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Gender Structures, Strategies, and Expectations during Nepal's Labor Migration

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**Abstract**

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Temporary migratory work has long been an adaptive response to concentrated material deprivation. As technological advances make transnational labor movements more accessible, and uneven economic development and growing global inequality boost the possible gains from migrant work, this phenomenon may become an even more salient feature of labor economies. Such migration flows are often gendered; when primarily men migrate, women in these contexts must decide whether and how to fill the labor gaps their husbands have left behind and to make sense of what this means for their social positions. Though we understand some of the ways such migration trends might matter for social transformation in migrants' homelands, we know little about when and how men's migration corresponds with changing beliefs about women's household roles when women take on absent men's labor. I use qualitative, ethnographic, and

quantitative methodologies to investigate these dynamics in Nepal's Chitwan district, a region where substantial flows of men are temporarily migrating to work in the Persian Gulf, Malaysia, and India. As women take on these new roles and responsibilities in their families, they experience increased work burdens and pressure. This may lead to changes in the gendered division of household labor, disrupting customary gender norms in households and families. The first empirical chapter of this work explores the relationship between the social structures of ethno-caste and educational attainment with traditional beliefs about sources of men's and women's household authority. This chapter uses mixed methodology to show that ethno-caste and education are associated with different patterns of beliefs and framing of those beliefs about household authority. The second empirical chapter examines women's strategic decision-making during men's absence to show how there is a difference between making decisions and claiming household power and authority and that women navigate a complex set of social expectations and practical needs during men's absence. The third empirical chapter builds on these two findings about structure and agency to examine patterns of expansion and restrictions of gendered expectations during men's migration. This paper shows how broadening and narrowing gender expectations exist in tandem and explores how this varies in two social sites, the household and in localized markets. Overall, this dissertation advances knowledge not only about changes in gender relations during large-scale social transformations like labor migration, but also the ways complex social and economic environments can create both opportunity and constraints.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES .....	IV
LIST OF FIGURES .....	V
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	VI
<b>CHAPTER 1—INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>8</b>
1.1 INTRODUCTION .....	8
1.2 LITERATURE ON GENDER AND MIGRATION.....	10
1.3 DISSERTATION OVERVIEW BY CHAPTER .....	15
1.3.1. Chapter 2 Overview—Social Structures and Beliefs about Household Roles .....	16
1.3.2. Chapter 3 Overview—Women’s Strategic Decision-Making .....	17
1.3.3. Chapter 4 Overview—Gender Expectations in Household and Market.....	17
1.3.4. Chapter 5 Overview—Conclusion .....	18
1.4 NEPAL AS A PHYSICAL AND SOCIAL SETTING .....	19
1.4.1. Geography.....	20
1.4.2. Migration Trends and Economy.....	22
1.4.3. Gender and Households .....	24
1.4.4. Ethno-caste.....	25
1.5 DATA SOURCES .....	27
1.5.1. Quantitative Data: Chitwan.....	27
1.5.2. Qualitative Data: Chitwan.....	28
1.5.3. Qualitative Data: Comparison Districts .....	30
1.5.4. Data and Analytic Strategy .....	32
1.6 CONCLUSION.....	35
<b>CHAPTER 2—SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND BELIEFS ABOUT WOMEN’S HOUSEHOLD ROLES DURING MEN’S MIGRATION IN NEPAL.....</b>	<b>36</b>
2.1 INTRODUCTION .....	36
2.2 THEORETICAL APPROACH.....	37
2.2.1. Social Structures and Agency .....	38
2.2.2. Interactions and Agency in Social Change.....	40
2.2.3. Education and Women’s Beliefs about Social Positions.....	42
2.3 NEPAL .....	44
2.3.1. Gender, Ethno-Caste, and Education .....	44
2.4 METHODOLOGY .....	45
2.4.1. Quantitative Data and Analysis—Chitwan Valley Family Study .....	46
2.4.2. Qualitative Data and Analytical Strategy .....	49
2.5 FINDINGS.....	49
2.6 <i>QUANTITATIVE RESULTS</i> .....	49
2.6.1. Education and Ethno-caste .....	50
2.6.2. Beliefs about Household Authority.....	51
2.6.3. Impacts of Education on Beliefs about Household Authority .....	53
2.7 <i>QUALITATIVE FINDINGS</i> .....	54

2.7.1. <i>Differences in Perspective and Responses by Ethno-Caste</i> .....	55
2.7.1.1. Brahmin and Chhetri .....	56
2.7.1.2. Hill Ethnic .....	59
2.7.1.3. Terai Ethnic .....	61
2.7.1.4. Dalit.....	64
2.7.2. <i>Differences in Perspective and Responses by Education</i> .....	67
2.7.2.1. No or Low Education .....	69
2.7.2.2. Middle Levels of Education .....	72
2.7.2.3. Complete or Credentialed Education .....	75
2.8 CONCLUSION.....	79
<b>CHAPTER 3—WOMEN’S STRATEGIC DECISION-MAKING DURING MEN’S MIGRATION IN NEPAL .....</b>	<b>83</b>
3.1 INTRODUCTION .....	83
3.2 STRATEGIC AND OPERATIONAL DECISIONS IN HOUSEHOLDS .....	85
3.3 STRUCTURAL AND INTERACTIONAL BARRIERS TO POWER AND CONTROL.....	86
3.4 NEPAL .....	90
3.4.1. Remittances are Lifelines and Mobile Phones are Guy Lines .....	90
3.5 METHODOLOGY .....	91
3.6 FINDINGS.....	91
3.7 <i>DECISION-TYPES, DECISION-MAKING</i> .....	91
3.7.1. Women Who Make Strategic Decisions .....	92
3.7.2. Making Decisions without Claiming Decisions .....	93
3.7.3. Impression Management and Order Giving .....	94
3.8 <i>USE OF MIGRANT REMITTANCES BY WOMEN</i> .....	96
3.8.1. Remittance Use Monitored by Husbands and Community .....	96
3.9 CONCLUSION.....	100
<b>CHAPTER 4— “WE HAVE FREEDOM BUT EQUALLY WE HAVE DIFFICULTIES”: SHIFTS IN GENDER EXPECTATIONS AMIDST MEN’S MIGRATION FROM NEPAL.....</b>	<b>103</b>
4.1 INTRODUCTION .....	103
4.2 THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE.....	105
4.3 LITERATURE REVIEW.....	109
4.3.1 Division of Labor, Remittances, and Decision-Making in Men’s Absence .....	110
4.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS .....	115
4.5 NEPAL .....	116
4.6 MALE OUT-MIGRATION AND GENDER EXPECTATIONS: DATA AND METHOD.....	119
4.6.1 Specific Measures and Limitations .....	120
4.7 FINDINGS.....	122
4.8. <i>HOUSEHOLD</i> .....	122
4.8.1. No Changes .....	122
4.8.2. Expansion in Expectations .....	124
4.8.3. Constrained Expectations .....	130

4.8.4. Broadening and Narrowing in Different Social Arenas .....	132
4.9 <i>LOCALIZED MARKETS</i> .....	137
4.9.1. Gendered patterns in customer interactions .....	139
4.9.2. Proprietorship, hosting, and shifting external expectations.....	140
4.9.3. Internal expectations and limitations of change .....	142
4.10 CONCLUSION.....	147
<b>CHAPTER 5 – CONCLUSION.....</b>	<b>151</b>
5.1 MAIN FINDINGS.....	151
5.2 LIMITATIONS.....	153
5.3 FUTURE RESEARCH.....	154
5.4 IMPLICATIONS .....	156
<b>REFERENCES .....</b>	<b>158</b>
<b>APPENDICES .....</b>	<b>174</b>
APPENDIX A: TABLES .....	174
APPENDIX B: METHODOLOGY .....	177
Partnership with Institute for Social and Environmental Research (ISER).....	177
In the Field: Chitwan.....	180
In the Field: Comparison Districts .....	186
Analytical Approach .....	188
Data Collection: Interviews, Focus Groups, Homestays .....	190
Motorbikes and Masala: Ethnographic Reflection .....	194
APPENDIX C: PROTOCOLS.....	201
Interview Protocol: Chitwan District .....	201
Hills Interview Protocol: Kaski & Tanahũ Districts /Focus Group Protocol: Gender Equality .....	204
Focus Group Protocol: Household Changes .....	205
<b>VITA.....</b>	<b>207</b>

## LIST OF TABLES

TABLE 1. DISTRICT AND NATIONAL LEVEL MEASURES OF MIGRATION-RELATED FACTORS, CENSUS 2011, NEPAL .....	22
TABLE 2. SUMMARY COUNTS OF CHITWAN INTERVIEWS BY ETHNO-CASTE AND MIGRATION TRAJECTORY.....	29
TABLE 3. SUMMARY OF FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS IN CHITWAN .....	30
TABLE 4. SUMMARY OF HOMESTAY FAMILIES IN CHITWAN, KASKI, AND TANAHŪ DISTRICTS .....	32
TABLE 5. SUMMARY OF QUALITATIVE AND ETHNOGRAPHIC DATA COLLECTED IN NEPAL, 2016-17 .....	33
TABLE 6. ETHNO-CASTE GROUP REPRESENTATION IN CVFS 2008 SUB-SAMPLE, NEPAL.....	50
TABLE 7. EDUCATIONAL DISTRIBUTION IN SUB-SAMPLE, CVFS, NEPAL, 2008 .....	50
TABLE 8. BI-VARIATE CROSS-TABULATION OF EDUCATION LEVELS AND ETHNO-CASTE, SUB-SAMPLE, CVFS, NEPAL, 2008 .....	51
TABLE 9. PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS BELIEFS ON AUTHORITY OVER WOMEN IN HOUSEHOLDS, SUB-SAMPLE, CVFS, NEPAL 2008 ..	52
TABLE 10. WOMEN RESPONDENTS IN CHITWAN BY EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT AND MIGRANT STATUS, NEPAL, 2016-17.....	68
TABLE 11. DISTRICTS COMPARISON ON HUMAN DEVELOPMENT MEASURES, NEPAL 2011 .....	174
TABLE 12. DISTRICT POPULATION CHANGE AND NUMBER OF ABSENTEES, NEPAL, 2001 & 2011 .....	174
TABLE 13. ETHNO-CASTE GROUPS FROM RESEARCH: SIZE, PERCENT OF TOTAL POPULATION, AND ABSENTEES, NEPAL, 2011 .....	174
TABLE 14. DISTRICT POPULATION CHANGE AND NUMBER OF ABSENTEES, NEPAL, 2001 & 2011 .....	175
TABLE 15. CHITWAN RESPONDENTS SUMMARY ON SELECTED DEMOGRAPHIC DATA, NEPAL, 2016-17 .....	175
TABLE 16. ETHNO-CASTE REPRESENTATION, CVFS, NEPAL, 2008 .....	175
TABLE 17. EDUCATION LEVEL DISTRIBUTION, CVFS, NEPAL, 2008.....	175
TABLE 18. EDUCATION DISTRIBUTION BY GRADE COMPLETED, CVFS, NEPAL, 2008.....	176



## LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE 1. NEPAL DISTRICT MAP: FEATURING DISTRICTS OF RESEARCH .....	21
FIGURE 2. CHITWAN DISTRICT AND CVFS STUDY AREA, SITUATED WITHIN MAP OF NEPAL.....	178
FIGURE 3. WESTERN CHITWAN DISTRICT AND CVFS STUDY AREA, NEPAL.....	178

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*“Women make their own lives (and life histories), but they do so under conditions not of their own choosing” -Personal Narratives Group (1989:5), attributed to Karl Marx*

## CHAPTER 1—INTRODUCTION

### **1.1 Introduction**

The December 2010 Special Issue of the *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* examined the ways global migration is part of social change. The different perspectives of the authors, though not always in agreement with each other, project a view of globalization, development, and social transformation that is heterogeneous, context-dependent, and complex. In this special issue, as in his previous work, Castles (2001:18-19) argues that, “studying social transformation means examining the different ways in which globalizing forces affect local communities and national societies with highly diverse historical experiences, economic and social patterns, political institutions, and cultures.”

Migration is one such global force that affects many aspects of local communities and national societies in the ways Castles describes, and this includes migration across national boundaries in the search for work. There are 232 million international migrants worldwide and 150 million of them are labor migrants (ILO 2015). These workers leave their countries, often poor and developing countries, to earn more for their labor abroad. Their earnings and their labor contribute to the economies in both their destination and sending countries. The earnings of labor migrants worldwide are so significant that they are considered essential parts of developing economies and many see labor migration as part of the globalization and development process (Castles 2010).

While labor migration is often a means to increase economic standing, it is also a larger global process that has wide ranging effects on social relationships and institutions (Castles

2010). However, much of the migration research looks at the effects of migration as strictly economic processes and misses the social and political contexts in which migration occurs (Boyd & Greico 2003; Asis & Piper 2008). The focus on economics is understandable: migration flows include millions of people and represents billions of dollars in remittances, and global migration is on the rise (ILO 2015). Nevertheless when family members leave as labor migrants, not only the economic but also the socio-cultural context and patterns of their sending locations change. Labor migrants' families and communities then must adapt to a social environment where different social actors take up different economic and social responsibilities.

This affects gender relations. Across the globe, more men than women migrate for employment: 56% of labor migrants are men, 44% are women (ILO 2015). The gender composition of labor migration is not uniform geographically, exhibiting the dependency on context that Castles describes; African countries and South Asian countries send more men as labor migrants and East Asian and Pacific countries and Latin American countries send more women (ILO 2015; Oishi 2005). In all of these settings, however, we can expect that large-scale labor migration disrupts social expectations of what men and women do and how those notions are enforced, especially in contexts with restrictive gender norms and expectations (Pessar and Mahler 2003). More so than other social patterns, gender relations and norms are especially likely to be reconfigured by migration in part because logics of who does what in households and communities is subject to change (Dannecker 2005).

In the contexts when men's absence due to labor migration is common, women married to these men must decide whether and how to fill the labor gaps their husbands have left behind. In so doing, they also must make sense of what his absence and their adaptive responses means for their social positions. Though we understand some of the ways such migration trends might

have an impact in migrants' homelands, we know little about when and how men's migration corresponds with changing beliefs about women's household roles when women take on absent men's labor. As women take on these new roles and responsibilities in their families during men's absence, it may lead to changes in the gendered division of household labor, disrupting customary gender norms in households and families.

I look at one country as a case; I use Nepal's migration of primarily men to understand women's gendered experiences, decisions, and expectations. Nepal is a good case for understanding how the absence of men affects women's social positions, actions, and their perceptions of their experiences; because of the configuration of families along a patriarchal structure and the form of migration fostering men's absence. I will elaborate on these in the coming pages. First, I will review the literature on the general effects of migration on women's status.

## **1.2 Literature on Gender and Migration**

The gendered division of household labor and the dynamics that undergird them are reproduced, in part, through women's responsibility for activities traditionally associated with the care of home and family (Sassen 2002). Often during men's migration, women move beyond their own household activities and handle absent men's tasks too, especially if they are married to the absent man (Dannecker 2005; Hadi 2001; Dinerman 1982; Aysa & Massey 2004; Menjivar & Agadjanian 2007). This shift in who accomplishes which labor has the potential to alter gender relations and has been the focus of research on migration and gender, both in sending and destination locales.

When women take on men's labor as new tasks it can expand their responsibilities and spheres of control in their households and communities because it increases their skills, self-esteem, freedom of movement, economic autonomy, and expands their support networks (Arias 2013, Menjivar & Agadjanian 2007; de Haas & Van Rooij 2010). However, they can also experience these tasks as a burden that contributes to time poverty (Abdourahman 2010), and that potentially reinforces traditional ideas that women's primary duties are in the home (Sapkota 2013; Espiritu 2003; Hadi 2001; Gulati 1992).

On the whole, literature on gender relations and migration deliver a mixed report of expansion and burden or constriction of gender dynamics. There is some variation depending on the specific area of focus and region of study. Common areas of change in these studies include but are not limited to: absent men's labor tasks in the household (Adhikari & Hopley 2015; Kaspar 2006), participation in community or civic organizations (Andrews 2014), financial management and decision making (Rahman 2009; Kaspar 2006) and women's labor market participation (Curran & Saguy 2001). I will review the literature on each of these before focusing on the findings specific to Nepal.

Changes to gendered household tasks can be either a temporary reallocation of work to other household members, or a more permanent shift in work norms and expectations (Torosyan, Gerber, and Goñalons-Pons 2016). The permanency of changes depend somewhat on what women gain when men leave. Evidence from South Asia suggests that women whose husbands migrate have more access to economic resources, more physical mobility, more residential independence, and more family decision-making power than their counterparts whose husbands did not migrate (Luna & Rahman 2018). This, in turn, gives them more confidence.

Like women who remain behind, women who migrate with their families to the U.S. report more independence and household power (Grasmuck & Pessar 1991) and a shift towards more egalitarian division of labor (Guendelman & Itriago 1987). For example, when Mexican men migrate with their wives, men share more in household tasks and their households move away from traditional arrangements (Parrado & Flippen 2005; Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994). In Mexico, some women who remain behind also experience these increases to resources and agency as empowerment, but others become targets of scrutiny and moral questioning, which has the effect of controlling women's behaviors and mobility (McEvoy, et al. 2012). These efforts at controlling women are often a response to women's widening social spheres and can be seen as an attempt to preserve traditional arrangements (Fleury 2016; Martin 2004, Yeoh, Graham, & Boyle 2002).

Just as taking on new household tasks can increase women's household power and confidence, so can handling tasks beyond the household in the community. Some of the increased access to power in men's absence occurs when women adopt men's political and economic roles in the community (Gulati 1992; Parreñas 2005). Civic engagement gives women access to political roles that can persist upon the return of migrant partners (Andrews 2014).

Political and civic participation is one sphere of community life associated with men; control of household finances is another. Finances are affected by migration in two key ways: a male migrant's earnings often represents an increase in resources to be managed by his household and then his absence pushes financial tasks to other family members (Luna & Rahman 2018). Female partners of male migrants often manage, spend, or save newly available money, which gives them increased access to resources via remittances and autonomy over daily household management (Levitt 2001). Increases in women's decision-making capacity and



access to resources and spending from remittances can undermine the traditional domains of men and modify gender roles at home towards egalitarianism (Rahman 2009; Hadi 2001; Luna & Rahman 2018).

Remittances are not the only way women can become economic actors; earning in labor markets also can increase with migration in both sending and destination countries. Mexican and Central American migrants to the U.S. experienced more egalitarian norms when they began working for pay (Curran & Saguy 2001; Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994). Men's migration also led to wage labor outside of the home for the women who remained in India (Desai & Banerji 2008). Women's earning has long been associated with empowerment and individual agency (Sen 1999; Kabeer 1999). However, women's employment does not necessarily lead to independence or an undermining of patriarchal gender relations at home (Torosyan, et al. 2016; de Haas & Van Rooij 2010). Women who do work when their husband's migrate can feel burdened and isolated, and still may not experience an increase in their social standing (Asfar 2011; Martin 2004; Fleury 2016).

The mixed impact of women's earning and household power relates to the gendered division of labor more broadly. Economic perspectives suggest that earning increases bargaining power and can allow women to "buy out" their share of household labor in exchange for leisure time (Torosyan, et al. 2016). However, this does not happen because household tasks are shaped by political and socio-cultural factors as well as economic ones; the existence of gender norms and expectations can hold women to certain household tasks, regardless of increases in earning, household bargaining power, or other skills or resources (Torosyan, et al. 2016). This can help explain why migration does not fully modify gender inequalities. On the one hand, the disruptions to family dynamics and social support structures can foster a reconstituting of

traditional gender structures to enforce gender dynamics (Parrado & Flippen 2005). On the other, women's access to independence and equality may be mitigated by their social roles attached to the patriarchal family as both wives and mothers (Donato, et al. 2006).

Taken together, the literature depicts a mixed set of results; gender relations can shift as women have increased responsibilities, household power, and access to community power. However, gender is complex and gender inequalities are not upended by shifts in one area of gender relations because others remain intact (Connell & Pearse 2015). This complexity and unevenness of change in gender relations is also evident in the research on gender and migration in Nepal. Dynamics in Nepal echo findings in India and Bangladesh, as well as findings beyond South Asia, like in Latin America. In Nepal, men's migration negatively impacts women's labor market participation, in part because remittances decrease economic pressure on households that remain behind (Joshi-Rajkarnikar 2017; Lokshin & Glinskaya 2009). However remittances do not always bolster security or financial control. Only larger remittances are associated with less physical work and more decision-making for women; smaller remittances are actually associated with more labor burden and limited decision-making opportunities (Maharjan, Bauer, & Knerr 2012). Moreover, some research indicates that any decrease in economic pressure is countered by increases in household work-load stress; women report feeling stress over increased expectations during men's absence and relief at their male partner's return (Kaspar 2004, 2006; Joshi-Rajkarnikar 2017). For some women, the exchange of economic security is worth the increased work.

In Nepal, men's migration promotes women's increased work responsibilities, decision-making power, and social activities at the community-level. However, these gains can feel stressful and their consequences are tempered by the household arrangement in which a woman

lives. Women who are the head of house have increases in decision-making power but those living under headship of others may experience a decline in power (Joshi-Rajkarnikar 2017; Kaspar 2004; 2006). Household headship is associated with both increased mobility outside the home, but also increased scrutiny (Joshi-Rajkarnikar 2017; Adhikari & Hobley 2015). In Nepal in general, household headship is often a contentious issue that can lead to generational disagreements, where young couples work together as “secret allies” to seek financial autonomy from the husband’s parents by moving away from them (Gram, et al. 2018).

These findings suggest that while practices are necessarily shifted by migration, there is not always a subsequent shift in beliefs about gender relations and changes may be viewed as temporary strategies. Women’s gains in one area can be met by constraint or restrictions elsewhere, either through actions, such as through increased scrutiny, or latently through inflexible social structures that make women’s movement into new arenas, like the labor market, more difficult. In the chapters I outline below, I pose different questions and use different methods to describe and analyze how women’s social experiences and positions are associated with their beliefs, actions, and expectations during men’s absence in Nepal. My approach uses quantitative, qualitative, and ethnographic measures across region and social categories to capture both patterns and mechanisms.

### **1.3 Dissertation Overview by Chapter**

I have just reviewed evidence that suggests a tie between men’s out-migration and changing gender relations; in Nepal and other counties as well. This dissertation focuses on the structures, strategies, and expectations that shape migrant’s wives experiences, choices, and beliefs during and after her husband’s migration in Nepal. Nepal makes a good case for further

investigation into how these links actually unfold and are generated through the lives of women who have relationships and shared lives with absent men. Nepal has a diverse socio-geographical population and my research examines how women make sense of their situations to understand if the impacts of men's absence varies within a single country by spatial and social locations across region and social groups. Nepal's family structures are patriarchal and often influenced by strict Hindu interpretations of family hierarchy by age and gender. The patriarchal standard of living arrangements create an especially good setting in which to explore and understand the impacts of men's absence on women's lives, beliefs, and opportunities.

### *1.3.1. Chapter 2 Overview—Social Structures and Beliefs about Household Roles*

In Chapter 2, I investigate how views about women's roles and authority in the household correspond to men's migration, and account for the possible influence of gender, ethno-caste, and education. I use the Chitwan Valley Family Study (CVFS) survey to establish patterns of belief in two traditional measures of men's and women's authority in households and relate these to ethno-caste and educational attainment. I expand on these findings with qualitative data from the same region to examine how ethno-caste and educational attainment may constrain or expand women's opportunities (real and perceived) for agency in their households. Beliefs in traditional household roles vary by ethno-caste, and education is positively associated with more progressive beliefs about women's household roles. My findings reveal a seeming interplay between the structures of ethno-caste and educational attainment and individual agency, shown in the ways women understand and explain their household roles in their husband's absence. Structures of ethno-caste and educational attainment affect the beliefs and framing of experiences by women that allude to their coping strategies during absence. These range from survival, getting by, or seeking to stabilize hierarchies that preference some groups over others.

### *1.3.2. Chapter 3 Overview—Women’s Strategic Decision-Making*

In Chapter 3, I build from the findings presented in Chapter 2 to look at women’s strategic decision-making during men’s absence through qualitative and ethnographic data. Increasingly women take on men’s household labor and decisions, which is often a departure from traditional and previous household arrangements. I determine how women make decisions, how they think about the decisions they make, and if their increased decision-making power leads to increased power and control. When the types of decisions women make are *strategic decisions* for the household, and not just *operational decisions*, it might increase their gains in social opportunities, household control, and power. However, women are not always able to leverage their decision-making into household control or power because of the broader social environment. I find that some women take more primacy in strategic decisions but that power gains from this are tempered by the need to manage impressions of the household towards their communities. These findings suggest that women’s agency are constrained by broader community norms and what others expect of them.

### *1.3.3. Chapter 4 Overview—Gender Expectations in Household and Market*

In Chapter 4, I address the ways in which male out-migration may shape women’s expectations of themselves as social agents and their views of how others perceive them and their capabilities. Chapter 2 shows how women’s social positions designated by ethno-caste and educational attainment shapes their ideas about their own household roles. Chapter 3 shows how expectations of women by others influences how women make sense of their decisions. Working from these findings, I argue that expectations have a dual character: they can be internal (personally-held expectations of oneself) or external (perceptions about the expectations others hold for oneself). I use qualitative data from interviews and focus groups as well as ethnographic

data of family-owned stores (called *pasal*), to plot how these dual expectations change across social spaces. Internal and external expectations vary across spaces, like the household, and in emerging spaces for women's actions, like family-owned stores. This chapter more fully interrogates the duality of expectations by looking at four logical pathways of changes to gender expectations during men's absence. There can be: 1) no changes, 2) expansion or broadening of expectations, 3) narrowing or constraint in expectations, and 4) a combination of both resistance and expansion. This work grapples with how expansion and gains are often coupled with constraint or stasis across different social positions (such as ethnicity, class, race, gender, age, education level) and spatial realms (such as region, household, market, community, shared public space).

#### *1.3.4. Chapter 5 Overview—Conclusion*

In Chapter 5, I provide a summary of my findings from my three empirical chapters that explore women's experiences during men's absence due to migration. This research shows how migration and gender are linked in complex ways that affect families, households, and communities of migrants and non-migrants alike. My findings depict women's current views and lived experiences during their husbands' absence to show a dynamic environment where migration allows for changes to gender relations that are neither linear nor uniform and which women and men navigate in different ways based on their social positions. This approach supports existing findings but brings in new understanding of the dynamics of stasis and change; mobility and scrutiny; and autonomy and cooperation by taking a comparative look across ethno-caste, region, and educational status. I also discuss the limitations of the study's design, data, and conclusions and revisit the suitability and generalizability of Nepal as a case. I make suggestions for future research and discuss, broadly, approaches to policy based on my findings.

In the next section I will provide background on Nepal as a social and research setting. I conclude this chapter with a description of my data, which is variegated and draws from a quantitative survey, qualitative interviews and focus group discussions, and ethnographic participant-observation and homestays. I conclude the chapter by describing my methods and analytical approach.

#### **1.4 Nepal as a Physical and Social Setting**

Nepal is a useful case for this research because its migration patterns are cyclical, characterized by temporary absence and expectations of return. Most migrants do not move with their partners and most partners do not expect to join them either. Instead, migrants' partners generally expect to remain in their home country where they might become responsible for their absent partner's labor and earnings. This is important because the way these tasks have been divided customarily is by patriarchal standards that shape norms of gender divided labor and household roles. In such family formations, men's absence and remittance sending can spur new roles, decisions, and opportunities. Beyond household formations, the community structures in Nepal are often in villages or neighborhoods that render individual or household actions, movements, and strategies visible to others and, at times, open for discussion. Such community arrangements can offer support but also can foster gossip. These social factors are helpful in understanding how gender relations change during men's absence, in this case due to migration, and make Nepal a good case for understanding mechanisms of change in societies with similar social structures. I will detail these social formations in more detail in the coming section.

Aspects of Nepal are also unique or exaggerated social conditions. For example, IMF data on GDP per capita and purchasing power parity place Nepal as among the poorest countries

in the world (IMF 2018). However, unlike its peers on these economic measures, Nepal hosts many tourists from around the world and many development projects through local and international non-governmental organizations. Also unlike many of its peers, Nepal was never directly colonized, in part because of its mountainous and hilly terrain. Outwardly, Nepal is landlocked by two large and powerful countries, India and China; internally Nepal's topography creates social groups that are distinct and diverse. For a small country such demographic diversity is unusual and allows for internal comparisons of similarities and differences across region, ethnicity, caste, class, and gender to show how impacts of absence can be mixed in a single country. Migration often occurs unevenly in areas and groups with the resources necessary for intra- and inter-national mobility across landscapes. Nepal's social realities based on its geography, demographics, and most importantly, social trends in migration pattern and family formation make it a useful case for research on gender and migration. I will provide more background on Nepal to support these claims.

