively applied in the SYVC, as an extension of the capacity of caring from within the community of staff, teachers, guests, and course participants, to those workers whose bodies regularly move through the spaces of the SYVC in India yet who are at this time conceived as outside the institutional sense of self. Re-visioning the yoga of action as a yoga of relation and framing what Williams refers to as "practices of friendship, empathy and tolerance" (2011:248) as the key means of working towards peace can bring about greater understanding and improved relations across the different spheres of belonging in the SYVC.

Though outside the SYVC's current definition of the term, the issue of relations, sometimes intimate relations, or what Virginia Domínguez (2000) calls a "politics of love," has everything to do with peace, particularly when that love crosses power lines. Countless examples in current events illustrate how moments of terror, of violence and violation, combined with public narrations of these in mass media (Butler 2004:147), can create registers of identification that link people to individuals like them, circumscribing circles of care – what Butler calls the "capacity to mourn" – while overlooking problems that lie outside these circles. Consider, for example, the way Ebola burst into the forefront of American news media in October 2014, just after the first of a very few U.S.-based cases of Ebola was diagnosed in a Texas hospital. Once the U.S. Ebola outbreak was declared contained at the beginning of the following month (washingtonpost.com),[99] most ordinary Americans ceased to be concerned with Ebola, though the disease continues to spread (though much more slowly) in parts of West Africa today (cdc.gov).[100] Still, the short period of outbreak in the U.S. and Europe may have been positive at least in that it raised awareness and passion (if only briefly) about a disease that has been

affecting areas of the African continent since 1976 (web.stanford.edu),[101] though of course concern dwindled once the visible threat of Ebola shifted off American and European soil. In this context, acts of commitment and love, empathy and shared feeling, across borders and power lines are inherently political as they work to reimagine allegiance, mobilize resources, and widen circles of belonging.

In *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson talks about nations being only imagined communities, "because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion" (1983:49). For Anderson, the nation "is imagined as a *community*, because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship" (1983:50). I view the imagined community of the SYVC as composed of shifting "scapes", overlapping and interwoven in places, yet because of these very overlaps, also in places uneven and unsteady. As the ethnographic chapters in this dissertation have demonstrated, the imaginative work of connecting and conceiving the whole in the SYVC, is often blind to injustices at its conceptual periphery; those who do not fall within the organizational sense of self are often overlooked in the process of conceiving community.

A politics of relation aimed at consciously widening and redefining our capacities of caring can be transformational on both the personal and political levels, but it is not easy work. Invited to conceive a wider circle of care, it is hard to imagine where one would draw the line, how one's heart could ever stop aching, if truly allowed to feel the greatness of faraway loss, whether that distance is conceptual or geographical. Perhaps this is part of why all of us impose some kinds of limits on our own circles of caring. Yet, in this very opening to grief, we invite the possibility of desire, attachment, even love. Butler shows that desire is the flip-side of grief. It

signals the possibility of ecstasy as "[t]o be ec-static means, literally, to be outside oneself… to be transported beyond oneself by a passion, but also to be *beside oneself* with rage or grief" (Butler 2004:24). I would argue that it is through this kind of connection across difference, a "politics of relation," in Carrillo-Rowe's words (2008), or what Butler provisionally calls "a relational view of the self" (2004:24), that we invite the potential for a more practical implementation of peace. Only if we conceive and imagine the consequences our living has on geographically or conceptually faraway others can we begin to see the absence of peace in the form of inequality and injustice.

"It's not easy," said a senior staff member I will call Jaya toward the end of a long interview in July 2008. "But the teaching is crystal clear." Jaya laughed then as she added, in response to my question about the future of the organization "You could put a donkey to run it." The teachings are so good, she said – emphasizing the schedule, the timing, and the daily routine – that it doesn't matter who is in charge.

"Is there anything [about the organization] that you'd like to see change?" I asked her, as I asked most every person I interviewed. Jaya's reply was immediate: "Yeah, of course!" And then she continued:

> I'd like to see… I'd like to see lots of change… within myself! [We both laughed]. So that I'm better able to… You know? To *do* something, and to serve. And then, you know, it's like. It's like your mirror, what you do, you know? You do that… That's the only change I can wish for. Even if I want to, I cannot change anything else! So I wish everybody else wishes the same. That's all. And I wish God keeps them in that.

Over time I came to share Jaya's wish – for change at the individual level towards greater action, "to *do* something," as she puts it, and change at the institutional level, through multiple changes of this kind. Perhaps, as Swamiji suggested, this is the only way to change a cloth: one thread at a time. Still, I believe the emphasis on action, moving out from the self, even as we are and can

only be responsible for our own change, is the most practical way forward for a just peace. We must all *do* something and not just *be* "at peace." In the final section of this chapter, I turn to another event that received much attention in the U.S. media to contemplate the broader reach of this practical approach to peace.

A Peace for Our Time

As I revised a very early draft of what has become this conclusion, from my home in southeast Michigan, in December 2012, most US papers and online media were focused on the news of a mass shooting in a small Connecticut town. For no explainable reason, a twenty-year old man first shot and killed his own mother and then drove to a nearby elementary school, where he murdered twenty children and six adults. Many of the victims were shot multiple times and at close range.

