ABSTRACT

SEASONAL MIGRATION AND CIRCULAR TURMOIL: A GEOGRAPHIC NARRATIVE OF BRICK FACTORY MIGRANT WORKERS IN THE KATHMANDU VALLEY, NEPAL

by Rupak Prasad Shrestha

Uneven development and urban bias has re-enforced rural to urban migration in Nepal. Such mobility – mostly conceived as economic, but also gendered, political and social - influences migrant livelihoods. I track the everyday geographic, social, and political challenges faced by brick factory migrant workers who are continuously pushed through economic and extra-economic means towards the periphery of urban spaces. I examine how seasonal migration affects migrants’ own understandings of development. I also discuss the processes through which brick factory migrant workers negotiate their rights in the migration process. I contend that migrant workers are confined to marginalized spaces of the city and are deprived of means to enhance their capabilities and livelihoods; they negotiate their rights directly with a middle-man, therefore, the owners have little to no liability for migrants’ safety; and, migrant mobilities trace a vector from the rural periphery to the urban periphery (margins of the city).
SEASONAL MIGRATION AND CIRCULAR TURMOIL:
A GEOGRAPHIC NARRATIVE OF BRICK FACTORY MIGRANT WORKERS IN THE
KATHMANDU VALLEY, NEPAL

A Thesis

Submitted to the
Faculty of Miami University
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
Department of Geography
by
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Miami University
Oxford, Ohio
2015

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Acknowledgement

I would like to thank my respondents who taught me that hope grows - more fervently - on the soil of despair.

I would like to express my gratitude to Dr. Stanley Toops for advising and counseling me through all the stages of research and writing; Dr. Ian Yeboah for his theoretical guidance on migration and development; and, Dr. Janardan Subedi for being a mentor and for guiding me in important life and career decisions.

I would also like to thank the faculty in the Department of Geography at Miami University who provided continuous support and feedback. Finally, I would, with the warmest of hearts, like to thank Debbi White without whom life in graduate school would be incomplete, and would fall into disarray.
Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

The city is expensive, so what are we to do now. I am unemployed, now it does not work out as we think it will. As for work, we work in the VSBK (unloading cooked bricks at the factory) for about 16 hours (daily), we get 12-13000 Rupees (about USD 130) as salary every month. What are we to do with that? That is the reason that the youths are compelled to migrate abroad, most of them have migrated already. Now I think my plan is to do the same – Chandra Pun

Inside a small, uncooked brick hut atop a small mound next to the brick factory he works at, Chandra Pun - a rural to urban migrant laborer in the city - pours out his frustrations and longs for a life as a transnational migrant in a land that is far and foreign. Chandra identifies himself as unemployed although he works at the brick factory. Stories like his construct a migrant narrative of hope, longing, and despair that help us understand the developmental implications of migration. In Nepal, 8 out of every 10 migrants are rural to urban migrants (Census Bureau of Statistics 2009). In conformity, brick factory migrant workers in the Kathmandu Valley are mostly from rural areas of western and southern Nepal. All but two interviewed migrant workers were from the districts of Rolpa, Rukum or Dang of western Nepal.

Scholars have pushed for a narrative approach to understanding the underlying processes of migration (Lawson 2000; Shah 2006; Silvey and Lawson 1999). In accord, with an emphasis on migrant narratives, I investigate how seasonal migration of brick factory workers - from rural areas of Nepal to the economic hub of the Kathmandu Valley - affect the migrants’ social and economic development. Through semi-structured interviews and the use of disposable cameras to record everyday migrant lives, I produce narratives on the migrants’ socio-economic conditions along with their experiences in the city. I explore how internal migration affects inequality, poverty and landlessness among migrants. In doing so, I use a methodology that ensures active participation of the migrant workers in the process of knowledge production.

Essentially, this thesis lies at the discursive nexus of migration and development. Developmental practices result in inequality, poverty, and landlessness. Consequently, these are the major drivers behind internal migration (Escobar 1995; Shrestha 1990). In a poststructural shift in migration studies, by emphasizing on both the place and the migrant, Silvey and Lawson (1999) argue that migrants - as subjects of research - are agents of their own mobilities and
development. Migrant experiences in the city are influenced by the knowledge of, and access to, rights. In a study of informal bidi (local Indian tobacco) and construction workers, Agarwala (2008) contends that laborers negotiate their rights directly with the state rather than their employers. Through this understanding, I examine what processes and strategies migrants adopt - and adapt - to negotiate their rights (social, economic, and political) and spaces at the destination. It will be evident that ethnicity, gender, caste, and class affect migrants’ experiences, access to services, and the ability to practice reasoned human agency. Through migrant narratives, I argue that rural to urban migration of brick factory migrant workers is not really a periphery to core migration but one that takes place from the periphery (rural spaces) to the periphery (margins of the city).

1.1 Research Questions

The research questions stem from a conceptual framework on the literature on development geographies and migration studies, discussed in detail in Chapter 3. The geographical dimensions of migration examine the relationship between the demographics of the migrants, the reasons for migration, the economic, social and political situations at the origin, and migrant experiences and subjectivities at the destination. At the confluence of these issues, I examine how these delineate within the contemporary concepts in development geographies and migration studies.

I frame the thesis around a main research question, which is supported by two sub-questions:

*How do the geographical dimensions of internal migration of brick factory workers affect the migrants’ social and economic development in Nepal?*

**Sub-question 1: How does internal migration affect individual and household development of migrant workers?**

**Sub-question 2: What are the processes through which migrants negotiate their social, political, and economic rights at the destination?**

Although I do not disregard the economic aspect of development, I allocate a much greater focus on migrants’ freedoms and rights. I answer Sub-Question 1 in two steps. First, I study the reasons behind the phenomenon of seasonal migration. Second, I study the changes in migrant livelihoods after migration by examining migrant development, experiences and remittances. To understand migrant development, I will borrow from Sen’s (1999) framework, especially the
factors on access to education and healthcare, political and civil rights, and the freedom to participate in public dialogue. Additionally, I explore migrants’ access to options at the destination to enhance their livelihoods. Although migration is a means of survival for many workers, it is not just a process of risk mitigation but also a path towards newer lives.

Through Sub-Question 2, I bring into light the practiced and unpracticed roles of stakeholders involved - NGOs, government institutions, employers and unions – that play direct and indirect roles in migrants’ livelihoods. Based on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UN 1948), this sub-question investigates if migrant workers have access to the fundamental human rights and the basic social and labor protections that they are entitled to. I emphasize on migrant’s access to public services (health and education), their right to the choice of employment, favorable conditions at work, and their access to trade unions to ensure labor rights.

I answer the research questions through primary data from field research, secondary census data, and the analysis of contemporary discourses on post-development and critical migration theories.

1.3 Summary of Chapters

Chapter 1 is an introduction to the thesis and a presentation of the underlying research questions. I provide a context through which the reader can understand brick factory migrant lives portrayed in the following chapters. Chapter 2 delineates the methods that I employed during field research to collect data and notes how I analyzed that data. Chapter 3 is a literature review of relevant topics on internal migration, development geographies, and literature that examines the socio-economic impacts of migration. Chapter 3 also provides a conceptual framework which helps to build up the research questions and henceforth guides the thesis.

Chapter 4 provides an introduction to the state of migration in Nepal and explores the geographies of brick factories that are dotted throughout the eastern to southern belt of the Kathmandu Valley. Chapter 5 analyses interviews taken during field visits at the brick factories. I also construct narratives based on observations and images from the field. Furthermore, the chapter examines the patterns from photographs that the migrants took using disposable cameras. I relate these results in Chapter 6 in relation to the literature as well as to the research questions. Chapter 7 is a conclusion with a summary of the thesis along with recommendations for further research.
Chapter 2: Methods

2.1 Introduction to Methods

This chapter discusses the methods I employed during fieldwork in Nepal between May and August of 2014. I interviewed fifteen migrants individually from two brick factories of the Kathmandu Valley. At the brick factory of Patan, I provided ten migrants each with a disposable camera to record their daily lives. The methods used construct narratives of the everyday lives and lived experiences of migrants at the brick factories. They also reflect on how migrants understand development through their own mobilities. The resulting data produce a qualitative analysis in the form of stories, narratives and imageries. I then juxtapose the analysis with the literature on migration and development.