#### *1.4.1. Geography*

Nepal is a tropical mountainous country in South Asia of 26.5 million people between India and China, with the Himalayan Mountains running like a spine along the northern third of the country that borders Tibet, an autonomous region controlled by China (Sharma 2014). While the highest points of Nepal are among the tallest in the world, the Himalayas steeply descend into the semi-tropical Hill regions and then down into the sea-level lowlands called the Terai. Only a small portion of the population (less than 7%) lives in the mountains. Half of the total population is on the Terai and the remaining 43% or so is in the hills, with a significant share living in the Kathmandu Valley. The Terai, Hills, and Mountains make up the three ecological zones of Nepal.



Nepal is divided into 75 districts over five regions of Development Zones (from West to East): Far Western, Mid-Western, Western, Central, and Eastern. The research in this paper was primarily in the Central and Western Development regions in the following districts: Chitwan (Terai), Kaski and Tanahū (Hills), Lamjung and Manang (Mountains), and in Kathmandu and Lalitpur (Urban). They can be seen on the map below (Figure 1). These districts vary by geographical and development region to create a general view of social changes in urban, semi-urban, and rural areas across Nepal.

*Figure 1. Nepal District Map: Featuring Districts of Research*



These regions represent the Nepali districts with middle-to-high levels of out-migration and are among Nepal’s districts with the highest ranking on the Human Development Index (NPC 2017). Out-migration and higher human development standards mean that the women in these districts’ regions are likely to have the more options, resources, and access to social goods than the average Nepali woman. In Table 1 (next page) there are comparisons of these research districts to each other and the national average on measures related to migrants, including

percent of population absent, female-headed households, female-owned land and homes, and the human development index. The Human Development Index (HDI) is comprised of markers such as literacy, schooling, and income—which vary greatly in Nepal by sex, ethno-caste, and ecological and development region. As stated briefly in the introduction, these measures are typically associated with women’s empowerment. Table 1 (next page) shows this research was conducted in districts with higher than average rates on just about all measures, with some exceptions. It is important to note that Lalitpur and Kathmandu are also internal migrant destinations. Appendix A, Tables 10 and 11 have more robust comparisons of districts to each other.

*Table 1. District and National Level Measures of Migration-Related Factors, Census 2011, Nepal*

<b>District</b>	<b>Percentage of Absentees</b>	<b>Percentage of Absent Households to Total Households</b>	<b>Percentage of Female-Headed Households</b>	<b>Percentage of Female Ownership of Land and House</b>	<b>Human Development Index</b>
Chitwan	8.0	29.0	33.7	17.1	0.55
Tanahū	12.5	43.6	42.7	13.0	0.51
Kaski	10.4	32.3	38.7	16.7	0.58
Lamjung	11.2	38.0	40.7	12.4	0.51
Manang	4.1	11.1	23.6	11.1	0.57
Lalitpur	5.0	15.1	23.9	13.2	0.60
Kathmandu	5.4	15.9	27.8	13.6	0.63
<b><i>Nepal</i></b>	<b>6.8</b>	<b>25.4</b>	<b>25.7</b>	<b>10.7</b>	<b>0.49</b>

(NPC 2017)

#### *1.4.2. Migration Trends and Economy*

Migration is an increasingly common method of household earning in Nepal. In the decade between 2001 and 2011 the number of Nepalis abroad nearly doubled and in 2010/11 about one fifth of Nepal’s population were absent<sup>1</sup> from their households (Sharma, et al. 2014).

<sup>1</sup> The statistics for absences are Census figures, another way absentees are measured are through permits to labor abroad, it is important to note that these permits only capture the migrants going abroad outside of Nepal or India. Nepal and India share an open border and many migrants pass over the border into India to labor and these migrants

For the Migrants that left South Asia between 1993/94<sup>2</sup> and 2012/13, they went to 108 different countries, but 90% went to just four countries: Malaysia, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and United Arab Emirates (Sharma, et al. 2014).

In 2014 Nepal ranked third globally for remittances as part of its Gross Domestic Product accounting for the equivalent of 29.2%, a figure that is rising. In 2012, nearly 79% of remittances goes towards daily consumption, 7.1% goes towards loan repayment, 4.5% towards household property, 3.5% towards education, and the remaining 6% towards other expenditures (Sharma, et al. 2014). The use of remittances to accomplish every day needs reveals both the economic constraint of many households in Nepal (and how migration aids in reduction of poverty). Migration is linked with the reduction of poverty in Nepal, there has been a decline in absolute poverty from 42% to 25.2%, among the fastest rates in the world (Sapkota 2013).

The majority of Nepali migrants go abroad to earn wages in low or semi-skilled jobs, often to compensate for absent or low wages domestically (Sijapati, Bhattarai & Pathak 2015). Low wages domestically are related to the reliance on agriculture, although that is shifting. Until the 1980's agriculture comprised 90% of Nepal's GDP, now it's down to 30%; although 80% of the population is rural and agricultural dependent in labor that is classified as 'high drudgery' (Sijapati, et al. 2015). Because many of Nepal's migrants are seeking employment and because of the patriarchal expectations of men as breadwinners in Nepal, about 90% of Nepal's migrants are men (Sharma, et al 2014). The migrants themselves are mostly from rural areas and the average age of laborers is 30, although it varies by destination country (Sharma, et al. 2014). The

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are not counted in some measures of absentees. Furthermore, many men and women leave their rural villages for Nepal's urban centers as internal migrants.

<sup>2</sup> Nepal uses a lunar-based calendar that starts the year around April, so Nepali Census years span two years on the Gregorian year calendar.

majority (about 65%) of migrants are married, meaning they likely leave behind a wife and children, too.

#### *1.4.3. Gender and Households*

Nepal is ranked 144<sup>th</sup> globally on the Gender Inequality Index, on the edge of the criterion that would make it a “low human development” nation. The Gender Inequality Index examines women’s outcomes in health, labor, and empowerment (as measured by participation in labor markets, government representation, and education rates) (UNHDR 2016). Families have traditionally patriarchal arrangements that echo the customary “indoor/outdoor” labor divide, where men generally function as heads of house and work outside of the home while women often manage the work inside the home and defer to both their husbands and their in-laws (Acharya & Bennett 1983).

Treatment of women in households and communities varies by ethno-caste, but all groups devalue women’s contributions through their association with the domestic sphere and lower social positions (Ortner 1974; England 1992; Folbre 2002). Women are gaining access to paid work and representation in government (Yadav 2016). Despite these gender transformations, the associations of women and the home remain in place. Customarily, young wives occupy the lowest adult position in the virilocal (meaning residing with husband’s parents) households, where she is typically expected to be subservient to both her husband and her mother-in-law in her martial household. In this arrangement, as she ages and her sons marry and bring wives to the home, she rises in the family hierarchy, realizing her full identity when she becomes a wife and then coming to power as a mother-in-law (Ahearn 2001).

In Nepal, hierarchies of gender and caste structure social life (Cameron 1998) and kinship networks are determined by patrilocality or virilocality. This means that couples reside with the

husband's family, determining women's positions through a patriarchal system (Bennett 2002). Women generally leave their natal villages for that of their husband's village or household once they are married. As a result households in Nepal are often joint households, meaning they are comprised of nuclear families as well as kin, often the husband's family, with whom they live with or nearby. This is in contrast to nuclear households of families that either never lived together or separated. This division is important for women because joint households have more family members present to share in labor, but also can have stricter social hierarchies that may disadvantage women. Many nuclear households still live in close proximity to their families and the division between joint and nuclear at times is blurry for households. As mentioned earlier, Nepal's patrilocal household arrangements allow for close look at shifting gender dynamics. Because such arrangements are the standard, they have helped shape normative ideas of family patterns, even in nuclear households.

#### *1.4.4. Ethno-caste*

Nepal had over 103 groups that are officially recognized in the 2001 Census (Bennett, Dahal, & Govindasamy 2008) and another 25 that are vying for recognition as distinct for the 2021 Census. The hilly terrain fostered the distinction of such groups and the political dominance of the Hindus since 1769 has maintained and institutionalized group difference and hierarchy. Hindus that came to Nepal from India centuries ago imposed the caste hierarchy system on the indigenous ethnic groups. In this system, some ethnic groups were favored or incorporated into the caste system, while others existed in parallel and still others were disadvantaged by it. The caste system was removed from law in 1963, but it remains influential and relevant in Nepali social life (Bennett 2002; Stash & Hannum 2001; Whelpton 2005).

As such, social science research on Nepal considers both ethnicity and caste as important social structures, often in a single combined category. Ethno-caste functions similarly to both race and class in Western research and theoretical contexts, but Dumont (1980) clarifies, “ultimately caste is linked to, but distinct from, class in Nepal.” Caste links to class in part because caste customarily designates certain jobs to certain groups; these are associated with caste and sometimes ‘touchability’, if the job requires violating some of ascetic Hinduism’s proscriptions of purity and pollution, such as in garbage disposal or working with cow carcasses or hides (Bennett 2002).

Another way caste functions like class is in education access and attainment. Educational access and attainment are dominated by ethno-caste. Higher caste Hindus (Brahmins and Chhetris) and Newars (the group indigenous to the Kathmandu Valley) are the traditionally educated and ruling groups<sup>3</sup> (Stash & Hannum 2001; Whelpton 2005). Educational inequality by caste is a function of social inequality in India (Desai & Kulkarni 2008; Sharda 1977) and in Nepal these effects are similar. Lower caste groups (Dalits)<sup>4</sup> and some ethnic groups experience less benefit from educational attainment than their similarly educated peers in other groups, suggesting a close connection between caste and class for the lower strata. Education designates advantage and occupation based on status characteristics associated with either caste or ethnicity such that both caste and ethnicity work together as social positions, much like race and class function intersectionally in Western settings.

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<sup>3</sup> There are historical tensions between these groups as well, particularly around the use of the Newar language among rulers (Whelpton 2005).

<sup>4</sup> Dalit, meaning ‘oppressed,’ has become the preferred nomenclature for describing the groups that comprise the lower caste groups. This term replaces the derogatory previous term of ‘untouchables’ because of the customs of ritual purity and pollution surrounding many social practices and peoples (Bennett 2002). These practices are associated with deep discrimination and violence against Dalit peoples and Dalit rights movements are on the rise in South Asia.

In this research I group respondents into one of five major ethno-caste categories, listed here in order of expected or customary structural disadvantage to advantage: Dalit (Lower Caste Hindu), Terai Ethnic, Hill Ethnic, Newar,<sup>5</sup> and Brahmins/Chhetris (Higher Caste Hindu) (Axinn & Yabiku 2001; Bennett, Dahal, & Govindasamy 2008). The first and last listed categories represent castes; the middle three represent ethnicities, although Newar are a singular ethnicity that has a caste system internal to it (Acharya & Bennett 1983). The specific castes or ethnicities that comprise these categories as well as their group size and number of migrants nationally are summarized in the Appendix A, Table 12.

## **1.5 Data Sources**

The three empirical chapters build from topically-relevant literature and theoretical perspectives on women's status and gender relations to examine the impacts of migration on women's gendered beliefs, experiences, and expectations. Data for the three studies are drawn primarily from original qualitative and ethnographic research conducted in Nepal over 10-months in 2016-17. One study (Chapter 2) uses the Chitwan Valley Family Study survey data.

### *1.5.1. Quantitative Data: Chitwan*

The 2008 baseline panel of the Chitwan Valley Family Study (henceforth CVFS) draws from Nepal's Western Chitwan District. The Institute for Social and Environmental Research

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<sup>5</sup> Newar, though a singular group and small in number in both the quantitative and qualitative sample, are an ethnicity with a caste system internal to them. Newars are Tibeto-Burman in origin like Hill ethnic groups (and their language, Newari, is Tibeto-Burman, not Indo-Aryan like Nepali), but they are strongly Hindu, and their social structure and family organization closely affiliates them with the Indo-Aryan cultural traditions of higher caste Hindus (Acharya & Bennett 1983). They are indigenous to the Kathmandu Valley and have had preference in ruling and educational systems, and therefore better access positions of power. In some ways, they are more like the Brahmin higher caste Hindus than other ethnic groups and are deserving of their own category, despite being only 6% of the data samples and 5% of the population (Whelpton 2005).

(ISER) administers this survey, which is representative of a sample of everyone living in 151 neighborhoods of Western Chitwan that were originally surveyed in 1996 (which was representative of Western Chitwan at that time). The 2008 survey contains 4,945 respondents across those 151 neighborhoods. These data are robust and offer an extensive look at the lives, resources, and values of respondents in this region. See Appendix B, Figures 2 and 3 for maps of this area of Western Chitwan where these 151 neighborhoods are located.

### *1.5.2. Qualitative Data: Chitwan*

I spent 10-months in Nepal for fieldwork, half of that time was spent in Chitwan district in residence at ISER or in homestays. I conducted interviews, focus groups, and homestays in the same research zone that includes the 151 neighborhoods of the 1996 and 2008 waves of the CVFS, but never interviewed the same households or families. While in Chitwan, I had 50 interviews with 61 individuals (11 were couples). 37 of these interviews were with women, 11 with women and their husbands, and two were with men (one a returned migrant with a wife working abroad and another was a non-migrant man who expected his sons might try and go abroad). Interviews were divided across stage in the migration trajectory: non-migrant, before departure/hoping to migrate, during absence, and after return. I also sampled across the four major ethno-caste groups living in the region: Brahmin/Chhetri, Dalit, Terai ethnic, and Hill ethnic. In Table 2, on the next page, I provide a breakdown of the 50 interviews in Chitwan by ethno-caste and stage in the migration trajectory.



Table 2. Summary Counts of Chitwan Interviews by Ethno-Caste and Migration Trajectory

<b>Ethno-Caste Group</b>	<b>Non-Migrant</b>	<b>Before Migration</b>	<b>During Migration</b>	<b>After Migration</b>	<b>Total</b>
<i>Higher Caste</i> (Brahmin/Bahun, Chettri)	1	3	6	6	<b>16</b>
<i>Dalit/Lower Caste</i> (Damai, Sarki, Kami)	1	1	3	3	<b>8</b>
<i>Terai Ethnic</i> (Tharu, Kumal, Darai, Bote)	2	2	3	3	<b>10</b>
<i>Hill Ethnic</i> (Newar <sup>6</sup> , Gurung, Magar, Tamang)	1	3	6	6	<b>16</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>50</b>

I also conducted nine focus group discussions with the family members of labor migrants; seven with groups of women that were primarily wives of migrant men from a mix of ethno-caste backgrounds and two with the teenage children of migrants. These youth focus groups were with children in grade 9 (ages 13-16) at two schools: one private and near an urban center and the other government run (public) and in a very rural area close to the Indian border. Of the seven focus groups with adult women, five centered on what changed in women's experiences and two focused on their beliefs about women and gender equality more broadly. All interview and focus group protocols can be found in Appendix C.

Focus groups were comprised of women or kids who were generally known to each other and lived in similar neighborhoods. Discussions were sometimes homogeneous by ethnicity or caste, but occasionally comprised of multiple ethnicities and castes. Dalit and Brahmin/Chhetri never appeared together and there were no obvious problematic differences in power dynamics by caste and ethnicity. Often the ethnicity or caste that was the majority dominated the

<sup>6</sup> Newar respondents were included in the Hill ethnic ethno-caste category for the qualitative research.

conversation and minority group members spoke only when there was a moment of quiet or when specifically prompted to. A summary of these focus groups is in Table 3, below.

*Table 3. Summary of Focus Group Discussions in Chitwan*

<b>Respondents (Gender, Number)</b>	<b>Groups Present</b>	<b>Who Migrated?</b>	<b>Migrant Status</b>	<b>Protocol Focus</b>
Women (6)	Terai ethnic	Husbands, Son, Brother	Away	Changes in Absence
Women (6)	Terai ethnic	Husbands	Away	Changes in Absence
Women (5), Man (1)	Hill ethnic, Brahmin	Husbands, Son	Away	Changes in Absence
Women (10)	Terai ethnic	Husbands, Son	Away	Changes in Absence
Women (7)	Dalit	Husbands, Son	Away	Changes in Absence
Girls (10), Boys (9)	Gr. 9 Youths in Private School	Parents	Away	Changes in Absence
Girls (12), Boys (5)	Gr. 9 Youths in Public School	Parents	Away	Changes in Absence
Women (5)	Dalit, Hill ethnic	Husbands	Away, Returned	Gender Equality
Women (5)	Brahmin, Hill ethnic	Husbands	Away, Returned	Gender Equality

In Chitwan, I lived with three families in homestays representing three ethno-caste groups (Brahmin, Terai ethnic, and Hill ethnic) each with a migrant family member (or three) abroad. In one family the migrant son returned during my homestay. Homestays ranged from three to eight days and I revisited one family several times for day and overnight trips during my time in Chitwan. A summary of these homestays and the others are in the next section.

### *1.5.3. Qualitative Data: Comparison Districts*

My remaining five months in Nepal were split between time spent in Kathmandu and Lalitpur (both urban and semi-urban districts in the Kathmandu Valley), the Hills, and the Mountains. I spent two months in Kathmandu Valley, the capital (Kathmandu) and cultural epicenter of Nepal. This time was spent learning the language, learning cultural patterns in

Nepal, and building connections with interlocutors and cultural informants. I spent two months in Kaski and Tanahū districts, both in the Western Hills for comparisons by region. Kaski district is home to Pokhara, Nepal's second city and a major tourist destination as well as destination for migrant's wives making rural to urban relocations. I did interviews and homestays in each of these districts.

In Kaski I interviewed eight women, six of whom worked in Pokhara for a co-operative textile factory that aims to empower women through skill development. My homestay in Kaski was in a rural village in the Hills above the city. In Tanahū I interviewed 16 women from a single remote hilltop village, where I was also in a homestay with a woman living a husband in a separation through divorce, not migration. Finally, I spent a month in the Mountain districts of Lamjung and Manang interviewing women who owned businesses in service to Nepal's trekking industry that also had migrant husbands. More information on how I navigated qualitative and ethnographic research as a westerner in Nepal can be found in the Appendix B.

I lived with five Nepali families in homestays in total; three in Chitwan, one in Kaski, and one in Tanahū. In total I spent 36 days living with rural families affected by men's absence, four from migration and the last with a divorced woman. In these families I had 21 immediate host family members that lived in or adjacent to the household where I was staying, though the kin networks for several families were much larger. I stayed with two Brahmin (higher caste Hindu) families, one in Chitwan and one in the Hills in Kaski district. I lived with one Tharu (Terai ethnic) family in Chitwan, and with two Hill ethnic families (Tamang family in Chitwan, Magar woman in Magar village in Tanahū). A planned homestay with a Dalit (lower caste Hindu) family in Kaski fell through at the last minute due to family illness, which led me to my

second Brahmin homestay instead. All homestay summaries are in Table 4 below, more on my experiences in homestays can be found in Appendix B.

*Table 4. Summary of Homestay Families in Chitwan, Kaski, and Tanahū Districts*

<b>Homestay Location</b>	<b>Ethno-Caste Group</b>	<b>No. Family in Home</b>	<b>Migrant Location</b>	<b>Migrant Status</b>
Chitwan	Brahmin	6	Afghanistan (US Army Base)	Absent son/ Returned
Chitwan	Terai ethnic (Tharu)	6	Malaysia (1), Saudi Arabia (1), Nepal Army (2)	4 sons away (3 of 4 daughters-in-law in household)
Chitwan	Hill ethnic (Tamang)	4	Dubai	Husband away
Kaski	Brahmin	4	Iraq, Afghanistan (US Army Base)	Returned son
Tanahū	Hill ethnic (Magar)	1	Nearly all family internal migrants to Kathmandu	None (Divorced Woman)

#### *1.5.4. Data and Analytic Strategy*

All of these data are well-suited to address my research questions in different ways. The quantitative measures provide context and help establish the links between structural positions in Nepal’s society and beliefs about the authority the men and women have in households. The qualitative measures establish women’s experiences, expectations, and beliefs across the different social positions that women hold. The ethnographic components of my data and fieldwork in Nepal add depth to the analytical frameworks developed in interviews and focus groups. Taken together I have data that establishes the who, what, where, when, why, and how of men’s absence and women’s experiences in Nepal. In Table 5, on the next page, there is a summary of all the data I collected and draw on in my analysis.

Table 5. Summary of Qualitative and Ethnographic Data Collected in Nepal, 2016-17

<b>Method Type</b>	<b>Number of Respondents for Each Method</b>	<b>Number of Events of each Data Collection Method</b>	<b>Average Length of Time for each Method (minutes)</b>
Interviews	85	74	20
Chitwan (Terai)	61	50	30
Kaski (Hills)	8	8	17
Tanahū (Hills)	16	16	15
Focus Groups	80	9	37
Migrants' Wives	44	7	36
Migrants' Children	36	2	38
Participant-Observation	50	--	--
Homestay (Terai)	16	3	6 days
Homestay (Hills)	5	2	5 days
Informal Interviews	16	16	~15 mins
Cultural Informants	13	Multiple per informant	--
<b>Total People</b>	<b>215</b>		

I worked with translators for all interviews and focus groups. In Chitwan, I worked with a man and a woman, each from different ethnic groups (Darai and Gurung, respectively) they are professional researchers for the Institute for Social and Environmental Research. They did all interviews, the youth focus groups, and the Gurung woman translator did my last two focus groups. A Brahmin man employed at ISER translated my first five focus groups. More on my relationships with these translators in Appendix B.

The recordings from my Chitwan interviews and focus groups were transcribed, translated by an ISER employee. A sub-set were back-translated by a graduate student with no affiliation with ISER in Kathmandu for quality assurance. In Kaski and Tanahū districts I hired a different Kathmandu-based university student as a research assistant who is Magar and took me to her father's natal village, where she has loose family connections. We translated cooperatively

together, and a second professional translator from ISER translated a subset for quality assurance.

All fieldnotes, transcripts, and translations were loaded into ATLAS.ti qualitative data software. I coded at three stages: descriptive, topical, and analytical coding (Richards 2015). *Descriptive coding* matches information to cases and is where I tabulated responses to formulaic questions to generate an understanding of the variation in responses. I categorized chores and answers to questions about daily, weekly, and monthly chores for men and women as a beginning in the process of quantifying, organizing, and grouping my data and respondents in ways to help direct my focus for *topical coding*. Topical Coding is “labeling text according to its subject” to create codes that explain at a more categorical level what is occurring in the text. I did this over three cycles, in the style described by Saldaña (2009). First, I coded a sub-set of transcripts, then the full body of documents with a larger number of codes built from the original subset, and finally again with a full body of documents with thematic codes taken from the second round of codes. This process of refining my topical codes lead into *analytical coding*, the central aspect of the inquiry that lead to interpretation and deeper engagement with theory. More details on the process of data collection, my relationship with ISER, and my coding process can be found in Appendix B.

This project was approved by the Human Subjects Division Institutional Review Board at my university. I use pseudonyms for all respondents that are common Nepali names and only use vague descriptions of specific villages to protect the anonymity of my respondents. All pseudonyms are consistent across the chapters, the same name always referring to just one individual, who may appear multiple times across the chapters.

## 1.6 Conclusion

Nepal is a useful case for studying how gender and migration relate during temporary, cyclical migration. As a patriarchal society with joint households, close-knit communities in village structures, and gender divided labor it is possible to capture the mechanisms of men's absence on changes in women's lives. My research design allows me to get at the complexity of social practices and how they change and may ultimately shift beliefs and ideas. The existence of the Chitwan Valley Family Study and my ability to conduct qualitative research in the same region allowed me to do comparative research that helps illuminate some of these mechanisms of changes to gender relations. Through an examination of social class structures, practices of decision-making, and beliefs about capabilities and expectations I am able to show the incredible persistence of patriarchy, and how it is maintained across social groups, even in men's absence.

I focus on and organized most of my data collection around men's absence due to international labor migration in this research, however, men's absence is the primary quality that influences social changes. Men need not be abroad to shift the social practices in their households, they can be internally migrated to other parts of Nepal and/or they can be absent for other reasons than labor. While remittances and earning from labor do highlight and exemplify markers of change and shifting social processes in sending locations, they are not a necessary condition for patterns I will discuss and analyze in this dissertation. Some of the migrant husbands in my study were not earning or sending money to the degree expected and others were living apart from family but within Nepal. In such cases it was clear that men's absence and migration away from home were more important than participation in international labor migration explicitly. As such, I describe migration broadly and as a way to understand men's absence from their households and communities.

## 2.1 Introduction

Migration research shows that men’s migration creates changes in the household (Rahman 2009), community (Dannecker 2005; Hadi 2001), and economy (Levitt 2001). As women fill in for absent men in household and community roles, the way that household tasks are accomplished shifts. The effects of shifting household labor practices on beliefs about household labor show that sometimes ideas about women’s household roles expand and other times they do not (Archambault 2010; Kaspar 2006; Yabiku, Agadjanian & Sevoyan 2010). This paper examines the relationships between some major social structures and beliefs about women’s roles in the household during men’s migration. Specifically, I ask how do social structures of ethno-caste and education affect women’s beliefs about women’s roles in the household during men’s migration?

Migration and men’s absence create scenarios, necessities, and opportunities for women to undertake new practices regarding household and tasks (Belanger & Linh 2001; Gulati 1992; Rahman 2009). These new social practices have the potential to alter social beliefs that may accompany the tasks. In this research, I argue that we need a multi-methodological approach, including an examination of lived experiences, to fully understand how agency and structure interact to transform meanings of gender in a context of large structural changes. I draw on the Chitwan Valley Family Study survey and interviews, focus group discussions, and participant-observation conducted in the same region of Chitwan, Nepal to examine this question. I look at ethno-caste and education differences to understand variation in beliefs about women’s household roles, finding patterns in how women discuss the changes migration has brought to



their lives and perspectives by these social structures. This approach will help disentangle some of the distinct yet mutually reinforcing ways that women revise their conceptions of gender expectations during times of men's out-migration. Using quantitative data I find that higher educational attainment is associated with lower rates of agreement on traditional beliefs about men's and women's household authority and that rates of agreement also vary by ethno-caste. Qualitative analysis indicates that individuals use different types of description, or frames, to discuss their beliefs based on ethno-caste and educational attainment.

## **2.2 Theoretical Approach**

Social science research documents how, in times of social change, people often shift their practices ahead of their beliefs, allowing structure to guide agency and beliefs (Tankard & Paluck 2017; Yadav 2016). However, both are iterative social processes; agents exist within structures and their responses to those structures may be both patterned and varying, depending on how agency is wielded and the specific arrangement of structures that agents experience. Social structures that affect interactions and beliefs about oneself and others might mediate the ways that an actor interprets their own changes to daily practices due to migration (Giddens 1984). Gender, ethnicity, and class are three common social-structures that social scientists draw on to understand differences in structural access or opportunity, social outcomes, and interactional styles. During men's absence from migration, women who remain behind in the homeland that are married to migrants may experience a new set of tasks that they must accomplish in lieu of their absent husbands. As these women confront new tasks and different options within both their households and communities, they may draw on different social resources to manage their changing labor and expectations. In turn, the possible shifts in beliefs

about women and their household roles will reflect the social structures that allow or constrain actions for women and their understandings of those options.

### *2.2.1. Social Structures and Agency*

The wives of male migrants that remain behind experience many changes, especially in their families and households. In many places, domestic work, particularly the work accomplished by women, is consistently devalued. The domestic sphere is a social arena that is identified with lower social order than the public or cultural realm (Ortner 1974; England 1992). While the devaluing of women's work is often systematic and occurs widely, the mechanisms producing devaluation are local (Tomaskovic-Devey 1995). Ortner lists possible forms devaluation of women may take; any of which, either singularly or in combination or arrangement with others, is evidence of the devaluation of women. Explicitly this may be awarding less prestige to roles, tasks, products, and social milieus occupied by women. There may also be symbolic and implicit valuations made at the cultural level that favor men and disfavor women. Women may also be excluded from structural arrangements where the higher powers of social life reside (Ortner 1974:69). In this way the specific roles and tasks, the symbolic cultural values, and structural opportunities available to women may all be indicators of women's lower social status in society.

