**Post Trafficking In Nepal. Sexuality and Citizenship in Livelihood Strategies
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WORKING PAPER

(Re) constituting Identities and Livelihoods: the City, Sexuality and Stigma in Nepal

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Abstract

Sexual trafficking is a global issue, yet many aspects remain poorly understood. Post conflict Nepal is a focal point for international donors and NGOs. In the new landscape of 'aidland' Kathmandu has gained an international profile, yet the urbanisation experiences of specific globalised subjects, in this case returnee trafficked women, often remain invisible. The stigma and rejection they face in rural communities pushes them to settle in Kathmandu post return as the city becomes the main option for livelihoods. In this specific context of the urbanization-globalization nexus the paper examines the complex relationship between what is regarded as acceptable and appropriate sexuality, constituted through marriage and motherhood, and 'queer' sexuality, which in this context is the returnee trafficked woman who, defined against the desired (hetero) norms is typically judged, as a 'prostitute', and often also an 'AIDS carrier', to be a 'bad woman' who is 'spoiled.' The paper looks at processes of managing stigma and (re) constituting identities and asks how these processes are linked to geographies of 'passing' and heteronormativity.

Introduction

Nepal is one of the leading sources for trafficked women in South Asia. While many Nepali women have been traditionally trafficked to India, new destinations facilitated by the open border between the two countries are emerging. India has recently become a transit route for trafficking on to the Middle East in particular and South East Asia in general. Much work on trafficking examines the process and flows of trafficking (for Nepal, Bal Kumar 2001, Beshford 2006 Brown 2000, Chen and Marcovici 2003, Hennick and Simkhada 2004, Human Rights Watch 1995, MWCSW 2001, Poudel 2008, Richardson et al. 2009; more widely, AWHRC 2003, GAATW 2004, Kangaspunta 2006, Kempadoo et al. 2005, Kim and Chang 2007, United

Nations 2003, US State Department 2010). Very little research has focused on the situation of returnee women themselves (Richardson et al. 2009). Also, although there has been much research on gender and migration across the social sciences, there is surprisingly little on trafficking specifically in some disciplines like Geography.

This paper focuses on sexualised forms of stigma and exclusion associated with returning from trafficking situations and the strategies used by returnee women to manage the stigma associated with a trafficked identity. (Other marginalised and excluded groups include widows, single women, lesbians and badi women (Cox 1992), ethnic minorities and indigenous people where according to Anaya (2009:13) "patterns of trafficking of indigenous girls and women" are found.) In doing so, it examines the geographies of post-trafficking stigma explaining how hierarchies of stigma are influenced by the destinations women are returning from and the places they go to subsequently, including analysing the distinctions women make between internal and international trafficking. It can be argued that increased migration from Nepal is blurring the categories of trafficked and migrant women in complex ways. This raises questions of how women invoke 'the border' to locate themselves strategically within discourses of appropriate and inappropriate femininities. Before explaining these issues however, the paper provides a brief background on the changing political situation in Nepal and the study on which the empirical material drawn upon is based.

The changing political context in Nepal

After a decade of civil war, 1996-2006, Nepal is undergoing political transformation by restructuring the nation and re-drafting the constitution through a Constituent Assembly (CA) process. Nepal's first multi-party democratic constitution was ratified in 1990. In April 2006 an Interim Constituent Assembly was enforced following the people's movement III, the revival of the dissolved parliament and the brokering of peace talks with the Maoist rebels (GoN 2007). Two years later an elected

Constituent Assembly was convened in April 2008, which declared the country to be a Federal Democratic Republic after ending the Monarchical parliamentary system. This assembly marked a turning point for gender representation in Nepali politics. More than thirty per cent of the elected CA members are women. This assembly represents a huge increase in female formal political participation from the 1990s figures when most parties struggled to reach the five per cent quota for female candidates. Female representation is diverse encompassing women from various social backgrounds including in some cases women who are illiterate. Female representatives are drawn from across the range of ethnic, geographical, class and religious groupings and include women who are farmers, landless women as well as former bonded labourers.

The original mandate to draft the new constitution by May 2010 was extended several times until in May 2012 the Supreme Court rejected any further extensions to the Constituent Assembly, which will lead to the setting up of elections to form a new democratically elected government in the near future. The Unified Maoist party represent the largest group in the CA and are expected to play a key role in government, although pro-monarchical groups have been actively resisting the recent changes.