It is important to explain positionality in this research. Nepali is the lingua franca of Nepal. Although the respondents’ first language was their own ethnic languages (mostly Magar), I communicated with them in Nepali. I translated interview questions into Nepali (Appendix I). All communication was recorded in Nepali and then translated into English when I compiled the results for analysis. I find it important to note that I, myself, am a native Nepali male of a middle-class Newari ethnicity.

2.2 Semi-Structured Interviews

I conducted semi-structured interviews with fifteen brick-factory migrant workers: eleven from Shree Satya Narayan Itta Bhatta (Patan), and four from Shree Mili Hanuman Fix Itta Udhyog (Bhaktapur). Brick factories employ naike (contractors), who recruit workers from villages and manage their earnings directly with the factory owners. In Patan, I met and interviewed a naike on the first field day of the research. I interviewed seven more workers through the naike’s network. I connected with the other three in Patan through snowball sampling. At Bhaktapur, I selected all four respondents through snowball sampling. All interviews were conducted in Nepali. Throughout the thesis, I have also assigned and used aliases for the migrants to conceal their identities.

The semi-structured interview is an essential tool in qualitative research that aims to produce narratives. These interviews are the most effective ways to communicate with people about their everyday lives and the issues that they face on a daily basis (Fontana and Frey 1994). Shah (2006) used this method to understand the social dynamics of migrants’ villages in India.
During my fieldwork, this method gave flexibility to the interview process as the migrants were free to speak their minds rather than being guided throughout the entire process. Longhurst (2003) and Secor (2010) note that comfortability is an important factor, as the setting of the interview can influence and create bias in the responses. To avoid that, I conducted my interviews right outside the huts where the migrants lived.

I developed the interview questions (Appendix I) to elicit rich stories from the migrant workers. This form of interviewing is parallel to the work of Lawson (2000), who used critical in-depth interviews to produce rich narratives that emphasized deep stories of migrant workers in Ecuador. I initially conducted a pilot interview with a migrant worker, after which I revised the questions to ensure a coherent flow of conversations. The interview questions are based on the following interrelated themes: migrant demographics; reasons for migration and socio-economic conditions at the origin; migrant income and remittance; changes in livelihood after migration; and, labor practices, working conditions, negotiating rights, and experiences in the city.

2.3 Visual Methods

I provided ten migrant workers from Shree Satya Narayan Itta Bhatta (Patan) with a disposable camera each. I had set up a mid-morning session with the workers to show them how to use the camera, and to explain what I wanted them to do. Ten people showed up at the session, of which eight of them were my respondents. I gave each one a disposable camera and asked them to take pictures of things that they encounter in a normal day, including objects and spaces that materialize from issues in their everyday lives. Migrants took pictures over a period of a week.

I employed this method because, as Harper (1994) and Young and Barrett (2001) note, visual methods ensure active participation of our subjects with the least amount of researcher input. The benefits of this method are twofold. First, it ensured active participation of migrant workers in the research process by reversing the role between the researcher (self) and the researched (other), hence facilitating empowerment through self-problem identification. Second, as cameras go to private spaces that I – as an outsider - was not be able to go to, they provided a visual narrative of the migrants’ living conditions in the city. Through this method, I am able to produce narratives of the experiences and expectations of migrants in the public and private spaces of the city.
2.4 (Participant) Observation

Participant observation (PO) provides a commentary and rich detail of the everyday lives of the people that we study and try to understand as researchers (Adler and Adler 1994; Laurier 2003). Recently, academics have used PO to explore the everyday lives of Muslim female factory migrant workers in a town in Britain, and of seasonal migrants from Jharkhand to brick factories of other states in India (Allsop et al. 2010; Shah 2006). Through the use of PO, Shah (2006) concluded that migrants migrate not entirely for economic reasons but also to escape family pressure and to experience freedom.

Through the use of PO, my field notes provide a thick description of the physical setting of the brick factories and on how the migrants respond to their physical setting. Through this imagery, I am able to understand the power relations that are produced and reproduced at the factories on a daily basis. Although PO may seem highly subjective, as Atkinson and Hammersley (1994) note, there is validity and transferability in such ethnographic methods. In fact, my observations were better understood - and later formed a basis for - critical in-depth interviews with the migrants. Participant observation also assisted me in further exploring migrancy at the brick factories as I used this method in conjunction with visual methods.

2.5 Conclusion to Methods

In addition to the triangulation of ethnographic methods, I used secondary data from the Census Bureau of Statistics’ reports and surveys, namely: Report on the Labour Force Survey 2008 (2009), Nepal Living Standards Survey 2010/11 (2011), and National Population and Housing Census 2011 (2012). On the ethical issue of positionality, Allsop et al. (2010) note how researchers are always able to leave the research site while the researched are bound to stay. I was always an outsider to the migrants as I had the option of leaving the brick factories at my will but the migrants were socio-economically bounded at the factories.

Miami University’s Institutional Review Board for the Use of Human Subjects in Research (IRB) reviewed the research proposal before I went into the field. In accordance, I made sure that the migrants were under no harm by participating in the research. I obtained permission from the owners to conduct research in their brick factories, and consent from migrant workers for interviews and visual methods.
Chapter 3: Literature and Conceptual Framework

3.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews literature in three areas: development, internal migration theory, and the social and economic impacts of migration on migrants. I explore the historic shift in the understanding of development. Within the shift, I align the thesis along a rights-based approach to migration, and a rights-based and capabilities approach to development. The conceptual framework for migration and development at the end of the chapter will tie in the literatures from the three areas into one synthesized, coherent whole, and will help situate research questions.

3.2 Development Geographies

The meaning of development has changed theoretically – and in practice - since its inception as a concept. In a modernization framework, traditional societies were perceived as backwards by western societies and therefore developmental practices were geared towards technological and industrial advancement in the traditional societies. With modernization theory, development was understood solely as a path towards economic growth measured through the indices like GDP and GNP. Scholars criticized this approach and argued that development researchers in both policy and academia should consider elements of poverty, employment, equality, education and freedom of speech to better understand development processes. They argued that poverty, inequality and unemployment are highly related inasmuch as a change in one influences or triggers a change in the other factors of development (Aoyama et al. 2011; Seers 1969).

Anti-development and development-from-below are alternative approaches to development that critique the neoliberal developmental agenda of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. Additionally, people-centered developmental approach emphasizes on human need, self-reliance, sustainable resource use, empowerment and capacity building (Page 2003; Potter et al. 2012). Within this framework, individual agency is dependent on - and is produced, restricted and resisted by - social and political norms, boundaries and systems (Sen 1999).

The capabilities approach to development prioritizes people’s well-being and their capabilities to achieve valuable actions to better their lives (Nussbaum 2003; Sen 1989). This approach promotes opportunities and abilities by emphasizing reasoned human agency (Nussbaum
This is better understood through a postmodern/poststructural approach to development, which is against the rationality of the modernization viewpoint. This approach emphasizes human agency, the *self*, and *identity* (Potter et al. 2012). In view that human rights and freedoms should be critically considered, scholars emphasize the removal of unfreedoms that bar people from ‘exercising their reasoned agency’ (Goulet 1971; Sen 1999). Herein, I understand these unfreedoms in terms of access to health, education, social life, and socio-political freedoms. Not only that, with this approach, scholars are also concerned with overcoming problems of famine, acute hunger, political unfreedoms, lack of women's rights and the degrading social as well as environmental issues (Potter et al. 2008; Sen 1999). Similarly, Escobar (1995), through a poststructuralist understanding of development, explores development as discourse in which multiple layers of interactions between knowledge and power act upon various stakeholders in the development process.

Rights-based approach to development advocates to redress injustice in the society by focusing on vulnerable groups and emphasizing collective rather than individual actions (Tsikata 2007). This approach places an emphasis on human rights and its relation to development. In so doing, it frames the roles and responsibilities of governmental and non-governmental actors in the developmental process. Scholars note that these actors play a substantial role in the political economy of development and that they ensure rights-focused participation at local, national and international levels (Desai 2014; Hickey and Mohan 2005).

I employ rights-based and capabilities approaches to development to understand the processes through which brick factory migrant workers negotiate their rights. To understand migrant development, I explore power relations between various stakeholders through the lens of difference and identity (based on gender, religion, caste, and ethnicity).

### 3.3 (Internal) Migration Theory

Since the 1960s, there has been a gradual shift in how researchers have understood migration. Lee (1966) notes that migration encompasses an origin, a destination, and an intervening set of physical as well as socio-political obstacles. A key concept of this theory is that migration is dependent on the individual rather than household and that the decision to migrate is not always - and never completely - a rational thought process. Zelinsky (1971) argues that Lee’s theory of migration only account for the relationship between source and destination of migration,
and that it fell short in describing the ‘definite, patterned regularities’ in the mobility process. Applying the Zelinsky model (1971), the internal migration pattern of Nepal follows Phase Two of an early transitional society, where there is a larger percentage of people moving from rural areas to the cities.