Households, as micro-level institutions, are nested within macro-level structures, placing the domestic sphere within larger cultural and public contexts. This nested structure explains how even when women gain individual resources, like economic power (that can be leveraged in negotiation in household decisions), egalitarianism does not necessarily follow. Shifts in power in one structure are often not enough to shift power dynamics beyond the boundaries of that institution, which sits nested within others (Blumberg 1984, 1991). The nested institutions often

remain dominated by powerful actors (those with gender, class, and ethnic advantages, for example), regardless of changes that occur within them.

The power dynamics within a household, as well as women's household roles, are influenced by two macro- and micro-level factors. At the macro-level, higher values are often placed on men's labor outside of the home, which can devalue the work that occurs inside the home (which results in the traditional divisions of labor). This occurs because patriarchal structures designate authority to men which often results in more control over decisions and the opportunity to participate in work that is valued as economically and culturally meaningful. At the micro-level, power dynamics in households are shaped (and sometimes off-set) by the resources that each individual partner offers in a marriage. Such resources include education, employment, the potential for employment, income, and constraints on time availability (Blood & Wolf 1960).

Macro-level and structuring forces such as the economy, culture, and ideology shape and are shaped by interactions and they can adapt to change. Therefore, these structures are not prescriptive of interactions. However, these large-scale forces can influence gender, ethnicity, and class to more directly govern individuals lives and interactional styles through their economic, cultural, and ideological participation. Nested within gender, ethnicity, and class are still more structures and institutions that affect agents', such as education and family arrangements.

The nested relationship of macro- to micro-level structures is what prevents structures from being uniformly prescriptive at the micro-level. In households, for example, the dynamics between structure and resources allow couples to depart from traditional divisions and exercise power in different ways based on their individual resources. Such agency within structure

explains variations that occur in interactional dynamics across structures and culture (Blood & Wolfe 1960; Fuwa 2004). This complex relationship shows how there can be both patterns and variations in the power dynamics within and across traditionally advantaged and disadvantaged groups.

### *2.2.2. Interactions and Agency in Social Change*

Individuals assert agency within changing structures, Swidler (1986) suggests that at times of social change and “unsettled lives” is when cultural change happens. The form of agency assertion varies by context and the type of social change. Ahearn (2001), for example, views the practice of writing love letters in rural Nepal as an emerging manifestation of agency. However, she warns that it is misguided to attempt to measure agency in terms of magnitude. Rather agency is better measured by how it changes, including how individuals attribute responsibility for events, what they identify as constraints and possibilities for action, and how they view themselves as individuals and as members of social groups (Ahearn 2001).

The suggestions that agency is best measured comparatively and contextualized and in terms of self-conception (individually and collectively) point researchers to examine both the content of beliefs and ideas, as well as the reasoning for them to understand how changing structures relate to groups. For example, Ahearn (2001) observes, over a decade and a half, households slowly adapt or change the practices that restricted women, such as seclusion during menstruation or daily rituals of honorific respect towards the husband. These traditions are truncated and then drop off but explanations for the changes are given in practical or logistical terms, although they are also linked to growing agency of individuals at a broader level (Ahearn 2001). These findings support the need to view the interplay between agency and structures at

multiple levels of analysis, to recognize that attributions to events are analytical points, and not everyone has the same range of options available to them.

There are limits to individual's agency within the structures that shape their lives. Women in less gender-egalitarian countries, who are more likely to be burdened by traditional divisions of household labor and confinement to the domestic sphere, are often less able to use their individual assets as sources of power to achieve a more equal distribution of household labor than their counterparts in more gender-egalitarian countries (Fuwa 2004). This suggests the extent to which individuals can use resources to shift interactional dynamics is limited by economic, political, cultural, and ideological macro-level arrangements.

The gender relationships and roles that tend to designate particular patterns of household labor are shaped by macro-level factors, including cultural ideologies that may vary by race or ethnic group and economic factors that may vary by class or socio-economic status. By looking at the perception of what women can and should do in households in a comparative way across actors in different social positions but the same social context, we can gain insight into how macro-to-micro interactions designate powers and how some structures mediate or affect them (Fuwa 2004). Such an investigation shows the patterns of social structures on outcomes, as well as the sites where individuals can more effectively assert agency against the confines of those structures.

The interplay between individual assets (such as education or earning) and macro-context (including ideologies of gender, household, and economy) may be affected or mediated by structures that put actors in different social positions of advantage or disadvantage. It is important to note that the way women's specific individual, household, and regional characteristics interact will vary widely. For example, gender, ethnicity, and class are structures

that may mitigate access to power beyond the household, yet also affect power within the household. The stratification of individuals in different race or ethnic, class, and gender categories likely alters the individual resources they bring to marital and household negotiations.

In ethnic or class groups that face structural barriers in access to labor markets, education, or other social goods, the women from such groups may face additional barriers related to their disadvantaged position in the gender order. Complicating this is that their labor outside the household might be crucial for household survival, which can minimize this disadvantage. Still, women's roles in household are often designated as supporting the household and the economic activities of men (Ortner 1974; Folbre 2002). When women participate economically, it is generally assumed to offset the extent to which women play a supporting role to men in households. Below, I discuss the ways that education and gender may matter for women's labor and women's attitudinal responses to men's migration.

### *2.2.3. Education and Women's Beliefs about Social Positions*

Economic participation and opportunities are increased by educational access in capitalist and non-capitalist economies. For both men and women, education is an individual asset that they bring as individuals to marriage and therefore household power dynamics. Yet, education is often not evenly available or of consistent quality by race/ethnicity, class, and/or gender, which affects rates and forms of economic participation (Stash & Hannum 2001). Girls' educational enrollment and attainment are classic measures of gender equality (Mehra 1997; Duflo 2012). These social positions can designate differing specific views of women's roles and agency in households, communities, and broader economic structures, in part because of variable education levels and enrollment rates.

The varying beliefs about gender in households that descend from low educational attainment can lead to stereotyping or typified expectation of women and men in different social and economic positions. These affect access of men and women to alternative arrangements through self-assessments by actors as well as structural expectations and interaction expectations. The implication is that women may hold stereotypical views about women and women's roles because of deeply internalized definitions of femininity and masculinity and a feeling of accountability to propagate the ensuing dynamics and divisions (Charles 2011; Fenstermaker & West 2002; Ridgeway 2009). Such women may lack the agency or ability to exercise the agency and question this arrangement. To examine the ways structure and agency interact to transform meanings of gender in households, I look to Nepal as a case for this research where I expect to see a relationship between women's beliefs about their household and social roles and men's absence and return from migration. More specifically, I expect that agreement with traditional beliefs will decrease as education increases among women and that ethno-caste also is associated with traditional beliefs.

The case for this research is Nepal, where, "layers of gender, caste, and ethnicity interlined and embedded within one another constitute a social fabric within which ecological and economic transformations occur" (Thomas-Slayter & Bhatt 1994:469). According to this statement, the interlaced structures of caste and ethnicity create the social environment that is both a setting and a possible mechanism for social transformations. During migration the shifts in micro- and macro-level institutions allows some individuals to better leverage individual assets in household negotiations than others, based on their ethno-caste (which functions like class and race/ethnicity), education levels (which are influenced by ethno-caste and location), and gender. Gender is central to the positioning of men and women in institutions, as well as in

their access to resources within these institutions and the wider economy in Nepal (Thomas-Slayter & Bhatt 1994; Bennett 2002; Ahearn 2001). In this paper I use ethno-caste and education to understand how migration is related to shifts in beliefs about women's household roles. I will further explain this in the coming section, which provides background on Nepal as a social setting to contextualize the social structures I draw on for my analysis.

## **2.3 Nepal**

### *2.3.1. Gender, Ethno-Caste, and Education*

Treatment of women in households and communities varies by ethno-caste, but all groups contain elements of devaluing women, suggesting women are associated with the domestic sphere and lower social positions to different extents (Ortner 1974; Rankin 2004). Women are gaining access to paid work and representation in government (Yadav 2016). Despite these gender transformations, the associations of women and the home remain in place. Customarily, young wives occupy the lowest adult position in the virilocal (meaning residing with husband's parents) households, where she is typically expected to be subservient to both her husband and her mother-in-law in her martial household. In this arrangement, as she ages and her sons marry and bring wives to the home, she rises in the family hierarchy, realizing her full identity when she becomes a wife and then coming to power as a mother-in-law (Ahearn 2001).

Just as there is variation in individual households, there is some variation in gender expectations and flexibility in household roles by ethno-caste group in Nepal, wherein Brahmin women have the most strictly proscribed social expectations. Ethnic indigenous groups, especially those from hill and mountain regions or that practice Buddhism, have more egalitarian household expectations (Acharya & Bennett 1983; Bennett 2002; Ahearn 2001). Caste and



gender interact, but not always in expected ways. “Social norms setting expectations for women are commonly considered to be more restrictive among high than low castes... High-caste groups tend to be socioeconomically advantaged, and households with greater resources may be better able to implement stricter standards governing women’s activities and interaction with men” (Stash & Hannum 2001:359). In other words, restrictions against women sometimes are a marker of high status, not low status as one might logically expect. Higher status women may have the resources or time available to implement restrictions on women, while lower status families fewer resources may necessitate women’s activities and interactions in a range of household arenas. However, these dynamics may be shifted with education, which may allow higher status women more opportunities in labor markets.

Gender differentials in education have decreased in Nepal from the mid-1970s onwards, women in all ethno-castes had difficulty accessing education, and in the 1991 Nepal Census gender was the strongest determinant of school participation in rural Nepal (Stash & Hannum 2001). Still, ethno-caste continues to affect the choice to attend and continue with school as well as access to educational opportunity in the first place (Stash & Hannum 2001). Some Hill ethnic groups (Magar and Tamang) made efforts to educate girls prior to education-focused campaigns because they have fewer restrictions on girls than other groups (Acharya & Bennett 1982). Other ethnic or lower caste groups have had difficulty accessing schools until recently.

## **2.4 Methodology**

I use mixed methodology in this paper to assemble a multi-dimensional understanding of structural effects on the beliefs that actors hold about women in households. My quantitative approach captures the effects of structures on patterns of beliefs while my qualitative data allows

individuals to explain, counter, or deepen understandings of the limits of these structures through agentic actions.

The quantitative data I use draws from the 2008 baseline panel of the Chitwan Valley Family Study (henceforth CVFS), a study that draws from Western Chitwan District in Nepal. The Institute of Social and Environmental Research (ISER) in Nepal administers the survey. The 2008 baseline data is representative not of Western Chitwan in 2008. Rather it is representative of a sample of everyone living in 151 neighborhoods of the same region in 1996. Therefore, it is a close match, but not a perfectly representative one, of Western Chitwan in 2008. The 2008 data contains 4,945 respondents living in those same 151 neighborhoods in Western Chitwan.

The qualitative interviews, focus groups, and homestays were done in cooperation with ISER in the same region, but not the same households. Although not a representative sample, the composition of qualitative respondents is more likely to align with the social composition of Western Chitwan in 2016 and 2017, than 2008. The data from these interviews, focus groups, and homestays work alongside the CVFS survey because they draw from the same population and region.

#### *2.4.1. Quantitative Data and Analysis—Chitwan Valley Family Study*

The 2008 baseline data are used in descriptive statistics and cross-tabulations. I use five variables: gender, ethno-caste, education level, beliefs about men's household decision making, and beliefs about women's obedience to her mother-in-law. I restrict my sample to only women respondents because most of my qualitative data is from women and changes in women's beliefs are my driving questions. For ethno-caste and education, I grouped them from the variables that measure father's caste and years of schooling attained. The ethno-caste groups are ranked from low to high status in the following order: Dalit, Terai ethnic, Hill ethnic, Newar, and

Brahmin/Chhetri. There are also other Indian and Muslims, but both occur so infrequently and are not representative of households in Chitwan that they were dropped from the sample.

Years of schooling were compiled into the following groups: Limited Literacy, Some Schooling, and Credentialed. Nepalis earn their School Leaving Certificate (henceforth SLC) after grade 10; it is the equivalent to a high school diploma and is necessary for further study<sup>7</sup>. It is the first credential possible to obtain in Nepal and individuals with the SLC or further study are captured in the “Credentialed” education category. The next category I call “Some Schooling” captures those with grades 4 through 10 (but without the SLC). These individuals have the benefit of literacy and numeracy and some general knowledge, but lack credentials necessary for many jobs and opportunities for further study or high-status work. The last category is “Limited Literacy,” which captures those who have never attended school and those who have only attended through Class 3 (equivalent to Grade 3 in the US). Such individuals are likely to have only basic literacy and numeracy, if any at all. Each of these educational ranges corresponds with different levels of social access and opportunities. Limited Literacy to Some Schooling and then Some Schooling to Credentialed are reliable analytical “joints” of educational difference and the usefulness of one’s education to their economic and social opportunities.

Beliefs about women’s roles in the household are captured in two questions asking respondents their level of agreement on a 4-point Likert scale to a statement ranging from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree on questions of men’s and women’s household authority. The first statement asks agreement with the statement, “A man should make most of the

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<sup>7</sup> The SLC is a challenging exam at the end of grade 10 that serves as the equivalent of a high school diploma. Schooling beyond the SLC may be an I.A. (more recently called +2), similar to an Associate’s Degree in the US, and a necessary step to go on to a Bachelor’s, and then, if possible, a Master’s. All are counted as SLC and beyond in this analysis, no one in the sample has a PhD.

decisions in the household.” And the second statement asks the level of agreement with the statement, “After coming to her husband’s home, a daughter-in-law should be obedient to her mother-in-law.” These two questions get at the two central axes of what can restrict women’s roles in households: first, the belief and custom that men are primary decision-makers and should have control over major household affairs. Second, the custom that women move into her husband’s family home where she is expected to respect the household authority of both her husband and her kin/in-laws, especially her mother-in-law. I use both measures to understand differences in different aspects of the beliefs of women in households. The variables that measure these are labeled “men’s authority” and “women’s authority” (referring to the women kin’s authority, versus the young woman’s agency or authority, in the statement) and I collapsed responses into a dummy variable of ‘Agree’ and ‘Disagree’.

Because the object of study is the effect of out-migration on married women’s household lives, I restricted the 4,945 respondents in the CVFS to women and those who had ever been married in 2008 (76.14% of the total CVFS sample) and were between the ages of 15-55 at that time, to reflect the common age range for migrants. The result was 2,099 individual respondents. I ran cross-tabulations with Pearson’s chi-squared to understand the likelihood that the patterns in the data arose by chance and I checked for statistical significance at a P-value of  $P \leq 0.05$  using Stata statistical software. Importantly, this sample is not divided by whether they have had a family member migrate or not, the data from the quantitative surveys helps establish the relationship of gender, ethno-caste, and education with patterns of traditional beliefs. This data helps establish the structures that respondents exist within and contribute to while helping reveal how they are associated with certain patterns of beliefs.

#### *2.4.2. Qualitative Data and Analytical Strategy*

I draw on qualitative data to understand how individual agents construe and navigate the structures that are described in the quantitative data I will show. The qualitative data helps explore the ways migration affects beliefs about women and how individuals explain those beliefs. This approach is in line with Ahearn's (2001) methods of examining agency through examining the content of beliefs and the explanations for why they change. Pairing agentic reasoning from qualitative data with structured patterns from quantitative data helps me show the extent of structural relationships on individuals and the ways agents navigate them during migration. The qualitative data for this paper draws from participant-observation, focus group discussions, and interviews from Chitwan District.

### **2.5 Findings**

#### *2.6 Quantitative Results*

The quantitative data establishes a basic view of the three major structures (gender, ethno-caste, education) in Nepal, which my qualitative data will explore in terms of how respondents understand how they affect their attitudes and experiences during men's migration. I will use univariate accounts of each structure and then show some of their relationships through bivariate cross-tabulations. The structures of ethno-caste and education are related in ways that are statistically significant and that reveal interesting patterns of social division along these structural axes. Descriptive statistic summaries for each of these structures can be found in Appendix A Tables 16, 17, and 18.

Different ethno-caste groups make up different percentages of the population of Nepal, of the Chitwan Valley Family Study region, and of the absentee population. Table 6 summarizes these relationships below. The sub-sample's representativeness of groups mimics the CVFS overall. There are more Terai ethnic people included in both the CVFS and sub-sample than nationally because they are indigenous to the region. All other groups in Chitwan migrated there in the last 50 years after the region was deforested, malaria was eradicated, and the government encouraged internal migration for agricultural development (Whelpton 2005).

*Table 6. Ethno-Caste Group Representation in CVFS 2008 Sub-Sample, Nepal*

<b>Ethno-Caste Category</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Dalit	10.91
Terai Ethnic	19.20
Hill Ethnic	18.68
Newar	6.15
Brahmin/Chhetri	45.07

### *2.6.1. Education and Ethno-caste*

Before discussing the distribution and bi-variate associations in the CVFS, I will include some information on the educational distribution of the CVFS as a whole, and the sub-sample as well, below in Table 7. The sub-sample has less education than the CVFS as a whole, likely because it has been restricted to only women and only married individuals.

*Table 7. Educational Distribution in Sub-Sample, CVFS, Nepal, 2008*

<b>CVFS Source</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Mean Years of Education</b>	<b>Standard Deviation</b>	<b>Limited Literacy</b>	<b>Some Schooling</b>	<b>Credentialed (SLC +)</b>
Sub-Sample	2,099	4.18	4.27	50.02%	38.97%	11.01%

Education levels remain low among the adult population: 42.59% of the CVFS sub-sample has 0 years of school (while 28.13% of the full CVFS sample has no schooling). In Nepal, access to education is shaped by ethno-caste and cross-tabulations of these measures shows this pattern, as seen in Table 8, on the next page.

Table 8. Bi-Variate Cross-Tabulation of Education Levels and Ethno-Caste, Sub-Sample, CVFS, Nepal, 2008

<b>Schooling Level</b>	<b>Percent Dalit</b>	<b>Percent Terai Ethnic</b>	<b>Percent Hill Ethnic</b>	<b>Percent Newar</b>	<b>Percent Brahmin/Chhetri</b>	<b>Total Percent</b>
Limited Literacy	61.14	71.71	50.77	42.64	38.79	50.02
Some School	36.68	26.55	42.60	40.31	43.13	38.97
Credentialed	2.18	1.74	6.63	17.05	18.08	11.01
<b>Total</b>	100.00 (229)	100.00 (403)	100.00 (392)	100.00 (129)	100.00 (946)	100.00 (2,099)

$\chi^2=192.4110, df=8, P\leq 0.001$

There are ethno-caste differences by schooling levels. The least educated ethno-caste category is Terai ethnic. They are followed by Dalit then Hill ethnic groups. The educational-access advantage that Brahmins, Chhetris, and Newars have customarily had is tangible in the data; they both have lower percentages with limited literacy and much higher percentages with credentials.

### 2.6.2. Beliefs about Household Authority

The patterns of increasing or decreasing rates of agreement with each of the two gender authority measures that affect women in households across different sub-groups in the ethno-caste and schooling categories are reflected in Table 9 (on the next page). This gives an overall picture of which social structures among gender, ethno-caste, and schooling are related to the most change and difference and the magnitude of significance. The quantitative results discuss these relationships in more depth, helping establish how structures relate to each other and beliefs about women's household roles and authority. The qualitative data will then explore the ways migration influences these beliefs based on those social structures.

Table 9. Percentage of Respondents Beliefs on Authority over Women in Households, Sub-Sample, CVFS, Nepal 2008

	<b>Percent Agree with Men's Authority</b>	<b>Chi-2 test for independence</b>	<b>Percent Agree with Women's Authority</b>	<b>Chi-2 test for independence</b>
<b>Overall</b>	<b>45.35</b>		<b>43.35</b>	
Ethno-Caste		93.8*		128.4*
Dalit	50.66		43.23	
Terai Ethnic	63.03		64.02	
Hill Ethnic	48.72		51.02	
Newar	44.19		35.66	
Brahmin/Chhetri	35.31		32.45	
Schooling		74.6*		153.9*
Limited Literacy	53.33		55.90	
Some Schooling	41.08		34.35	
Credentialed	24.24		18.18	

\* Significant at a  $P \leq 0.001$

Table 9 shows how social structures are reflected in differences within and across groups, as described in the theoretical section. As explained in the methodology section, beliefs about women's household roles often unfold in relation to different family members along two axes, in relation to husband and mother-in-law/kin. Men's Authority is measured through agreement with the statement that men should be decision-makers and Women's Authority is measured through agreement in the obedience of the daughter-in-law to her mother-in-law. Respondents do not uniformly agree or disagree with both measures of household authority, rates of agreement vary for each measure within ethno-caste and educational categories.

When looking at ethno-caste differences in beliefs there are clear differences in patterns of beliefs about men's decision making by ethno-caste such that the Terai ethnic groups have highest agreement levels, by over 10 percentage points, then Hill ethnic, Dalit, and Newar. Brahmin/Chhetris are nearly 10 percentage points below their closest group (Newar). When looking at women's and kin authority, there is a similar pattern as with men's authority across ethno-caste group. Within groups there are lower levels of agreement (compared to agreement



with men's authority) for Dalit, Newar, and Brahmin/Chhetris. However, Terai ethnic and Hill ethnic groups each have slightly higher levels of agreement on the need for women to heed women's authority in households compared to men's decision-making authority. These two groups have the highest rates of agreement for women's authority. In general, there is more disagreement with traditional beliefs about women's obedience compared to men's primacy in decisions, but less so for Hill and Terai ethnic groups.

### *2.6.3. Impacts of Education on Beliefs about Household Authority*

Ethno-caste is a structure that corresponds to beliefs about household authority, and education is not evenly accessed or attained by both gender and ethno-caste. I will show variations in associations of beliefs with each aspect of gender authority by educational attainment. There are similar patterns of beliefs for both men's and women's authority by educational level. As expected, agreement levels decrease with schooling and disagreement increases with schooling on both men's and women's authority. There are larger magnitudes of change at each level of schooling regarding women's authority compared to men's authority, suggesting that some amount of schooling is associated with departures from agreement with traditional beliefs, particularly concerning women's obedience. In both authority measures over half of the respondents with limited literacy agree with the traditional measures, but some schooling and credentialed education are both associated with more than half of respondents disagreeing. In the credentialed education group, the drop off in agreement with women's authority is a faster and farther drop off than agreement with men's authority.

In aggregate, these cross-tabulations give interesting insights. First, the data show continuing stratification in educational access and attainment by ethno-caste such that traditionally advantaged groups (Brahmin/Chhetri, Newar) attain more education while

traditionally disadvantaged groups have lower levels. Second, those from groups with lower levels of education and customarily disadvantaged ethno-caste groups are associated with higher percentages of agreement with traditional forms of household authority. This is interesting, given that scholarship in Nepal shows the traditionally advantaged Brahmins and Chhetris are regularly described as being more conservative about women's household roles than their peer groups (Bennett 2002; Acharya & Bennett 1982; Ahearn 2001). The higher levels of Brahmin/Chhetri disagreement with traditional forms of household authority could be related to their higher education, which is also associated with beliefs about household authority. The increased education and structural opportunities for Brahmin/Chhetris show how values can be influenced by ethno-caste and education in perceptions of what women should do in households. Whether education and ethno-caste interplay into agency, as described in the theoretical section, is a question that my qualitative analysis addresses. This quantitative data alludes to relationships and associations between groups and education that I will further explain with on my qualitative data, including how statements of beliefs and practices in households are experienced and understood.

## ***2.7 Qualitative Findings***

The qualitative data that I will bring to bear on the insights from the quantitative data are taken only from those respondents who have a migrant currently away or a returned migrant to help examine the effects of migration on beliefs about women's household attitudes. The quantitative findings reveal interesting and, at times, surprising relationships between gender, ethno-caste, and education levels and beliefs about women's household roles vis-à-vis men's and women's authority. The qualitative data will help show the frames and perceptions of these

relationships to add understanding and explanation to how and why individuals may come to agree or disagree with traditional beliefs about household power, and how men's absence might influence those beliefs.

I will primarily examine how individuals understand and explain agency in terms of ethno-caste (among all women respondents), before briefly discussing variations by educational attainment. I find that, in interviews, Brahmin/Chhetri and Terai ethnic individuals are more likely to describe traditional ideas about men's and women's authority and households relations, including deferment to in-laws. As such, they describe their own labor in terms of the expected roles and duties in their lives. Meanwhile, Hill ethnic individuals are more likely to describe themselves as managers of the households and to frame their experiences in terms of their own practices and labor. Dalit individuals mix roles/duties-based and practice/labor-based framing; they describe family hierarchy as important but have more flexible dynamics.

### *2.7.1. Differences in Perspective and Responses by Ethno-Caste*

One of the more noticeable differences across ethno-caste are the ways that women discuss men's absence on their lives and household roles. There are general patterns of ethno-caste difference in how these changes are viewed: in terms of roles in the household, in terms of labor, or in terms of kin relations. This suggests that women use different social resources to manage their households. I will discuss the themes and patterns within each group. I do not include Newar because the two Newar respondents that had husbands away did not express distinct patterns and were like Brahmins in what they expressed and how they expressed it.

### *2.7.1.1. Brahmin and Chhetri*

Brahmin/Chhetri women responding to interview questions about changes from migration are far more likely to discuss their experiences in terms of the roles of men and women than other groups. They describe more traditional ideas about men's and women's authority in the household and are more likely to mention their in-laws compared to other groups, even though these relationships, especially with the mother-in-law, are often described in cooperative (rather than authoritative) terms. The two Newar women with husbands abroad spoke in terms of household roles. These findings are consistent with literature on Brahmin/Chhetri women but are a break from quantitative findings in this paper, which showed more disagreement with traditional ideas. The quantitative findings were interesting and warrant more exploration to understand how the associations unfolds across different social intersections. Such analyses extend beyond the scope of this chapter; I use the quantitative data to understand general trends and patterns and then I use qualitative data to capture the immediate effects of the absence of migrant men in families.

An example of discussing roles of men and women in traditional terms is in an interview with Anudeep, a Brahmin woman of 35 who projected confidence and a little spunk. When asked whether she could make decisions without asking, Anudeep replied, "I ask for big and urgent matters, but otherwise for the small things I don't ask." She later clarified this might be agricultural decisions, but she said, "I do ask about almost everything. For instance, if I need to go somewhere then I must ask. The matters should be a discussion, so I ask about almost everything." For Anudeep, part of the expectations she lives under is a need to discuss or ask for permission, including her own whereabouts beyond the house. This describes a traditional relationship to men's authority that has not changed with men's absence and may be more time

consuming, given the need to coordinate with a husband living in Dubai, several time zones away, each time she might need to leave the house. Her statement also shows how women's labor can be devalued through the exclusion of women from arenas of power (decision-making). The dynamics and specifics of decision-making are the focus of the next chapter.

Not every woman experiences this kind of constraint on movements, Laxmi is also a Brahmin woman with a plucky and eager demeanor and credentialed education with an IA (+2 years after SLC) education. She described her household roles in traditional terms, but also had more freedom of movement. She explained this while describing her work burden, "Yes, I have to do all the work. If we need something, then I have to run to buy it. When he was here, he'd go on the motorbike, but when he left, I have to run on the bicycle." Unlike Anudeep, Laxmi can leave the house to run errands, but it is both a work burden for her to cover her husband's labor and also a slower process due to her analog means of transport compared to his motorized options. In Chitwan, women rarely drive motorbikes, if using motorized transport, they are more commonly riding motorized scooters. However, they are most often on bicycles, foot, or buses when they run errands.

Women's workloads can be extensive, as Jaspreet explained about the gendered division of labor, "Men go to buy things for the house, work in the animal fields, they collect money and they manage the house financially. Then we women do the remainder of the work." She is 39 and has a smiling and youthful energy about her. She, too, espouses a traditional division of household labor, where men hold the positions that are related to economic gain and management while women then fill in around them and hold everything together with a myriad of small tasks, like mortar. This division is also an example of women's labor and social roles and milieus being devalued (Ortner 1974; Folbre 2002). However, this perspective of traditional

dynamic is what is available to many women, but it does not mean that they view gendered household dynamics as static social processes or an aspect of life they cannot push against.

Although Brahmin/Chhetri women describe their actions and women's roles in terms of traditional arrangements and as prescribed by gender, Jaspreet also pointed out that things are changing.

**Jaspreet:** In the past women couldn't go outside the house for work, but now women also can do as men do. Before we just did indoor work in the kitchen, but nowadays we attend community meetings.

Interviewer: How have your concepts changed regarding men and women?

Jaspreet: In the past our parents-in-law used to say that daughters-in-law should not go outside the house, but now they support us to do outdoor work.