One aspect of the drafting of the new constitution is a re-definition of citizenship rights where it is anticipated that an established gender bias in accessing citizenship will be overturned. Until now notions of female citizenship have been based on ideas of kinship (Joshi 2001:158). Since 1963 citizenship claims need to be sponsored by a male relative (typically a woman's husband or father). Many girls are trafficked before the age of sixteen, when they become eligible to claim citizenship, so they often do not have citizenship. Family reaction to their stigmatized status and associated family stigma and dishonour on their return often makes becoming a formal citizen difficult. Not having a citizenship card severely limits returnee women's livelihood options. They (and any children they have) are likely to have difficulty accessing government services, health and education, skills training and waged employment. Citizenship is also seen as a key mechanism in terms of establishing/

maintaining one's identity as 'respectable' and 'trustworthy'. The Interim Assembly of 2006 declared that girls can claim citizenship through their mothers if their mothers already have their own citizenship, although this needs to be endorsed in the Constitution when it is finished and divisions over models of citizenship continue. Our research suggests that the situation of returnee trafficked women is not being sufficiently addressed by the currently proposed definitions. In order for this situation to change, citizenship for women and men would need to be granted based on birth, with no parental endorsement being required. Also citizenship for children born abroad, to mothers who were sexually exploited abroad and who are now living in Nepal with their mothers, would need to be granted based on state endorsement. However at this point in the CA process these do not seem to be the dominant lines of thinking that are emerging.

The new democratic scene in Nepal has met with great support from the donor community. Extreme poverty, a large rural population and the need for post-conflict resolution, together with Nepal's geopolitical importance between two of the fastest growing economies in the world, China and India, has set the scene for a large donor presence in the country. This includes a range of programs operated by different United Nations agencies such as UNIFEM, United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the ILO among others which have large anti-trafficking projects. More recently the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) has started to take an interest in trafficking projects as part of its wider migration remit.

The study

This paper draws on findings from a recent study 'Post Trafficking in Nepal: Sexuality and Citizenship in Livelihood Strategies' funded by the Economic and Social Research Council in the UK. The main aims of the study were to investigate the livelihood opportunities and strategies of trafficked women on their return to their home country (or region of) Nepal, and to examine the intersections of sexuality, gender and citizenship in returnees' livelihood strategies, focusing on the

experiences of diverse groups of returnee trafficked women as new democratic processes unfold. The study is distinguished from previous work in focussing on post trafficking. Also, a key aspect of the research was to gain knowledge grounded in the actual experiences of returnee women themselves. Not only are the issues faced by returnee women largely ignored, but also the stigmatisation and poverty which they typically encounter means they often have little voice in citizenship debates and pro-poor development policy making.

In-depth/semi-structured interviews with trafficked women returned from national and external trafficking settings (46 in total) were conducted. These interviews were split between Kathmandu and three provincial/rural sites identified by the government as having high occurrences of trafficking (UNDP 2004), one site from the Far West (Kailali, a region that is predominantly Tharu, a marginalised ethnic group who are beginning to organise as an ethnic rights movement) and two from the Central Development Region (Sindhupalchok, a stigmatised region historically for trafficking and ethnically Tamang, and Makwanpur). See Figure 1, which highlights in blue 26 districts identified by the government as at risk for trafficking - primarily in the Kathmandu valley and along the South Eastern border with India. A recent version of the National Action Plan Against Trafficking of Women for Sexual Purposes, however, now designates 75% of Nepal as 'highly at risk areas'. One explanation offered for this shift is that traffickers are now moving women from the South East to traffic them through the Far West region of Nepal into India due to the success of NGO awareness training in the East Central area and around that border region. Samarasinghe (2008) also suggests that monitoring of the most frequently used crossing points is forcing traffickers to use more difficult routes despite transport challenges.

Figure 1: Trafficking Risk Districts Identified by the Nepal Government

The sample included women who self-identified as returnee trafficked women from eight ethnic social groups, four religious backgrounds and ranging from 17 – 44 years of age, and drew in women with different representation by local home region, returnee routes and timeframes of return; age of being trafficked/returned; ethnicity, caste and religion; access to citizenship; and who had differing levels of engagement with NGOs and social movements. The majority of the women who were interviewed had been trafficked to India (other destinations included Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and the US); and a small number had been trafficked within Nepal. Anti-trafficking NGOs were the starting point for recruitment and selection of interviewees, in particular via the project's partner organisation Shakti Samuha. Founded in 1996 by a group of

trafficked women, Shakti Samuha locates itself strategically within the anti-trafficking lobby as the only NGO run by returnee women in Nepal. Their demands challenge discourses of victimisation and assert citizenship claims focused on a right to chosen livelihoods. Snowballing techniques were employed to access women without current, direct NGO contact. Pilot fieldwork indicated that professionalisation was an important issue for anti-trafficking groups in Nepal, and consequently a subset of interviews were conducted with returnee trafficked women who identified as activists in order to explore these issues in more depth.