In dual labor market theory, migration is caused by upward mobility in economic development in the destination while the source of migration still faces underdevelopment (Keshri and Bhagat 2012; Shrestha 1988). Furthermore, migratory patterns manifest a core-periphery development model and that internal migration is - to a large extent - influenced by urban-bias (Brown and Lawson 1985; Shrestha 1988). Reversely, changes in rural socio-economic conditions also influence migratory patterns and flows to a large extent (Fussell and Massey 2004).

Cumulative causation of migration states that migratory decisions are based on either previous migration or relative deprivation. Relative deprivation theory argues that the presence of higher migratory social networks in rural areas increases the rate of migration as changes in the income distribution between members in the origin community through remittances influence other community members to migrate for their economic growth (Fussell and Massey 2004). Internal chain migration is therefore sustained by these social networks and migrant experiences. These are common themes in the political economy approach to migration studies (Shrestha 1988).

Through Bourdieu’s Theory of Practice, we understand that migration is a social practice and that it is highly influenced by kinship, familiarity of place and socio-economic conditions (Fussell and Massey 2004; Poertner et al. 2011). A direct correlation exists between internal migration and the factors of human capital, social capital and physical capital (Bohra and Massey 2009; Keshri and Bhagat 2012; Shrestha 1988). Migration researchers understand social capital mostly in the form of social networks. Social networks of migrants are the linkages of family, friends and acquaintances through the use of which they significantly reduce the cost of internal migration. Researchers have attributed the lack of physical capital such as land at the origin to be the main reason behind internal migration. Migration is also a ‘risk-coping strategy’ adopted by many households to survive. The rate of internal migration is higher among socio-economically marginalized groups, who have multiple internal migration strategies for sustenance and survival (Keshri and Bhagat 2012; Poertner et al. 2011). This shift in focus from individuals to households in migration research underlies the theory of the New Economics of Labor Migration.
A critical turn in understanding migration and migrancy is advocated by postcolonial and feminist scholarship. Scholars working from this approach have strongly supported migrant narratives. Narratives emphasize individual motivations behind migration, the ambivalence of the migrant experiences, and the reinterpretation of migration and developmental practices through migrants’ own voices (Silvey and Lawson 1999). As experiences of migrants are highly influenced by political, economic, cultural and social contexts, migration studies should incorporate discourses of identity, sense of belonging, social inclusion and marginalization (Jennissen 2007; Lawson 2000; Silvey and Lawson 1999). Through migrant experiences and narratives, Shah (2006) concludes that migrant labor mobilities are ‘temporary spaces of freedom’ from issues that migrants may have with families at home. Brick-kiln migrants in the Indian state of Jharkhand perceive their destination as spaces of resistance against tribal activists and policy-makers who see such migration as a ‘problem’ to the purity and morality of the tribes (Shah 2006). Emphasis on migrant narratives provide a non-linear understanding of dynamic migration processes in relation to culture, political economy and development discourse. I place the thesis within this narrative, place and migrant experience based scholarship on migration theory.

3.4 Socio-Economic Impacts of Migration

A few scholars have noted that rural migrants in urban areas live in compressed public spaces in high-density poorer migrant neighborhoods. In these neighborhoods, they have easier access to social networks through which they seek assistance in finding food, shelter, employment and additional social networks in the city (Abu-Lughod 1961; Banerjee 1983; Frayne 2007). Some rural migrants establish village associations, which are linked to associations in the source to maintain strong traditional systems of community (Orellana 1973). These associations in the city assist the migrants in social adjustment and to maintain communal ties. Support from these social networks not only influence the migrants’ destination but it also helps in minimizing risks and negative social impacts associated with rural-urban migration (Banerjee 1983; Deshingkar et al. 2008; Frayne 2007). The impacts of migration on migrants at the destination are dependent on the caste, ethnicity and tribe that the migrants belong to (Deshingkar et al. 2008; Keshri and Bhagat 2012).

In accordance with the theory of new economics of labor migration, in India, members of Dalit households from Sugao migrate to Mumbai temporarily to secure enough money so that they
can return to their families in their villages to invest in land or property (Dandekar 1997). Internal migration of this sort causes stress and hardship not only to the migrants but also to the family members who are left behind. Although there are a few cases of women migrants that have succeeded in socio-economic upward mobility at the destination, cities are spaces of gendered division of labor where female migrants do not have the same socio-political status as compared to the males (Dandekar 1997; Fontes 2011).

Scholars also contend that migrants work longer hours, make much less money and receive unequal welfare treatment than local workers (Deshingkar et al. 2008; Mosse et al. 2005; Ngok 2012). In neighboring China, the hukou system limits migrants’ access to insurance, healthcare, the urban dibao program, subsidized housing, and education (Ngok 2012; Park and Wang 2010). In housing, migrant spaces are constantly produced and reproduced in the city as city officials demolish temporary migrant dwellings. These along with issues of abuse, theft and harassment constantly marginalize the migrants in the ‘increasingly hostile urban environments’ (Deshingkar et al. 2008; Frayne 2007; Mosse et al. 2005). Migrant workers are also continuously in conflict with the locals for economic and social benefits at the destination. Due to these issues, Agarwala (2008) finds that informal bidi (local Indian tobacco) workers in India configure and reconfigure their labor relations, as they negotiate their rights directly with the state rather than their employers.

Though there are significant inequalities that migrants face in urban areas, Park and Wang (2010) argue that poverty is not a crucial concern due to the coping strategies that migrants adapt at the destination. Government agencies and local organizations could reduce migrant inequalities by establishing support services for migrants to include counseling, skill training, rehabilitation and social protection (Deshingkar et al. 2008; Ngok 2012).

### 3.5 Conceptual Framework

Table 3.1 illustrates the issues in between migration and development. It shows how the issues and topics within the broader migration and development processes influence migrant livelihoods and wellbeing.

Uneven development and urban bias results in landlessness and limited resources for the rural poor (Shrestha 1988). Through a political economy approach, to attain Sen’s freedoms and for risk aversion, people from rural areas migrate to urban centers, where – as discussed in Section 3.4 - they are continually discriminated against and marginalized. Hence, migrants seek assistance
from social networks to avert these risks and hardships at the destination. Support services through state agencies, NGOs, Hometown Associations, migrant households and individual migrants themselves are prevalent in the migration domain. These support services reduce migrant inequalities and stress.

Although remittances and savings play important roles as they act as indicators for economic development and migrant well-being, it is crucial to reflect on migrant stories. Critical migration theory advocates for migrant narratives through which we can understand the processes of development (Lawson 2000). Migrant narratives inform us about migrant subjectivities and individual reasons behind migration and how they negotiate their subjective identities and spaces at the destination. Narratives also help us understand how migrants themselves interpret migration and development, manifested through their own journeys and stories. With these narratives, I plan on exploring how, and with whom, migrants negotiate their rights and spaces at the destination.

Table 3.1 Conceptual Framework

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<td>Development as Discourse</td>
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<td>Role of actors</td>
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<tr>
<th>Internal Migration Theory</th>
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<tr>
<td>Core-Periphery migration</td>
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<tr>
<td>Urban bias</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social networks</td>
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<tr>
<td>Landlessness</td>
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<tr>
<td>Risk aversion strategies</td>
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<tr>
<td>Remittances</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inequality at the destination</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social and human capital</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rights of migrant workers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Migrant narratives and subjectivities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identity and marginalization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support services (NGOs, State, Household, Individuals)</td>
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<tr>
<th>Impacts of Migration</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social Networks</td>
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<tr>
<td>Upward mobility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic opportunities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unskilled Labor</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gendered division of labor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child labor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity and Caste</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dependent on identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discrimination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stress and hardship</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reduce migrant inequalities</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Inasmuch as local cultures influence the establishments and processes of development goals, social remittances through migration in the form of ideas, behaviors, norms and practices also heavily affect community development at the origin (Levitt and Lamba-Nieves 2011). In recent decades, emphasis in both development and migration has shifted from individuals to households in terms of decision making. The new economics of labor migration theory that advocates for a household perspective aligns itself with the livelihood perspectives in development studies. This nexus argues that migration is a ‘broader transformative process of development’ (de Haas 2010). In this process, the social, cultural, political, and economic impacts of migration affect migrants’ development at the destination and the origin. Therefore, the linkages between migration and development lie at the crux of this thesis.