Jaspreet's vision of women's household roles is one shaped by both men's authority and the authority over women by her in-laws. These attitudes are in line with agreement with the measures on the CVFS survey, and she demonstrates the importance of in-laws to not only household order, but also for change to take place. She views change (women working outside the home) as a social process coming from elders (in-laws) giving permission. For her, change comes from the holders of power, not the actors making changes to their daily lives. As she describes thinking that women should have more opportunities outside the home, she does so in terms of agreement with traditional beliefs, not as a firm stance against them. This helps show that sometimes shifting practices (such as attending community meeting or working more outside the home, which itself may be related to migration) can shift beliefs about gender in the household. However, the shifts made by one actor are constrained by the nested structure of institutions of power. Changes within a household do not necessarily shift power dynamics beyond it (Blumberg 1984, 1991).

### 2.7.1.2. *Hill Ethnic*

Women from the Hill ethnic groups, in contrast to Brahmins/Chhetris, are more likely to describe the work they do, how they accomplish it, and the way they must tell or remind their husbands to participate in work. They are far less likely to discuss their mothers-in-law when asked about their household roles. In using the frame of practice, not roles, some Hill ethnic women also describe telling their husbands what to do for work to keep him busy. This shows that these women view the management of household affairs as part of their purview.

Binsa is a 51-year-old Gurung woman who was composed and at ease and one of the handful of respondents with no schooling. She said that migration has changed her views of men and women, and when asked why, explained, “Men can go abroad for their family and women have to do indoor work. And educated women have also done as men have.” She describes the type of work that is done in terms of traditional divisions, but not for ideological but practical reasons. Women do indoor work because it is what they do for the family while men go abroad for the family. Educated women can work for the family because they have the opportunity to work outside. Binsa’s perspective is that reality is shaped by both beliefs and available practices. She espouses a stereotypical view of women and men, but also understands gender-related barriers as surmountable with resources (education).

Gender divided work is baseline among my respondents and many people across all groups made statements like Kasmitha, a 42-year-old Gurung woman, that “We have different works for men and women.” However, the questions that lead to such answers are addressed in different ways by individuals who have different kinds of agency designated by the structures in their lives. Hill ethnic women are more likely to describe the work they perform when men leave, rather than the prescriptions (what they are supposed to do) of work and roles. For

example, Rupa, 33, a Gurung woman, described her work as, “it’s just the household chores and nothing more than that” while saying “there are no such rules” for which men and women divide their work. These statements show both stereotypical views (which are associated with lower resources like education) that view women’s work as devalued (“just chores”). As women gain resources, they can exert agency and broaden the kinds of tasks that they can and should do<sup>8</sup>, which in turn challenges stereotypes and thinking about what women “should do.” These statements help show how agency, rather than being measured in magnitude, can be captured in change, and specifically changes to ideas of what women should do (Ahearn 2001). As women’s practices broaden their agency will increase, particularly if they draw on a frame of practices to understand expectations of women.

In contrast, these same questions led Brahmin/Chhetri women to describe proscriptions (what they are not supposed to do), a framing seldom employed by Hill ethnic women. This different framing of the work that women do, in terms of expectations of labor (Hill ethnic) versus roles and duties (Brahmin/Chhetri) is a major difference and highlights how ethno-caste is associated not just with varying rates of agreement with traditional beliefs, but also different ways of construing those beliefs. An individual’s perspective on household roles is an indicator of the type of agency available by status characteristics, like ethno-caste or gender as well as broader circumstantial changes, like men’s absence.

Men’s migration, while for economic gain for the family, creates a labor gap that must be addressed by the family that remains behind. The practical need for labor and the ways households may call on others to fill the need is revealing of the ways agents can use their resources (labor) for gain. If a task can be filled by anyone with the labor resources to do so,

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<sup>8</sup> Even if women defer to their husbands or mothers-in-law, it is possible to do this agentially if they had the choice to do so, choice being a central aspect of empowerment (Kabeer 1999).



regardless of the household social roles they occupy as wife or daughter-in-law or sister, those agents may more fluidly come to view women's household roles from a new perspective guided by practices, not expectations. When there are proscriptions for who can or cannot perform a task based on social roles that are gendered, such as wife or daughter-in-law, then those agents are likely to continue to view their household labor in terms of roles that are under the authority of others. The strength of marital and kin authority over women's actions is evidence in how women differently frame and perceive their contributions to their households in men's absence.

#### *2.7.1.3. Terai Ethnic*

Terai ethnic respondents describe a more traditional arrangement of men's work and they depict a household order set by in-laws in a hierarchical manner. Like the respondents in the Hill ethnic groups, a focus group with Terai women raises the dynamic of men not always wanting to do work. This household dynamic that these women describes shows how men can use their authority as a social resource to manage the household dynamic in their favor. What follows is a household arrangement where women lack the resources and authority to make the men work and instead must absorb his neglected tasks. Reports of men not always doing their work when they return is an indication of their maintained household authority, since women never described choosing not to work.

The dynamic of women working hard while men relax occurred regularly in homestay participant-observations across ethno-caste. A focus group discussion with Tharu women led one woman, Sarjona to say, "Yes, but sometimes he doesn't feel like doing work, since he's been working a lot when he was abroad." This view was typical, that the time home was a break and women often described this as being earned or deserved. Kali, a 39-year old Tharu woman who was loquacious and quick to laugh, echoed this sentiment when she said, "I want to do his work

myself because he has been working so hard abroad. So for the time that he is home I want to let him rest.” Kali made this statement the second time we asked about who does his work when he returns. A few minutes prior to this statement above where she describes wanting to continue his work and allowing him to rest, Kali said the following about his return,

**Kali:** That’s the point, if he got back it will be less pressure on me, after that I won’t have mental work stress. He will do his work himself and I will feel more relaxed. That is the truth of having your husband around you and living without your husband. He will take his part of work once he here. I will have less work burden because he takes care of all the responsibilities. My husband is not some kind of lazy person. He has been doing so much hard work abroad, so he understands everything.

Initially, Kali describes wanting to do her husband’s work under the logic that he has earned a break. Here, she defends his not-working and says he is not lazy and will do his work and help alleviate her work burdens. She describes migration as an uneasy departure from their previous household labor arrangement, one that she wishes to resume when he returns; even if she earlier said he does not always work when he is back. Despite this mixed report, his return is ultimately a relief to her, even if she also appears to want to hold onto aspects of his labor. It is possible that some of what she wants to maintain, in doing some of his work, is a measure of authority or agency that may come with doing his work. And she is willing to shoulder additional work pressure to maintain it.

Kali makes two statements—one that says she would choose to keep handling her husband’s work and another where she feels relief when he takes on his own labor again. Rather than being contradictory, these statements suggest the importance of choice in doing absent men’s work—for Kali the choice to keep on working is a kind of agency she has. Kabeer (1999) suggests empowerment is about women’s choices, even if those choices are to maintain traditional divisions of household labor that may disadvantage women and limit their

opportunities. Women choosing to follow traditional norms is still an exhibition of agency and empowerment, even if it appears normative.

Kali's choices, including to uphold patriarchal standards in her household, are contextualized when she illustrates how she understands absence. Kali imagines a dichotomy where having a husband around and not having a husband around are fundamentally different. She describes the "truth" of having a husband around or not as related to whether work is experienced as stressful (where absence is stressful, and return assuages that stress.) This perspective that absence and presence are instrumental to a woman's experiences and wellbeing is evidence for the impact of men's migration on the families that remain behind. It also goes to show that some of the changes related to agency and change in household dynamics is directly related to men's absence in her own experiences.

Kali and her husband do not live with her in-laws, so they are not able to share labor. Those who do live with their in-laws experience different work pressures and attitudes towards migration related absences than those who live separately. In a focus group discussion with Tharu women, the following exchange took place, cleanly essentializing these differences.

**Sangita:** I have to look after farming and agriculture; I have to go market, here and there in his absence. And also the household work! When someone gets sick in the family, like the kids and mothers-in-law, I have to bring them to the hospital like that.

**Interviewer:** So all the household works have been added?

**Sangita:** If he were here when the kids got sick, I'd tell him to bring kids to doctor and he would do it.

**Interviewer:** Okay and what about your family?

**Ritu:** My parents-in-law and brother-in-law are at home, so there are no such changes in my life.

Sangita and Ritu describe different realities with their day-to-day lives and work burdens related to men's absence. For Sangita, it is stressful to work without her husband, particularly when unexpected needs arise, as with illnesses. For Ritu, who lives with her in laws, this new burden is

absent. She describes no changes to her way of accomplishing household labor when her husband left, and the presence of her parents-in-law and her brother-in-law maintain the household order. Ritu's description of no real changes in absence was common in interviews, particularly among those living in joint households with their in-laws, which are more likely to have traditional kin hierarchies influencing household dynamics. Experiencing change, and change as burden, can spur an agent to wield their household roles in new ways or in ways that seek to maintain the previous arrangement. This may influence how flexible they view their household roles and the authority those roles are under. Sangita and Ritu cite their household arrangements as influencing their experiences, and by extension, their understanding of what household tasks are "theirs".

#### *2.7.1.4. Dalit*

Dalit women generally describe the impacts of migration in terms of their labor and their approaches to their labor. However, their responses are a mix between how Brahmin/Chhetri women view the effects of men's absence in terms of household roles and how Hill ethnic women view absence in terms of labor. Dalit women describe labor with both flexibility and a tone of direct matter-of-factness; the realities of their situation may create experiences that do not fully line up with an idealized role that they also bear in mind. They describe the relationship with their in-laws in more flexible terms, but also describe a family hierarchy that espouses obedience to in-laws, as with the Terai ethnic respondents. As a traditionally oppressed group, the structures that Dalit women exist within appear to interact in interesting ways that translate to beliefs and explanations that reflect aspects of other social groups.

The mix of reactions to men's absence and household labor that essentialized the Dalit response is nicely captured by Bihana, 30, who has a focused gaze and the following approach to

managing her absent husband's labor, "I hire people for the hard work, and for the work I can do, I do myself.... Most people think now that women should not do hard work." Bihana describes her approach to his labor flexibly, hard physical work she hires others to do, in line with traditional household roles. But the labor she is able to perform, she does on her own, a departure from traditional expectations. However, her avoidance of hard physical work may be less about ability and more about conforming to commonly held beliefs about what kind of work a woman should be doing. She mixes role- and labor-based framing to her own experiences with her absent husband's workload. Bihana is using the resources she has (the ability to hire laborers) to manage her life within the structural expectations (women should not do hard physical work), but the act of hiring laborers is, itself, an expansion beyond what women traditionally should do and a form of agency. This agency is both a change and a resource she can continue to use.

Other women described this departure of strictly gender divided work, but when asked whether such changes were positive or negative, the most common response was "*tikai*", meaning "neither bad nor good." In other words, the demands of the situation have people breaking role expectations and doing what needs to be done; a mix of role and practice-based frames. Priyanka, a 37-year-old Dalit woman, helps explain some of the ways necessity shapes both roles and practices in her household.

**Priyanka:** In the past women had to do the cooking, even if she has also done outdoor work. But nowadays it has changed; whoever has time, men or women, will cook. Nowadays wives are also on power. Men also do the work that women do. We have done a stage drama about gender discrimination so after that men are now alert on that topic. So concept of male and female has changed now.

Priyanka sat composed and calm as she delivered a commentary on our interview questions while her teenage children came in and out of the room getting ready for school and scooping rice from a large bag to prepare breakfast. Her replies generalize to her community based on her

own experiences throughout the interview. She describes a flexibility in who does what chores, using cooking as an example. She says that men now help and it is accomplished by whoever has the time (flexible approach). Because of this, she conjectures that women are also “on power” now; both because men help out and men now understand gender discrimination because of a social awareness program that used a dramatic production to carry its message. This is an example of roles- and practice-based framing; Priyanka describes changing roles and also changing practices. She attributes the changes in roles to men’s awareness from an external source, rather than from the changes in practices. When she depicts the past, when concepts and roles of men and women were more stereotypical and traditional, she shows that women had flexibility because they always had to cook, even if they also did outdoor (meaning men’s) work. Only when men began to cook and become aware did the roles shift. In the paradigm that she describes, ideas about women only change when ideas about men and what men do changes.

The quantitative data shows how Brahmins and Chhetris, often described as the most conservative in Nepal, have the highest rates of disagreement with the questions about authority over women in households. As a higher caste woman, Jaspreet shows how, even among those who may agree with traditional ideas, that there is attunement with social changes and implicit support of them. The qualitative data helps show the diversity of motivations for responses that, along with the quantitative trends from cross-tabulations, can help narrow down how social positions related to gender, ethno-caste, and education, as well as men’ absence, might contribute to those beliefs. Agreement may be firmly held beliefs about the social order, as seen with Terai ethnic groups, or implicit support for the current system because individuals understand their household positions in terms of roles designated by traditional systems, as with Brahmins and Chhetris. Disagreement may also come from an individual’s relationship to their own labor,

rather than the positions associated with that labor, as with some of the Hill ethnic and Dalit respondents.

Taken together, all groups show that family structures and the strong roles of mothers-in-law help keep existing forms of power relations relatively stable in the absence of men. While wives do have more work, and sometimes more leeway that they find meaningful, it is not enough to constitute change to the social order. The changes that do occur are interpreted and presented differently by ethno-caste and also, as I will show, educational attainment.

### *2.7.2. Differences in Perspective and Responses by Education*

In the quantitative data there were significant differences in rates of agreement with traditional gender ideas by levels of education. The correlation between increasing rates of disagreement with traditional beliefs and more educational attainment aligns with literature on the topic. The qualitative data helps us understand how schooling is associated with viewing household labor and opportunities in specific ways that allow some women to leverage opportunities while others cannot. Just as there are ethno-caste difference, the educational attainment groups also vary in the framing and descriptions of experiences. Those with no or low education discuss tasks based on needs and speak fluidly about their own experiences. The women with middling levels of schooling have more traditional arrangements and experience burden during men's absence, they are minimally reflective of their experiences and speak with restraint. Women with higher levels of education also call on traditional ideas but use abstractions and nuanced reflective positions in their explanations.

Most of the women interviewed had some schooling and those who had SLC or higher were almost exclusively in Brahmin/Chhetri or Newar ethno-castes. I divide up the schooling

categories in my qualitative data at different “joints” of schooling from the quantitative data, in part to reflect the distribution of education among the women I interviewed. I look at those with no or low education (0 years of school through 5 years) to capture those with no, minimal, or basic literacy and numeracy. Then I look at those with middle levels of education (6 years through 9 years), who have the benefit of more schooling, but their educations are incomplete and without any credentials that may be helpful in employment or other opportunities. Then I count 10 years and up as having complete or credentialed education, which includes those that finished class 10 but did not take or pass their SLC along with those with SLC and beyond. In the 48 interviews with women in Chitwan, 37 women had husbands away or returned from migration. Of those 37 women included in this analysis, 13 had no or low education, 14 had middle levels of education, and 10 had complete or credentialed levels of education. This is summarized below in Table 10.

*Table 10. Women Respondents in Chitwan by Educational Attainment and Migrant Status, Nepal, 2016-17.*

	<b>During Absence</b>	<b>After Return</b>	<b>Total</b>
Low or No Education	6	7	13
Middle Education	8	6	14
Complete or Credentialed	4	6	10



### *2.7.2.1. No or Low Education*

The 13 women with no or low education came from the Hill ethnic, Terai ethnic, and Dalit groups; no Newars or Brahmin/Chhetri women in the interviews had only attended primary school or less. The way these women discuss their household roles is generally consistent with their ethno-caste groupings analyzed above. When household roles are discussed, they are described in more flexible terms when talking about women. In general, the more concrete descriptions of household roles are used to describe absent men's labor expectations, not women's labor expectations.

When asked whether there are rules for what men do and what women do, Neha, a Dalit woman who was 34, said, "I haven't heard of such a thing up until now. He earns and sends money and I do things my own way. There are no rules that women should only do some things and men should do others. If he had stayed here, then maybe this would have happened. He is not here, so I am doing things all myself." Neha can imagine strict prescriptions and gender division, but does not claim to experience it, especially since her husband is gone. She thinks of women's options as flexible and open because she can "do things her own way."

Neha's flexible view of labor and explanation of her labor in neutral terms (rather than as a burden) is similar to what another Dalit woman Savita, 37, says, "He has worked abroad for a long time, so he doesn't have housework. But his responsibility is now mine." Even though Savita is taking on all the household labor, she also does not describe in terms of burden or pressure, but instead responsibility. Her husband has been absent so long that she now "owns" the labor that was his to do. She makes this distinction in practical terms, not based on traditional ideas about roles. Neha and Savita each experience their husbands' absence and labor in terms of freedom and flexibility which has led each of them to believe women have more options (even if

that also means more work) because of men's absence. But as women with few resources they face barriers that allow them opportunities beyond their households and therefore must be flexible in taking the opportunities that come to them.

Women with no or low education do not generally describe their labor in terms of roles; more common is for them to describe their labor in terms of the demands of the season and agricultural needs that correlate with those seasons. For example, Indira, a 45-year-old Dalit woman, when asked what women do daily, first replied, "Everything is according to the season" before specifying, "Cooking, cleaning, washing, cutting grass, household works, and so on." Indira's statements also show the myriad of tasks that women typically do each day. The orientation of viewing labor expectations seasonally is one where there are patterns and needs that are dictated by something larger than family absence or presence. Latent to this view is that what women think they should do is about what needs to be done to survive, not what they should or should not do, regardless of whether their husband is absent or present.

Survival needs being prioritized in the framing of household tasks, versus concern over what should or should not be done by women, is more common among the women with no or low education. They are more likely to describe the changes brought about by migration in terms of their physical homes or their living conditions. This is perhaps because low education levels give men and women fewer options for employment beyond subsistence agriculture or wage labor (often hard physical labor). Migration stands to bring such families significant gains in security; migration from Nepal has been associated with a decline in absolute poverty from 42% to 25.2%, among the fastest rates in the world (Sijapati, et al. 2015). The effects of migration on poor households is essentialized in Neha's interview,

**Neha:** There are a lot of changes. Earlier it was very difficult for us. We had a house with a thatch roof.... Earlier when he had daily wages instead of a salary,

we exchanged grains and we used those grains as our food. We had to struggle if our children got sick, worrying about who would give us a loan.

The poverty that Neha and her family lived in, until her husband migrated to Saudi Arabia, put the family's immediate daily needs in the forefront of her thinking and perhaps made prescriptions and proscriptions of specific tasks by gender less salient. For women in the most disadvantaged social positions, beliefs about women's roles in the household are secondary to material needs for survival. As material security increases with migration, the way these women understand gender ideologies maintains the flexible perspective developed during leaner times.

Some individuals did espouse more strict ideas about gender divisions in the low education category. When more strict ideas of household roles do come up, they are more likely to be stated by Terai ethnic women. Patterns of beliefs about women's roles among those with education see some variation along ethno-caste lines in ways that support and are consistent with the differences in beliefs in the analysis on ethno-caste above. For example, many of the Dalit and Hill ethnic women say that they handle the money sent by their husbands as remittances, both during migration and also after return. However, the Terai ethnic women do not usually describe this; one woman's father-in-law handles all the tasks of her absent husband, including the finances. Another Terai ethnic woman (Tharu ethnicity), Anupam, 43, did make decisions about where her kids went to school, but said, "I used to ask while paying school fees and I used to let him know what was going on." Later, when asked if he said anything about her decisions ("No") and how it was to make decisions, she replied, "It used to be ok, but I used to feel that if I spent a lot, he might scold me." Interactions are shaped by structures that place men in a position of primacy; scolding is a way to enforce structures of hierarchy. In such an environment, women's primacy in interactions and paths for agency are more limited.

Although there is some variation in the beliefs and styles of women with no or low education by ethno-caste, in general, these women expressed views of their labor and contributions that demonstrated independence and a sense of understanding of how the world works and their place within it. Perhaps counter-intuitively, the women with no or low levels of schooling were rated high among those in my sample as more talkative and bolder in speaking up for themselves and expressing their beliefs. These women's styles of communication are more conversational and free flowing than others and they openly share their observations and understandings more freely than their peers in other education groups, on the whole. For example, Nima, 36, is Magar (Hill ethnic) and married to a Dalit man. She has never gone to school but shared openly, "Nothing has changed, I go everywhere. And I also do labor work even though my husband told me not to go. But I don't want to just sit in the home, so I go to work." This manner of interacting and plainly stating experiences and reasoning stands in strong contrast to the 14 women with middle levels of education.

#### *2.7.2.2. Middle Levels of Education*

Those with the middle levels of education were the most traditional and most obsequious in conversational style of the women I interviewed. They answered questions in interviews in short sentences and they adhered to prescriptions of demure behavior by women. For example,

**Interviewer:** Who does the work that your husband usually did before?

**Arushi:** I used to do it myself.

**Interviewer:** After he returned back, who was doing that work?

**Arushi:** He does.

**Interviewer:** What are some of the activities that women in families like yours do in Nepal every day?

**Arushi:** Vegetable farming.

**Interviewer:** What works do you do weekly?

**Arushi:** What should I tell you now?

Arushi's last response, in the form of a question, occurred with some regularity among women who seemed to feel both that they had nothing to say that I would find important or interesting and also maybe worried about saying the wrong thing. Such interviews do raise questions about social desirability bias in interviews; however, though short and perhaps worried about saying the wrong thing, Arushi's interview still contains useful information, but it lacks in details. Still, homestay data can help round out this kind of interview; I observed women and their tasks in ways that added depth to thin responses to such questions in interviews. I elaborate on the ways I used my data in Appendix B. Additionally, I can use this kind of response to understand patterns to short responses; the inability to say much was most common among women with some, and sometimes minimal, education. The women in this group represent all ethno-caste groups, while both groups of low and high levels of education are skewed by ethno-caste. Like in the no or low schooling group, there were ethno-caste differences within the category of middle education levels. In the middle levels of education group, the women described the effects of men's absence in terms of roles across the ethno-caste groupings.

The women in this education group are more likely to describe their experiences without men's household labor as a burden when men leave. Rabina, a Brahmin woman of 25, explains, "It's difficult for women because men go abroad to earn and send money, but women have to manage everything." Although this statement is similar to how Neha describes men's roles of earning and sending money above, the implications for the effects of men's absence on women varies quite a bit between Neha's and Rabina's accounts. Rabina directly relates this to women needing to manage everything while Neha says she does things her own way. Rabina's framing suggests that men were the previous managers of everything and their absence has pushed women into this role, one that is described as difficult. For Neha, men's earning helps her do

things her own way and even insulates her from a traditional gender dynamic. Neha is Dalit and Rabina is Brahmin, their interpretations of gender dynamics are patterned both by education as well as the norms and expectations of their respective caste groups. The differences between Neha and Rabina extend beyond individual differences and rather exemplifies a pattern of variance captured at the intersection of ethno-caste and educational attainment.

For most women in the middle education levels, men's return is often a return to traditional gendered divisions of household labor and a removal of the burden and difficulty of managing his labor. They are more likely to revert to previous arrangements, which themselves are more traditional and gender divided. This framing of gender relations in traditional terms occurs fairly uniformly across the middle education group, with minimal changes across ethno-caste group. This is consistent with the ethno-caste analysis. Their less descriptive and terse responses to who does what leaves less room for interpretation of framing and understanding of change. There is less evidence for how migration has influenced changes in beliefs about household roles for these women, whose beliefs are shaped more directly by their ideas about roles than what they do during absence.

Migration is a major social event with permeating social consequences in Nepal, the impacts it has at the household level are numerous, including women doing men's work (as my respondents report). Women in the middle education group are the most likely to report there are "no changes" to their household labor, suggesting that men's absence is less likely to alter patterns of gender dynamics in such households because of how families divide and handle absentees' labor. Coupling this information with the descriptions of respondents who say they do take on his labor and that it is a burden suggests not that nothing changes in the day-to-day, but rather that the changes that occur in the day-to-day, such as doing his labor, are viewed as

temporary. They do not alter the underlying gender order or labor structure in the household and instead are a burden because it is a temporary shift in how labor is allocated, without shifting how power is allocated. For women with some, but uncredentialed, education the absence of men is felt as a burden and one that does not have the “pay off” in shifting beliefs about women’s household roles or how families should divide labor, power, and representation in the family.

### *2.7.2.3. Complete or Credentialed Education*

The 10 women with complete or credentialed education come from Brahmin/Chhetri, Newar, and Hill ethnic groups. None of the Terai ethnic or Dalit women have such high levels of education. The difference of additional schooling is evident in how these women respond, they speak in longer sentences and express their thoughts in more complete and assembled ways than the loquacious women with low education and the laconic women with middle levels of education. For example, Bandana is able to think about absence in broader terms than just her life, “Since he went abroad it has been easier. There is a saying [about men’s work], ‘either money or manpower.’ Now he can send money, so I can hire workers here to work. It’s easy now, but the economic part would be different after he returns back.”

Women with more education, like Bandana, express their understandings of women’s household labor in terms of roles, but generally with more nuance than other groups. Some of that nuance is in their framing and longer sentences, which allows the women to situate their understandings more evidently in a context. Bandana describes how things are easier because men’s roles are to either contribute money or manpower; migration mean that he is contributing money, but that his manpower is handled by his family. The money makes it easy, according to Bandana, but she recognizes this will change when he returns and trades money for manpower once again. The women with low education depicted a similar trade of money and manpower

during absence, but they communicated this through personal experience rather than through an abstracted and generalized understanding of social dynamics.

Women with complete or credentialed education talked about roles or labor in similar patterns as they did according to ethno-caste in the findings above. Educated women talk about themselves with the most confidence, for example, Amal, a Tamang woman of 36, states confidently that she never made any mistakes when making decisions and laughed that there was nothing more to say on that matter. Other women that made decisions and handled finances, continued to express their understandings of women's household labor in terms of roles and to de-emphasize the personal aspects of their actions and speak about roles in more general terms. For example, Sharmila, 35, a Brahmin woman said, "Indoor work is for women and outdoor work and earning work are for men. Women also can earn, but mainly they have to do indoor work." Sharmila also had some independence while her husband was away, but she downplayed that and did not speak about it personally and instead deferred to more widely accepted social norms around the gendered division of household labor. However, she did still add a caveat that some women can earn too, as if to demonstrate the existence of flexibility and difference, but only to add that, for the most part, it is traditional and as expected.

Despite that women with educations still generally speak of women's household roles in traditional terms and demonstrate thinking about them that way as well, there is room for nuance. Pramila, 34 and her husband Aditya, 35, were interviewed together at their home while their baby goats chased each other around and between where we all sat together. She was composed, confident, and had a giddy energy about her while Aditya was inward and seemed brooding until it became clear that he was quite shy. They gave a nuanced response, building off of each other's words, to express how changes have come about.



**Pramila:** In the back days, there used be the concept that women should cook and clean the house, but now it has changed.

**Aditya:** Now times have changed. We became literate and we can distinguish between right and wrong, so I guess things have changed now.

**Pramila:** I think that now women have become more forward in doing outdoor work. Women and men are getting the same opportunities; therefore things have changed.

**Interviewer:** Why do you think that changes have happened?

**Aditya:** Because of education, because of time. As you know, this is the age of the computer and things will be different.

Together Pramila and Aditya explain how the household division of labor has shifted and women have the same opportunities as men because women have become bolder in seeking other kinds of work, which Aditya contributes to literacy, education, and time; not migration. While Aditya credits time and education as central components of change, he acknowledges an era of modernization, marked by computer-use, that is related to migration. The effects and impacts of migration diffuse through social levels in different ways; remittances introduce capital to agrarian systems that allow for technology and new purchased goods. These computers signify an era of change to Aditya and, implicit in his statement is the view that progress is linear and changes in gender ideology are tied to women's opportunities through education, something that will compound in the 'computer age.' Such a perspective renders changes from traditional beliefs structurally out-of-reach for many women, those without literacy, education, or access to digital technologies. Pramila and Aditya have a nuanced understanding of shifts in beliefs about gender, one that draws on advantages and opportunities they have more readily than others.

Despite their perspective, my data shows that women without the same structural advantages, such as literacy and education still experience changes to their beliefs about women's roles. The changes to beliefs for women with low education and literacy stems from their understandings of migration-related change through the lens of their own experiences and the framing of their lives in terms of their labor more than their proscribed social roles. The

structural advantages and disadvantages related to educational attainment are nested within other structures, such as ethno-caste, which are related to specific frames and understandings of women's social options.

The qualitative data show differences in interactional styles and perspectives on gender. Women with low levels of education express their thoughts fluently and depict a more flexible arrangement of household labor and beliefs about gender. Those with middle levels of education show restraint and less reflection or personal response. They envision a more traditional arrangement, one that causes them burden and stress during the absence of her husband. The women with higher levels of education hold onto traditional beliefs, but with nuance, reflection, and perspective. They express understandings of the world in terms of the personal as well as the abstract.