The interviews examined returnee women's own experiences and assessments of the strategies that enable women to exit (or not) trafficking situations, including passing as 'migrant workers'. This included their evaluation of the significance of a range of factors including local contacts, social capital, and skills-training. Interviews were taped and transcribed in Nepali (or in a few cases ethnic dialects), and then translated into English. Quotations given in this paper use the idiom of the original translation in recognition that Nepali English is one of many forms of global English that is spoken.

Semi-structured stakeholder interviews with anti-trafficking activists, key personnel in NGOs and in government (15 in total) were also carried out to examine assessments of the issues facing returnee trafficked women and activist strategies; trafficking network relationships, hierarchies, and professionalisation pressures and processes; the ability of grassroots NGOs to influence wider agendas and any fissures or new coalitions emerging. We recruited from national anti-trafficking NGOs and pro-democracy groups led by women's rights activists also advocating the rights of trafficked women. Selection reflected different forms/levels of support for varying approaches to livelihood strategies. Other qualitative methods adopted in the project involve the analysis of discourses and emerging policies on trafficking and citizenship in Nepal.

Effects of Sexual Stigma

Women who have been trafficked typically experience sexualised forms of social stigma as 'prostitutes' and/or HIV 'carriers' when they return to Nepal, whether or not they have been trafficked into the sex sector, the circus or other forms of forced labour. This is especially the case where a woman is understood to be returned from India (see discussion below on geographies of stigma). Although being trafficked is not a homogeneous experience, being labelled a 'trafficked woman' is a homogeneising identity closing down differences that would otherwise be socially significant. This is all the more significant in a society that is extremely diverse in terms of caste, ethnic and religious differences. The processes through which a woman's trafficked identity remains hidden or disclosed are important to whether returnee women are stigmatised and suffer discrimination. The research shows that for returnee trafficked women individual strategies of dealing with stigma and poverty focus heavily on the labour market and count on local NGOs who play an important role in providing skills training, which includes traditional female occupations/skills such as sewing, cooking and carpet making. The research also indicates that some 'non-traditional' jobs can be better livelihood options for women such as, for example, driving 'tempos' (motorized rickshaws), or working as security guards, plumbers or electricians. However, these jobs are traditionally dominated by men and require building up a client base and going into people's homes to work. These situations raise particular issues for returning trafficked women who often face prejudices for being female and also for being trafficked. Related to this, there are also issues of confidence and personal safety which are a wider concern more generally for returnee women seeking jobs after training.

Heteronormativity as a Livelihood Strategy

Reclaiming their identity through marriage remains one of the key livelihood strategies for returnee trafficked women to manage stigma and poverty, and also facilitates their access to citizenship and livelihoods in post-trafficking situations,

despite issues of personal risk and safety. Managing stigma in this way is clearly very personal and requires much individual energy and courage. For most returnee women who have opted for marriage as a livelihood strategy to manage stigma (see Richardson et. al. 2009 for more details), being able to keep her trafficked identity a secret from her husband or her husband's family is important to avoid personal risk. Findings from the study suggest that many returnee women who have chosen marriage as a way to establish a livelihood live with situations of extreme abuse from their husbands. Fears of discovery, potential violence and family rejection can lead to anxiety because of the constant worry that, as one interviewee remarked, "one day it will be known anyway". Marriage is also important to livelihoods because it is a means by which women can become a citizen and access the rights and services associated with having a citizenship card. A central aspect of feminist critiques is that 'citizenship has been made in the male image' (Pateman, 1988: 14) and that for women access to citizenship has historically been linked to marriage and motherhood (Walby, 1994, Lister, 2003). Feminist and queer writers have also highlighted how ideas of citizenship are racialized, as well as gendered (see, for example, Anthias and Yuval –Davis, 1992) and, more recently, associated with the institutionalisation of heterosexual as well as male and white privilege (Richardson, 1998, 2012; Bell and Binnie, 2000; Phelan, 2001). Pateman (1998), for example, argues that 'the sexual contract' is fundamental to ideas of citizenship, highlighting the significance of a married heterosexual context as the norm for full citizen status. (See Tamang 2002 for a critical discussion of Pateman's ideas in relation to Nepal.)