3.6 Conclusion

The literature provided in this chapter form a basis for the research questions on which the thesis is based. I employ a capabilities and livelihoods approach to link development with the understanding of the migration process. I am certain that this approach - with an emphasis on migrant narratives and rights - will enable a just representation of migrant lives.
Chapter 4: Study Area

4.1 An Introduction to the State of Migration in Nepal

As a result of urban bias, people have migrated from villages to cities due to the underdevelopment of rural areas in Nepal (Shrestha 1990). Nepal’s ten-year long civil war also displaced and forced people out of rural areas into urban centers (Thapa and Sijapati 2005). Underdevelopment, exacerbated by war, has severed economic growth in many parts of the country, especially in Mid-Western districts, which were the hearth of the decade-long Maoist insurgency. Tiwari (2013) notes that the effect of the violent conflict was hit the hardest in the Mid-Western Development Region of Nepal, where Rolpa, Rukum, and Dang districts are located (relevant census data on each district in listed in Table 4.1). This is mostly due to the fact that the conflict started in this region and maintained a stronghold until its end on November 21, 2006 (Tiwari 2013). 13 of the 15 interviewed migrant workers migrated from Rolpa, Rukum, and Dang.

Consequently, many residents from Rolpa, Rukum, and Dang migrated to urban centers either temporarily or permanently to work as laborers in industries like brick making, carpet weaving and construction. To cope with dire situations and for risk mitigation, people from rural areas have continuously migrated to the Kathmandu Valley - the land of opportunities - where urbanization has significantly increased the demand for labor. For many households in rural areas, internal migration is a livelihood and a poverty alleviation strategy (Shrestha 1988).

Scholars have also attributed landlessness as a crucial reason for internal migration of peasants (Shrestha 1990; Escobar 1995). Rural areas in Nepal, outside the tourism sphere, have very limited economic opportunities. When people are landless in these areas, the only option - in most instances - besides working in the farms of landowners is to migrate to urban spaces of the Terai (lowlands of Nepal), the Kathmandu Valley, or to lead lives as transnational laborers across Nepali borders – historically in India but also increasingly in the Persian Gulf, Malaysia, and other spaces of emerging capitalist economies. This is not to imply that only the landless migrate for risk aversion. People who own land also migrate for other economic opportunities as they find it increasingly difficult to sustain their lives through subsistence agriculture (Poertner et al. 2011). Most of the respondents who owned land in their villages would either farm seasonally or lease their lands to others so they could migrate to work in the brick factories.

Data from the Report on the Nepal Labor Force Survey (2009) shows that 76.5% of people currently living in urban areas of Nepal migrated from rural areas. The Nepal Living Standards
Survey 2010/11 (2011) states that 56.9% of absentees migrate internally within Nepal. The National Population and Housing Census (2012) indicates that around 25% of the households have at least one member in their households absent. The percentage for the same for Rolpa and Rukum districts are 39% and 24% respectively (See Table 4.1). Absent population implies that at least one member of a household has migrated for an extended period of time away from the household (for at least six months). In Nepal, members of a family usually live in the same household, besides the female member who moves to her in-laws domicile after marriage. When we take this social dynamic into consideration, we find that the percentage of absent household is actually quite high. Therefore, the phenomenon of internal migration calls for an understanding of its linkages with development and the reasons behind such migration patterns.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Total Household</th>
<th>Absent Household</th>
<th>Absent Household %</th>
<th>Absent Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nepal</td>
<td>5,423,297</td>
<td>1,378,678</td>
<td>25.42%</td>
<td>1,921,494</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban Areas</td>
<td>1,045,575</td>
<td>200,380</td>
<td>19.16%</td>
<td>285,421</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural Areas</td>
<td>4,377,722</td>
<td>1,178,298</td>
<td>26.92%</td>
<td>1,636,073</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Districts in Focus</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Absent</th>
<th>Absent Household %</th>
<th>Absent Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dang</td>
<td>116,347</td>
<td>32,686</td>
<td>28.09%</td>
<td>43,160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kavre</td>
<td>80,651</td>
<td>11,782</td>
<td>14.61%</td>
<td>14,531</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rolpa</td>
<td>43,735</td>
<td>17,047</td>
<td>38.98%</td>
<td>23,597</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rukum</td>
<td>41,837</td>
<td>9,854</td>
<td>23.55%</td>
<td>13,051</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.1 Absent Household Population. Source: Census Bureau of Statistics, Nepal (2012)

A national survey indicates that 6.9% of people that migrate to urban areas in Nepal moved for better employment opportunities (Census Bureau of Statistics, Nepal 2009). But, the census is inadequate in defining what socio-economic conditions influenced them to migrate from their places of origin. Socio-political issues that migrants face when they are in the city are also not clearly understood. So, the fundamental question I seek to understand with this research is if seasonal migration actually assists in a better living or if it just sustains, and ensures future seasonal migration without hope for further choices in migrants’ life paths.
Figure 4.1 Migrant Trajectories of Interviewed Brick Factory Migrant Workers
Figure 4.1 (enlarged maps in Figure 4.2) is a map of Nepal that shows the districts of origin of respondents. It delineates migrants’ origin villages and the routes they take to reach Kathmandu. A key pattern evident in the map is that of Cumulative causation, also discussed in Section 3.3. Cumulative causation of migration states that migratory decisions are dependent on the presence of higher migratory social networks in rural areas. This then increases the rate of migration as changes in the economic status of households in the villages through remittances influence other
community members to migrate for economic growth (Fussell and Massey 2004). The districts of Rolpa, Rukum and Dang manifest this pattern of migration. More so, cumulative causation is even clearer on a local level. We can tell from the map that origin villages lie in close proximity to one another making it possible for social networks, remittances and relative deprivation to influence migration. I further analyze this theoretical pattern in Chapter 6.

4.2 Brick Factories in the Kathmandu Valley

The Kathmandu Valley comprises of three central districts of Nepal: Kathmandu, Lalitpur (Patan) and Bhaktapur (See Figure 4.1, 4.2 and 4.3). There are around 150 brick factories in operation within the valley. Most of these factories are located in Patan and Bhaktapur. For centuries, bricks have been the preferred material for masonry construction in the valley. In recent decades, rapid urbanization has significantly increased the demand for bricks resulting in the increase in brick factories throughout the eastern and southern belt of the valley (Brun 2013; Gutschow and Kreutzmann 2002). The factories operate seasonally from late November until the early monsoon months of May and June. This is the reason why there is a trend of seasonal migration of workers from rural areas. While at the brick factories, migrant workers typically live in huts made out of (uncooked) bricks in the premises of the factory (See Figure 4.2 and 4.5). Figure 4.2 is a satellite image of brick factories in a section of Bhaktapur along the Araniko Highway. The factories (seen as clay red in the image) are surrounded by some of the valley’s most arable land.

Figure 4.3 Satellite imagery of brick factories in Bhaktapur. Source: Digital Globe (2014)
Figure 4.4 Brick Factories in the Kathmandu Valley. Source: Google (2015)
Of the 150 brick factories in the valley, majority are conventional brick kilns that consist of open brick firing structures with moveable chimneys (Brun 2013). These type of brick factories cause serious environmental problems in, and beyond, the Kathmandu Valley. There are only two Vertical Shaft Brick Kilns (VSBK) in the valley. These are cleaner and efficient alternatives to the conventional kilns (Animal Nepal 2011). For the study, I chose one of each. The first is a conventional brick factory, Shree Mili Hanuman Fix Itta Udhyog of Bhaktapur. This factory (Figure 4.4 and 4.5) was not in operation during field visits due to the off-season in brick production. But there were about a dozen migrant workers who had stayed behind to haul bricks and for other manual labor. I interviewed four of them. The second is a VSBK factory in Patan, Shree Satya Narayan Itta Bhatta (Figure 4.4 and 4.6), where I conducted eleven interviews along with a visual method involving disposable cameras. This factory is one of only two in the valley that remains in operation throughout the year.
Figure 4.6 Huts of workers next to Shree Mili Hanuman Fix Itta Udhyog. Source: Author (2014)

Figure 4.7 Shree Satya Narayan Itta Bhatta. Source: Author (2014)
Chapter 5: Results

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings from field research in two brick factories of the Kathmandu Valley between the months of June and August of 2014. I interviewed fifteen brick factory migrant workers: eleven from the Shree Satya Narayan Itta Bhatta in Patan, and four from the Shree Hanuman Brick Factory in Bhaktapur. The interview data, processed images from the disposable cameras and observation reveal that there are patterned themes - evident among the migrant workers - that are parallel to the concepts and theories of migration and development as discussed in Chapter 3. This chapter presents those patterned themes.