In general, the women with complete or credentialed education are more likely to express the changes from migration in terms of changes to traditions or their lifestyles. When they describe these changes, they provided more explanation on these relationships than other groups. The perspective of the relational ways that migration affects people on a broader, macro, and abstract level comes primarily from educated women while women with less education view changes in terms of their more immediate households. Education moderates ideas about gender when men are gone because education is regarded as creating opportunity and conferring skills and perspective. When absence creates opportunity for different forms of work and skill building, educated women understand these changes in terms of broader social shifts. They imagine the options they have in terms of women as a whole, less educated women view the changes in terms of their own lives.

Patriarchal relations persist even in the absence of men. For poorer families, low education levels contribute to their lives being organized around the demands of survival. In such families, men's absence does not change much about the patterns of their lives, which are more likely to be centered around survival. For the women with middling status, the gains they may make during men's absence are not, perhaps, seen as worth the extra work that the women must handle. For families with the most resources and status, traditional living arrangements with in-laws stabilizes the existing hierarchies that advantage these groups and families.

## **2.8 Conclusion**

This paper examines the relationships between some major social structures and beliefs about women's roles in the household during men's migration. I specifically examine how ethno-caste and education affect women's beliefs about their household roles. I expected that increases in education would be associated with decreased espousal of traditional beliefs. My aim was to examine how structures helps us understand how migration relates to changing beliefs about women's household roles and what women should do.

To do this, I used quantitative and qualitative data from the Chitwan district of Nepal. The Chitwan Valley Family Study survey allowed me to establish the large-scale trends and relationships of the structures of ethno-caste and education. The qualitative data of interviews, focus groups, and homestays captured the dynamics of agency and frames and perspectives of individuals by ethno-caste and educational attainment. I used the CVFS to establish the patterns of association between ethno-caste and education on beliefs about traditional sources of men's and women's household authority. The qualitative data shows how agency and structure can be mutually reinforcing for perspectives and beliefs about gender expectations in households.

My quantitative findings suggest that higher levels of education are associated with lower rates of agreement with traditional beliefs about men's and women's household authority. There are differences in these beliefs by ethno-caste and education. Terai ethnic groups have the highest rates of agreement with traditional beliefs, especially about women's authority measures. Interestingly Brahmins/Chhetris are the most likely to disagree with traditional measures, which is surprising given literature on the area, but less surprising given their higher rates of education. Increases in schooling levels are associated with an increasing disagreement with traditional household authority measures, especially concerning women's obedience to kin authority.

My qualitative data shows differences in response types to these lived experiences around household labor and household roles. Brahmin/Chhetri women discuss experiences in terms of the expected roles of men and women while Hill ethnic women talk about their own tasks, labor, or practice, which allows for more flexibility and agency. Terai ethnic women are the most traditional and likely to discuss their in-laws. Women's descriptions depict the lasting effect of men's authority on women, even in absence, and they are more likely to take on men's labor. Dalit women describe their experiences as a unique combination of these different approaches, often describing their labor but also deferring to roles and expectations.

Interactional styles vary by education group, women with low education are more talkative and talk more about their experiences in a casual way. Middle education women use short sentences and were the least talkative. Women with credentialed education speak with more nuance and about more abstract ideas as well as about personal experience. Low education groups generally view household roles flexibly, partly because of needs related to survival and economic constraint. Changes to beliefs for low education women stem from their own experiences and looking at their lives through labor, rather than proscribed roles. Middle levels

of education women show restraint and less reflection or personal response. They were the most likely to feel burdened by their absent husband's labor and then return to traditional dynamics when he returns. Higher education levels hold onto traditional beliefs but with nuance, reflection, and perspective. They use personal as well as abstract lenses in their responses.

These findings and my conclusions are limited by several factors. As mentioned previously, this research was conducted in districts in Nepal with middle to higher levels of human development and therefore my findings may represent an "optimistic" view of the degree of agency available to women. Especially since migration of men is less available in more remote and poor regions and groups in Nepal. Additionally, in our approach to find interviews was to enter neighborhoods known to my translators to be primarily populated by a specific ethno-caste group and to ask around if anyone had a migrant abroad. Although this is not sample selection bias, it may have resulted in some bias and missed households that live in mixed neighborhoods or among neighbors that are a majority of another ethno-caste group. Finally, the data I have from my qualitative interviews and participant-observation to answer questions about beliefs about women's roles and was intended to ask about what women should do, though many women responded with what they actually do. This may be because some women were less willing or able to make abstractions about their lives, which was more likely among lesser educated women. Others may have answered in ways that sounded socially acceptable for their context (whether in favor or tradition or not), even if not reflective of their private beliefs. I would expect this desirability bias to be more likely among educated women.

Despite these limitations, I find that change and preservation coexist. Women are still faced with different expectations than men; even as they take on new tasks, gain education, work outside the home, make decisions, and have degrees of autonomy from their kin. The

prescriptions and proscriptions that women navigate affect not just their experiences and options, but also their attitudes and how they come to understand their realities. Given this, it becomes possible to see how respondents can practice labor that might counter traditional ideals for women's household roles without changing their beliefs. Women's practices, attitudes, and understandings that might push against traditional ideas cannot always be enacted in counter-traditional ways because of structural constraints to their agency. Additionally shifting practices do not always disrupt broader patterns of power because of how structures are nested and interacting. The evidence that few women question the contents of the beliefs about women within the household and not just beyond the household is evidence of those constraints and nested structures. Mass male migration in a labor economy does present women in the sending location with a different array of household options. The ways women can use their agency to address gaps in labor and shifting power dynamics in their households is patterned by broader social structures.

### 3.1 Introduction

Labor migration is a common household survival strategy in developing regions (Rahman 2009) and, as a result, it is increasingly common to have families of migrants that remain behind in their home countries while the migrant is abroad. Often it is the men who are migrating and it is their wives, children, and parents who remain behind and comprise migrant families (Rahman 2009; Yeoh, et al. 2002). Research highlights the ways female partners of male migrants assume new roles and responsibilities in their households and communities (Dannecker 2005; Hadi 2001; Aysa & Massey 2004; Menjivar & Agadjanian 2007). Women’s increased labor can be experienced as a burden, both because it increases the volume of household labor, they must accomplish but also because they feel pressure to demonstrate their capabilities and meet their husband’s expectations (Archambault 2010; Kaspar 2004, 2006; Yabiku, et al. 2010; Espiritu 2003; Hadi 2001). Despite these pressures, the increased responsibilities can allow women access to previously closed tasks, opportunities, earning, and community participation. The increased responsibility and social access can reorder the logics and approach to household economics, which can affect human capital, upward social mobility, and gender relations (Rahman 2009), as well as undermine traditional sources of household authority (Hugo 2003). However, the effects of these changes are slow to surface (Rahman 2009).

This paper closely examines if more decisions translate into more power and control for women who stay behind during men’s migration by looking at how these women think about and discuss their decision-making. There is insufficient scholarship on how women think about their decisions and how that thinking, and the decisions themselves, translates to power, opportunities, or control. It is often easy to assume that decisions result in control or power, but a necessary

component of having power is claiming or thinking about power as such and using it to have others accomplish one's own will. Social structures and interactional expectations can stand in the way of women thinking about or using their decision-making as a source of power or control. Increased roles in decisions do not come without burden or stress and therefore, women can be caught among multiple structural and social constraints. As such, women's thinking about their decisions may not match up with their actual practices. This research attempts to understand women's thought processes and practices around household decision-making during men's migration to understand how patriarchal structures and interactional dynamics shaped by gender relations can preserve gender inequalities in households, even during men's absence and periods of women's control.

The underlying logic of the relationship between *power* and *control* is that more decisions result in more power. Control accompanies power and is a necessary pre-condition for it. *Control* is the ability of an actor to accomplish their own goals or aims. *Power* is the ability of an individual or group to achieve their own goals or aims, even if others try to prevent that from happening (Weber 1964). Power in households is understood specifically as making important family decisions, spending money (Davies & Carrier 1999; Rahman 2009), or the share of women's earning compared to total household income (Nordman & Sharma 2016). This means they are able to make decisions about their own lives, time, and whereabouts.

In this chapter I will be examining these issues of decision-making, control, and power in Nepal using qualitative and ethnographic data. Interviews and participant-observation help reveal what decisions women make, how they think about those decisions, and the dynamics of power and control that shape those processes. Nepal is a good case for this critical examination because



it has high rates of men's migration, widespread traditional agrarian practices, and traditional household structures.

### **3.2 Strategic and Operational Decisions in Households**

Prior research on gender and migration has examined the importance of decision-making for women in gaining skills and community relationships (Kaspar 2004, 2006); but not all decisions have the same social importance. Kaspar (2004, 2006) differentiates between *strategic* and *operational* decisions. Simply put, *strategic*, large, or outdoor decisions are traditionally male-typed tasks and *operational*, small, or indoor decisions are female-typed tasks. *Strategic decisions* describe decisions that concern the outside of the household, they are complex and farther-reaching decisions that affect a household's outcomes, planning, and are in service to the long-term interests of the family. These decisions require more planning, they carry more risk, and they may concern the allocation of finite resources. Examples include: money management and investment (such as buying and selling land or large livestock), renovating houses, choices around schooling for young children and arranging marriages of older children, community meeting attendance and participation, and healthcare decisions. In contrast, *operational decisions* are the day-to-day decisions that are routine, habitual, or recurring tasks that carry low risk and pertain to the running of the household. Such small decisions have little impact on the social opportunities of household members and are not guided by particular interests in the household but are part of overall management or wellbeing of members. Examples of operational decisions specific to Nepal's agrarian households include: hiring laborers, managing irrigation, managing household and fields, selecting and purchasing food or clothing, visiting relatives that live nearby, paying school fees, deciding what to cook for dinner and what time to eat. Many

operational decisions are the types of decisions women may have been making prior to men's absence.

Operational decisions are often gendered in nature and in line with expectations of gendered household roles (Kaspar 2006; Acharya 1980). The domestic and agricultural spheres that are subject to operational decisions often fall within women's expected tasks (Acharya 1980) and are decisions that uphold these expectations and can maintain, not undermine, power relations that determine household roles. Before migration became widespread in Nepal, Acharya and Bennett (1981, 1982, 1983) find that women gained power and control in households when they participated in the market economy (local and broader), but when they worked only in the domestic or agricultural spheres (i.e. making operational decisions) they had less power and control. Given that operational decisions were not linked with increases in power and control in Nepal both before trends of migration started (Acharya & Bennett 1981, 1982, 1983) and after migration rates increased (Kaspar 2004, 2006), my analysis focuses only on strategic decisions. There are many reasons to think that big, strategic, or risky decisions, when soundly made, would result in more power. However, classic sociological theories concerning structures of gender stratification, gender socialization, and impression management could result in a different relationship between women's strategic decision-making and power and control.

### **3.3 Structural and Interactional Barriers to Power and Control**

There are three theoretical reasons why increased decision-making might not lead to increased power and control: gender stratification, interactional socialization, and impression management. First, gender, family, and economy are the "triple overlap" that constrain women's economic participation and access to gender equality according to Blumberg (1991). When

looking at non-capitalist agrarian economies she finds that even when women control income, they are often unable to gain power and make gains towards gender equality because of a series of structural barriers related to male-dominated institutions.

Even if women gain household power, it is just one type of power that is nested within other male-dominated structures like community, class, ethnicity, and state. Women's gains in the household can square against their lack of power in these larger meso- and macro-level contexts. And when women do leverage power in micro-level circumstances (such as the household), the power they gain is often regulated by male enterprises and resources, such as banks or patrilocal family structures that designate men as heads of house. However, women's realization of power at the micro-level can erode men's control in the macro arenas over time. Furthermore, women's control over economic resources can also increase their control over other aspects of their own lives like fertility, decision-making around household labor, and also self-esteem (Blumberg 1991). The implications of Blumberg's gender stratification theory is that the micro-level gains that women make through control of economic resources have the ability to make small changes in the woman's self-perception as well as alter the male-dominated character of meso- and macro-level institutions, but more slowly.

The second reason household decisions may not lead to power and control is foreshadowed by Blumberg's (1991) gender stratification theory, which suggests that women's gains of household resources are often limited by their ability to leverage micro-level power through interactions. This brings interactions to the fore as a location where power dynamics shift or are enforced. Interactions are the result of actors understanding a social structure, their place within it as an individual, and interacting with others and structures accordingly. Individuals manage to understand social landscapes and how they map onto them through the

process of socialization. Collins (1975, 1991) discusses this socialization process in the context of the workplace, developing an explanation of the relationship between order givers and order takers. Collins' framework explains power differences by gender and class in workplaces, but he extends the concept to household labor (Collins 1975, 1991). In households, women are socialized as *order takers*, while men are socialized as *order givers*. The result of placement onto this internal class structure in a household is that individuals' cognitions are shaped by the social communications with others and this constructs their realities. The extent to which an actor can define their own reality depends on their available resources and power; those with more resources and power have the ability to determine the order and an individual's level of control.

When an individual gives or takes orders, it affects their behavior and outlooks such that: *order givers* are often associated with pride, self-assuredness, and formality and order takers are often associated with subservience, fatalism, external conformity, distrust of others, and extrinsic rewards (Collins 1975, 1991). The resultant cognitive structures, self-perceptions, and interactional styles are "sticky" and persist, even when behaviors and structures change. Meanwhile, egalitarian exchanges that minimize this dynamic can lead to more informality, friendliness and acceptance of other ideas and can diminish the importance of this paradigm. The implication of this framework, especially within the context of structural gender stratification, is that even as women are making strategic decisions (and therefore acting as order givers in their households), they may not think they have or could claim power or control.

The third reason women may be reluctant to claim power or control when giving orders or making decisions is also related to interactions and socialization. Claiming power can be uncomfortable (and even dangerous) for women socialized to see themselves as order takers and in a position of subservience and conformity. Women are rewarded for conforming to social

expectations that place them in the realm of order taking and they demonstrate their self-perception as such through what Goffman (1959) calls the presentation of self and impression management. Actors work to present their “front stage self” to others in order to be seen as they would like to be seen and they work to confine any “backstage” moments out of the view of others. The process of an individual presenting their front-stage self and obscuring their backstage self is called *impression management* and it is a social project that everyone undertakes.

Women hold multiple important roles in families and women often manage impressions not just for themselves, but also for their families (Hochschild 1989). The consequence of this is that even if women are making decisions and even if they are claiming power and control in their households, they still may feel social pressure to present their decisions as congruent with customary social expectations and gender dynamics. Women who do make decisions may still think of themselves and their decisions as part of an order taking arrangement and/or they may use impression management to address discrepancies in expectations and behaviors. When women give orders, it is likely to occur within the backstage, thereby their control and interactions may only erode male dominance and structures of inequality within a single micro-context without permeating out into the wider structures that the household is nested within.

The concepts of the structures of gender stratification (Blumberg 1991), interactional socialization (Collins 1975, 1991), and impression management (Goffman 1959) would lead us to expect that strategic decision-making, may not lead to power and control in most cases. Rather, when strategic decision-making does occur, we could expect that it might lead to either no claims of control or power or that it may lead to a claim of power within the household, but a

downplaying of that power outside of the household. This paper explores these relationships in Nepal among their millions of women who stay behind during men's migration.

### **3.4 Nepal**

The gender dynamics in Nepal are unique in their specific formations, but generalizable to other patriarchal societies with high numbers of men migrating and woman handling the household tasks behind. Specifically, remittances sent from migrant laborers to their families, are a key way that women access and use social power during men's absence (Rahman 2009; Luna & Rahman 2018).

#### *3.4.1. Remittances are Lifelines and Mobile Phones are Guy Lines*

Remittances are the lifeblood of Nepal's economy and they make very real impacts on daily life. They have the potential to increase women's decision-making, but many women describe consulting with absent husbands about decisions. This is a relatively new shift in transnational household management made possible because of the ease of communication via mobile phones. Stay-behind wives are in regular communication via mobile phone calls, texts, or web-based chat applications with absent husbands and mobile phones are often one of the first purchases with remittances once loans are paid off. This easy availability of talking privately is relatively new; the women who have had husbands absent for five years or more recall sending letters or walking (sometimes long distances) to the nearest store and waiting in line to use the land line for short calls, made within earshot of community members. Such analog and public communications rendered strategic decision-making more firmly in the domain of the stay-behind wife.

The adoption and widespread use of mobile phones in rural Nepal has the potential to shift changes in household decision-making back towards men. The presence of men in decision-making can ease burdens of responsibility but may also complicate stay-behind women's access to power because their husbands can still exert some dominance in household matters. Still, men are dependent on their wives for information about the household and upcoming decisions and the stay-behind wife is the broker of the information. Even deciding whether a matter is worth bringing up for discussion with her husband or if it can be made alone is a decision that can add to women's decision-making skill set and can empower her in the same way strategic decisions might (Kaspar 2004, 2006).

### **3.5 Methodology**

The data for this analysis draws from participant-observation, focus group discussions, and interviews in Chitwan District, where I had more systematic questions about decisions and remittances. More information on data collection and what these data entail can be found in Chapter 1 and Appendices B and C.

### **3.6 Findings**

#### ***3.7 Decision-Types, Decision-Making***

When I asked respondents in Chitwan if they had to ask permission to make decisions while their husbands were away, the overwhelming response (over half) of all people say that they can make small (operational) decisions but must ask for the big (strategic) ones unless something is urgent, as with medical emergencies. Even though operational decisions may seem

small to a westerner—they do have social influence and consequences. And they are not available to all women equally. The number of women who claimed to make no decisions in Chitwan (8 of 48) is approximately equal to the number of women who made all the decisions (7 of 48 women). Interestingly, two of these seven did not claim to have made all decisions, but in describing their experience it was clear they made big, strategic decisions without their husband's consult. The majority of these findings focus on women who made strategic decisions to some extent in order to understand their thinking, but it is important to note that a portion of women did not feel they could or should make any decisions alone, operational or strategic, without their husband's input.

### *3.7.1. Women Who Make Strategic Decisions*

Some women take on major decision-making confidently, when given access. While most women reported making only small or operational decisions, a subset of women described making major or strategic decisions independently of their husbands, such as the buying or selling of land. Sita, 41, is a soft-spoken but self-assured woman from the Magar ethnic group. She was interviewed with her husband who had been in the Indian Army. When he first left the household before their marriage 24 years prior, they sent letters every six months but with mobile phones they talked regularly, generally about household matters.

**Interviewer:** Did you make some decisions without asking your husband?

**Sita:** Yes, I used to decide on some of the small decisions because it's not possible to contact for each one.

**Interviewer:** What did you decide yourself?

**Sita:** About household things, financial activities, and bringing money to friends. And if we had to visit somewhere and we don't have contact, then I would decide to go. And even I used to buy land and tell him after. And I took loans. Mostly I had to do these things.

Sita exhibits a level of control over decisions that was surprising; more surprising was that the extent to which she made strategic decisions was not the answer she led with. This suggests she



thinks of her decisions differently than how she makes them in actuality. Her qualification that her strategic decisions were necessary (and not a form of giving orders) is a form of impression management on behalf of her family to outsiders. Given that her husband was absent for over two decades of marriage and at a time when communication was slow and irregular, it is likely Sita developed strategic decision-making acumen over years of heading the household alone. Despite her record of making major decisions, Sita does not convey that she thinks of herself as a major-decision-maker. For her, cognitively it seems there is a difference between thinking of herself as a decision-maker and actually making decisions because of structural necessity. Logically, household power or control may appear to lie with the decision-maker (regardless of the circumstances leading to their decision-making), but my data suggests that thinking of oneself as a decision-maker and having control are important parts of household power that many women in Nepal may not have or may not claim to have.

### *3.7.2. Making Decisions without Claiming Decisions*

More common in the Chitwan data were women who claimed to make only small or operational decisions. Srijana, 32, typifies this pattern of women who claim to make only small decisions. She and her husband Abhi, 41, are a higher caste Hindu couple that had three years of separation due to migration, they were interviewed together after he had returned from Qatar.

She described the larger decisions that she made without discussing it first with Abhi.

**Interviewer:** Do you ever make decisions without asking you husband?

**Srijana:** No, I didn't. I didn't ask about agriculture and selling domestic animals. But I did ask for buying or selling lands, or in huge financial activities.

**Interviewer:** And for children's education fees?

**Srijana:** Yes, I made decisions for children's education fees and their needs. And even sometimes I bought or sold animals and told him afterwards.

Srijana's statements may seem contradictory: she claims not to have made decisions but continues on to show that she did make decisions independently and only informed her husband

after the fact. Her husband later chimed in to affirm that the decisions she made while he was away were good ones and conveyed trust in her capabilities. The dynamic of his affirmations over her actions is an example of an order giver and order taker dynamic, Abhi delivers extrinsic rewards to Srijana.

Abhi and Srijana's interview reveals an interesting pattern that reoccurred in my interviews, where women state that they do not make any or many decisions, but then concede small decisions and then possibly even major decisions without input from their husbands. Women's increasing comfort with small and major decisions suggests the possibility that women's perception of decision-making power shifts as they make decisions more often. A matter that seemed like a worrisome or big decision early on during a husband's migration may begin to feel small and more automatic after several years. Women who had husbands currently absent versus those with returned husbands followed similar patterns of thinking of their decisions as either minor or made through discussion (where discussion was an option). The downplaying shows how even as divisions between order taker and order giver blur as women's comfort shifts, self-perceptions as order takers may persist. Srijana, like many women, downplayed her decision-making roles or power when asked directly, even though she appeared comfortable making decisions. This suggests that many women may not think of themselves as having power or as actually making the decisions fully or independently.

### *3.7.3. Impression Management and Order Giving*

Gopal, my 23-year old host mother took her youngest child, 3-year old Sano, to the doctor after she had vomited twice in one day. When she did so, she quite literally gave orders to the rest of the household on how to care for Sano; actions that stood in stark contrast to her usual social position in the household. In this extended joint household I lived in a house comprised of

my host mother Gopal, her 7-year old son and 3-year-old daughter, and the great-grandmother of the children (Gopal's absent husband's grandmother). In the neighboring house were more family of the absent husband and movement between these two houses, and a third house full of more cousins and aunts, were fluid and it was one multi-home household. Gopal occupied a social space where she functioned more like a big sister to the teenage cousins (who lived next door) than as a full adult among her older in-laws.

As a Tamang Hill ethnic family, they did not have a firmly hierarchical arrangement and each adult had relative control and independence in their whereabouts and time-use. Especially since it was February and an off-season from farming and large parts of days were spent watching many hours of TV. Gopal had autonomy in operational matters but was not a major decision-maker. Interestingly, the visit to the health clinic happened while Gopal was alone with Sano and her son was at school. Both matriarchs (the grandmother and great-grandmother) and all cousins and I were away celebrating a Hindu holiday in the next major village, 5 kilometers away. When the group of us returned from celebrating, tired and hungry from the long walk to and from the festival, I was surprised to see Gopal and Sano dressed up in fancy kurtas (a tunic) and pants, instead of their usual well-worn sweaters and fuzzy pajama pants that each wore every day and night of my homestay. Gopal relayed that she took Sano to the doctor and took full control of her care and directed others to help get her medicine, keep a cool compress on her head, and keep her bundled in blankets.

Gopal's close watch over Sano stood in stark contrast to the usual free-roaming ways of the curious child. Sano once took off walking a full ten minutes across the village without looking back (I was trailing behind her) and another time she came home coated up to her thighs in a thick muddy layer of water buffalo dung, having run through the animal pen behind her

grandmother's house. When Sano was sick, Gopal stepped into an order giver role around this strategic decision and had more control in the household than she had at any other time in my homestay. She stepped ably into the role of making a strategic decision in an emergency when given the opportunity (and the necessity given the absence of all other adults in the household). She took the decision seriously and knew would be visible to the community, which was clear through her clothing switch. Wearing nice clothing to the doctor's is a form of impression management that communicates order in the family, even around a moment of shifting social order internally. Decision-making in absence of husbands creates new possibilities for the stay-behind women and itself is possible because of economic remittances from migration.

### ***3.8 Use of Migrant Remittances by Women***

Use of a migrant's remittances can be an economic lifeline for families. The overwhelming majority of my respondents describe the opportunities and access they have gained through migration. Although this is not always the case, decisions and money are sometimes a source of tension for couples and it can be stressful for women to navigate this when make daily spending decisions.

#### ***3.8.1. Remittance Use Monitored by Husbands and Community***

As women become primary operational decision makers and their comfort with decision making and financial management increases, they are more likely to share in decisions or, at the very least, have the ability to bargain for her wishes for spending. Yet, making decisions, while crucial for building strategic thinking and acumen, can be a fraught process. One Tharu woman from a Terai ethnic group, Anupam, 44, said, "I used to ask [him] and only after discussion would I make decisions... I used to ask about paying school fees and I used to let him decide

things that are going on.” When asked if she felt she made good decisions, she explained, “It used to be ok, but I used to feel that if I spent a lot, he might scold me.” Anupam is educated through grade 2 and her demeanor was quiet, unsure, and well meaning. Her husband, who was present for the interview and never contradicted her statements, had a serious and aloof disposition. Their interactional dynamics fit firmly in the order giver and order taker arrangement.

Several women reported a concern that their husbands would notice and be displeased by how much they spent. And several others preferred not to make any decisions without their husband’s permission, they would say things like, “we always have to ask”. Two women I interviewed called their husbands that were abroad for his permission to do the interview. In one case the absent husband spoke with my translator briefly before agreeing his wife could participate. These calls themselves may be a result of order taking and also a form of impression management before neighbors and family, demonstrating the order taker dynamic is intact, despite distance. An interesting conversation on this topic of husband involvement took place in my interview with Kali, a 39-year-old Tharu (Terai ethnic) woman who was very talkative and had a commanding and light-hearted presence. Her husband had been in Dubai for 15 years.

**Interviewer:** Do you make any decisions without asking your husband?

**Kali:** A few. Small decisions I’ve made myself, but some big decisions I don’t make alone, so I must ask. It depends on the importance of the business; some business should be discussed with my husband otherwise I will get blamed.

**Interviewer:** What kind of decisions do you make yourself?

**Kali:** The small things like what clothes I need to buy, since I choose what I wear, right? Likewise with food, I eat what I want to eat. I don’t think I need to ask on those matters. And sometimes children ask for clothes and shoes. If the matter is important to discuss then I do, otherwise I don’t.

**Interviewer:** How are the decisions that you make when your husband is away?

**Kali:** I feel he might say something. He may say, ‘Oh you spent a lot of money.’ It comes to money; it’s all the matter of money. For instance, I buy things such as my own Whisper [sanitary napkin brand], and when he found out he asked, ‘How much did you spend?’ Therefore, I sometimes feel a little uneasy when I don’t ask

him. But I don't think that we always should depend on the husband, sometimes we should do what we want, too! I also wish to earn for myself so that I don't need to depend on my husband's money all the time.

Kali explicitly describes her husband's push back on and accounting for her spending. His attention to her spending makes her restricted from following through on her wishes (and physical needs) without scrutiny. The result of these feelings and experiences are that Kali wishes she could earn her own money to gain freedom in her spending and decision-making. Many women echoed the desire to earn their own money and Kali's experiences get at why this may be the case. Remittances bring access to spending on household goods that make women's lives easier, yet many feel pressure from their husbands to be frugal. The power and independence that come from making financial decisions can be mediated by how others react because it is clear that while migrants go abroad to earn for the household and remittances are spent by households, the money is often viewed as the migrant's own. Women imagine earning might free them of these constraints and give control over spending. They imagine earning would bring fewer reactions or judgments because it would shift the locus of power in the order giver and order taker dynamic.

The preservation of this dynamic of order giving, even in men's absence, created worry in many women that was a burden. Women worried about making poor decisions, though, when asked, most said they made good decisions and they knew they did because their husbands told them so. The praise of husbands is the extrinsic rewards that Collins (1975, 1991) classifies as part of order taking. The husbands' word that the decisions were good served as an important piece of evidence for their capabilities, more so than their own self-knowledge, which itself is shaped by their position as order takers. This suggests that even if women gain some power and opportunity through decision-making, they still may not have full agency over their decisions or

even their self-assessment without external approval, specifically from a man. The apparent need for approval from their husbands suggests that decision-making, even if primarily accomplished by women or in a shared way, may still be considered within men's purview in latent thinking because of the enduring and "sticky" nature of interactional socialization.