As I sat with the news, read responses in formal and informal media, and conversed with family and friends about the shootings, I was struck by the prevalence of the notion that Newtown, Connecticut was supposed to be a safe community, no doubt because of its majority white, middle class demographics. It was as if the sheer unexpectedness of the violence made it more intolerable. As one article noted in a pointed critique of this rhetoric:

> Though they constitute 15 percent of the child population, black children and teens make up 45 percent of total youths felled by guns. On the whole, an average of five to six children and teens are murdered with guns every day. About 40 percent of inner-city residents may suffer from symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, though it's really perpetual traumatic stress disorder. At some points, American urban violence has been so dangerous the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has advised entire communities not to go outside. These communities are terrorized on a daily basis. But until gun violence touches quiet suburbs like Newtown, described often by shocked residents and reporters over the last few days as "quiet" and "quaint," we allow it (Cagle 2012) .

Another article proclaimed in the title "In the US, mass child killings are tragedies. In Pakistan, mere bugsplats" and criticized President Obama's sorrowful response to the Newtown shooting,

in contrast to his seeming indifference to daily deaths by US drone attack in Pakistan (Monbiot 2012) . Here also we can see the working of what Das (2007) calls the social contract, whereby violence at the hands of the state against far off others is sanctioned and, as Butler notes, other lives become ungrievable (2004).

In response to the tragedies in Newton, the SYVC ashram in Grass Valley, California, sent a special e-newsletter to their mailing list, with a letter from Swami Sivananda written between 1957 and 1963, which the blog editors retitled “Prayers for America from Swami Sivananda”:

> [S]elflessness is based on the recognition of the unity of all creation.... Love, patriotism, humanitarianism, and ultimately, cosmic love, are all expressions of this inward understanding of the unity of mankind. Peace, prosperity and happiness, both individual and national, are the delicious fruits of this understanding. Canada, United States, Mexico and South America are all names coined by man for his convenience. Selfishness should not utilize these boundaries as barriers that separate nation from nation. Similarly, the distinction of caste, creed, race, religion, and color divide mankind. That is due to man’s ignorance.
>
> It is easy for the people of America, where God has already created a sense of brotherhood, to imbibe this spirit. Their forefathers came from different parts of the world and they learned to live together. Today they regard themselves only as Americans. In the same spirit, they should feel that they are all citizens of the world, that they are one with all mankind, as children of the same God. America can set an example to the rest of the world in this respect (sivanandayogafarm.org).[102]

The very fact that the deaths of these suburban children called for this kind of response from the SYVC, whereas other daily deaths as well as numerous large-scale tragedies in the years since, have gone unremarked, illustrates the way that communities of caring are circumscribed and reified in the SYVC even in the appeal to world peace. It is not just in India that people outside the organization’s cosmopolitan sense of self fall outside the organization’s capacity of caring.

Many of the SYVC staff members I interviewed spoke in shared language about Swami Vishnudevananda’s vision of peace as something ultimately focused on the individual. “Just

simply talking about peace does not guarantee that I can create peace," said one senior staff member, profiled in Chapter Three. "I can get pieces, but not peace." Yet, although Swami Vishnudevananda appealed to the ultimate importance of inner peace, he also waged a difficult and at times dangerous personal struggle for peace between nations. He was committed to overcoming what he conceived as illusory identification with country, community, religion, and language group. But he did not just sit in silence. He engaged in powerful symbolic actions to wage the peace he envisioned.

In Swami Vishnudevananda's organization today, there is a spirit of religious pluralism in the repetition of daily prayers to a string of deities and prophets from the world's major religions. There is a spirit of internationalism in the Teacher's Training Courses, with the daily recitation of Swami Sivananda's Universal Prayer in several languages. And there is some opportunity to transcend rules of gendered and class-based division of labor, through the practice of karma yoga. The cosmopolitan community of yoga practitioners in the SYVC in many ways reflects ideals of universal harmony and world peace. Yet, my research indicates that there is still much room for the development of interpersonal and intergroup peace in the context of the SYVC, especially across differential privilege and power lines.

By extending the conceptual vision of the imagined community of this organization to include the paid workers (who may have little investment in the organization's ideals or practices, but nonetheless labor to ensure its daily continuity) and others in the communities neighboring the SYVC's Indian locations, the organization could take a large step in the direction of a truer positive peace. As in any instance, the blind spots I found can be easily conceived through a slight shift of the gaze or turn of the head, thus incorporating a new perspective on what it means to achieve peace through yoga. This transformed vision in

itself will not be the end-all in achieving a just peace, but it is a necessary first step to conceiving its absence. It is this extension of the commitment to peace in the SYVC beyond the immediate circle of the organization's community to neighbors and others both in and outside the SYVC's formal spaces that seems to me a way forward to a realization of peace both within and beyond the context of globalized yoga.