5.2 Migrant Demographics

Age

The age of the interviewed migrant workers were between 18 and 46 (See Table 5.1). The median age of the respondents was 22, while the modal age was 21. Thirteen of the fifteen respondents were below the age of 30. The only two over 30 were the naike of 40, and a brick porter of 46, who had worked in the factory for 17 years at the time of the interview. Due to IRB protocol, I was not able to interview workers below the age of 18. But, there were children below 18 years of age working at the factory (See Figure 5.1 and Figure 5.2). The Construction and Allied Workers Union of Nepal (CAWUN) announced Shree Satya Narayan Itta Bhatta as a child labor free worksite on June 14, 2014. But just a few weeks after the announcement on August 8, there were children working at the factory on a school day. Figure 5.1 shows a child – estimated to be 13 to 14 years of age – at the worksite and behind him hangs a banner from CAWUN that proclaims the worksite as child labor free.
Table 5.1 Brick Factory Migrant Worker Demographics. Source: Author (2014)
**Gender, Household and Child Labor**

I interviewed eight male and seven female migrant workers (Table 5.1). All of them were married except for one who was eighteen. Most of the workers noted that they were married when they were young. Marriage is a survival strategy for many households. A few migrants ran away from their village homes to work at the brick factories and had married while they were at the factories. In a married household, both male and female members work at the factory in varying capacities. Women and children usually work as brick porters or coal breakers. Although a few men do work as brick porters, they mostly work in the capacities of brick unloaders, firemen and drivers.

The gendered experiences of migration are evident as women are expected by their male counterparts to perform productive (working at the factory) as well as reproductive (taking care of children, cooking, washing) roles. A harsher gendered experience is evident in Laxmi Chaudhary’s story. She came to the brick factories two years ago along with her husband and children. When hopes of migration turned into despair, Laxmi’s husband migrated to Malaysia (one of the major destinations for Nepali migrant laborers) for hope of earning more to support the family. But currently, Laxmi is entrapped by the broader political forces of transnational migration as her husband is jailed – for the past eight months at the time of the interview - in Malaysia for working illegally. So, Laxmi is not only responsible for sustaining herself and the five children that are left behind at the factory, but she is also burdened with saving enough money to bail her husband out of jail, all with an income of no more than thirteen thousand rupees (USD130) a month. She has also yet to pay back a loan of $120 that she took from the factory owner. Due to issues like these, child labor is a coping strategy for many migrant households at the brick factories. It is also the main reason why children of migrant workers become migrant workers themselves as they start working out of necessity to support their parents. Dhrishya Pariyar echoes this somber household coping strategy, “when problems are high - when the household is void of a father and a mother - when situations ask for it, there are cases of child labor.”
Ethnicity and Caste

Bista (1991) and Lawoti (2013) state that the caste system of Nepal has historically – and also in present – discriminated against some groups (Dalits, Madhesis, and members of other indigenous groups) based on caste and ethnicity, while privileging others (Bahuns and Chhetris). Moreover, the caste system considers the Dalits untouchables, rendering them vulnerable to social ills and excluding them from social and political spheres to such extremes that Dalits have had to pretend to be Bahuns or Chhetris to obtain housing in the city and elsewhere (Lawoti 2013).

Eleven of the fifteen respondents are from marginalized ethnicities, out of whom seven identified as Magars and four as Dalits (Table 5.1). Sunita Chhetri, a respondent, notes that caste-based untouchability is still practiced in her village in Rolpa. In her village, she notes that, even if a member of the Dalit community is offered food in a plate, the Dalit would refuse to receive the plate and instead pick up a leaf and ask that the food be poured in the leaf. Dalits also refrain from
entering the curb of a non-Dalit house even under the imminent drench of a monsoon rain. But, the border between castes and ethnicities blur at the brick factories. In the city, the living spaces inside the brick factories are utopian spaces where people from different castes and ethnicities cook and eat together in the same kitchen space - an idea that is foreign and unheard of in the traditional spaces of the migrants’ villages. Although, none of the respondents said that caste and ethnicity were direct push factor for their mobilities, I argue that caste and ethnicity based structural discrimination has limited Dalits and Magars of the Western hills of Nepal to practice their reasoned agencies and to work towards improving their livelihoods.

Education

Only twelve respondents had studied until fifth grade (See Table 5.1). Three migrants had never been to a school for education in their lifetime. Only one of the respondents, Chandra Pun, had studied up to eleventh grade. Even Chandra had to stop going to school so that he could migrate to the city for work at the factory to earn enough money to continue his and his wife’s education. Individual agency is dependent on - and is produced, restricted and resisted by - social boundaries and systems (Sen 1999). Education is the most critical of such boundaries. Due to lack of education, migrant workers are forced to work as unskilled laborers. When access to education is limited and access to knowledge is inhibited, it is difficult for migrant workers to find decent work.

5.3 Reasons for Migration

Landlessness and Economic Conditions at the Origin

Although Escobar (1995) and Shrestha (1990), through a political economy approach, attribute landlessness as a major reason for migration, twelve respondents moved to the city even though they had land in the village. They would rather lease their land in the village to others as it was getting increasingly difficult for them to sustain their lives solely through agriculture. The migrants practiced subsistence farming before they started to migrate seasonally to the city for work. Sailendra Gharti - a father of two young boys - solemnly says that agriculture in his village provides food only for five to six months, and that he is forced to migrate to the city for additional work. Krishna Pun and Sunita Chhetri had taken loans in their villages to survive, but they were not able to pay their debts just through farming. As most rural areas in Nepal lack secondary sectors
of the economy (manufacturing), there are limited economic opportunities in the villages. So, Krishna and Sunita had to migrate to the city to work in the brick factories to pay off their debts.

Although migration has helped the migrant workers economically, the system of underdevelopment, uneven development and urban bias in Nepal has created economic spaces that are accessible to some and restricted to others. Therefore, to access those limited economic spaces, people have migrated from rural spaces to the Kathmandu Valley.

Non-economic reasons for migration

The theoretical knowledge of the New Economics of Labor Migration notes that migration is a household strategy rather than one that is just influenced by an individual (de Haas 2010). So even though one member of the household will migrate for economic reasons to the city, other members - including their significant others, children, and siblings – will migrate with them for the purposes of education, health or other factors. All the respondents had brought their children along with them to the factories for primary and secondary education at nearby schools. Sailendra Gharti explicitly said that the main reason for his migration was to educate his two young children in the schools of Kathmandu.

Although economic reasons were primary, most migrants had parallel social and cultural reasons for their mobilities. The younger respondents saw migration as an act of social emancipation. They practiced it by running away from home to either avoid getting forcibly married in the village, or to elope to the city to marry someone of their choice. Durga Pariyar ran away from home and got married with another migrant worker at the brick factory. Devendra Magar had left his home because he did not get along with his parents and later on he never felt like returning home as subsistence farming was the only form of work there. Sunil Kunwar had just come to visit one of his uncles at the factory one day but stayed behind to work. For Rupa Pun and Chandra Pun, the reason for migration was to just visit and experience lives in the city.

5.4 Mobility: Migrant Trajectories

Work at the brick factories is seasonal as brick factories operate from November until May, right before the start of the monsoon rains. Shree Satya Narayan Itta Bhatta is the only factory out of hundreds in Patan that operates year round. So in this particular factory, the interviewed migrant workers tend to stay longer and well beyond the regular brick factory season. Migrants who work
in other brick factories migrate to the city in November and return to their villages in late May or early June.

The workers are mainly influenced to migrate by their social networks (friends, relatives and other kin from their villages) who have previously worked at the factories. In the mobility process, the respondents note that, *naikes* (contractors) play a significant role in influencing people in rural areas to migrate. Eight respondents used the naike’s assistance for transportation to the city and to find work. Five respondents came to the city by themselves but used the naike’s help to secure jobs at the brick factories.