Some women felt worried about how others would view their use of remittances, conscious of how they present themselves and the impressions of their families they must manage. A specific worry is that that people would *backbite*, which means gossip or literally 'cutting words', about their spending. Respondents told me backbiting could concern spending that is for leisure, as with jewelry or new clothes or that they would say that her values were spoiled and she disrespects her husband by spending "his money." Respondents were on high alert for backbiting and this fear of being talked about can serve as a form of social control over women's actions.

Despite women's attunement to backbiting, women may also participate in it. I witnessed hushed tones and rapid exchanges of information about others. While sometimes it was out of a concern for a community woman's health or circumstances, a specific valence and pattern of speaking made clear to me that the exchange of information was about others and could easily descend into the realm of gossip or backbiting. The way women's actions are closely watched speaks to the ways handling money and making decisions invites scrutiny that diverts the control a woman may gain from making decisions through attention (or the perception of attention) to her choices and actions. The effect of this is likely to affect women's consciousness and feelings of being seen—a topic that will be explored in Chapter 4. The pattern of women's awareness that they are being noticed and watched comes through in my interviews and homestays and they may perform impression management to demonstrate that they know they are seen and that they

are still complying with interactional expectations. Such awareness and actions reveal the extent to which many women have internalized the importance of the presentation of self for them and their families in exchanges.

This fear of being talked about is not unfounded. I documented a recurring anecdote in all of my fieldnotes of people telling me about the dangers of women running run off with other men with her husband's money (generally such accounts came from men and/or those without a migrant). In these stories, the absconded money is always framed as being the husband's money, as opposed to family or household money, despite that economic remittances are often shared by families and households. Bahadur, 30, is a handsome Gurung Hill ethnic man that I interviewed who is both a returned migrant and a migrant spouse, with his wife away in Korea. At the end of the interview after asking if there was anything else that we should know, he turned to my male translator and said: "She is studying about migration; there are lots of other problems in our lives by migration. It also may affect our married life. If a husband has migrated, his wife sometimes takes his all income and runs away with another man." Bahadur, as both a returned migrant and stay-behind husband, has not personally experienced this situation. Still, he wanted to make sure I knew that sometimes migrant's wives were unscrupulous with their husband's remittances and this was a social problem in Nepal, in his view.

### **3.9 Conclusion**

The questions this paper looks to address are how the absence of male migrants influences stay-behind women's thinking of their decision-making power during migration and return. I show how women take on strategic decision-making with varying degrees of independence or comfort. The act of making decisions, even if they are in consultation with the



absent husband or his in-laws, acts as a social opportunity for women that can increase their own decision-making power. However, even when women are strategic decision-makers in the household, they are often still regularly communicating with their absent husband, which can limit their sense of control or power. Few women in my study claimed to make major decisions or to hold decision-making power, irrespective of their actual track record of decisions. The finding that women frame their decisions as minor suggests they think of their decisions as part of a migration strategy made within a context of constraint or necessity rather than as re-centering the locus of power or control in the household. This is consistent with the interactional socialization that results from order taking in households and how that can shape self-perception. As a result, I find that men's absence does not significantly increase power or control in households through decision-making, even if women make more decisions and couples discuss decisions together more than prior to migration.

However, I also find that women's social access does increase as they gain new skills, competencies, and responsibilities during absence, particularly when they are able to make strategic decisions independently or with the tacit or overt support of her husband. I found evidence that absent husbands retain some of their centrality in household decision-making through mobile and digital communications, which are increasing in Nepal. For some women, this may assuage stress over making a bad decision because they have their husband's support. However, this preserves the order giver and order taker dynamic.

Practically this research highlights the constraints rural Nepali women experience, and how digital communications may decrease isolation from their partners while also mediating independence in decision-making from them as well. As Blumberg (1991) suggests, decision-making in a household is not directly leveraged into broader community-level power. Women

who are decision-makers are often reluctant to claim the title of decision-maker or think of their decision-making as a source of social power. Specifically, the stress or pressure many women experience is due, in part, to social perceptions of women who take liberties with remittances, as well as concerns about appearing incompetent in their households and families. Some women's apparent reluctance is related to their interactional socialization as order takers (Collins 1975, 1991) and it may lead some women to defer to their husbands or at least minimize their own roles, rather than take ownership over household decisions. The downplaying of their control over decisions may be a result of feeling their decisions are both visible and open to judgment that their actions are representative of not only themselves but also their families. These perceptions and the subsequent impression management may continue to constrain women's ability to leverage strategic thinking and decision-making into household power or control in service of gender equality (Goffman 1959). Shifts in perceptions of women is a slower social project, but women's decision-making does lay the groundwork for changing what others see in women and women's own self-perceptions.

This research preserves the complexity of social changes as they occur in migration sending locations and reveals how opportunity and constraint often occur in tandem for women. Developing policy responses or social programming requires a nuanced understanding of the structural and social constraints women may experience regularly, even as they foray into new domains of household duties in men's absence. Policy makers need to understand the scope and form of women's increasing decision-making power, how women's thinking of decision-making affects this power, and to know how they can support women through community-based efforts that work to help women within the structures of male-dominated institutions and interactional norms.

#### 4.1 Introduction

Some migration scholarship, particularly earlier works, portrays women as “victims” of migration, where descriptions of them are as involuntarily accompanying their husbands or are as stranded by them in the sending location (Lutz 2010). The term for these women in the latter category in research has often been “left behind women.” This term suggests women have little agency in their male partner’s migration decision, despite research that suggests migration is a *household* strategy (Paul 2015). Lutz (2010:1654) asserts that “the discourses on gender orders in the receiving and the sending societies need to be investigated and confronted with social practices of migrant actors” to shed light on the changing gendered lives of migrant men and women, without the assumption of women’s lack of agency in these migratory situations.

Suspending assumptions about women’s lack of agency opens up important questions not only about women’s participation in migration decisions, but about women’s agency and empowerment in the aftermath of a male family member’s migration abroad. What happens to women’s expectations of themselves and their families, and their family’s expectations of them when men leave during migration? Much of the literature on how migration affects gender relations focuses on what men and women *do* differently during migration and return (Dannecker 2005; Hadi 2001; Luna & Rahman 2018; Torosyan, et al. 2016; Menjivar & Agadjanian 2007; Yeoh, et al. 2002). Fewer scholarly works focus on how gendered expectations shift because of these new ways of doing things, and those that do examine how migrating women frame this potentially-gender transgressive move in normative gender terms (Paul 2015; Hoffman & Buckley 2011, 2013; Lam & Yeoh 2018).

Expectations, in this case, refer specifically to gendered expectations that women hold of themselves (internal) and that are held of them by others (external). Internal gendered expectations arise from imagining oneself in the social world and projecting forward one's capabilities and performance. Appadurai's (1990) concept that imagination is a social, and not individual, process helps us understand how one's internal representations of their self are inherently tied to their social experiences and positions. An actor's own sense of self and their cognitions, aspirations, strategies, and capabilities are a reflection of their interpretations of their social options. These options are shaped by the historical, social, and cultural positions they occupy such as gender, and including age, race, ethnicity, caste, class, sexuality, nationality, and other relevant status characteristics.

Social options are also shaped by large-scale social forces as well as the social demands of household, family, and community (Bastia 2014). In this way, social options are also tied to external expectations, which can be understood as the expectations others hold of women to act accordance with social roles and norms regarding their capabilities, obligations, and entitlements. Migration can alter both norms and role expectations as well as the value system or social structure (Portes 2010), opening up new social options for women while closing off others. At the same time, internal and external gendered expectations may come into conflict, creating a dual reality for women in terms of their lived experience, particularly during moments of social change when expectations might fluctuate at different rates and in different directions.

The research in this chapter is an effort to add to the small literature that looks at gender relations during migration through expectations and gender norms. I ask what happens to women's expectations of themselves and, to women's perceptions of the expectations their husbands, kin or others hold *of them* when men leave during migration. This question is

important for understanding social changes and transformations that occur during migration broadly, and more specifically as they pertain to women's empowerment in their households and communities. I use qualitative and ethnographic data collected in rural Nepal, a major male migrant-sending location, to address this question. I will introduce the theoretical frameworks I use to address these questions and then review the literature on migration sending before introducing Nepal as a case and my data and methods. I find that women's internal and external expectations are related but separate social processes that move differently for women based on their actions, social positions, and the spatial locations they operate within during men's absence. This has implications for the extent to which external expectations of women change alongside internal expectations.

#### **4.2 Theoretical Perspective**

Research on migration has long documented differences across social spaces and recognizes that social actors have varying degrees of autonomy and control within a single social context. To grapple with this complex and multi-leveled social world, two scholars (Mahler & Pessar 2001; Pessar & Mahler 2003) developed the *gendered geographies of power* framework to analyze people's gendered social agency given their social positions (both relating to physical and social space and to hierarchies of power). Their approach asserts that: 1) gender is embedded in different social and spatial scales, namely the body, the family, and the state; 2) gender is intersectional and outcomes are shaped by historical, cultural, and social processes that are beyond an individual's level of control; and 3) people express agency in these different social locations. Agency, in this case, is an individual's ability to access resources and mobility in

transnational social spaces as well as their ability to initiate or transform their conditions in those spaces (Mahler & Pessar 2001; Massey 1994:149).

By emphasizing that gender is spatial through their term “geographies,” the authors acknowledge that gender operates on multiple scales in the social world. This framing is especially important when considering transnational landscapes, where social relationships span national borders and thus encompass different social arenas with potentially different gendered power relations in each. The second point of the theoretical approach addresses this by focusing on social location and the intersections of major structuring forces. Social location refers to the positions occupied by individuals at the intersections of historical, political, economic, geographic, and other socio-culturally relevant power hierarchies (Pessar & Mahler 2003). Individuals carry with them gendered positions shaped by the interconnected dimensions named above that play out in different social arenas, like household, market, or village, which in turn affects their expectations and how they think and act.

While the authors assert that such inter-connected hierarchies are beyond individual control, they account for individual agency in their theoretical model. The gendered geographies of power perspective views agency as shaped by social location *and* individual characteristics, which requires inclusion of cognitive processes like imagination, planning, and strategizing (Mahler & Pessar 2001). These cognitive processes contribute to agency and are influenced by what people imagine of themselves and what they are capable of but are also based in part on the expectations that others hold of them<sup>9</sup> (Pessar & Mahler 2003). The ways that men and women

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<sup>9</sup> Cognitive agency is closely linked with internal expectations in that they both reflect an individual’s understanding of their options and surroundings, but they are different. While cognitive agency allows for action, internal expectations are the depiction of how one should be or how one conceives of themselves. Cognitive agency allows an individual to reconcile or connect their internal expectations of themselves and the external expectations of them when they do not align because individuals may imagine an alternative and act on it, if their social positions allow (Callero 2003; Mead 1934).

imagine their own gendered lives and the gendered lives of their peers might influence their agency and subsequently, their achievements and outcomes. Agency is used to navigate social realms and negotiations in those realms are built upon the social imaginings one has of themselves and their prospects (Pessar & Mahler 2003).

Agency and choice are key aspects of the development literature's discussions of women's empowerment. Although there are disagreements on what constitutes empowerment, especially across social and geographic locations (Malhotra, Schuler, & Boender 2002), Kabeer's (1999) framework is widely used because of its flexibility and suggestion that empowerment is a triangulation between resources, agency, and achievements.

Kabeer (1999) describes empowerment as the ability to make choices when that option did not previously exist. Empowerment is therefore a process, specifically a process of change through control of choices. Choice is exercised in three interrelated domains: resources, agency, and achievements. *Resources* are materials like money, information, or labor power, but they are also allocations like future claims and expectations. That is, an awareness or conception that one *has* a choice over certain matters can serve as an important resource. For example, we can imagine some women might plan to continue some of her husband's tasks after he returns—a future claim used as a resource exhibiting her sense of choice in the present. Access to resources reflects the rules and norms in different arenas. As this relates to gendered expectations, we can imagine that external expectations, such as women's primacy in household and domestic matters, are a domain with increasing choice when men depart. Women may then choose how to complete his tasks using their own or other's labor. The experience of confronting this choice and acting on it may shift expectations of resources and is also a demonstration of use of agency.

*Agency* is the ability to define goals and act upon them so that they are externally observable. But agency can also be the personal sense of power that one feels (Kabeer 1999). It is important to note that agency can be a choice to uphold traditional values or ideals, which may appear as a lack of agency, particularly to feminist and western frames (Avishai, Gerber, & Randles 2012). Choice is a key element of agency and power, including the choice to do what is expected traditionally; which may help leverage resources or achievements. Extending on the example above, a woman who takes on her husband's labor as a way of shifting her household resources is demonstrating agency likely related to imaginings of herself as capable of that work, despite that conventional norms may discourage it. The outcomes of using resources and agency together are *achievements*, which are more context-specific and can range from successfully managing the household, obtaining goods like children's education or health, or starting a new economic endeavor.

In their *gendered geographies of power* framework, Pessar and Mahler (2001, 2003) use agency to understand how women in similar social locations can have different outcomes. However, Kabeer's (1999) framework suggests that to understand women's empowerment and choices, one must consider not only agency but also resources and achievement. Empowerment is the triangulation of these three elements, more than the sum of its parts. In a similar vein, Sen (1985) emphasized resources and agency as constituting *capabilities*, which are central for allowing people *to achieve* valued ways of living and being.

Expectations play a role in that the expectations one has of themselves and their capabilities draw from personal exposure to resources and agency and anchor one's sense of control and choice over "ways of living and being." When capabilities are translated into achievements, they feed back on the expectations one has of oneself and the expectations others



hold of them. Migration and men's absence may empower women through such expectations, developed through expanding access to resources, exposure to greater control over choice, and new achievements. The ways that capabilities translate into outcomes or achievements may shift external expectations, and the altered field of play for choice and agency may shift internal expectations.

### **4.3 Literature Review**

Men's out-migration can affect women in a variety of ways and in specific social and household arenas. While I focus specifically on gendered expectations in this article, many scholars' work discusses changes in women's status broadly. Connell (1984), for example, reported three possible outcomes to women's status from their own migration and the migration of their husbands: 1) women's status improves due to flexibility in gender roles through remittances, autonomy, decision-making, and new personal freedoms, 2) women's status remains the same because gender ideologies do not change with shifts in the gendered division of labor, or 3) women's status deteriorates through loss of independence. These three logical possibilities of changes (or not) to women's status can be summarized as expansion, stasis, or narrowing.

These three potential outcomes are also evident in Pessar's (2005) descriptions of migration's changes to gender relations. Pessar includes some mechanisms and extensions to the concepts of expansion and narrowing. She suggests that, for those who are migrating, being confronted with alternative gender ideologies in new places can: 1) challenge gender ideologies and practices, 2) increase acceptance of the counter-hegemonic regimes already in existence before migration, or 3) recreate and even intensify the gender norms that characterized the pre-migration stage. In other words, confronting alternative gender patterns in migration can shift

gender relations through direct challenges or else acceptance of alternatives, or it can result in a “doubling down” on the original forms of gender relations, even if migration’s shifts make them a poor fit for reality (Pessar 2005). Taken together, Connell and Pessar suggest that migration (that of men or women) can change what women do and how that makes them think of themselves, both at home and abroad.

Both Connell (1984) and Pessar (2005)’s work suggest four logical possibilities that gender relations can undergo during men’s out-migration: 1) expansion in gendered relations, allowing for alternative gender ideologies and practices, 2) no change in gendered relations, 3) restriction or narrowing of gendered relations, or 4) a combination of both expansion and resistance to expansion of gender relations, but in different social realms. This final possibility, means, in other words, that an opening-up in some areas of women’s lives through men’s absence can trigger or be related to a closing or intensification of gender expectations in others.

When looking at gendered expectations specifically, research shows evidence of each of these four pathways, in some cases as distinct pathways and in other cases as overlapping processes, varying by geographical, social, political, and cultural contexts. I will provide an overview of key empirical findings that highlight the distinctions and overlaps in changes to gender relations during migration. The literature that explores these changing social dynamics focuses particularly on the gendered division of labor, the use of economic remittances, and decision-making.

#### *4.3.1 Division of Labor, Remittances, and Decision-Making in Men’s Absence*

Literature on men’s out-migration finds a variety of gendered outcomes for women. We can understand these mixed outcomes through the lens of internal and external expectations. Women’s expectations of themselves and what they are capable of may change, but larger norms

or expectations of women might not shift. Looking at expectations can help us understand the mixed outcomes accounted for in the literature below. Further differences in outcomes are explained by the *gendered geographies of power* that remind us that gendered expectations can vary by social and spatial context and the specific socio-cultural and historical hierarchies of power in which an individual is situated.

One of the more immediate changes that happens when men are absent due to migration is that their household labor must still be completed, often by their wives, a process that is generally associated with empowerment and increases in self-confidence (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1992, 1994; Dannecker 2005; Hadi 2001; Rahman 2009; Luna & Rahman 2018; Torosyan, et al. 2016; Menjivar & Agadjanian 2007; Yeoh, et al. 2002). Handling new tasks can be expansive to gender relations and women's sense of capabilities by weakening traditional norms (Hondagneu-Sotelo & Messner 1994; Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994; Mahler 1999). For example, Hondagneu-Sotelo and Messner (1994) find that men share in household tasks more upon return to migration. Andrews (2014) finds that women increased their political engagement after attending community meetings in their husbands' stead, and they maintain attendance after men return. But such additions to women's schedules and tasks can also be a burden (Kaspar 2006; Arias 2013; Martin 2004; Asfar 2011 in Fleury 2016), decrease women's leisure time (Torosyan, et al. 2016), and may only create temporary changes in the division of labor that do not persist after the migrant returns (Torosyan, et al. 2016).

Handling income and finances is another activity that changes during absence, both because men may not be around to handle their income as they once did, and also because their earnings generally increase with migration. The remittances that migrants send home are often handled by their wives or a combination of family members (Luna & Rahman 2018). Broadly,

economic remittances increase standards of living, but also can change social behaviors in sending regions through the diffusion of new ideas (Hadi 2001). Spending, saving, and managing remittances can help build women's skills, self-confidence, and bargaining power in the family (Luna & Rahman 2018; Torosyan, et al. 2016). They may also be leveraged by women to change post-marriage norms of patrilocality (living with her husband's parents) through household separation (Arias 2013; Gram, et al. 2018).

Remittances bring new economic possibility and with that comes a range of important and strategic household decisions. Decision-making is another change to many women's lives that comes with migration and often is linked with remittances. In the previous chapter of this dissertation on strategic decision-making, I argue that not all decisions are created equal in allocating power, control and resources to women. And I find that even when women make strategic and major decisions, they often do not claim them due to pressures of impression management and maintaining gender norms. Kabeer (1999) emphasizes this point:

Evidence that women played a role in making decisions which were of little consequence or which were assigned to women anyway by the pre-existing gender division of roles and responsibilities, tell us far less...than evidence on decisions which relate to strategic life choices or to choices which had been denied to them in the past (Kabeer 1999:447).

Women's decision-making in new strategic areas such as managing remittances is associated with empowerment, and the likelihood of making such decisions increases with migration. For example, in a large-scale survey in India, a comparison between women married to migrants and women whose husbands had not migrated showed that the wives of migrants participated in household decisions more, had more mobility outside the home, and were working in the labor force at higher rates (Desai & Banerji 2008).

However, remittances are not all positive: remittances can exacerbate the dynamic of men as the breadwinners and women as handling all unpaid household and domestic tasks (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1992; Jetley 1987; Menjivar & Agadjanian 2007; McKenzie & Menjivar 2011). The amount of remittances also matters, with larger remittances being associated with less physical work and more decision-making for women but smaller remittances being associated with more burden (Maharjan, et al. 2012). Alternatively, increased access to resources via remittances can weaken women's willingness to partake in market work and can maintain women's financial dependence on their husbands (Amuedo-Dorantes & Pozo 2006; Acosta 2006). Sometimes this reliance is compounded by restrictions like preventing women from working outside the home and men's close monitoring of remittance use (Pessar 2005; Francis 2002; Asfar 2011 in Fleury 2016). Other times remittances are unsatisfactory for a household's needs, prompting women to need to seek employment that fits their busy household labor and childcare schedules and thereby compelling them to seek insecure earning in the informal sector (Benerìa & Roldan 1987 in Hondagneu-Sotelo 1992; Maharjan, et al. 2012).

Taken together, the literature shows that what women do can change when men migrate, and that women often are able to work in new social arenas and on new tasks, which can improve their skills, mobility, and self-esteem, all of which are linked to empowerment (Kabeer 1999). These gains can be met with women' experiencing limited mobility in public spaces due to increased scrutiny over their actions (Adhikari & Hogley 2015; McEvoy, et al. 2012). However, these shifts are not always linked to changes in gender inequalities (Parrado & Flippen 2005) and can be burdensome (de Haas & Van Rooij 2010). This may indicate the no changes to gender relations. Furthermore, changes that broaden women's access are not always altogether positive, often coming with caveats or secondary social consequences that challenge or constrain

women; particularly based on geographical and social context and what, specifically, is being studied. This is consistent with the pathway that describes narrowing or the combination of expansion and restriction. In short, this literature shows an interchange of gains and losses, actions and reactions that fits the four pathways that I suggest building from Connell (1984) and Pessar (2005).

The literature above primarily focuses on what women do during men's absence due to migration and how that affects their outcomes; few scholarly works focus on or feature gendered expectations as central to their analysis of outcomes. When assessing changes in migration, it is important to note that gender ideologies and scripts are more resistant to change than practices or acts (McIlwaine 2010). The persistence of gender relations and gender inequalities, despite large changes in how gendered tasks are accomplished, is part of why Pessar and Mahler (2003) include cognitive agency in their model—it gets in the cracks between actions and agency.

For this reason, I examine expectations as a component of gender ideologies and scripts that might help build a closer understanding of how gender relations change during men's absence. More specifically, I look at what happens to women's expectations of themselves and their families, and their family's expectations of them when men leave during migration. To do this, and to help make sense of the geographic, social, and specific differences in outcomes I observe, I will employ the *gendered geographies of power* framework to situate this research and the concept of women's empowerment more broadly (Mahler & Pessar 2001; Pessar & Mahler 2003). I will use this approach to examine the changes in internal and external expectations across the four logical pathways of change to gender relations. The data that I bring to bear on these questions of women's expectations during men's migration come from the case of Nepal.

In the coming section I will review my research questions and then Nepal's suitability as a case and my data and methods before moving onto my findings.

#### 4.4 Research Questions

The four possible pathways of change in gender relations of expansion, no change, narrowing, or a combination of broadening and restriction guide the questions that I address empirically. Using *gendered geographies of power* I interrogate how women's gendered expectations of themselves and that others have of them shift during men's absence due to migration. I focus on gender in the social scale of the family and the spatial scale of women's market activities in their communities. I look across the hierarchies of ethno-caste, rurality, and region to understand the expectations of women as they are communicated through perceptions of norms, personal aspirations, plans, sense of self, and how others view them. I look to see how and where gender dynamics shift; including the relationship between internal expectations and external expectation, by asking:

- How does men's absence in migration affect women's expectations of themselves and their capabilities?
- How does men's absence in migration affect gendered expectations of women in terms of norms and community or household expectations?
- How do internal and external expectations vary across key social and spatial locations?

Nepal's diverse population, patriarchal landscape, large-scale migration and broader social shifts make it an interesting case to answer Pessar and Mahler's (2003) call to find where the cultural creation of *gendered geographies of power* occur. I look across region and social location in Nepal to find social settings, dynamics, and locations that are unique and distinctive for how women think and rethink about the possibilities in their lives.

## 4.5 Nepal

Nepal is the case for this research because it is a classic patriarchy with significant numbers of young, married men migrating. As defined by Kandiyoti (1988), the classic patriarchy is typically agrarian and defined by a patrilocality of extended household (young couples residing with the husband's parents). Such patrilineage "totally appropriates" (Kandiyoti 1988:279) women's labor in a way that leaves her in a state of deprivation and subordination in her own household. Classic patriarchies shape women's choices and unconscious gendered subjectivities, which can transform and breakdown when material conditions change, especially when capital is introduced to rural and agrarian systems, as with migration (Kandiyoti 1988).

In Nepal, hierarchies of gender and caste structure social life (Cameron 1998) and kinship networks are patrilocal and virilocal, meaning that women generally leave their natal villages for that of their husband upon marriage; resulting in joint households comprised of nuclear families and the husband's kin (Bennett 2002). Families have traditionally patriarchal arrangements in labor that echo the customary "indoor/outdoor" household labor divide, where men generally function as heads of house and work outside of the home while women often manage the work inside the home and defer to both their husbands and their in-laws (Acharya & Bennett 1983). Customarily, young wives occupy the lowest adult position in the virilocal households, where she is typically expected to be subservient to both her husband and her mother-in-law. Young married women rise in the family hierarchy as they age, realizing their full identity when they become wives and then coming to power as a mother-in-law (Ahearn 2001). As Kandiyoti (1988) describes, women's security in this system comes from having sons that marry and bring a young wife into the household, which is where women ultimately gain some form of power.



Although Nepal fits many of the definitions of a classic patriarchy economically and in social arrangements like households, it differs on two key parameters. First, my data suggests that many people in Nepal perceive themselves as having relatively equal and good gendered relationships at home in part because there are fewer prohibitions on women than in the past in Nepal. These will be elaborated further in my analysis in this chapter. Additionally, since many labor migrants go to the Gulf Coast, where there is more gender segregation, this is drawn on as further evidence by many Nepalis that there is relative gender equality in Nepal, as my data also shows. These perspectives that people hold about Nepal as more gender egalitarian are in spite of its ranking of 144<sup>th</sup> of all countries on the Gender Equality Index (UNHDR 2016). It is important to note that women are not unaware of gender inequalities in Nepal, rather there is evidence to suggest that gender inequality is something many women consider as beyond the household, not necessarily within it. Pokharel (2008) finds that over 90% of both married and unmarried women in her sample of 200 agree that there is societal-level gender discrimination in Nepal. But these numbers fall dramatically to 36% of married and 21% of unmarried women agreeing that there is discrimination when asked about gender discrimination at the household level in Nepal.

The infusion of capital to agrarian systems because of migration is not the only major social change in recent decades in Nepal, which has endured a series of major social turbulences that are broad and extend beyond migration. In 1990 Nepal was mostly an absolute monarchy until it slowly transitioned into a constitutional monarchy that was fraught with corruption and social exclusion. This gave rise to the Maoist party which started a civil war in 1996 and appealed to groups excluded from traditional forms of power based on ethno-caste, religion, geography, and economic standing (Whelpton 2005; Sharma 2006). The People's War ended in 2008 – the same time that migration was rapidly increasing nationwide. Although migration was

affected by the conflict, with violent events increasing migration and political events slowing it, the relationship was not causal (Williams 2013). The rebuilding of the country, the passing of the constitution, and development of a functioning government have been slow processes hampered through political and environmental disturbances like the April of 2015 earthquake. The magnitude 7.8 earthquake shook Nepal, causing massive destruction, death, and damage that continued across powerful aftershocks that shook the small country over the subsequent weeks and months.

Nepal is an apt case for research because it is a classic patriarchy experiencing the influx of capital to agrarian systems amidst a context of major out-migration. At the same time, Nepal's social transformations extend beyond migration. Women's sense of who they are and what they are capable of are therefore shaped not just by migration, but by all these social upheavals. Yadav (2016) finds more women working in all levels of government in the aftermath of The People's War. The decades of change have found women moving into the workforce in higher numbers, receiving education in higher rates, migrating in small numbers, and doing the things that men used to do when they migrate (Yadav 2016; NPC 2017). While all of these social changes influence gendered expectations of women on the macro level (which perhaps helps explain, in part, the perception of relative gender equality); migration directly affects women's households, which, in patriarchal systems, is the institution that most immediately governs their access to power and empowerment (Paul 2015; Kandiyoti 1988). Furthermore, my research design allows me to disaggregate broader social changes from the specific changes of men's absence on women's lives. I look at men's absence *due to labor migration* in this analysis, although the data suggests that men's absence itself is what matters for shifts in gender relations, rather than absence specifically to international destinations to work as a laborer.

#### **4.6 Male Out-Migration and Gender Expectations: Data and Method**

Migration is an increasingly common method of household earning in Nepal. In 2014 Nepal ranked third globally for remittances as part of its Gross Domestic Product accounting for the equivalent of 29.2%, a figure that is rising. In the decade between 2001 and 2011 the number of Nepalis abroad nearly doubled and in the 2011 Census about one fifth of Nepal's population was absent from their households (Sharma, et al. 2014). The migration and remittance-sending trends in Nepal mean that there are many wives of migrants that are handling the tasks of absent men as well as making decisions about the remittances that they send.