As mentioned earlier, traditionally in Nepal citizenship has been based on ideas of kinship through male lineage. To gain citizenship a woman needs to be sponsored by a male relative, typically her husband or father. Under the 1990 Constitution, only a person who is over 16 years of age and whose father is a citizen of Nepal at the time of the birth of the child can be a citizen. The mother is not considered on a par with her husband in terms of being able to confer citizenship to her child. According to the Citizenship Act of 1963, after the age of 16 both men and women shall apply for a certificate of citizenship to ensure that their citizenship rights are protected. This is a relatively simple process for a young man, however for a young woman an application must be supported either by her father or her husband (HMG, 1963). The

Interim Constitution of Nepal suggested a provision that stated that "citizenship shall be provided to a person applying for citizenship after the age of 16 years, in the name of father, mother or both" (Article 8(3), 2006). At the time of writing it appears that the likely model of citizenship by descent will be father **and** mother rather than father **or** mother, which in practice may mean little change.

For women who are trafficked and do not have citizenship the stigma and rejection they experience from their families and villages means they frequently lack the support of a father or husband and therefore are unable to obtain formal citizenship status. For example, Rupa commented:

> "Women who have experienced [being trafficked] can get citizenship either through their husbands after getting re/married or they can get made from their father provided the fathers are supportive. Some get it made from their fathers if the fathers are good. Otherwise it is difficult for them to have it."

In this context formal citizenship can be seen to be both gendered and (hetero) sexualised. This highlights the norms of sexual citizenship and connects with broader debates on sexual citizenship and globalisation (Altman 2001; Puar 2002; Binnie 2004; Richardson (2000, 2004, 2012) which have yet to be brought fully into mainstream development studies (Jolly 2000).

Citizenship is not only about access to rights it is also about identity: citizenship as a process of identity-making and the formation of new subjectivities. In this case it is about the process of managing stigmatised identities as trafficked women and (re) constituting identities as 'respectable', 'trustworthy', 'ordinary' women. Having a citizenship card helps to establish 'trustworthiness' and decrease doubts about one's status. As one woman stated it helps "not to raise suspicions". What this illustrates is that for trafficked women managing stigma is not so much about 'passing' as someone who they are not, but rather (re)constructing believable narratives around an identity they once had, where markers of doubt around those narratives are highly significant. Empirically, in our study, intersecting markers of doubt included having no citizenship, forms of embodiment (illness might imply having HIV), NGO/police

involvement, family rejection, and the places they returned to and from (see below). For Nita, it was the language and rescue tactics used by the Indian NGO from where she sought help. They drove her to her home village in an Indian bus with Indian number plates, despite the fact that she asked to be dropped at a distance so she could make her own way home. As she explains

> "When I encountered the problem there [India] I through the support of different NGOs was directly brought home by a bus. This is how all the people in public knew that I had encountered problem (trafficking). It had bad impact upon my parents. It definitely perturbed me a lot. … I had requested them a lot to drop in the middle. They [Indians] spoke Hindi, however I could also speak bit of Hindi… [but] I couldn't convince them."

In certain instances then policy and NGO practices can influence the abilities of returnee trafficked women to manage the effects of potential stigmatisation by 'outing' them as trafficked or by raising 'markers of doubt' around their identity.

By contrast, markers that helped to remove or contest doubt and establish 'ordinariness', defined in terms of gendered and sexualised norms for women of their caste, religion and ethnicity, included: socio-economic status of the family, the timescale of the trafficked experience, whether a woman returned with money (helping to 'pass' as a migrant worker), and whether it was international or internal trafficking. Here the role of the Nepal-India border is significant. Some women use the border to say "I'm not 'as trafficked' because I 'escaped/was rescued' before I crossed". Uma, a dalit woman with more than twelve year's association with an anti-trafficking NGO, explained.

> "They hide it in different ways. They might say I didn't go for the purpose of this work [sexual exploitation]….or some might say I was taken into a trafficking situation but I didn't reach the place; I was almost to reach there but I returned…I was not trafficked".