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[1] Sivananda Yoga Vedanta Centers. 2015. About Us. Electronic document, https://www.sivananda.org/about, accessed March 20, 2015.
[2] The SYVC is in some ways and contexts a religious organization. As a registered non-profit that is home to a living lineage of monks or swamis, for example, the SYVC is able to help obtain "religious worker" visas for some of its staff, so they may travel to different parts of the organization. The organization also employs Hindu priests in the performance of rituals at the start and finish of most courses and on special occasions and Hindu holidays. However, most members I interviewed resisted the notion of yoga as a religious practice. Members and teachers in the organization insist that yoga can be practiced by individuals of any religious affiliation or none. They consistently refer to the SYVC and the practice of yoga as "spiritual." I follow this insider terminology in this dissertation and also elaborate in Chapter Three on how this organization fits in to the academic study of new spiritualities.
[3] Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies. 2015. About Us: What is Peace Studies? Electronic document, http://kroc.nd.edu/about-us/what-peace-studies, accessed May 28, 2015.
[4] The phrase is my own, honed after much revising of the issues herein, but just after settling on the idea I did a Google search for both "conceptual blindness" and "conceptual blind spots" and found two scholarly articles utilizing these phrases in their titles. Interestingly, both reflect on pedagogy. The first, by Wolff-Michael Roth, which I skimmed, examines how "students of ecology are enculturated to particular ideologies" and argues that "mathematical representations in textbooks" create a false sense of disciplinary certainty about the world (2001:5), his "conceptual blind spots." Roth argues that school science courses should allow for more critical representation of knowledge production. A second article, "Healing Conceptual Blindness," by Pat C. Hoy II, considers the art of writing. It proved a wonderful meditation on the conceptual processes involved in developing an idea in writing, not unlike the work that led me to the idea of "conceptual blind spots" in this dissertation. Hoy is the director of a large university writing center, and his aim in this writing is to demonstrate the importance of what he calls a "conceptual moment" in the composition process, "when the mind acquires a notional sense of what the accumulated evidence means" (2009:304). Hoy believes that teaching students about and *through* this art of conception is the only way to heal an epidemic of "conceptual blindness" among undergraduate writers.
[5] Though contemporary scholars are rightly suspicious of broad, seemingly homogenous terms like "Eastern" and "Western," members of the SYVC regularly use these terms to describe themselves and others. Among Indian members, it is even common to refer to any non-Indian, including the many Japanese and other East Asian participants in the SYVC, as "Western." Because these oppositional, if monolithic, terms are so integral to ways of thinking in the SYVC, I will not avoid them, but will use them in keeping with their meaning to the members of this study.
[6] Caste was not an obvious factor in relations between members of the SYVC, and in fact both volunteer staff and paid workers came from a variety of caste backgrounds, though the majority were Hindu. Several priests officiating in SYVC ashrams in India came from the tradition of Sri Narayana Guru, a leader in the anti-caste reform movement in Kerala, in the early twentieth century.

[7] The organization, founded in Canada by an Indian national, uses this British spelling of "Centres" in its name. I do the same when writing the name of the organization. Elsewhere, I use the American spelling when referring to the individual SYVC yoga "centers."
[8] I am grateful to Susan Wadley, who first suggested that I try writing about transnational yoga using Kopytoff's (1986) notion of a "cultural biography of things."
[9] See also Miller 1974
[10] An excerpt from Thoreau's writings in Milton Singer's essay "A Passage to More Than India" indicates that Thoreau's sense of "yoga" was drawn from his reading of the Bhagavad Gita (Singer 1972).
[11] De Michelis draws her categories from Hardy (1984), Halbfass (1988), and Kopf (1969).
[12] In addition to Joseph Alter's work, discussed below, scholarly writing about the construction of "Indian Classical Dance" (cf. Allen 1997, Chakravorty 2001, Meduri 2001, O'Shea 2003) has greatly influenced my thinking on these issues.
[13] Defining the "Indian middle class" is obviously complicated and has been attended to by a number of scholars (Alter 2011, Sheth 1999, Stern 2003, Waghorne 2004). I will attend to the issue of class more fully in Chapter Five. For the moment, when I refer to people who are "by no means middle-class, I have in mind a broad range of non-English speaking, economically disadvantaged participants in the SYVC, who are employed as cooks, custodial workers, and drivers, for less (and sometimes far less) than INR. 5,000 (approximately $108) per month. The cooking and cleaning women in Neyyar Dam at the time of my research were lobbying for a raise to INR 100 ($2.15) (from approximate INR 80 or $1.72) per day at the time of my research, and to my knowledge, they successfully won this raise toward the end of my stay in India. "The World Bank defines poverty as living on less than $2 a day, absolute or extreme poverty as living on less than $1 a day." (Stiglitz 2006: 10)
[14] For an in-depth textual analysis that seats hatha yoga in close relation to alchemy in medieval India from a history of religions perspective, see David Gordon White *The Alchemical Body: Siddha Traditions in Midieval India* (1996).
[15] Contributing to this same line of discussion, though with less academic bent are Sjoman's (1996) *The Yoga Tradition of the Mysore Palace* and a book for a popular audiences by Stefanie Syman, *The Subtle Body: The Story of Yoga in America* (2011). For another look at modern postural yoga for a popular audience, see *First There is a Mountain: A Yoga Romance* (2004), by Elizabeth Kadetsky.
[16] One of the groups profiled in Babb's book is the Sathya Sai Baba organization, which was also the subject of two more recent works, *Winged Faith* (T. Srinivas 2010) and *In the Presence of Sai Baba* (S. Srinivas 2008).
[17] See also Heelas 2008.
[18] Warrier is not the first to argue this. See also M. Mines 1988 and 1994.
[19] NRI is the common acronym and official citizenship category for Non-Resident Indians – people of Indian citizenship living abroad. NRIs who return to India with money and prestige earned abroad (an especially common occurrence in Kerala, where this research is primarily based) often build what are colloquially referred to as "NRI houses," large homes with all modern conveniences, like washing machines and internet, even in areas where minimal water supply and spotty broadband connectivity make these minimally functional.
[20] It should be acknowledged here that most SYVC publications are based on Swami Vishnudevananda's own telling of his life story and the organization's history, and apart from