I went to Nepal for 10- months with the aim of interviewing and observing women whose husbands are labor migrants at various stages in the migration trajectory: before departure, during absence, and after return. The qualitative data for this paper draw from participant-observation, focus group discussions, and interviews in three districts in the Terai and Hills. I interviewed 69 women married to men who hoped to migrate, had migrated, or had returned. Another 80 individuals, mostly women and children of labor migrants, were interviewed as part of focus-group discussions. I lived in five homestays in three districts in the Hills and Terai affected by either migration or men's absence. I maintained representation of the five major ethno-caste groups that are important for understanding social outcomes; within those groups I have diversity by educational attainment, participation in paid labor, household arrangements, and reliance on agriculture. Please refer to the tables in Chapter 1 and in the Appendices A and B for more information on the distributions of my respondents across interviews, focus-group discussions, homestays, region, and migration trajectory.

#### *4.6.1 Specific Measures and Limitations*

My interview questions aimed to capture a sense of what women did, what had changed, and their perceptions of themselves and gender expectations. The full protocols can be found in Appendix 3. For the 44 women whose husbands had migrated out of the Chitwan district on the Terai, I asked a series of Likert-type questions about their level of agreement with certain statements. For example, one question reads: “It is important to me to make my own decisions. I like to be free and not depend on others. How much is this like you?” and their options range from “A lot like me” to “Like Me” to “Somewhat like me” to “Not at all like me”. These questions give us a sense of how someone sees themselves and whether these perceptions are congruent, or not, with their presentation in their interview. Furthermore, as these were the final questions in the interviews after respondents had “warmed up” I was able to make notes on the relative cohesion or contradiction in their responses to these questions and in the interview at large. I also noted any moments of discomfort, reluctance, ease, willingness, or amusement in response to these questions. For example, one woman immediately began to fiddle around with a notebook she was holding for her daughter, a physical expression of nervousness talking about her aspirations and her sense of self that was a clear contrast to her physical composure during the rest of the interview prior to these questions. Other women added commentary, explaining why or what they felt about each question.

Because I asked interviewees to react to these statements, I am able to compare my interview data with the region at large through the Chitwan Valley Family Study (CVFS), which uses the same questions and is where I drew these questions from. However there are limitations in the conclusions I can draw from these responses. One problem is in consistency. One of my translators, when probing a respondent who was at first unsure, would often present them with

just two choices on the second read through, “Like Me” or “Not Like Me”, which almost always yielded a non-committal “like me” that I rate as unreliable. There is also evidence of some social desirability bias where women answered in seemingly contradictory ways across the questions. For these reasons, in what follows I focus on responses to less-structured questions and my observations recorded during the interviews, rather than drawing direct comparisons between my Likert-measure responses and those contained in the wider CVFS.

Another limitation is that I worked with professional translators for interviews and focus groups, but not homestays. As such, the data from homestays reflects the daily operations of life and how tasks are accomplished through observation, rather than interviews, and unlike the interviews and focus groups, do not benefit from the assistance of a translator.

Also included in this chapter’s analysis are observations made in my host family’s *pasal*, which is a shop or store. A large section of my findings is devoted to the *pasal* as an important social space for gendered expectations. My interest in *pasal* developed at two separate times during my 10 months of fieldwork. The homestay family I spent the most time with operated a *pasal* (as did both of my host uncles, brother, and sister-in-law in this family) and consequently I spent many hours every day for twelve days watching the traffic through this *pasal* and those of my kin. As I continued fieldwork, I noted the frequency with which I saw families operating *pasal* from their homes, including a portion of my interview respondents. I made note of these interactions and, after returning from Nepal and beginning analysis, I began to realize what an important social space they were for women. I noted how the *pasal* created a space of expansion for women, but often within the physical bounds of the household’s property. In a single social space I could capture and describe some of the complex dynamics of expansion and resistance that came through in my observations and analysis of both interviews and participant-

observation. I will use my ethnographic data to discuss the role of *pasal* in everyday life and the gendered patterns of proprietorship and in customers before getting to my deeper analysis of spatial patterns and expectations.

## **4.7 Findings**

As discussed in the theoretical-framing and literature-review sections of this chapter, there are four possibilities regarding changes in women's expectations, both internal and external. I will proceed by analyzing my data from the interviews, focus groups, and observations in homestays for patterns that suggest women's expectations are expanding, are not changing, are narrowing, or are experiencing multiple kinds of changes across different social and spatial scales. I divide my findings into two socio-spatial realms: the household and localized markets.

## **4.8. Household**

### *4.8.1. No Changes*

The pathway of no change suggests that, in aggregate, women's expectations of themselves, their capabilities, and their family's expectations of them have not changed at all during men's absence. In my research, those reporting no change come from all major ethno-caste groups but are more concentrated among the Hill and Terai ethnic groups. Interviewees in these regions discussed how they were continuing to live life as much like before as possible. They did not state that there were literally no changes in their daily lives, which would have implied that the absent migrant men did little in their households or communities before, for which there is no evidence. Rather, data from these regions imply that the adaptations to men's

out-migration have not shifted the way women understand themselves or how the households understands those individual women.

In a traditional arrangement, if there is no other man in the family to step in and do the male-typed labor tasks, the household may abandon that work, rather than have a woman take responsibility. For example, Neha, a 34-year-old Dalit woman in Western Chitwan, explains this while demonstrating that she does not feel capable of taking over these responsibilities herself.

**Interviewer:** Who does the work that usually your husband used to do before?

**Neha:** It was labor work so anyone can do it.

**Interviewer:** Do you do it?

**Neha:** Me? How can I do a man's work?

**Interviewer:** You don't have son. So no one does it?

**Neha:** No one does it. Nowadays does a son do the work of making bricks or [physical] labor work? No, even if I had a son, he wouldn't do it.

Neha's response seems almost contradictory; she at first says the type of work is labor so anyone can do it. But after being prompted and asked if she does this work, she is quick to say its men's work and asks how she could possibly manage it. Neha's expectations of herself and her capabilities are very much in line with customary expectations, so much so that she has neither considered that she could do the work of her absent husband, nor has his absence triggered these thoughts. When asked, at the end of the interview, to rate herself as like someone who likes to do things a new way, Neha hedged and said that it was "a little bit like me". Her hesitation in trying new tasks and her apparent uncertainty about this aspect of herself is consistent with her statement that it is "somewhat like me" to want to be independent and make her own decisions. Neha's internal expectations of herself as compliant with external expectations appears unchanged in spite of her husband's three-year absence and the hard-physical tasks left to be accomplished. Her limited agency in this circumstance could be a response to the resources she has available or a reflection of personal or cognitive dynamics shaped by her as an individual.

Her lack of agency may also be shaped by circumstances like her low educational attainment, as she has basic literacy and numeracy only.

There is another element to Neha's words that warrants analysis. Neha imagines that if one of her four kids were a son, he would not do the work of absent men either. The placement of her imaginary son as similar to his peers is indicative of generational shifts in relationships to hard physical labor. This type of work still must be managed and is often done by hand, not machine, in Nepal; it is accomplished by the hiring of laborers who have few other economic options and often come from disadvantaged social positions.

Several respondents in Chitwan report hiring laborers as a way to avoid the burden of taking on their absent husband's labor. It is unclear whether this is empowering or a way that husbands insulate their wives from doing labor they see as unfit for women. This likely varies by social position. For example, my returned-migrant Brahmin host brother was adamant that women should never plow and it would reflect poorly on him and his mother if he had not hired someone to do this in his stead while he was in Iraq. Other times, women's hiring of laborers is discussed like a management skill that she takes pride in. Deeper exploration into gender dynamics around outsourcing of gendered and physical labor to non-migrating men during men's migration would be an interesting area for future research.

#### *4.8.2. Expansion in Expectations*

Agriculture in the Hills of Nepal is less mechanized and more physical than on the Terai, partly because the terraced fields make using machines difficult. The women interviewed in the Hills did much physical agricultural work collectively as a community in ways not seen in Chitwan. This labor appears to have influenced how these women view themselves and their capabilities. Anchal, a 24-year old Magar woman interviewed in a remote hilltop village in



Tanahũ district, explained that “Women cannot be fully capable or do as much as men can, but I am confident that I can be strong.”

Anchal’s belief that women are not as capable as men highlights the tensions seen in the literature review between larger gendered norms and individual expectations. Anchal personally feels strong and able and recognizes that she has some choice in this matter, but she has internalized normative expectations that women simply are not able to do what men can. The movement of internal expectations and external expectations occur at different rates and are spurred by different activities.

I observed Anchal do hard and physically demanding agricultural labor, as do many of the women in their village. Doing this work has slightly different effects on women’s beliefs about their capabilities. Anchal’s neighbor, Nita, is 26 and comes away with a slightly different sense of expectations of her capabilities than Anchal. Nita feels capable when she works in the fields, stating simply, “I feel strong like a man, I can do this, and I can do that. I can work like a man.” Nita builds her expectations of herself from her capabilities and actions that she takes in the fields, which she does more since her husband left for Malaysia to work at pipe company. Implicit in Nita’s statement is agreement with Anchal that each woman, as an individual is strong and capable. Nita might hold external expectations that men are more physically strong than women further from her sense of her own capabilities than Anchal does. The impact of external expectations on Nita’s sense of self appear to be less marked than on Anchal’s, despite that these women share the same small, remote village and are exposed to the same village-level norms and expectations. Such differences in agency in similar social locations is part of Pessar and Mahler’s (2003) attention to the individual differences in agency related to initiative and imagination.

Priyanka is a Dalit woman of 37 years who readily handled household decisions and openly shared this when I asked about how she and her husband communicated, before I even asked her specifically about household decision-making. Priyanka shares how her expectations of herself have broadened, given her confidence, and allowed her to assert quite a bit of agency and choice in her life. She has taken these positions despite that her husband initially did not expect her to be able to handle tasks on the magnitude of what she has done in his absence.

**Priyanka:** I talk a lot with my husband...but sometimes I make decisions first and talk after. And I say, 'you don't let me do it, so I have to do it myself.' And he says it's okay. But he doesn't mind it, he always supports me, so I am happy.

...

**Interviewer:** What decisions have you made?

**Priyanka:** About the household and even building some small parts of the house or painting it. I do it first and send photos to him so he knows. When building this house I started from only 30,000 rupees but completed in 9 lakhs [900,000 rupees]. When he returned home last, he was surprised, and he said, 'how will you manage financial activities?' and I say, 'don't worry I will manage it.'

Priyanka has expectations that she can and should handle financial and household tasks and that her husband will come to accept this. The scale of the household projects she has managed, scaling a 30,000-rupee (just over \$300) project up 30-fold to be a 9-lakh project (a lakh is 100,000 rupees) is significant and demands cognitive agency, planning, and aspirations. Her husband was initially hesitant or skeptical about her capabilities, but upon seeing her flourish in her new tasks, ultimately supported her and likely recalibrated his expectations of her and her capabilities. Priyanka's imagining and strategizing, founded in internal expectations, had the effect of shifting the external expectations that her husband held of her.

The empowerment that this use of agency, resources, and achievements that Priyanka has found brings her happiness and encourages her to continue to take on household management in his absence. She calls on this empowerment to negotiate changes in household operations with her husband upon his return. She told me that she aims to continue to manage finances and

expects her husband to comply since he does not like managing money. This is an example of Priyanka using remittances as resources and agency to renegotiate household power. This is also evidence that even those, like Priyanka as a Dalit woman, who occupy social locations lower in social hierarchies can re-bargain with patriarchy using the resources and agency made possible by migration. New tasks allowed Priyanka to imagine herself as capable and find satisfaction in meeting her new expectations of herself and her success and agency lead her husband to adapt and expand his expectations of her.

The large-scale social transformations taking place in Nepal since 1990 have fomented changes and, overall, a widening of social options for women. In my interviews and during my homestays, respondents regularly reference how Nepal is different than it was and that has changed women's experiences and increased equality. They also describe women's leadership in major decisions like household renovations as part of flexible households, as well as emphasize the importance of family support as markers of this opening-up.

The majority of the women I interviewed attest to the existence of gender equality when asked what it means to have gender equality and if they have it. Often, women draw on one or several of four recurring claims or pieces of evidence for why they have equality. They say that now, unlike in the past: 1) men and women have the same legal rights in Nepal, 2) men and women share labor and work together cooperatively, 3) men treat women well and with respect, and 4) women have more social opportunities than they did previously.

When asked about equality most women respond similarly to Pramila, 34, who sees the relationship between working together and equality in simple terms. "If the family members are cooperative with another, then automatically everything becomes equal." She no longer sees society as male-dominated because women make decisions and work with men. These expanded

capabilities and expectations that women have of themselves and other women are part of and necessary for equality in this line of reasoning. Equality, in this conception, is holding gendered expectations that paint women as capable of working with men and such expectations result in women's own sense of their capabilities.

Matched internal and external gendered expectations that are based around ability, participation, and cooperation are both an expansion of expectations and also an indicator that that expansion is viewed as moving in the direction of equality. Pramila, and many of the women who report similar relationships between sharing labor, gender equality, and respect for women, view external and internal expectations as related, and not as separate, like women in other social positions and locations do. Some women view equality as matter of others holding external expectations of competence and ability and others, while other women extend their ideas of equality to include a woman's own sense of ability as part of the process of equalization. These differences suggests that, for women in the former category, their internal expectations are deeply linked to expectations of them by others, as we saw in Neha's statements.

Not all women are as quick to report that the expansions to women's expectations have amounted to equality, however. Jyoti is 21, well-educated, and Brahmin; she is less willing to see equality as so easily obtained. Jyoti does not think there is actually gender equality yet, in part because she thinks people need more education to better understand each other. This implies that external expectations are based in understandings of women that might be stereotypical or not based in interactions with or understandings of women's experiences. Jyoti thinks women's expectations of themselves and others' expectations of women need to broaden before equality is achieved. And Jyoti believes that understanding comes from education and perspective taking. When pressed to explain more, Jyoti describes equality as coming from similar processes of

equal capabilities and cooperative labor that Pramila described. She identifies several social spheres that she imagines are open to men's and women's participation where men and women need to be equal:

**Jyoti:** I think equality between men and women means that as much as men can work, the women also can do the same things. The way men contribute for their family and household, women also can contribute the same. The way men can participate into social and community activities, women also can participate. As much as men earn, women also can earn.

Jyoti speaks confidently about this and said “actually, not” when asked if she had equality in her own home. While thinking of herself as very independent, she said it was only “somewhat like me” to want an exciting life, before adding, “I want to be courageous without risk.” This annotation captures Jyoti as someone who aspires to live a “courageous,” meaningful life, albeit one where she has control. Her self-confidence and imaginings of her life lead her to know concretely what she desires, but she also recognizes that she has not yet obtained these desires.

The type of courageousness Jyoti describes is akin to agency; she wants to have choice and control in her life and is taking steps to ensure that. Jyoti is employed in a store that sells beauty products and she was my only respondent that wore modern Western clothing (tight-fitting jeans and a striped sweater) and not traditional Nepali clothes. But she wants to mitigate risks; her empowerment takes form still within the bounds of acceptability for someone in her social position (Kabeer 1999). Jyoti is young, educated (she has an IA, +2 after her SLC), Brahmin, and living in close proximity to an urban center in Chitwan. Her age, caste, education, and lack of rurality or reliance on agriculture insulate her from more-constrained gender expectations than her contemporaries in much more rural regions, with less education, or in less advantaged ethno-caste positions.

#### 4.8.3. *Constrained Expectations*

Bandana is a 27-year old Brahmin who also has her IA (+2 years of education after her SLC). She lives in a more rural, but not the most remote, part of Western Chitwan. Bandana shares some social characteristics with Jyoti but differs on others. Although she is a contemporary of Jyoti's, Bandana experiences more strict gender expectations in her family. She explains the differences in how men and women are treated in her household and community,

**Bandana:** There is [gender] differentiation in our family and community. For instance, if I want to go somewhere first, I need to get all the household work done; only then am I allowed to go. But for men, if they want to go, they are free to go. And if a woman talks or walks with another man then the people will consider it negatively. Even if it is a healthy conversation between man and woman, people will still say bad things about the woman. So there is still a lot of differentiation between men and women.

Bandana understands and articulates the different standards for freedom of movement and socialization for men and women and recognizes that differentiation, as she puts it, persists and results in different expectations of men and women. The classic patriarchy (Kandiyoti 1988) that governs gender ideologies in Nepal is evident in responses like this, about what men and women should do. It is evident from my interviews in the descriptions of labor and what each gender *should* do, that men have a broader and less defined set of tasks and expectations than women. Bandana describes having some mobility, but it is conditional on her chores. Bandana presents these expectations as one sided, as men's mobility is not tied to their chores or duties. Such narrow expectations of women are likely to influence women's sense of self, although Bandana, perhaps due to her education, is cognizant of the lack of parity in these gendered expectations. Even if her sense of self and her sense of capabilities is insulated from this double standard, her opportunities to wield her agency are more limited.

Bandana is aware of the expectations of her by her family and household members, as well as in her community, which she demonstrates in the excerpt above. The narrow expectations of women that Bandana describes might constrict even further in migration as men's absence creates movement of women outside the home. Women may become responsible for tasks outside the home such as errands for medical reasons, banking, shopping, or the like. Indeed, Bandana understands these restrictions as related to changes from migration and a concern by more-powerful household member's worries over women's movements.

**Interviewer:** Are there any changes in the social rules, culture or traditions because of the trend of migration abroad?

**Bandana:** Yes, there are some changes. *They don't want daughters-in-law to go outside and even the husbands don't want their wives go outside and adopt new life styles. Husbands think their wives should be taking care of their house.* (emphasis added)

Here Bandana reports that migration has changed broader social expectations of women, and those changes restrict women's movements. The expectations of women as housebound and under the authority of in-laws and husbands is a retrenchment in expectations, a move towards more strictly enforced pre-migration norms at a time when many women are finding men's absence compels them to need to tend to family matters outside the home. Both in-laws and husbands hold these expectations, which may be related to a worry over loss of power or control, or concern that women have access to other men and lifestyle choices (such as new clothing) through more unsupervised time and financial means. But this restriction does not happen in isolation of expansion, but rather in reaction to or anticipation of it, in line with other scholarship in Nepal that finds a similar gendered response to changes and women's mobility (Adhikari & Hopley 2015; McEvoy, et al. 2012).

#### 4.8.4. Broadening and Narrowing in Different Social Arenas

As the data show so far, expansion in gendered expectations often come with caveats or differ for different social groups. Similarly, narrowed gendered expectations are sometimes viewed as reactionary or reflect tightening patriarchal norms. My data also suggests that narrowing expectations mostly pertain to external expectations of how a woman should act; there is no direct evidence that men's absence is linked with women feeling they are less capable than before his departure, even if they sometimes feel pressure to be successful in handling many new tasks. So far, my evidence supports the idea that gender is embedded at multiple levels of social life and that changes are not uniform across groups, one-directional, or without rippling effects and counter-effects.

Despite Nepal's low ranking on the Gender Equality Index, many respondents report that, on the whole, their lives are not nearly as restricted as in previous generations. It is common for respondents to explain the relative freedom and equality women have now by comparing the present to previous strict rules expecting women to remain in the home and in service to the in-laws. In one focus group with mostly Dalit and Hill ethnic women, a Dalit respondent called Sarita, who was 54-years-olds shows this in her statement.

**Sarita:** Mostly now men and women are equal. Women are also capable, they got there by thinking, 'I also can do the same as men.'... The only difference is in marriage... When a husband and wife separate the father has a right to keep children, this is different. Mothers should get the rights of fathers... They can walk freely, they don't have to cover their faces like in other countries. Many things are good in Nepal for women, only women were not able to get a modern education in the back days, but nowadays it is good. Women can be minister and even president! (laughter)

Sarita charts changes in women's options and describes them as an expansion not only from Nepal's past (which she, as a 54-year-old, would remember) but also from other countries (such as Saudi Arabia, where her husband has been for 10 years). Importantly, she directly attributes



these expansions to women's expectations of themselves ("I also can do the same as men") and their capabilities. But she also sees expectations of women by others changing and uses increasing access to education and women's participation in high government offices to make this point, even if she also finds it amusing. For Sarita, expectations of the self drives changes that lead to expectations of others changing. But this broadening of gender relations is squared by the restrictions women continue to face in rights, particularly around marriage, divorce, and custody of children and assets. The boundaries of acceptability have moved, but not in all arenas.

There are parallels between Sarita's reflections during the focus group in Chitwan and an interview with Sushila, a 40-year-old Brahmin woman in the hills of Kaski district. She also compares Nepali women to Gulf Countries and also talks of rights gains and continuing challenges for women. Like Sarita, it is likely that her views are shaped by accounts of other countries from her husband in Bahrain. In her interview she lamented that she never worked, despite having some qualifications to do so.

**Sushila:** I have a box of certificates of teaching, tailoring, and others, but life slips from my hands... here are a lot of challenges. Others say that nowadays women have a lot of happiness but, although we are more educated, it is still hard to face the dowry system and other [factors]. If women were financially independent, it would be better. If we are capable it is better, but if we are dependent on others, it is bad.

**Interviewer:** What is good for women in Nepal?

**Sushila:** Some things are good, and some are bad... (*laughter*) we have freedom. We have rights of 50% [meaning: half or equal to men] and it is not like that in Muslim countries (*pause*). We have freedom but equally we have difficulties.

Sushila's personal regrets in her life are disempowering for her. She was unable to use her agency to leverage her resources (trainings, skills) towards an achievement (working and financial independence). Sushila believes it would be better for women to be capable and to work towards financial independence, and that it is bad to be dependent. Sushila is dependent on her husband's earning and lacks the empowerment that "slipped" from her hands when she had

opportunities through trainings. Sushila does not directly blame herself and acknowledges the structural constraints that challenge women, such as the dowry system, but she communicates a sense of self that has limited agency. Her expectations of herself and her capabilities have fallen short of her hopes and she does not see herself as capable and independent, but rather dependent. She does not dwell on this disempowerment she feels, instead she changes her reference and views the narrow expectations of women as broader in Nepal than they are compared to Nepal's past or Gulf Countries. By shifting focus to external expectations in comparison to other countries, Sushila can limit the extent to which she focuses on her own lack of choice, independence, and limited internal expectations.

Sushila's acknowledgement of restrictions for women is like when Sarita verbalizes that marriage and custody laws are uneven, before clarifying that women are now capable. Despite that many women felt capable, especially because of the work they do, there is acknowledgement by many women that they do not have equal representation or opportunities. Women in Nepal do not have equal rates of education or access to education, paid labor, or legal rights such as land inheritance or ownership (NPC 2014; Agarwal 1994). Some women discuss this, and others do not. I interviewed Kopila in the Tanahū district in the Hills. She is a direct and confident young woman of 25 who is a primary school teacher. She speaks poignantly about issues and understands the improvements in women's lives from the past are not yet at parity.

**Kopila:** Women are backwards compared to men in many things. Even in community social meetings we can find fewer women. This may be due to her household work, because of this there is also a problem in getting a job or going far for work. Here are a lot of challenges for women.

“Backwards,” in this context, means “behind” rather than opposite or worse from, as it might seem to imply. Kopila recognizes that women are lagging behind men in representation in civic meetings and the workforce or their options for work locations. She suggests that this may be

due to the high household labor expectations of women. While Sarita and Sushila emphasize structural and macro-level expectations of women as limiting, Kopila hones in on the immediate and household expectations as limiting women's options and representations outside of their households. Later, Kopila said that "equality is when freedom is given to women also." Kopila does not think that women have the freedoms that men do, and also conceptualizes freedom as something that is given. This view of freedom as designated by others suggests that external expectations and norms are the resource that women need in order to have empowerment and agency. In Kopila's conception of women's options, internal expectations and aspirations that women hold are secondary to external expectations for obtaining achievements and agency.

For many women, their expectations of themselves and their aspirations were linked closely to expectations by family in the form of support. The critical role of "family support" for women's success was recurring. Namrata, a 25-year-old Magar woman with an unsure and quiet demeanor held her relaxed toddler during an interview in a remote hilltop village of Tanahū district. Unlike her fellow villagers Anchal and Nita, she was less sure of what women need to succeed. She did not answer what women need to be successful and, when prompted eventually said, "I don't know what women need to be successful, but I know they need support at home." While Namrata, who lives a quiet life tending to her garden and household, is unsure of what specifically women need to be successful and capable, she is certain that it would not be possible for women to do so without the support of their family. She shows the intimate way that women's expectations of themselves and their capabilities are determined in part by how they anticipate their family supporting their actions and how they act on those expectations.

I have few examples of conflict in families over support or expectations from interviews or observations, but I do have a poignant example of generational differences in expectations that

played out during my interview with Nita, the respondent from the excerpts included above. I asked her how she will help her daughter realize her capabilities, and she said that she will not let her marry before age 18 and will make sure she has an education. Nita, who married before age 18 and has minimal education, has expanded expectations of herself due to her husband's absence, which has perhaps allowed her to imagine even broader expectations for her small daughter who slept suspended in a hammock rigged from a shawl tied between porch posts. As Nita expresses these wishes, her mother-in-law chimed in with more traditional expectations of her granddaughter: "Good food, good clothes, then it will be good. And good education." Nita's mother-in-law's expectations of her granddaughter are traditional and reflect conventional wisdom for the quality of life everyone is striving for: quality food and clothes are all you need. She adds education almost as an afterthought. Expectations that education is important, and important for daughters and sons, is a recent change in this village, as my interlocutor explained. She said that everyone who is around 40 years old or older came of age at a time when education was seen as a waste of time and money if it was possible to have "full bellies" without an education. Migration, the infusion of capital, and moves away from reliance on agriculture are shifting that norm and with it, the external expectations that others, particularly parents, may have for the next generation's education.

Taken together, these examples of no changes, of narrowing, and of expanding expectations, both internal and external, give us a picture of how gender relations may change. Sometimes, as in the case of Priyanka, these changes amount to empowerment through a successful combination of resources, agency, and achievement, which also appeared to change her husband's view of what Priyanka could do. In other instances, male out-migration primarily affected internal expectations; Nita's capacity for hard agricultural work, for example, gave rise

to new expectations of herself and altered aspirations for her daughter. For other women, like Jyoti, expanding expectations may be tempered by a calculation of the risks involved with testing social norms, which can self-limit the scope of one's "agency." Taken together, the stories of these women illustrate how women's ability to make choices that help them realize their capabilities vary based on region, social location, and the expectations of others in their household.

Expectations of oneself expand best with family support, according to my respondent, affirming that households are important institutions and social locations for gender relations, equality, and empowerment, particularly in traditional patriarchal societies like Nepal. Next, I will explore the *pasal*, or the family-owned shop or store, to explore the movement of internal and external expectations in spheres associated with women's economic and community participation.

#### **4.9 Localized Markets**

Migration is changing the scale, range, and character of local economies in Nepal through economic remittances. These have a significant impact on the material conditions of Nepali's day-to-day lives; families have more resources available, which changes their living standards and sources of income which may encourage departure from subsistence agriculture (Sharma, et al. 2014). A popular economic strategy that I documented in my research in Chitwan district was in the establishment of small shops, called *pasal* in Nepali, which serve their neighborhoods with basic goods, functioning much like a bodega or local convenience store in the US. The selling of goods is increasingly necessary as families leave subsistence agriculture and rely on purchased

goods for daily food consumption. *Pasal* are a growing entity that fills a growing niche as capital flows into Nepal's previously agrarian-based economy.

Among the 50 households I conducted interviews with in Chitwan district, 15 had stores built into their homes, nearby, or in the form of a small wooden kiosks that look like a chicken coop that would sit in front of the home. These kiosks fold up to be closed boxes but, when opened, can seat one person and the merchandise inside. This kind of *pasal* does not require renovation or conversation of a concrete home to create or operate; but it is more permanent and requires investment of capital in a deeper way than other market activities women may participate in. Remittances and capital in the area also mean more families have money to spend on items such as processed foods like ramen, chips, and cookies in addition to mobile phone refill cards, vegetables, rice, and items like toothbrushes, combs, single-use shampoo and conditioners, gum, and betel leaves (used like chewing tobacco). Some or all of these are typical *pasal* items, and each *pasal* carries slightly different items so the community needs can be cobbled together across several shops.