This invocation of the border constructs a differentiated version of the binary of "acceptable and unacceptable" femininities

Other influences were having a sustainable livelihood on return, citizenship and, connected with this, marriage. As one of the women in Poudel's (2011) study remarked:

"I have been trafficked, it's true that I'm trafficked and when they say these things then I can't say anything. A woman always has to be under others and I don't even have a husband. Even if your husband is physically weak or sick it's his presence that supports you. **If you have no husband then you are not a pura nagrik (full citizen)**." (Deep, emphasis added)

Whereas marriage may appear to be 'a solution' to social rejection and access to citizenship status, it is also important to understand the constitutive role it plays in the sexual politics of poverty. To understand the connections between marriage and trafficking we need to recognise not only how young women may be placed at risk of being trafficked through early marriage, but also that when young girls are sold into marriage and sold into trafficking definitional boundaries between early marriage and the trafficking of young girls may appear blurred. In many areas of the region known as the middle hill, traffickers represent themselves as marriage brokers and promise the parents that they will introduce successful future husbands to their daughters (GAATW 1999). Dowry is also common in southeast Nepal, where a poor family often falls foul of traffickers who agree to marry their daughter for a low dowry and then sell her out to Indian cities.

There is then a complex relationship between what is regarded as acceptable and appropriate sexuality, constituted through marriage and motherhood, and unacceptable and inappropriate sexuality, which in this context is the returnee trafficked woman who, defined against the desired norm is judged, as a 'prostitute', to be a 'bad woman' who is 'spoiled.' It is through marriage that acceptable sexuality is regulated and achieved, but at the same time where women fail to conform, for example in the case of women seeking to escape from forced early marriage or an

abusive relationship; this may put them in risk contexts for trafficking and subsequent normalising judgements that constrain their access to citizenship and livelihood options.

Geographies of Stigma and 'Passing'.

The geographies of stigma associated with trafficking make the experience of return very difficult for women. First, **the destination a woman is returning to** can be crucial. When we asked Maya 'how might the society treat her in the village afterwards?' she explained:

> "It affects in a negative way….The society says to her, 'This woman was sold and now she is back from such situation. Now she is going to spoil the people here in [the village]".

Similarly, Sushila returned to her village from India and experienced so much harassment that she was unable to carry on with the new life and livelihood she was trying to establish.

> "It was hard living in the village. The people gossiped. I opened one small tea shop. One of my friends who is a member of Shakti Samuha had given me 1000 Rupees. It was at Sindhupalchok. Ten minutes from my home. It was again very difficult. I used to make tea, local wine there and the men used to show me disrespect - trying to grasp me, touch my hands, talking in a stupid way, throwing stones on me. It was very embarrassing."

After eight months Sushila was forced to close her shop. It seems that returning to rural situations is potentially very difficult for women because, as Bindu explains:

> "You can't hide it from your neighbours and people surrounding you providing that you are living in your own village. You can hide it just not opening up your mouth to anyone if living in places other than your village".

Connected with this urban and rural spaces are seen to afford different opportunities for 'passing' or, at least, avoiding disclosure. Urban spaces, particularly major cities like Kathmandu, can be important in negotiating fears of being 'found out' to be trafficked and managing sustainable identities and livelihoods. Kathmandu is the capital city of Nepal and the place where the majority of returnee women settle and a more anonymous life can be sought. Apart from the city affording more 'protection' through anonyminity, some of the women regarded urban spaces as being more informed about trafficking through media and NGO activism and, as a consequence, less rejecting and stigmatising that some rural communities. Maya, for instance, implies that things are now very different from when she first returned in 1996.

Question: In what ways [different]?

"In good ways. There may not be any changes in the villages but it has changed in the urban areas. "

Kathmandu as the capital city is also the key site for anti-trafficking organisations and donors, and therefore of forms of support for trafficked women. It also plays an important role in trafficking as the centre for domestic and international transport, where processes of trafficking originate and transit through to and from other destinations is organised (see Figure Two).

Despite these significant general findings, it is also important to understand that not all rural places are the same and also that increasingly public awareness programmes that aim to decrease the risk of trafficking and challenge stigma are focusing on rural communities. A further layer to the complex geography of stigma is revealed when we look in more detail at where Sushila's tea shop experience occurred. Sushila is from Sindhulpalchok which is located in the High Middle Hill area of Nepal. Its inhabitants are predominately people from the Tamang ethnic group. Sindhulpalchok is a highly stigmatised district/region because the Tamang communities were among the earliest to be exposed to trafficking. Over time a stereotype emerged implying that families sold their female members - daughters, sisters, wives - into trafficking on a semi-organised basis, using the profits and any

remittances for family welfare (Joshi 2001). Such stigmatised constructions of ethnicity probably have longer historical roots. In the 19th Century the feudal Rana ruling family recruited Tamang girls from this region to serve as entertainers for themselves in Kathmandu (Poudel 2011; Samarasinghe 2008). Until recently, even if a woman is a migrant worker not working in the 'sex industry', it is likely that she will have been read as sexually trafficked or seen as a prostitute if she returned to Sindhulpalchok from India or further afield. We would argue that this example points further to the associative power of geographies of stigma, where origins as much as destination can affect how a returnee woman is seen.