sparse references to Swami Vishnu and Swami Sivananda in the scholarly literature on Modern Yoga my telling here is based on these SYVC publications. I have not made any attempt to verify the truth of biographical statements, nor am I inclined to do so. I have heard and recorded stories of Swamiji's early days in North America as well as the organization's development and eventual establishment in India throughout my research from participants of various locations in the organizational hierarchy. I therefore feel I have a good and nuanced picture of the organization's past and present. For my purposes here, getting the story "right," is not as important as retelling the SYVC's own official narrative, in order to set the frame of my dissertation research around issues explicitly relevant to the organization's history, structure, and mission.

[21] For more on Vivekananda and the standardization of these "4 paths," see De Michelis (2004).

[22] The SYVC defines satsang literally as "spiritual company." In practice it refers to an hour and a half to two hour meeting that is free and open to the public, usually held each morning and evening at the SYVC ashrams and on Sunday and Wednesday nights and every morning in the SYVC Yoga centers. Although perhaps technically open to the public, the morning sessions at the centers are not often attended by non-residents. A typical SYVC satsang starts with a half hour of silent meditation, followed by fifteen minutes or more of chanting and then a reading or talk given by a staff member or special guest. In the ashrams, satsang are much more elaborate, and the evening program often includes a special guest lecture or entertainment – sometimes movies about the life of Swami Vishnudevananda or Swami Sivananda, and occasionally performances by dancers or musicians. For other examples of satsang, or what he calls "congregational observances," see Babb (1986:17).

[23] The eight limbs of Raja Yoga are: 1). Yama (moral principles; abstentions) 2). Niyama (observences) 3). Asana (posture) 4). Pranayama (breath control) 5). Pratyahara (withdrawal of the senses) 6). Dharana (concentration) 7). Dhyana (meditation) and 8). Samadhi (pure contemplation). See Barbara Stoler Miller's (1996) translation of the *Yoga Sutra*.

[24] In the early years of the SYVC, Swami Vishnudevananda taught his students to perform homas and pujas on their own in the altars of the SYVC centers and ashrams. Within the timeframe my own history with the SYVC, I have seen more and more formal temples inaugurated on SYVC grounds, and with them the installation of temple priests who perform these rituals. When I asked about this in interviews people consistently told me that the importance of priests was unchanged, but only recently have international travel and visa become possible for these priests, so now the SYVC is able to bring specialists to perform these duties.

[25] This was apparently a common practice at the time. For more on this type of experiment and the interplay of yoga with science, see Joseph Alter's work *Yoga in Modern India: the Body Between Science and Philosophy* (2004).

[26] In interviews I conducted at the SYVC headquarters during summer of 2008, several long-time participants in the SYVC recounted Swami Vishnudevananda's anger over the Trancendental Meditation (TM) organization charging fees for mantra initiation. In addition to numerous articles cited here, which were clipped and saved by a staff member who shared them with me, my own search also turned up a book review of Harvey Cox's *Turning East: The Promise and Peril of the New Orientalism,* which refers to an angry phone call from Swami Vishnudevananda to the author, Adam Smith, stating that TM had "strayed… from the proper principles of Hinduism" and offering "$10,000 to the first TM graduate who could really levitate" (Smith 2007).