*Naikes* are middle-men employed by brick factories and are paid on a commission basis depending on the amount of work that the migrants do. *Naikes* are paid directly by the factory owner and their salary is not deducted from the worker’s pay. They usually travel from village to village in a certain area of a district to recruit workers for the brick factories. They help potential workers by covering their transportation costs to the city, which is paid back once the migrants start earning money at the factory. In addition, *naikes* also provide migrant workers with loans (mostly interest free) from the brick factory owners to help migrants with the initial costs of living in the city.

I asked the workers what they would have done if they had not migrated to the city. Nine respondents said that they would just continue farming in their villages if they had not migrated. But Sailendra Gharti and Drishya Pariyar would have migrated to India, the Gulf or Southeast Asia for work. Even after working in the brick factory, Chandra Pun wishes for a life as a transnational migrant laborer in the near future as he does not see himself being able to sustain his nuclear family on a monthly income of just thirteen thousand rupees (USD130).

**5.5 Labor: Value of Work**

Although the income of migrant workers at the brick factories are higher than what they could have earned if they had not migrated, none of the migrants perceived any economic growth in their livelihoods due to higher spending and very low savings in the city. An article in The Kathmandu Post (2013) reports that the Government of Nepal increased the minimum salary of industrial workers to 8000 rupees (80 USD). The migrants at the brick factory earn more than the minimum salary (See Table 5.2).
In contrast to the common saying that their livelihoods have not been any better, three respondents had bought land in their districts from the money saved up from working at the brick factories. Devendra Magar notes that, with his earnings from the factory, he can now live independently. Rupa Pun mentions that the need for money has decreased since she started working at the factory. Sailendra Gharti is also thrilled that he is able to send his two boys to school.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Work</th>
<th>Wages</th>
<th>Monthly/ Semi-Annually (Dec – May)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brick makers</td>
<td>$8.6 per 1000 bricks</td>
<td>$260/$1560</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(skilled labor)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brick porters</td>
<td>$2.75 per 1000 bricks (carry 1500 to 3000 bricks per day)</td>
<td>$125 to $250/$750 to $1500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(unskilled labor)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fire men/ brick unloaders</td>
<td>$130 per month (fixed salary)</td>
<td>$130/$780</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(skilled labor)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Laborers</td>
<td>$4 per 8 hrs. of work (work from 8 to 16 hrs. per day)</td>
<td>$120 to $240/$720 to $1440</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(unskilled labor)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.2 Wages by type of work. Source: Author (2014)

Firemen and brick unloaders, who are considered skilled laborers, earn a fixed monthly salary of $130. Brick makers (skilled laborers) earn $8.6 for every 1000 bricks they make. So, over a season of brick production, they make about $1560. Brick porters (unskilled laborers) carry between 1500 to 3000 bricks per day, and for every 1000 bricks they carry, they earn $2.75. Depending on the type of work and the time of the year, the respondents work from 8 to 16 hours per day. Table 5.2 lists the wages in detail by type of work in the brick factory.

Besides working at the factory and farming while not in the brick making season, three respondents have additional sources of income. Drishya Pariyar, a naike, has leased his land to another villager for $80 per year. The husbands of both Mamata Khadka and Sabita Gharti work as international migrant laborers in Saudi Arabia and Malaysia respectively.
**Role of naikes**

Social networks are crucial in the migration process (Banerjee 1983; Deshingkar et al. 2008; Frayne 2007). *Naikes* – a part of the migrants’ social network - are a crucial part in the structured labor recruitment system of brick factories. Migrant workers are assisted by *naikes* (contractors) throughout the mobility process as well as while they are working at the factory. *Naikes* assist the workers in arranging transportation to the city, finding work at the factory and managing their earnings with the owner of the factory. *Naikes* are responsible to record the working hours of workers, the number of bricks that they have made or carried and any other work related activity carried out by the migrant workers.

Although *naikes* do not get a commission directly from the workers’ wages, brick factory owners provide them with relative wages. *Naikes* earn 60 cents for every 1000 bricks made; 35 cents for every 1000 bricks carried; and, 25 cents for 8 hours of labor from a general laborer. Through this commission system, *naikes* make $3000 to $5000 on a normal brick making season.

**Migrant Services**

Brick factories provide migrant workers with huts to live within factory premises. During the season, the factory also provides drinking water to the workers. During off-season, workers have to walk to a well in a nearby village for water. The factory also provides electricity in the huts from 6pm until 5am every night. Besides these basic services, the factory also provides no-interest loans to the workers of up to $300. If there are any work-related accidents that incur high medical bills, the factory helps the migrants to pay those bills. Although, there was no consensus among the workers on how much the factory was willing to pay in such instances. In one incident, Chandra Pun’s hand was pressed in a mechanical shaft while he was unloading bricks. The injury incurred $10 in medical bills and nine days of leave for which the owners cut $28 from his fixed monthly salary of $130. These are very high costs compared to Chandra’s average wage of $4 per day. For the incident, he received no assistance from the factory towards the medical costs. On this, Chandra solemnly notes that “laborer’s correct and just value and compensation is still not present”. Migrants work without contract and legal representation, and because *naikes* act as middle-men between them and the owners, the owners have little to no liability for the migrant’s safety and well-being.
The respondents noted that NGOs like Concern Nepal provide health and education services for their children. Dalbir Pun and Chandra Bahadur Pariyar said that Concern Nepal had provided uniforms, books, bags, and school enrollment fees for their children. They have also assisted in skill training for migrant workers so that they can enhance their capabilities.

When I asked Sabita Gharti how she felt about working in the brick factory, she told me: “What is the point of expecting services and easiness for hard labor like ours”. In agreement with Sabita, none of the other migrant workers uttered a single complaint against their poor working conditions at the brick factory, and no one perceived any form of threat at work either. Sabita further told me, “some places have food shortages, at least we do not worry about that here”. Although the migrant workers are aware of the dangers at work, they do not fail to mention that it was their choice and will, they were aware of the dangers, and that they are content with their work.

The workers negotiate their welfare benefits with the naike, who negotiates in turn with the owners. But the respondents told me that besides a hut, partial electricity, and a few buckets of water, they have not received any other services through the brick factory.

**Structured Negotiating Practices**

Drishya Pariyar, a naike, noted the presence of a Maoist-affiliated labor union registered with the Ministry of Labor and Employment that represents brick factory migrant workers. According to Drishya, union representatives visit the factory occasionally to ensure best labor practice. Representatives of the Construction and Allied Workers Union (CWAN) had visited Shree Satya Narayan Itta Bhatta in Patan and had hung up a banner that proclaimed the factory as child labor free. The banner is prominently displayed on a wall as seen in Figure 5.1. But a child worker is seen working in the foreground of the same image. This is a state of perplexity as the owner of the brick factory is a member of the 2nd Nepali Constituent Assembly, which is responsible for drafting the new constitution for Nepal.

Although the naike mentions the presence of a labor union, none of the migrant workers are aware of such an entity. If any issues arise, the migrants negotiate their wages and rights with the naikes who then talk to the owners of the factories about those issues. Only one respondent was not represented by any naike.
5.6: Conclusion: Actors in the Migration Process

Brick is the primary form of masonry construction in the Kathmandu Valley. Rapid urbanization has stimulated the growth of residential and commercial buildings. To maintain the supply for this ever increasing demand, there is always need of bricks (Gutschow and Kreutzmann 2002). Brick factories work with *naikes* – through a structured labor recruitment system - to recruit and manage migrant laborers in their factories. *Naikes* are connected with political party-affiliated trade unions. In another node, NGOs research, manage and disseminate knowledge and information of the broader migration context to the respective actors for policy formulation and support services.

Seasonal labor migrants - in hope, longing, and despair - migrate from rural spaces of Nepal to the Kathmandu Valley in search of employment and opportunities to enhance their capabilities. In doing so, migrants, as agents of their own mobilities, constantly negotiate - directly and indirectly - with actors illustrated in Figure 5.3.

![Figure 5.3 Actors in the Migrants’ Livelihood Process](image-url)
Chapter 6: Analysis

6.1 Introduction

This chapter explores the interconnectedness between development and seasonal migration of brick factory migrant workers in the Kathmandu Valley. By linking the results from field research in Chapter 5 with the literature in Chapter 3, my aim is twofold. Primarily, it is to contend that such seasonal labor affects migrants’ well-being and livelihood. It is also to elaborate - through migrant narratives - that although migrant mobilities align with migration theories and meta-narratives, individual narratives of migrant workers inform us of the underlying processes of migration. Personal narratives clarify how migrants understand migration and development through their own mobilities, and the processes they adopt - and adapt to - at the destination for risk aversion and rights seeking. I use these narratives to answer the research question: How do the geographical dimensions of internal migration of brick factory workers affect the migrants’ social and economic development in Nepal?