The **destination from which women return** also means that stigma is often a differentiated experience. The geographies of borders appear to sexualise some forms of trafficking and desexualise others. This is mainly in relation to specific countries. The border crossing to India is a crucial one in trafficking being construed as sexual trafficking, whereas other routes and destinations appear to occupy a more ambiguous place in the imaginations of Nepali's 'back home'. However, some cities stand out as city stigmatised places such as, for example Mumbai and Kolkotta. Rupa for example, not only draws a distinction between internal and international trafficking in relation to different levels of stigma but also highlights that this is influenced by different destinations, countries and cities.

> "The society perceives differently to women trafficked to Delhi, Calcutta and women trafficked abroad such as [to] Lebanon, Kuwait. It is seen as they have nice work in Kuwait or Lebanon".
>
> Question: What about women trafficked in Nepal?
>
> "People will definitely backbite against her if not directly…though the stigma is not same as to those returning from Bombay".

However some women believe that internal trafficking provides more opportunities to hide a trafficking past, as the following exchange with Tara indicates.
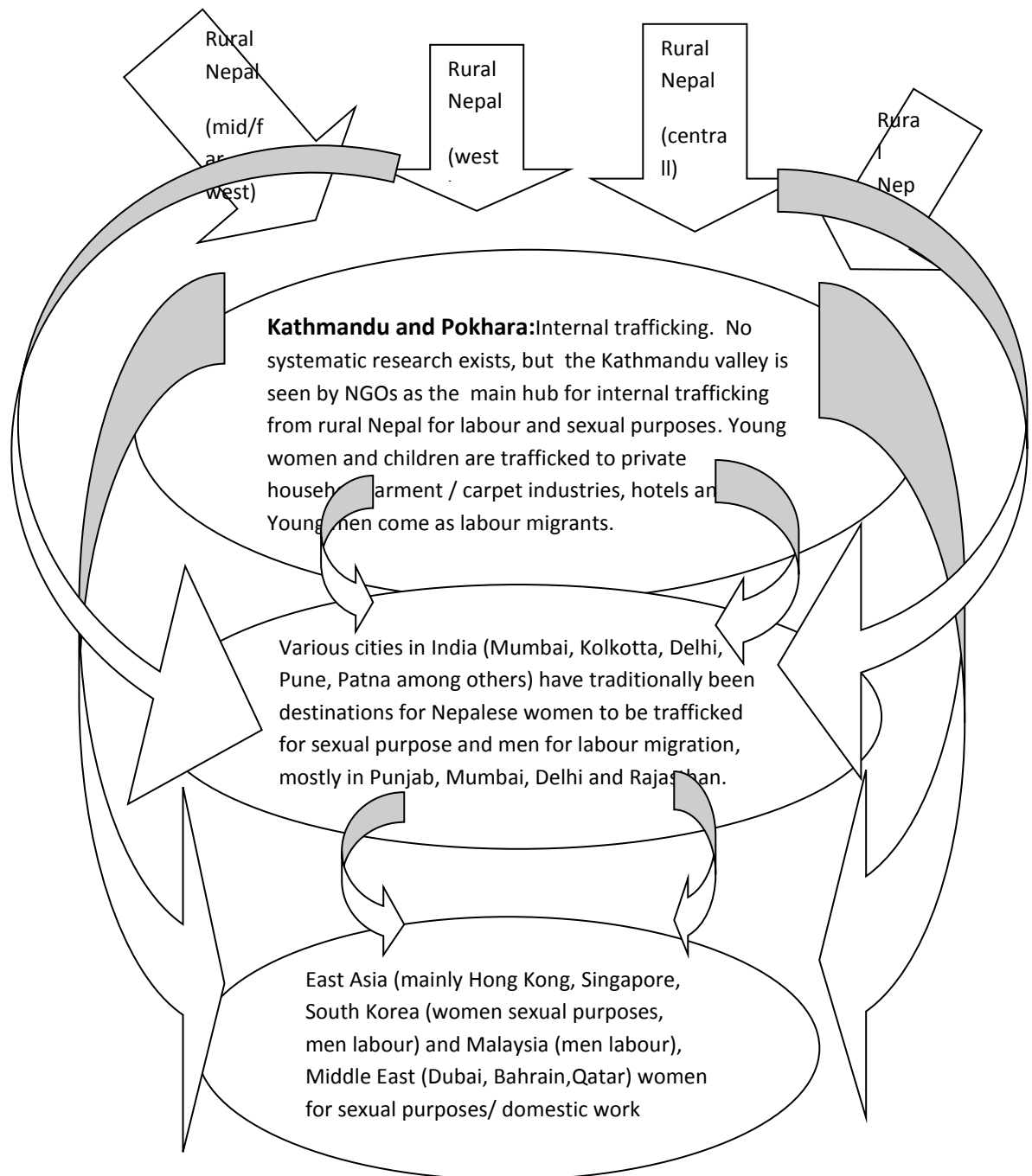
Question: "If you were sold within Nepal, would there be difference in terms of social rejection and stigma towards you?"