[27] The term *mahasamadhi*, translated by SYVC members as "great realization" or "liberation" recognizes that Swami Vishnudevananda was thought to be a *satguru*, or realized being, and that his passing away was not a death, but the final liberation of the *jiva*, or soul, from the cycle of births and deaths.
[28] I have never interviewed this swami formally, but I have worked and studied under her on many occasions, since 1997.
[29] Sivananda Yoga Vedanta Centers. 2015. About Us. Electronic document, https://www.sivananda.org/about, accessed March 20, 2015.
[30] Sivananda Yoga Vedanta Centres. 2015. Teachers' Training Course Schedule. Electronic document, https://www.sivananda.org/r/en/ttc_schedule. Accessed March 20, 2015.
[31] See also Langford 2002 and Selby 2005.
[32] Sivananda Yoga Vedanta Centres. 2015. Ayurveda. Electronic document, http://sivananda.in/neyyardam/other-programs/ayurveda.html, accessed March 20, 2015.
[33] Sivananda Yoga Vedanta Centres. 2015. Teachers' Training Course Schedule. Electronic document, https://www.sivananda.org/r/en/ttc_schedule. Accessed March 20, 2015.
[34] The current prices (February 2015) for TTC courses listed on the SYVC website are: Neyyar Dam, Kerala $2,185; Nassau, Bahamas $2,580; Grass Valley, California $2,400; Orleans, France €2,060; Woodbourne, New York $2,310. These numbers have changed slightly from when I last recorded numbers in July 2012: Neyyar Dam, Kerala $1,900; Nassau, Bahamas $2,400; Grass Valley, California $2,300, Orleans, France € 2,350; Umbria, Italy € 1,850; Woodbourne, New York $2,400. Both New York and France have lowered their prices, but the others have all increased. These prices include room and board for tent accommodations for the one month course. Staying in a dormitory or private room costs more. Much earlier in my research, (circa 2000) SYVC course prices were exactly the same across all locations.
[35] One notable exception is the TTC in Vilnius, Lithuania, which costs just €890 (February 2014) for tent accommodation. This strikes me as remarkably low, quite in contrast to the high cost of courses in India, especially in relation to local cost of living.
[36] In recent years, with the organization's more fractured operations, it may be misleading to speak in these comparative economic terms about why there are more courses offered in India than elsewhere. Course scheduling and financial matters are, for the most part, issues controlled by a given region, as it affects that region, so the frequency of courses offered in India may have more to do with the number of people who wish to enroll in India than with a comparative factoring about the relative cost of the course in India versus in other regions. In fact, it is now common to have more than one course running at the same time in different parts of the organization. Just a few years ago, this was unheard of, and the international schedule had to leave time for teaching staff to travel between countries for the different courses. Now, no doubt partly because of the presence of paid workers, courses are run by a smaller number of volunteer staff and frequently by fewer senior teachers than they would have been in the past. This fact concerns many long-term members, and I heard about it frequently in interviews.
[37] After settling on this term, towards the end of my writing process, I learned about the work of Daromir Rudnyckyj (2009) on what he calls "Spiritual Economies." Rudnyckyj's work on Islam and Neoliberalism in Indonesia and his definition of this productive term, spiritual economies, are very much relevant to my own approach. Due to time constraints, however, I will save discussion of Rudnyckyj's argument for the concluding chapter of this dissertation.

[38] Because it is commonplace to give Indian "spiritual names" to foreign members of the organization, I have given pseudonyms similarly. Where I believe it is important to the discussion, I will specify the identity as foreign or Indian, or give other relevant biographical information.
[39] Sivananda, Swami. 1998. Mind – Its Mysteries and Control. Electronic document, http://www.dlshq.org/download/mind.htm, accessed March 26, 2015. My notes from that day include quotation marks around passages I felt confident I had heard exactly, as was my practice with all lectures. Bracketed text usually reflects moments where the speaker got ahead of my ability to accurately quote, or where I was unsure about what I'd heard but felt confident I had understood the gist of the meaning. In this passage, unlike another quoted below, I did not include any bracketed text. I do not have access to a physical copy of the book, but a searchable document found on The Divine Life Society's website reads: "The body with its organs, is *no* other than the mind…" (emphasis added).
[40] It is common knowledge that the director, a middle-aged white man brought up in Zimbabwe, was a medical doctor before he came to the SYVC organization.
[41] Average exchange rates for the period of my research (April 1, 2010 to March 31, 2011) were obtained from oanda.com. Historical Exchange Rates. 2014. Electronic document, http://www.oanda.com/currency/historical-rates, accessed June 11, 2014.
[42] In both of the SYVC centers in Delhi, there were male rather than female cooks, but because of a language barrier I did not interview them and so did not learn their wages. However, because of both gender and the cost of living in Delhi, it is fair to assume that both earned more than their female counterparts in South India.
[43] See, for example, the description of Seva Study and Volunteering on the website for the SYVC's California ashram. Sivananda Ashram Yoga Farm. 2014. Serve. Electronic document, http://www.sivanandayogafarm.org/seva_study, accessed June 16, 2014.
[44] I could not find this policy spelled out on the website, but I became aware of, and indeed helped enforce, the policy during my research at the Kerala ashram, when, as a part of my karma yoga, I helped answer official email enquiries made to the ashram director.
[45] For example, many staff raised in relatively poor backgrounds in India had never traveled by flight or even above basic class on the train. When booking transportation either for organizational purposes (travelling between SYVC sites due to transfer of placement or temporary service in another site) or to visit home once or twice per year, junior staff from these backgrounds in India would usually confine themselves to the class of travel they were accustomed to, even if not explicitly asked to do so. Western staff more often flew or travelled by private car both when travelling for official purposes and of course when visiting family abroad. Such decisions were not often administered explicitly, though because of Western staff's more senior roles in the organization they often needed to travel quickly from place to place, whereas junior staff could afford the longer travel times posed by train travel throughout India. Junior western staff in similar positions, if offered only basic train fare for SYVC-related travel might easily pay the difference in fare on their own.
[46] Contrasting these general trends, one long-term non-Indian staff member told me that though many people react to their first experiences of ashram life by remarking on the rough living conditions – small rooms, shared baths, etc. – her own experience was different. Having grown up in a poor communist country, she had never had her own bedroom as a child, so when

arriving at the ashram she was pleasantly surprised by the accommodations. Recalling it, she exclaimed "Wow, my own room!" (personal communication, August 2008).

[47] The "ladies only" asana class is also a feature unique to Indian branches of the SYVC, and is an effort to respond to local gender norms, by making it more comfortable for women to attend classes. These classes tend to be held in the late mornings and/or early afternoons when women who do not work outside the home tend to be freer from household duties and responsibilities to children. The ladies-only setting also provides some feeling of privacy to women who find it embarrassing to wear pants (required for asana practice) in mix-gendered company, especially if the teacher is also a woman.