6.2 Seasonal Migration: Development as Freedom

Development scholars indicate that inequality, poverty, landlessness, and urban bias are the main drivers of internal migration (Aoyama et al. 2011; Escobar 1995; Shrestha 1990). Land is at most times the only space of labor and employment in the villages of Nepal. Due to scarcity of arable land, exacerbated by social inequalities, the landless are forced to migrate to the cities. Respondents reverberated that land was a crucial factor in their mobilities. Land is not just a livelihood strategy for survival but also a commodity based on which one’s prestige is measured in the society. One migrant, Ram Bahadur, relates his past sorrows and struggles at the village when he was always “worried about the kids, then having to look after the house, and then working at another person’s land”. This is an interesting alienation and distinction of labor through time and space. Both the land and the industry are owned privately by individuals, but his sorrows are linked very closely to the land than the industry.

The rate of internal migration is higher among socio-economically marginalized groups (Keshri and Bhagat 2012; Poertner et al. 2011). Migrants constantly live within the visible patterns of the Nepali caste system. In the Nepali caste hierarchy (discussed in Section 5.2), Dalits are socially marginalized groups who are traditionally rendered as untouchables (Lawoti 2013). Ram Bahadur, a Dalit, is now content that his work at the brick factory is a work of independence and
that he does not need to labor in someone else’s farm anymore. Discerning Ram Bahadur’s narrative through a lens of social inequalities, his understanding of development is one of freedom. He understands his mobility transition as one from a space with social injustice to an emancipatory space where labor provides equality. This understanding of migration as devoid of inequality is contested by another migrant. Sunita Chhetri contradicts Ram Bahadur’s argument, “whatever Dalits are made to feel in the villages, we face the same from the people in the city”. Sunita’s narrative is shaped by her own experience working as a maid in a few city houses, where she, albeit from a higher caste, is treated unequally by city residents. In the houses where she works part-time, she is forbidden from entering the kitchen and spaces of worship. Although not representative, this experience of caste-based exclusion is shared by other migrants from underprivileged groups as well.

Migrant experiences are produced and reproduced by political, social and cultural contexts. Migrant narratives through experiences of the human self and individual identities reify the meaning of development (Potter et al. 2012). Ram Bahadur’s narrative becomes powerful when he notes that he converted to Christianity just to avert from the traditional caste-based societal divisions. This reworking of identity was a mode through which Ram Bahadur sought to attain his development.

Sen (1999) argues that development should remove unfreedoms so that people can exercise their reasoned agency to increase their capabilities and well-being. Brick factory migrant workers migrate with hope for development - the removal of their understanding of unfreedoms - and to seek for opportunities to practice their reasoned agency. But, as discussed later in Section 6.3, such labor mobilities are circular and coerce migrants to move continuously. Although the respondents may save enough money to buy land in their villages, they have continued to migrate to the city. For secondary income, they would rather lease their land to others while primarily working at the brick factories.

I find it adept to understand migrant development and mobility through their own narratives rather than forced upon by meta-narratives of poverty or economic exclusion. Migrant narratives of development - as Silvey and Lawson (1999) have argued - puts an emphasis on individual motivations behind migration, the ambivalence of the migrant processes and the reinterpretation of developmental practices through migrants’ own voices. Sailendra Gharti migrated to the city to provide better education for his children. In so doing, he is resisting the unfreedoms (of lack of
education) to attain his understanding of development. Access to education for his children ensures not only their rights for a proper education but also for a just future where they could maximize their capabilities and move away from a migrant life like that of their father. Drishya Pariyar migrated because of economic and social conditions forced upon by the Maoist insurgency in his village. For Drishya, mobility for, and towards, development is one that overcomes the socio-political boundaries and restrictions.

Skeldon (2008) argues that migration is an outcome of implemented development policies. Freedom is contingent and subject to individual migrant narratives. When development is understood as freedom, then it is fluid and unceasing. It’s meaning changes for each individual. Attainment of one’s development continually leads to a longing for another. So although migrant narratives vary significantly between respondents, and that even though migrants migrate upon their own choices, development is a chain that binds them in a continuous, structural circle of labor migration.

6.3 Circular Turmoil: Hope, Longing, and Despair

![Image](image.jpg)

Figure 6.1 A woman hauls brick at Shree Satya Narayan Itta Bhatta. Source: Author (2014)

Migrant lives are filled with hope but shadowed by longing and despair. Migrants benefit from economic and social remittances in the form of social capital such as ideas, behaviors, norms
and practices (Levitt and Lamba-Nieves 2011). This makes it possible for them to maximize their capabilities and achieve their freedoms. But it also makes the migrants dependent upon further migration (Skeldon 2008). In this cycle of dependence, the processes through which migrant workers pursue their rights and development are attached with costs that force them into lives of continuous migration and circular turmoil.

Work at the brick factory is hard labor (Figure 6.1). Laborers work between 12 to 16 hours daily in dust and dirt without proper equipment. Observation and the pictures developed from the disposable cameras indicate that the working conditions are definitely poor. Respondents also acknowledge that their work is hard. But, Sabita Gharti laments and questions the reasoning, “what is the point of expecting services and easiness for hard labor like ours”. She, along with few other respondents, express their content with the working conditions at the factory. They do not seek any services from either the employer or the state. But although the respondents are content with their work, they perceive it as temporary.

The hope and longing for either returning to their villages in the future or to migrate internationally for work is evident in their narratives. Respondents romanticize their village lives and note that their villages were communal and that the villagers think of them differently now. Krishna Pun asserts, “people in the village think of us highly and (they) are happy when we return for holidays”. For Krishna, migration is emancipatory and empowering through financial and personal independence and increase in self-esteem. But in doing so, he forgets to note the conflict and inequality present in his village. This nostalgia of a village life “artfully conceals forms of violence and exclusions that existed in the past that makes them harder to recognize in the present” (Connolly 1991, 464).

Social Networks and Support Services

The roles of NGOs and community organizations are substantial as they aim towards a participatory and rights-based approach towards supporting and facilitating the migration process (Desai 2014; Hickey and Mohan 2005). Governmental and non-governmental support services and projects like the Safer Migration (SaMi) project of Helvetas Swiss Intercooperation and the South Asia Labour Migration Governance project implemented by the ILO in collaboration with the Nepali Government aim to lower the costs of international migration (Helvetas Swiss Intercooperation 2013; ILO 2013). Internal migration lacks such policy-driven national projects
and services. Therefore, internal migrants are mostly left to reconfigure their conditions by themselves.

To reconfigure their rights and voices, migrants navigate through various channels and stakeholders (See Figure 5.3). Sunita Chhetri chairs a women’s organization through which she conveys the needs of migrant women and children to NGOs like Concern Nepal. Respondents have mentioned that Concern Nepal has provided children with school uniform, books, and bags, as well as health checkups and awareness for equitable education. Other organizations including Terre des Hommes and Brick Clean Network have also visited the brick factories to provide health checkups for workers in the past (Brick Clean Network 2010; Terre des hommes 2010).

There are costs involved in the migration process. In the extreme end, although rare, there have been instances where naikes have trafficked children by promising them profitable jobs in the city. Once in the Kathmandu Valley, they have exploited and forced children into harsh working conditions (Khatiwada 2015). In recent years, the media has highlighted firstly, the hard labor and exploitation of workers in Nepal’s brick factories and secondly, the absence of law enforcement and public policy to restrain such practices (Pattison 2015; Richardson 2013). Costs and risks of migration are minimized through social networks (Banerjee 1983; Deshingkar et al. 2008; Frayne 2007). All but one of the respondents noted that they used the support of naikes to migrate to the city. All but two respondents noted that they negotiate all issues with the owner of the brick factories through the naikes. The other two, Sailendra Gharti and Bir Bahadur Gharti, responded that they will use the help of the local police to redress any issues that they face in the city.

*Cumulative Causation and Relative Deprivation*

Through an understanding of migration through cumulative causation, migration decisions are largely based on either influence from previous migrations or from relative deprivation. Relative deprivation theory notes that the rate of migration increases if there is a presence of higher migratory social networks in rural areas. Relative deprivation further explains that changes in income distribution between households in the origin community due to migration also influence other households to migrate for their economic growth (Fussell and Massey 2004). The pattern of cumulative causation and relative deprivation is evident in migrant narratives. The respondents
noted that they had migrated because previous migrants had told them that the work in the brick factories was good and that they could make more money than farming in the village.