"If I was sold within Nepal I could hide my family about it and I could hide the nature of work I had done. I could be in touch with them and see them sometimes, it would be different".

Internal and international trafficking, however, are not necessarily distinct experiences. Figure 2 illustrates that both are linked through a complex geography of flows and movement with certain cities and smaller towns playing a key focal point. For instance, women may be brought from rural areas to the city/town (e.g. Kathmandu and Pokhara) and from there may be at risk of being trafficked to India and from there on to other destinations. These circuits are highly gendered at all levels, thereby affecting how particular people going to specific destinations are seen. Once the border has been crossed, however, a hierarchy of stigma comes into play. India, especially cities such as Mumbai and Kolkotta, is the most stigmatised destination as it is seen to be synonymous with sexual trafficking (although it is not necessarily so)

Figure 2: Internal and International trafficking transit routes through Kathmandu

Rural Nepal (mid/far west)

Rural Nepal (west)

Rural Nepal (central)

Rural Nep

Kathmandu and Pokhara: Internal trafficking. No systematic research exists, but the Kathmandu valley is seen by NGOs as the main hub for internal trafficking from rural Nepal for labour and sexual purposes. Young women and children are trafficked to private househ   arment / carpet industries, hotels an Young en come as labour migrants.

Various cities in India (Mumbai, Kolkotta, Delhi, Pune, Patna among others) have traditionally been destinations for Nepalese women to be trafficked for sexual purpose and men for labour migration, mostly in Punjab, Mumbai, Delhi and Rajasthan.

East Asia (mainly Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea (women sexual purposes, men labour) and Malaysia (men labour), Middle East (Dubai, Bahrain,Qatar) women for sexual purposes/ domestic work

In the following section we focus on the ways in which women's identities as migrant and trafficked women are becoming blurred. We explore how this blurring in some cases shapes the associative power of geographies of stigma as women seeks to locate themselves in particular ways in relation to their experiences of crossing the border or not.

Blurring Identities

There has been a huge increase in migrant workers from all over Nepal in recent years (Seddon 2005; UN Office 2010; United States 2010). Formal migration from Nepal has increased nearly tenfold over the last decade according to official statistics. As Table 1 indicates, the numbers of migrants leaving Nepal with official government permission have increased from approximately thirty five thousand (1999-2000), to nearly three hundred thousand in 2009-10. It is estimated that each day around 900 youths leave for overseas employment from Nepal with an estimated 3 million migrants working and residing overseas. As Table 2 suggests most of these migrants go to the Middle East

Table1: Labour Migration Trends in Nepal (total Numbers of labour migrants by year) 1992-2010

1999/ 20	2000/ 01	2001/ 02	2002/ 03	2003/ 04	2004/ 05	2005/ 06	2006/ 07	2007/ 08	2008/ 09	2009/ 10
35,543	55,025	104,739	105,055	91,540	183,929	165,252	204,533	249,051	219,965	298,094

Source: Department of Foreign Employment, 2010.