[48] In an email sent May 31, 2015, the Neyyar Dam ashram director told me that 75% of participants in the most recent TTC were Indian nationals, a surprising change from the past when Indian students made up a much smaller percentage (perhaps only 15-25% at the most).

[49] Sivananda Yoga Vedanta Centers. 2014. Yoga Vacations. Electronic document, http://sivananda.org.in/neyyardam/yoga-courses/yoga-vacation.html, accessed June 20, 2014.

[50] Sivananda Yoga Vedanta Centers. 2015. Open Classes. Electronic document, http://sivananda.org.in/trivandrum/courses-programs/open-classes.html, accessed March 23, 2015.

[51] Sivananda Yoga Vedanta Center, New York. 2015. Rates. Electronic document, https://www.sivanandanyc.org/topic/838, accessed March 23, 2015.

[52] I understand from my interviews with South American staff that the organization's centers in South America also employ paid workers for cleaning. Here again, domestic workers are available because of the organization's relative wealth in relation to the domestic workers' relative poverty.

[53] Virginia Woolf. 2015 (1938). Three Guineas. Electronic document, http://www.blackwellpublishing.com/content/BPL_Images/Content_store/Sample_chapter/9780631177241/woolf.pdf, accessed March 23, 2015.

[54] To my knowledge Carrillo-Rowe's metaphor of leaning has no relationship to the popular 2013 text by Sheryl Sandberg, *Lean In: Women, Work, and the Will to Lead.*

[55] Doreen Massey. 1994. A Global Sense of Place. Electronic document, http://www.unc.edu/courses/2006spring/geog/021/001/massey.pdf, accessed May 28, 2015.

[56] I first saw the film, which I refer to below simply as *Gateway,* in a presentation to teachers convened at a monthly meeting at the Trivandrum SYVC yoga center. While writing this chapter, I have accessed it multiple times through Youtube.com, where it is posted in four parts:
Part One: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AJuipHvAUo0;
Part Two: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UcCOvgTc5_A&feature=relmfu;
Part Three: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g_eO16T_iSk&feature=relmfu;
Part Four: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3Anl6RpzW0o&feature=relmfu
The film was made in English, and there are versions translated into German, French, Spanish, Japanese, and Italian.

[57] Statements quoted in this paper were made in English, though Malayalam is the first language of almost all of people interviewed here (one speaks Tamil). All of these individuals speak English very well and preferred to speak with me in English, even if I asked my questions in Malayalam, though some portions of most of these interviews were in Malayalam. I am unable to conduct a computer-aided search for references to "blood" and "land" in interviews conducted fully in Malayalam, because these have not been systematically translated, and were transcribed

by hand by a research assistant. However, references to “blood” or “soil” seem to have been more prevalent in my English than in Malayalam interviews. This may underline the cosmopolitan status of those individuals who made the kinds of associations I discuss here. In general, Malayalam-speaking teachers who teach in Trivandrum speak English very well, which is quite different from the situation in Madurai and also a relatively stronger trend than in Chennai, both cities where I conducted short-term comparative research during my research year. The teacher’s meeting described also took place in English.

[58] Although the term “Third World” is problematic, because of its numerical and ordered status in relation to the “First,” I am satisfied with Chandra Talpede Mohanty’s justification of its continued use. Mohanty argues that "‘Third World’ retains a certain heuristic value and explanatory specificity in relation to the inheritance of colonialism and contemporary neocolonial economic and geopolitical processes” (2003:144). Gmelch’s work on the Caribbean deals mostly in the terms North and South, which I will employ when building on Gmelch’s ideas in this section.

[59] My research for this section began when I wrote a seminar paper about similar advertising rhetoric on the website for the SYVC ashram on Paradise Island, Bahamas, in 2007. I thank Professor John Burdick for his comments on that paper, which helped refine ideas developed in this chapter.

[60] Speakers in the film are identified by their spiritual names and nationality.

[61] International Sivananda Yoga Vedanta Centres. 2015. Becoming Staff at a Sivananda Centre or Ashram. Electronic document, https://www.sivananda.org/about/staff.html, accessed March 23, 2015.

[62] I am grateful to my colleague Ian Wilson who pointed this out after a talk based on this paper, given at Syracuse University in November 2014.

[63] This framing may be less obvious in popular renditions of yoga focused on the body and exercise, but yoga philosophy is explicitly based on a merging of the individual self with “the absolute” and a consequent end to worldly identity and suffering. In the SYVC setting, this goal is explicit and upfront (sivananda.org/teachings). International Sivananda Yoga Vedanta Centres. 2015. Teachings. Electronic document, https://www.sivananda.org/teachings/, accessed March 23, 2015.

[64] The Indian Ministry of Tourism states in their 2011 Annual Report: “To focus on development of infrastructure at places of national and international importance, the Ministry, through its scheme of providing financial assistance to the State Governments and Union Territory Administrations, has identified 38 mega tourism projects, out of which 26 have been sanctioned till 4th February, 2011. These mega projects are a judicious mix of culture, heritage, spiritual and eco-tourism in order to give tourists a holistic perspective” (http://tourism.gov.in). Ministry of Tourism. 2011. Annual Report, 2010-11. Electronic document, http://tourism.gov.in/writereaddata/Uploaded/Tender/053120110313488.pdf, accessed March 23, 2015.