Figure 2.1 also illustrates the pattern of cumulative causation in Nepal. The map denotes how the origin villages of the respondents, especially in Dang, Rolpa and Rukum, are in close proximity to one another. Migrant narratives help us understand that social networks and relative deprivation had played significant roles in formulating such migratory patterns evident in the map.

### 6.4 Conclusion: Reinforced Identities and Re-established Inequalities

Migrants participate in place making through their own workings of mobility. Place is acted upon by migrants and is filled with migrant identities, narratives and subjectivities. Such experiences produce the processes through which migrants negotiate their rights at the destination. Brick factory migrant workers mostly negotiate their rights with the naiké rather than the owners of the factories. Due to this, the owners have very little to no liability for the migrants’ safety and well-being.

Migrant narratives portray the ambivalence about hope, longing and despair. Their hope to unshackle themselves from their understandings of unfreedoms influence them to migrate from their villages to the cities. But such migration trace a vector from the rural periphery to the urban periphery - margins of the city in the huts of the brick factories. This migration then - through the workings of cumulative causation - influences them to migrate internationally. This cycle of hope, longing and despair then continues in migrant lives.

Impact of migration on migrants at the destination are dependent on migrant identities (Deshingkar et al. 2008; Keshri and Bhagat 2012). Gender roles are reinforced in migrant spaces as women perform both productive (working at the factory) as well as reproductive roles (taking care of children, cooking, washing). Although gender roles remain concrete, ethnic and caste based identities become fluid in the brick factories. Ethnicity dilutes and blurs in the city. People of different castes and ethnicities who do not share the same public (sacred and living) spaces in the villages use the same space to cook and eat at the brick factories. But, Sunita Chhetri validates how the ethnic and caste-based divides are re-established when migrants return to their villages.
Chapter 7: Conclusion

Through a capabilities approach to development with an emphasis on migrant rights, we understand that brick factory migrant workers in the Kathmandu Valley are deprived of ways to enhance their capabilities and livelihoods. Although meta-narratives and meta-theories provide us a generic pattern for development and migration processes, it is crucial to understand these processes through migrant narratives. Migrants reinterpret and understand development through their own experiences of migration (Escobar 1995). Development when realized through migrants’ own understandings of development inform us of the “multiple motivations for mobility, ambivalence about the actual experience of the process and resistances to, and reinterpretations of, modernization” (Silvey and Lawson 1999, 125).

Irrespective of the definition, migration is a result of development (Skeldon 2008). The complications of development manifest in migrant narratives. Through their narratives, I contend that migrants are trapped in the vicious circle of development practices. For the respondents, migration is not just a risk aversion strategy but a path towards better lives to attain their understandings of development. But, their paths are not always aligned with poverty. Poverty is enforced by difference and identity in a way that it is conceptualized and contingent on the norms of the society. Interestingly, poverty was not the main concern for brick factory migrant workers. Their concerns were mainly of access to labor, education, health, and other forms of freedom. Although statistically many households improved their economic well-being after migration, they did not perceive their economic growth themselves.

Migrant narratives trace the internal migration of hope and longing for development. This hope soon turns into despair and migrants end up longing for lives as transnational migrant workers in the Persian Gulf or in Southeast Asia. The narratives of hope, longing and despair continue to echo in migrants’ diminished huts. For migrant workers, their rural to urban mobility is not really a periphery to core migration. But in fact it is one that takes place from the rural periphery (villages) to the urban periphery (margins of the city). For them, seasonal migration is a temporary labor migration better understood as ‘spaces of freedom’. Migrant experiences and narratives manifest that the real cost of neoliberal development is the commodification of their labor. Migrant workers negotiate their rights directly with a middle-man, therefore the owners are partly invisible and have little to no liability for migrants’ safety and well-being. Migrant workers also use their social networks extensively to cope in the city.
Ethical issues that surround this migration research run parallel with contemporary debates on the importance of migration as a fundamental human right. Although, internal mobility is not legally restricted in Nepal, the socio-political structures limit most migrants to the margins of both the core and peripheral spaces of the country. To address this issue, internal migration policy should be a growing part of the local governance. Only then, local municipality-level support groups for migrants in the city can be realized.

Through migrant narratives of hope, longing and despair, this research briefly notes how internal migrants long for international migration. Further research should provide in-depth inquiries on the interlinkages between internal and international migration. In doing so, the research should address how migrant subjectivities and their understanding of development change once they migrate internationally. In doing so, the research should continue to be evidence-based in order for it to be able to guide policy in reworking migration processes for ensuring the rights and freedoms of migrants.
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Appendix I: List of Interview Questions

1. Gender छल
2. Age उम्र
3. Ethnicity जात
4. Religion धर्म
5. Education Level कल्ट सम्म पढ्नु भएको छ?
6. Marital Status विविध भएको छ कि हैन?
7. Household size, # of family members who eat in the same kitchen परिवारमा एउटै भन्दा खाने कति जना छन्?
8. When do you leave your town/village to come to Kathmandu and when do you return? काठमाउं आउनु हुन्छ? गाउँहरू फर्कँनु हुन्छ? (कुन कुन महिमामा)
9. Who else in the family migrates with you? तपाईलाई गाउँबाट काठमाउं अरु को को आएका छन्?
10. Is this the first time that you have migrated to Kathmandu or have you migrated in previous years? If yes, how long have you been working as a migrant worker in Kathmandu? पहिले पटक काठमाउं आउनु पाउनु भएको थियो कि यो पहिलो पटक हो?
11. Who helped you the first time when you migrated to the city? What kind of assistance did you receive? पहिलो पटक काठमाउं आउनु तपाईलाई कसर भन्दा लिङ भएको थियो? के के कुरामा सहयोग पाउनु भएको थियो? के आउनुको पक्ष आफ्नो बेहोनू भयो?
12. What roles do naikes play in the migration process? What services do they provide? सहर आउनु नाइकेको के भूमिका छुड्नु? नाइकेको के कुराहरू महत्त्व गर्नु?
13. How much money do you make at the brick factory in a month or in the entire working season? काम गरे यस्ता कति पैसा कमाउनु हुन्छ? मानक अवधा वार्षिक
14. How much of that do you spend in the city and how much do you save to take back to the village? सहरमा कति खर्च हुन र पर लगत कति जित बचाउनु हुन्छ? वर्षा कति जित पैसा पर पढाउनु हुन्छ?
15. What are your other sources of income? (rent, farming, other remittances, etc.) ईटा कारखाना बाहेक परिवारको अरु कुत्री आम्दानीको श्रोत छ?
16. Where is your hometown/ village? तपाईको गाउँ कता हो?
17. What situations do you face in your village that forces or influences you to migrate every year? तपाईलाई गाउँबाट आए गरी तर जिम्न छ?
18. Do you own land in the village? Do you have your own house? गाउँमा तपाईलाई आफ्नो घर र जिम्न?
19. If yes, what do you do with your land? If not, do you rent land from someone else? भएको जिम्नमा के गन्नु हुन्छ? वेदी जिम्न छैन भन्ने अरुको खेतमा काम पनि गन्नु हुन्छ?
20. What would you have done in your village if migration was not possible to the city? सहरमा नआएको भए गाउँमा के गन्नु हुन्छ?
21. Was your migration to the city for work influenced by other people who have migrated from your village before you?

22. Did the insurgency force you out of your village to work in the city?

23. What were your (livelihood) conditions in the household before you started migrating for labor?

24. What (social/economic) changes have you noticed since you started working as a migrant laborer? (impacts)

25. What differences do you find/see in the past and now in your village (after you have started working in the city)?

26. Describe your work at the factory.

27. Tell me about your experiences working at the brick factory this season.

28. Will you be working at the brick factories next year?

29. Tell me an incident or a story about a time when you felt that you were being discriminated in any way at work or outside in the city.

30. Tell me about your housing conditions in Kathmandu. (access to potable water, electricity, sanitation, and proximity to schools)

31. Have you faced any issues with the neighboring locals?

32. If you have any issues at work, how do you tackle it? Where do you go to solve your problems? Do you have an association where you get together to talk about those issues?

33. Tell me about any perceived threat at work.

34. Do you have access or knowledge of any means to organize politically?

35. What services does the factory that you work for provide you with?

36. Where do you go for assistance in the city when in need?

37. How easy is access to health and education for your children and yourself?