Table 2: Country of Destination for Nepalese Migrants gone abroad with permission from Department of Foreign Employment (other than India) from 1993/94 till 2008/09

S.No.	Country	Male	Female	Total
1.	Malaysia	455, 436	249	455, 685
2.	Qatar	425, 237	571	425, 808
3.	Saudi Arabia	277, 755	170	277, 925
4.	U.A.E.	180, 069	1,258	181, 327
5.	Bahrain	17, 849	481	18, 330
6.	Kuwait	14, 938	1,264	16, 202
7.	Oman	7, 928	265	8, 193
8.	Israel	3, 658	2, 440	6, 098
9.	Lebanon	249	5, 693	5, 942
10.	Hong Kong	4, 237	40	4, 277
11.	Others	31, 199	1, 238	32, 437
	Total	1, 418, 555	13, 669	1, 432, 224

Source: Department of Foreign Employment.

There are marked gendered dimensions to this migration. While men migrate to various destinations in the Middle East and Malaysia for construction work, in official statistics women are concentrated in a few countries such as Lebanon and Israel where they are recruited for domestic work and to look after children or older people.

Nevertheless these figures are not the full story. The research team's participant observation in high level meetings and policy briefings indicates that the Ministry of Labour and Transport Management are disseminating gender estimates that conflict. For example, figures shared by the Ministry suggest that 11% of the Nepalese migrants working in the labour market abroad (which does not include India) are women and of these women 90% are estimated to be undocumented. However other figures shared by the Ministry for the Arab States alone put the estimate of Nepalese women working as migrants at 66,000. This is more than double the 11% estimate of female participation in the overall foreign labour market. The gender dimensions of migration therefore need more critical analysis. The blurring of the distinction between migrant and trafficked women identities may in part be influenced by the fact that the open border between India and Nepal is a gendered migration route. While men migrating for work through formal recruitment agencies typically leave from Kathmandu and fly over the border, women are more commonly both trafficked and formally migrate by overland means, the latter often flying on from Delhi rather than Kathmandu to destinations further afield.

Previously we have argued that neoliberal labour arrangements between Nepal and specific countries in the Middle East and parts of South East Asia where there are labour deficits have made it easier for some women to pass as generic migrant workers upon return (Richardson et al 2009). Our current research, however, is suggesting a change in this scenario. As more women migrate in search of work, increased awareness of what is required for formal migration with official permission makes passing as a migrant worker upon return less easy. For example, in response to our question about women being able to hide their trafficked status by pretending that they left for foreign employment, Tara explains: "it needs evidence like citizenship card, passport with company's stamp which I didn't have, I went with nothing, so lying was….[not possible]". In addition our findings suggest that ever more complex patterns of trafficking are emerging. With greater numbers of people leaving the country migration is acting as a route into trafficking for many. When these women return after a long period of no contact with family and with no money

they face rejection and suspicion from their communities. As a result, post return, more women are beginning to be perceived as potentially 'trafficked', irrespective of how they originally left the country.

Although many female migrant workers in the Middle East face situations of sexual exploitation similar to those of trafficked women, they are likely to be read differently if they have been in a position to send money home. However, because of fears of rejection and stigmatisation these women are often forced into silence about the negative experiences they encounter whilst abroad, as Tara explains:

> "It is called foreign employment at the time of their departure but in fact they experience trafficking out there. …They are similar to trafficked women since they encounter the similar exploitation."

Conclusion

The emerging findings from this recently completed research project on post trafficking livelihoods and citizenship in Nepal have a number of implications for the ways in which we can begin to think about bridging the gap between international and internal migration theory. Our work indicates the need to develop new theorisations of the role of border imaginaries in shaping both the policy framing and individual experience of trafficking for a number of reasons. First a border does more than mark the difference between internal and international migration. Not only are these connected but also our interviews indicated that for Nepalis the term 'abroad' only refers to places beyond India. Crossing the border into India does not count as international movement. This finding has implications for how 'crossings' are understood and highlights the need to theorise them in relation to hierarchies and geographies of stigma. Second while the border is a physical thing it is also important to recognise that it stretches into a country much beyond the policed site of a border crossing. Borders are extended into national territory through bilateral labour agreement and the policies, discourses and actions of donor organisations

and (I)NGOs. Postconflict situations often mean that borders are rigidly marked and fixed while at the same time being stretched through the technocratic governance of aid. Third and perhaps most importantly from the perspective of the aims of our project, the border is something that is experienced differently. It can be given agency and used to mark specific people in particular ways, rendering them in or out of place when they come home. The border therefore is not something that returnee women just pass or cross over but rather it continues to influence their livelihood opportunities well into the future as they seek to (re)make their lives and identities post trafficking.

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