[65] During one recent stay in Kerala, I hired a taxi to take me from Fort Cochi to the airport in Ernakulam for a return visit to see my family. My husband, who was not going home for this short trip, accompanied me to the airport by cab and then planned to have the taxi drop him where he needed to be. This driver, who I later recognized in the tales of two other friends who had taken my hotel recommendation and so hired the same taxi, took the opportunity during the drive to tell me my fortune and future. I took this as a clear example of someone capitalizing on

foreigners' assumptions of spirituality and mysticism in their Indian hosts and guessed, rightly, that he'd want some sort of donation at the end of the drive for his special advice. Although we spoke to him in Malayalam, and there should have been no miscommunication since my husband is a native speaker, the old man (perhaps hard of hearing) completely missed our introductions and must have assumed my husband was a guide or simply a friend escorting me for my safety. In any case, he gave me a strange set of forecasts that assumed I was much younger, unmarried, and spiritually searching, no doubt like many of the foreign women he sees travelling "alone" (meaning without a foreign man). When I was later told the story by one acquaintance from the states, it appeared he had gotten some of her own aspirations right, and she believed he was telling her something special. Her reason for sharing the story with me was because he had also asked her to sit with him in the front seat and "may have" inappropriately touched her. She was so caught in his enticing claims to be able to read the future, and no doubt also presumed some measure of innocuousness due to his age, that she had a hard time believing it could have been inappropriate. She ran it by me, her friend with more experience in India, to check her instincts.
[66] Emera Bridger Wilson (forthcoming) found that the authorized sightseeing rickshaw drivers at Keoladeo National Park, Rajasthan take into account tourists' national backgrounds, language(s) spoken and occupations among other things in order to customize their performances for different audiences. Wilson argues that these performance strategies have both economic and other motivations.
[67] Many Indian people use no surname or only an initial to indicate the family name, so a lack of a surname does not indicate that Atmaram is a spiritual name. However, the *use* of surnames in the other members of the production team does indicate these are not the types of "spiritual names" given to SYVC participants.
[68] My use of the concept of race here builds on its critics who critique and effectively dismantle any scientific notion of races in the terms first laid out by Carl Linnaeus (1735), where humanity was classified into four types, with their attendant stereotypical qualities. Contemporary scholars of race and racism nonetheless see practices of race and racialization playing out in everyday life, due to its embeddedness "in academic, popular and political discourses that are themselves a constitutive part of academic, popular and political relationships and practices" (Wade 1997:5).
[69] Sivananda Yoga Vedanta Centers. 2007. Frequently Asked Questions. Electronic document, Sivananda.org/faq, accessed February 2, 2007.
[70] See Chapter One for a description of the five points of yoga as taught by Swami Vishnudevananda.
[71] This conversation took place in Malayalam, in an informal setting in late evening. I recorded it to the best of my memory the following morning, already translating, as my typewritten field journal is in English.
[72] International Sivananda Yoga Vedanta Centres. 2015. Becoming Staff at a Sivananda Centre or Ashram. Electronic document, https://www.sivananda.org/about/staff.html, accessed March 23, 2015.
[73] CensusIndia. 2011. Kallikkad. Electronic document, http://www.censusindia.gov.in/pca/SearchDetails.aspx?Id=674281, accessed April 1, 2015.
[74] These timings are for kitchen workers during high season. Cleaning workers had shorter hours (around 7:00am to 4:00pm) but were, according to everyone I spoke to about it, paid the same. In low season kitchen workers were usually able to finish work around 4:00pm.

[75] Rates for one night range from R400 (tent) to 1500 (double air conditioned room with private bath) during low season and from R500-1500 during high season. At the time of my research, women employed in the kitchen and as cleaners earned less than R100 per day. The average exchange rate was 45.38 Indian Rupee to 1 U.S. dollar (oanda.com). Another problem is that cleaning workers earn the same but do less, and men doing any and all jobs earn more.
[76] Divine Life Society. 2015. Karma Yoga, The Yoga of Service. Electronic document, http://sivanandaonline.org/public_html/?cmd=displaysection§ion_id=636&format=html, accessed March 23, 2015.
[77] Likewise, in the SYVC ashram on Paradise Island in the Bahamas also employs several paid local female cleaning workers, a receptionist and boatman/groundskeeper. During my time in Bahamas, staff familiar with the situation told me that laws governing the organization's status as resort forbid the organization from classifying anyone officially as a volunteer. It was therefore essential that the ashram employ some local people, in order to legally operate on the island. It is interesting to note that here, where a lacto-vegetarian diet is not common, and where "traditional" Bahamian food bears no relationship to yoga, the cooking was done entirely by volunteers. Although I have never visited the SYVC centers in South America, I understand that there also, at least some of the cleaning and administrative work is hired out.
[78] For an interesting look at volunteer kitchen work in a very different context, see Courtney Bender's 2003 ethnography *Heaven's Kitchen: Living Religion at God's Love We Deliver*.
[79] All conversations in the kitchen are in Malayalam.
[80] *Prasad* is consecrated food, offered at the altar during morning and evening prayer and meditation sessions (satsang), then distributed to the people in attendance. It is thought to contain the essence of the positive effects of the satsang.
[81] The SYVC advocates a *sattvic* diet, which is lacto-vegetarian but also avoids onion, garlic, and also extremely spicy and most fermented foods. This diet is informed by the concept of the three *gunas*, the dynamic qualities (*sattva, rajas* and *tamas*) that make up all of nature, or *prakriti*, according to *samkhya* philosophy and yoga (Feuerstein 1998:75). Sattva guna is considered to be peaceful, rajas is stimulating or active, and tamas embodies the principle of inertia or stagnation. Since the objective of yoga is a peaceful mind, foods that are thought to be overly stimulating or dulling are avoided, as a rule. I will discuss the three gunas further in Chapter Six.
[82] In Malayalam, verbs are not conjugated for person, so subject is always ambiguous, if not specified.
[83] This notion of taking sides is commonplace in labor movements all over the world where the "workers" view themselves as pitted against the "management." Sandhya Hewamanne's 2008 ethnography about garment workers in a Free Trade Zone in Sri Lanka is a good example.
[84] Yoga Peace. 2015. Bharata – Director of Yoga and Inner Peace. Electronic document, http://www.yogapeace.com/bharata.html, accessed March 23, 2015.
[85] I can almost hear in the recording my own gears spinning as I realized I had put my foot in my mouth, assuming this woman and I shared a perspective about our relative privilege.
[86] Shanti is the dog's real name, not a pseudonym.
[87] Saraswati followed something called the "Blood Group Diet." Followers of this diet believe that each person's blood type has an effect on the types of foods appropriate for their unique body, and they avoid and emphasize certain foods according to this belief.

[88] In the US, pregnant women are often warned of the risk of toxoplasmosis, a parasite that can be spread from house cats to their owners by way of fecal matter and which can be harmful to the fetus.
[89] I am very grateful to Bill Kelleher for suggesting and sharing this article during what became our last face-to-face conversation about my work, shortly after I had returned from India in April 2011.
[90] It has been difficult to locate scholarly references to this chant, but Professor Madan Lal Goel of the University of West Florida refers to the chant, with translation, in a conference paper online. The translation is basically similar to the English given in the second part of Sivananda's chant, except where Sivananda inserts the Biblical command to "Love thy neighbor as thyself," Goel speaks of peace and harmony. "The Lord God is One, people call Him by different names. Some call him Ishwar; others call him Allah. O Beneficent Lord, bestow on humanity the peace of Thy Harmony." Goel, M. Lal. 2002. "Religious Tolerance and Hinduism." Electronic document, http://uwf.edu/lgoel/documents/areligioustoleranceandhinduism.pdf. Accessed April 2, 2015.
[91] I am cautious about my use of quotation marks for this discussion, as notes on this conversation were of necessity recorded some hours after the event. A few key phrases are written in quotes in my notes from the day, so I do repeat those here, trusting they are extremely close to a verbatim record.
[92] I have tried multiple times, unsuccessfully, to track down copies of these newspaper articles from around April or May of 2007. My understanding is that this "bad press" was related to the ashram having encroached on lakeside land owned by the government. Apparently, the ashram had a long-standing verbal agreement that allowed the ashram to keep some pumps at the lakeside, which supply running water to the ashram. As ashram numbers increased through the early 2000s, community members began to object to the significant consumption of the area's water. It is unclear how this issue has been resolved, though I suspect ashram authorities have had to negotiate with local political authorities, and in India this type of negotiation usually involves monetary compensation in some form.
[93] History of the United Nations. 2012. http://www.un.org/en/aboutun/history/1951-1960.shtml. Accessed December 17th, 2012.
[94] The concept of World Order was another that seemed to echo in surrounding institutions. In 1972, the World Law Fund merged with the Institute for International Order, to become The Institute for World Order, in New York, still a leader in the field of international policy and conflict resolution, now known as the World Policy Institute, (http://www.worldpolicy.org/history).
[95] Swamiji's own border-crossing in the name of peace was an attempt to spread the teachings of yoga, according to his own conviction that yoga's tools of inner discipline could bring about inner peace and thus help to produce outer peace. Some might argue this was itself an attempt to impose an ideology, but I believe Swamiji saw it differently.
[96] Duplicates of Swamiji's original Planet Earth Passport have been distributed to organization members at various times in SYVC history. The copy I reference here was given to me by a swami who was personal assistant to Swami Vishnudevananda around the time of these peace missions.
[97] Swami Ramdev Yoga. 2015. Electronic document, http://www.swamiramdevyoga.org. Accessed April 6, 2015.

[98] Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies. 2015. About Us: What is Peace Studies? Electronic document, http://kroc.nd.edu/about-us/what-peace-studies, accessed May 28, 2015.
[99] Ebola outbreak in Texas officially over. November 7, 2014. Electronic document, http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-nation/wp/2014/11/07/ebola-outbreak-in-texas-officially-over/ Accessed April 8, 2015.
[100] Ebola in Liberia. January 6, 2015. Electronic document, http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/notices/warning/ebola-liberia. Accessed April 8, 2015.
[101] Waterman, Tara. 1999. Brief General History of Ebola. Electronic document, https://web.stanford.edu/group/virus/filo/history.html. Accessed April 8, 2015.
[102] Sivananda Ashram Yoga Farm. December 20, 2012. Prayers for American from Swami Vishnudevananda in 1957. Electronic document, https://www.sivanandayogafarm.org/blog/34, accessed March 23, 2015.