While I note the frequency of *pasal* throughout my fieldwork, I regularly spent time in four *pasal* all connected to one family in my longest homestay. The majority of my data draw from spending hours per day, at different times, in the *pasal* in one homestay, which I use as an exemplar of *pasal* more generally. My host parents live in a small concrete house with three bedrooms and a *pasal* that is centrally located in the village center, across a playing field from the Hindu temples. The left half of the squat orange house with royal blue trim is the *pasal*; it has a rolling garage-style door that, when open, reveals a large table that abuts a glass counter filled with goods. When closed, it is the family kitchen and eating space because the only stove in the house is behind the counter, a two-burner portable countertop gas stove. A permit for the store

hangs on one wall depicting its legal owner in a stone-faced photo, my usually warm and smiling host-mom Lopika, a 42-year-old Brahmin woman who insists I call her *Mami* (pronounced “mommy”) and calls me her *chhori* (daughter). Lopika opened this store when they renovated their house with money from my older host brother’s migration to Afghanistan. They rely on the income from the *pasal*, do not participate in agriculture, and my kind-hearted host father Anand does not work.

#### 4.9.1. Gendered patterns in customer interactions

There are busy and slow times at the *pasal* and a rotating set of regular customers, family and extended kin, friends, and village acquaintances. When there are customers in the morning and afternoon Lopika can often be found behind the counter cooking up simple snacks (called *khaja*) like ramen and *chiya* (milk tea, called chai in the US) for customers. The morning and evening customers who stay, eat, and sometimes smoke or drink are overwhelmingly men who work as wage laborers or farmers and they come for meals, to be social, or to have a rest. Sometimes customers do not come to the *pasal* be served at all; their visits are social, and they hang around and sit on the porch to pass the time. If the visitors are women, they might sit in the hall that joins the store with the house with Mami and me, hoping to catch a breeze during the hot part of the day.

Women use the *pasal* in two major ways: they buy goods, or they use it socially. They almost never have meals or even tea. When women visit the *pasal*, they stay longer and interact with others and Lopika more than the customers who are (non-kin) men. Men use the *pasal* differently than women; some use it as a store to meet needs, others use it as a café, and still others as bar for solitary drinking or in pairs (often out of sight in the backyard). Men are more likely to linger but not necessarily to interact or socialize, or at least in the same ways that

women do. How an actor uses the space shapes, to an extent, the valence of their interactions in the space and with others who share that space with them. *Pasal* are a key social space where gendered expectations emerge and can shift.

#### 4.9.2. *Proprietorship, hosting, and shifting external expectations*

The *pasal*'s gendered patterns of customer use and type of interaction place Lopika, as the owner and primary operator, in a position where she complies with existing norms governing gender relations. But Lopika is also operating autonomously in an economic market, which stands to broaden her resource and agency through new skills and feelings of capability. Lopika walks a line between social host and autonomous proprietor that suggests that *pasal* as social spaces comprise a place where proprietors, who are often women in their homes, draw on different cognitions in their dynamics than if they were hosting guests in their homes socially. Being a proprietor is different than being a host. Hosting visitors that are family or kin means hierarchy can be invoked and displayed with certain ritual greetings made to the most powerful or senior in the interaction. A host makes tea and might even bring a small snack for guests. They conjure up plastic molded chairs out of seemingly nowhere to seat guests the moment they cross the threshold onto the porch, commanding them to sit.

While a proprietor is expected to make customers comfortable, the standards are looser; they might still bring snacks or seats, but not immediately. More likely, proprietors wait for patrons to settle themselves in and will only bring tea when asked and it becomes a transaction. If a proprietor is busy with other matters, they may tell their patrons to wait or explain that they are busy and to come back. This happened in three separate interviews in Chitwan; the respondents I was interviewing waved away the customers (all men, in these cases) who were



standing and waiting with money in hand asking to be served. When the potential customers were women, they usually took a seat and listened to the interview without interrupting or asking to be served. These gendered interactions with proprietors suggest the expectations men and women have of women proprietors is different; men still had expectations of how women should interact with them, but women were in a social space that allowed them the choice and agency to take control over when they would assist men, as their customers. This is an example of women exercising choice by triangulating agency and resources towards achievements and ultimately a degree of empowerment as Kabeer (1999) describes. The transactional nature of capitalist exchanges gives women alternative social roles that allow them to interact with men on a more equal plane than when they occupy social positions defined only by household and family roles. Such interactions of proprietorship are a departure and expansion from what would be expected of women if they had been hosts in their homes.

With men as customers, Lopika slips into a formalized version of her usually smiling and outgoing self. Her encounters with male customers are normative— her comments are shorter than with family or women customers – but she still makes conversation and adds commentary to men’s conversations in ways not grounded in subservience or obsequiousness. For Lopika, working in an economic setting generates transactions with men that are less gendered than if she were hosting these men as guests in her home. However, her interactions with male customers are different than those with women or male kin. This suggests the expectations other have of her shapes her interactions and possibly her internal expectations. When Lopika has mostly women in the store, she holds a position of leader and proprietor that is agentic and demonstrates confidence and self-assuredness. She controls conversation, is the first to laugh, and generally determines the valence of the visits women make to the store by engaging, or not, in lively

conversation. The differences in interactional styles could be because of gendered expectations. Lopika feels closer friendship with the women who visit, but the animation in her style of interacting also suggests that among women her internal expectations are different. She steps more easily into a position of leadership that fades but endures among men; this suggests she imagines herself as a central to the village because of her role in the *pasal* and therefore interacts with men fairly directly. This cognitive agency helps Lopika leverage and grow the social and economic resources she has from the *pasal*.

In Nepal, where customs of gender and hospitality expect much of women's attention and labor, store proprietorship allows some relief and can refigure expectations of women when they are in that role. Women can slide into the position of passive host or at least monetize their host-like duties. However, these gendered social exchanges of proprietors and customers fit within the larger social milieu and do not upend external expectations of women. Yet *pasal* are a space for the process of shifting gendered expectations because they are so central to social and community dynamics. *Pasal* are one way that new habits and differing expectations diffuse to alter social dynamics and allow for a re-bargaining with patriarchy by shifting the implicit scripts that men and women draw on for interactions and around women's labor (Kandiyoti 1988).

#### *4.9.3. Internal expectations and limitations of change*

*Pasal* are a social location that captures the tactics that women employ as they navigate a changing economic landscape in Nepal. Proprietorship expands and alters what women do in a social space that leads to different kinds of interactions with community members. These interactions can represent shifts in external expectations of women, but what impact does ownership have on women's internal expectations and what are the limitations of this social space? Women's internal expectations are also shifted, both among proprietors and the women

community members who visit *pasal*. For women patrons, the *pasal* gives them the pretense of a social visit that is not a hosted visit and is more informal. Men customarily have free reign of places to socialize and women have fewer spaces physically outside their own homes to socialize and less time due to their long and varied regular household labor, but *pasal* present opportunities for shifts in these gendered social landscapes. Even though *pasal* are physically located in the home or on the property, the way the space is used transforms and creates a new kind of locality in which women interact with each other and community members differently.

Stores such as Lopika's occupy a unique and growing social space for women to socialize and exchange information informally, outside of the host-guest dynamic without violating the community-norms for women's time use. These interactions allow for information sharing, which is a resource women can use towards empowerment. Women may discuss worries over health (theirs or that of family members) or share resources (such as strategies for decision-making), information about upcoming events or meetings of women's savings groups (small groups sponsored by banks that teach basic financial strategies to women) or help with women who cannot read with paperwork or interpreting documentation.

Some diffusion of information is non-verbal, such as how a store is actually owned and operated. As more women open *pasal*, others see how they operate and may aspire to their own. Aspirations of ownership are evidence of a broadening sense of one's capabilities and suggests support from family or household as well. In fact, Shruthi, a 30-year old Gurung woman interviewed in Kaski district while sewing at a women's skill co-operative factory said one of the biggest limitations in her life was her family not allowing her to open a *pasal*. Her family's expectations of her were powerful in limiting her agency, especially when considering that they lived in a neighboring district and not a shared household. Their expectations of her and what

was appropriate market-behavior for her influenced her economic prospects as well as her agency. Her family begrudgingly accepted her employment in a women's skill development factory only after they saw how much the earnings helped their family's economic position. The concern over perceptions of women who earn was also evident in an interview with Monlam, a mountain guide whose mother said, "Now I have a son, not a daughter" when she began to lead westerners up Nepal's famed trekking routes near her natal village. Her mother only accepted her employment when she was on the first all-women team to summit Annapurna IV, a 24,688-foot-tall mountain in Nepal.

Given the form some traditional attitudes by family can take of women's employment, the wider acceptance of the *pasal* as a viable economic strategy becomes more evident. Operating a store is a way that women can contribute directly to the generation and growth of capital in their households more directly than if they earned wages outside of the home. While this work in a *pasal* can broaden expectations, *pasal* can help keep women tied to their homes too. *Pasal* are nearly always run from a family's home or property and the operation of a shop keeps women at or near the home. Close proximity to the home can still color interactions, even transactional ones, in a gendered manner. Because *pasal* often are part of or next to homes, patterns of family and market life can blur for the proprietors. Shops can be "open" because women are often home and doing household chores and can be summoned away from their chores by potential customers.

I witnessed this during several interviews and found gendered patterns in who expects to be able interrupt women's work and make demands of them. Men were the only customers who interrupted women. This echoed a broader pattern in interviews where the majority of interruptions by curious community or household members were made by men while women

were more likely to listen and try to understand what was happening without asking until after the interview was completed. The exchanges that take place between women shopkeepers and male customers might revise expectations of women, but the extent of these shifts is limited by women's ability to run the store without leaving home. Even re-stocking goods is a delivery service performed by young men who travel from village to village on their motorbikes selling goods wholesale.

*Pasal* keep women at home and make it easy to know where women are or can be found, which can limit the sense of autonomy that may help broaden women's internal expectations. Further, while women are participating in the market and perform labor that is valued, they are not paid wages for this work; rather, the earnings from the store are directly funneled into family coffers. Women's labor as operators of *pasal*, while revalued in novel ways, rarely receives a wage. In this way, *pasal* are unlikely to be the panacea for women's liberation. Rather, they are more likely sites of re-bargaining with patriarchy (Kandiyoti 1988); offering more favorable terms for women's lives in the form of expanded expectations and credit for generating additional household income without fully undoing the system or even the association of women with households.

Some women described the whole endeavor of their *pasal* as more of a project to alleviate boredom than as an entrepreneurial foray into a new kind of capital and household dynamic they use as a resource for their own empowerment.

Kali, a 39-year-old woman from the Tharu ethnicity (Terai ethnic), described her store as *time pass*, the phrase Nepalis use to describe what they do to keep from being bored.

**Kali:** I used to have livestock but once my husband went abroad, he told me not to keep livestock because it was a burden to me. I would say that is the change for me [with his absence]. And you might have seen my small shop there; it is like time pass to me. When my daughter went to school, I felt bored, so this shop

helps me to time pass.

For Kali, her *pasal* gives her something to do that is more manageable than handling livestock without her husband's help. She implemented this strategy of managing boredom because of her husband's absence; his income and her free time allowed the change, but only on the condition that she abandon care of the livestock. Although among women Kali was assertive, laughing heartily with a husky voice and making jokes, in her interview she described dynamics that revealed her husband's expectations of her as based around her obedience to his wishes. Her expectations of herself and her capabilities, though perhaps increased by her *pasal*, are limited by her husband's resistance to her independence. Her actions that represent an expansion of expectations, such as managing large decisions, were met by her husband's skepticism and scorn about spending. Kali is limited by how the *pasal* still keeps her close to home as an individual form of time pass her husband wanted her to do, rather than an agentic move into the market made by imagining herself as capable of running a store. Her own internal expectations of herself may have grown and benefited, but she remains trapped in narrow and normative external gendered expectations, particularly by her husband.

The *pasal* are important social locations for re-bargaining with patriarchy through shifted gender expectations, but there are limits to the changes they spur. *Pasal* expand the boundaries of expectations by creating space for different kinds of gendered interactions, by building skills in management and operations, and by creating space for women to share information and ideas in a new social context. They are an important feature of social life and allow women to contribute economically to their households, which increases their agency and resources. However, gender expectations do not disappear in *pasal*, they continue to be called upon in transactions between men and women proprietors, and *pasal* also can limit women's mobility

and keep them close to the home. In short, *pasal* capture the social processes of change, the push and pull of expansion and constriction, in expectations in a singular locality that is both physically within and socially beyond the household.

#### **4.10 Conclusion**

This chapter was motivated by questions looking to understand how men's absence due to migration affects women's gendered expectations of themselves and others' expectations of them, with a focus on variations in distinct social locations. I identified four possible gendered responses to men's out-migration: 1) broadening of women's expectations, 2) no changes to expectations, 3) narrowing of or retrenchment in expectations, or 4) a combination of expansion and constriction. I viewed expectations as a dual process that involves an interface between the internal expectations women hold for themselves and the external expectations that others have of them. Each contribute to aspects of empowerment in different ways and broadens the understanding of empowerment as something beyond agency. External expectations can be enlisted as resource and internal expectations contribute to agency, together they are linked to capability and achievement. I used the *gendered geographies of power* framework to situate these different aspects of change in social spaces and across different contexts and types of individuals.

I find only some evidence that migration does not change women's expectations of themselves or their capabilities. Rather, as expected, the majority of my findings indicate that women are changing practices in reaction to men's absence, which broaden their sense of self and can influence others to view women as more capable. Other reactions to male out-migration constrained women through doubled-down traditional expectations of obsequiousness and that

they would remain in the household. Most often, individuals experience an expansion in some social realms, but resistance and constriction in others. This pattern is consistent with evidence of a “re-bargaining” with patriarchy (Kandiyoti 1988), where some alternatives to patriarchal gender relations take root, but gendered expectations are consolidated in other realms, particularly those related to mobility or movements away from the household or immediate community. My research shows that when internal and external expectations are broadened, women are empowered to make use of the resources available to them through their own agency and capabilities. Sometimes internal and external expectations move at different rates or in different directions, which complicates the social dynamics women navigate.

The process of empowerment varies across social spaces (between the household and localized markets) and across structural positions that mediate opportunities. Ethno-caste, education levels, locality (such as Hills or Plains), and joint or nuclear households are all factors associated with differences in agency, choice, and expectations. Additionally, some individual differences related to personality, initiative and cognitive agency were found between individuals occupying similar social locations based on the criteria just named. Despite the variation in outcomes by social position, one commonality is that the feeling of support by family is integral to women’s expectations of themselves as capable and feeling capable is closely linked to feeling that there is equality. Generally, there is agreement with the idea that Nepal has relative gender equality in households. This conclusion is perhaps being fueled by out-migration to areas like the Persian Gulf. Nepali migrants and migrant families perceive Persian Gulf countries as more gender discriminatory, which may have implications for their internal expectations of themselves and the returned migrants’ external expectations of them.



I find that *pasal* or family-operated stores are a kind of social niche or location wherein one can observe these social dynamics of internal and external expectations in a single social setting. *Pasal* are important to community life and increasingly so, due to changes in local economies stemming in part from migration. Customers of *pasal* enjoy the easy access to desirable and necessary goods as well as a social setting that builds network and community ties. For women especially, the *pasal* is a setting for informal social gathering outside of the home but within the parameters of social acceptability. Furthermore, women often operate these stores, which increases their skills in management, expands their social networks, and increases their expectations of themselves based on these capabilities and also family support of their entrepreneurial ambitions. However, *pasal*, by virtue of being operated from homes, also keep women in the home and can limit their mobility in their communities.

The data to support these claims come from multiple regions and methods of collection. However, there are limits to how far I can generalize my findings. The districts of my fieldwork, particularly Chitwan, are more developed than many regions of Nepal. Therefore my observations on the widespread presence of *pasal* and women-operated *pasal* may not be representative of lesser developed regions, or less populated regions, of the country. Furthermore, because the importance of *pasal* was an emergent finding in my data, rather than what I set out to study, I cannot speak to the representativeness of Lopika's *pasal* to all stores in the region and I must confine these findings to an example of how a place can embody broader social dynamics and processes. Because this has the potential to influence my results, I try to confine my analysis of *pasal* as an important and embedded social space where processes unfold, rather than a cause or outcome of those social processes.

Despite these limitations, this research and these data are important for understanding how migration-related men's absence influences women's gendered expectations of themselves and by others. The gendered impacts of migration, particularly on migrant wives in sending locations, is a growing area of research where complex dynamics of gender, age, social position, ethnicity, class, and resources are at play. My work attempts to unearth and understand this complexity and in doing so points to the importance of developing multi-faceted policy responses to men's migration. Women, even as they experience expansions in roles, tasks, and expectations, face constraints, resistance, and retrenchment in what is expected of them. Women's expectations of themselves and their capabilities are always squared by their anticipation of their family's expectations of them and this can be a site of tension, conflict, or misunderstanding. Local, regional, and national level responses to migration should develop programming for everyone, not just women, that can foster an expanded view of women's capabilities and agency and helps re-set gender expectations in ways that promote women's empowerment.

## 5.1 Main Findings

This dissertation examines the impacts of men's absence on women's experiences to understand how beliefs and ideas about gender relations are affected by migration. I examine beliefs about men's and women's household authority by ethno-caste and educational attainment, women's strategic decision-making, and internal and external expectations of women in households and *pasal* (family-owned shops).

In Chapter 2, I use quantitative and qualitative measures to find that higher educational attainment is associated with lower rates of agreement on traditional beliefs about men's and women's household authority. The rates of agreement also vary by ethno-caste. I analyze responses to interview questions that examine gendered beliefs and find that individuals use different types of description, or frames, to discuss their beliefs based on ethno-caste and educational attainment. Some groups describe beliefs about women's household authority in terms of roles, and others in terms of experiences. Each frame is associated with varying levels of individual agency, as illustrated through their interactional styles. For example, women with some education were the most restrained while women with low levels of education were more talkative. The most educated women expressed themselves in more nuanced ways, drawing on abstract concepts and generalized social lenses.

In Chapter 3, I find that women take on decision-making with varying degrees of independence or comfort. The act of decision-making, even if in consultation with an absent husband or in-laws, is a social opportunity for women than can increase their decision-making power. However, even when women are the strategic decision-makers in the household, they are

still often communicating with their husband, which can limit their power and control. Few women who make major decisions actually claimed to hold the decision-making power. Instead, they are more likely to downplay the significance of their decisions. As such, I argue that women might think of their decisions as part of a migration strategy that is made within a context of constraint and necessity, rather than a renegotiation of household power dynamics.

In Chapter 4, I investigate women's internal expectations of themselves and others' external expectations of women across social location and spatial realms (Pessar & Mahler 2003). I suggest, in line with the work of Pessar and Mahler (2003), that differences in women's internal and external expectations can be understood by looking at variations in women's empowerment, as measured through cognitive agency and how women use agency, women's access to and use of resources, and women's achievements. I find that changes to gendered expectations happen along four pathways: they do not change, they expand beyond what was once typical, they narrow to pre-migration norms, or they both expand and contract in different social realms. I also find that both internal and external gendered expectations vary by social location and agency. External and internal expectations react to change differently in different circumstances, a dynamic that I explore in more depth using the case of localized markets and family-owned stores (*pasal*).

Together, these chapters combine to show that changes to women's lives during men's migration absences are complex, multi-sited, and occur at multiple social levels. I establish patterns of similarities and differences by ethno-caste, education level, region, household type, age, and individual factors related to cognitive agency. As literature on gender and migration shows, aspects of men's absence are linked to empowerment, agency, and control over resources for women. But these gains are sometimes met by increased scrutiny, decreased mobility, and

other limitations related to normative and traditional gender expectations. This research shows how migration and shifts in gender relations are linked processes that affect the families, households, and communities of migrants and non-migrants in sending locations. The complexity of these social systems and their embedded and nested structures create a dynamic environment where changes are neither linear nor uniform and that women and men navigate them by drawing on the tools available based on their social stations.

## **5.2 Limitations**

There are limitations to these studies and findings. As previously mentioned, these data draw from districts in Nepal with middle to higher levels of development, human capital, and women's access to resources. As such, the findings may represent an optimistic read of how men's absence might affect women's empowerment and expand gender relations towards increasing equity. The women in my study may have more access to resources and agency than women in poorer, more conservative, and more remote regions of Nepal.

The way that interviews were conducted removed women from their tasks at hand and often family and kin were nearby, perhaps inhibiting discussions of power dynamics within the household between women and their in-laws or returned husbands. I used data from homestays in an effort to gather this information that was potentially omitted from interviews. While homestays did yield understanding of social life that women considered either too mundane or too personal to say in an interview, I was still treated as a guest and some aspects of women's lives and negotiations remained hidden or partially hidden from me as a guest and researcher in their private home and as a non-native Nepali speaker.

As a foreign researcher lacking fluency in Nepali, I was reliant on translators and transcriptionists to obtain my interview data. It is possible that some meanings, phrasing, or culturally significant markers were misinterpreted on my part, or omitted by the translator. I took steps to mitigate this issue, which are outlined in Appendix B. However, my upbringing in the west has shaped my cognitive frameworks indelibly, and I therefore may draw different conclusions than a Nepali researcher would have. Alternatively, my status as an outsider has given me access to spaces and the ability to ask questions that may have been unavailable or unwanted coming from local.

Finally, one of the better ways to understand agency is comparatively and across time. While 10-months in Nepal allowed me to get a thorough and broad sweep in my areas of focus, I was not able to look deeply at changes across time in just a few selected families or areas of life.

### **5.3 Future Research**

Migration is a particularly interesting social force that can shift the social logics that shape gender and gender inequality. Future research should continue to explore resources, agency, and achievements as components and factors of women's empowerment. Specifically, longitudinal research is needed to better understand how women's agency changes over time and across men's migration trajectories of absence and return. This would dovetail nicely with the findings in this study and the others I reference.

More specifically, research in Nepal could focus on the gender, ethno-caste, and class patterns of hired labor to replace absent men's labor. This was a recurring peripheral theme in my data that warrants a focused study and examination—ideally using mixed methods to capture depth and breadth of this interesting socio-cultural and economic trend.

Another interesting finding in my data that warrants deeper study is an analysis of power and cooperative dynamics in kin relationships, particularly same-sex kin relationship in joint-households. While the relationship between husbands and wives is interesting for understanding patriarchy in households and its impacts on women's lives; it is clear from my findings that women's relationships with their mothers-in-law are significant for how gender relations unfold in households. I witnessed strained social dynamics in one homestay comprised of three wives of three brothers and the unmarried adult younger sister of the brothers. There were alliances and power plays among the sisters-in-law; three women who were not related but were married to three brothers that were absent. While it was interesting to observe these complex social negotiations and moments of jockeying for power, I also recognized that such dynamics were beyond the scope of this project and required more socio-linguistic fluency than I had.

Finally, as is common to suggest in research on the impacts of migration in sending locations, it would be fruitful to study the children of labor migrants. In Nepal, a generation of millions of children are growing up with absent parents, usually fathers. This demographic fact is the cause for much worry, debate, and concern in domestic discussions and newspapers in Nepal. It would be especially interesting to see how young people internalize gender expectations when migration can skew the traditional model of the gendered division of household labor. It is easy to imagine that seeing mothers accomplish tasks associated with fathers, power, and control would be influential to a child's thinking. Just as easy as it is to imagine an alternative scenario, where mothers with absent husbands rely on their sons and daughters to assist them in household labor in gender-normative ways. Likely both are happening. Such social patterns coincide with other results of migration, such as increases in wealth, education, and economic security; all of

which will have long-term impacts on gender ideologies, beliefs, and expectations for the generation coming of age presently.

#### **5.4 Implications**

This research answers the calls of scholars before me to expand what we know about how migration affects women's lives in sending locations, and to do so in ways that both draw on micro-level processes and also examine women's agency. This research adds to gender scholarship by augmenting what we know about how gender relations shift during times of migration, what patriarchal bargains look like in the midst of their very re-bargaining, and how women often must leverage change in terms of the (often male-dominated) structures that are already in place. Additionally, this research adds to what we know about Nepal's specific migration flows, and, more broadly, migration sending locations and the complex social embeddedness that social transformations filter through.

Nepal is both like and unlike other countries. It is a unique setting, in part due to how its geography has created such distinct and varied social groups in a relatively small land area. Unlike many countries that are developing and other South Asian countries, Nepal was never colonized directly. Despite a history of control over their own government, Nepal must manage the difficult diplomatic reality of being physically sandwiched the world's two most populous countries, India and China, both of which are major economies and world powers. Despite these factors that place Nepal in a unique position geo-politically, it has similarities to other countries as well. Nepal has different "peer" countries across the different measurements of large-scale social processes like development indexes, poverty, rates of out-migration, remittances as percentage of GDP, gender inequality, and cultural similarity. While the geography, history, and



social compositions that make Nepal a unique context are indeed distinct, we can generalize from them. My findings can be taken and applied to locations that are peers of Nepal along some or several of the social indicators and parameters named above.

Accordingly, I recommend that policy or social responses to labor migration that focus on sending countries use the take-aways from this research to guide them. Women, like any social group or category, are not monolithic; their experiences are heavily shaped by the characteristics that are structured by ethnicity, class, caste, gender, citizenship, sexuality, ability, and likely other context-specific facets. Maintaining this perspective while designing support and programming for skills-development, health interventions, educational and literacy programs, and fertility would go a long way in the efficacy of these programs. What helps some women may not help all of them; paying attention to women's framing of their own experiences and beliefs will aid those working towards women's empowerment programming and supporting women in ways that are useful and in areas where different communities could most benefit.

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**Appendix A: Tables***Table 11. Districts Comparison on Human Development measures, Nepal 2011*

<b>District</b>	<b>HDI</b>	<b>Population</b>	<b>Avg. Life Expectancy</b>	<b>Adult % Literate</b>	<b>Avg. Years of Schooling</b>	<b>Per Capita Income (USD)</b>
Chitwan	0.551	579,984	69.78	72.23	5.01	1,537
Tanahū	0.506	323,288	70.14	68.32	4.17	1,072
Kaski	0.576	492,098	70.51	78.57	5.76	1,561
Kathmandu	0.632	174,4240	68.55	84.04	7.05	2,764
Lalitpur	0.601	468,132	70.30	79.68	6.47	1,894
<b>National Average</b>	<b>0.49</b>	<b>26,494,504</b>	<b>68.8</b>	<b>59.57</b>	<b>3.9</b>	<b>1,160</b>

*Table 12. District Population Change and Number of Absentees, Nepal, 2001 & 2011*

<b>District Name</b>	<b>District Population</b>	<b>Absentees Abroad</b>	<b>Absentees 2011 (%)</b>	<b>Absentees 2001 (%)</b>	<b>Pop. Change 2001 to 2011</b>
Chitwan (Terai)	579,984	50,421	8.7	3.0	22.9
Tanahū (Hills)	323,288	46,387	14.3	8.0	2.6
Kaski (Hills)	492,098	57,305	11.6	7.1	29.3
Kathmandu (Urban)	1,744,240	99,805	5.7	1.7	61.2
Lalitpur (Semi-Urban)	468,132	24,386	5.2	1.5	38.6

(Sharma 2014)

*Table 13. Ethno-Caste Groups from Research: Size, Percent of Total Population, and Absentees, Nepal, 2011*

<b>Group Name</b>	<b>Group Category</b>	<b>Percent of Pop.</b>	<b>Total Group Population</b>	<b>Group % Absent</b>	<b>Absent Population</b>
Chettri	Higher Caste Hindu	16.6	4,398,053	7.5	331,613
Brahmin	Higher Caste Hindu	12.2	3,226,903	7.8	250,085
Magar	Hill Ethnic	7.1	1,887,733	9.9	186,130
Tharu	Terai Ethnic	6.6	1,737,470	3.3	57,510
Tamang	Hill Ethnic	5.8	1,539,830	6.4	99,011
Newar	Newar/Hill Ethnic	5.0	1,321,933	5.4	71,120
Kami	Lower Caste Hindu/Dalit	4.8	1,258,554	10.7	134,791
Gurung	Hill Ethnic	2.0	522,641	12.7	66,271
Damai	Lower Caste Hindu/Dalit	1.8	472,623	9.8	46,530
Sarki	Lower Caste Hindu/Dalit	1.4	374,816	10.4	38,943
Kumal	Terai Ethnic	0.46	121,196	8.2	9,914
Darai	Terai Ethnic	0.063	16,789	8.8	1,476
Bote	Terai Ethnic	0.039	10,397	8.4	869

Table 14. District Population Change and Number of Absentees, Nepal, 2001 & 2011

District Name	District Population	Absentees Abroad	Absentees 2011 (%)	Absentees 2001 (%)	Pop. Change 2001 to 2011
Chitwan (Terai)	579,984	50,421	8.7	3.0	22.9
Tanahū (Hills)	323,288	46,387	14.3	8.0	2.6
Kaski (Hills)	492,098	57,305	11.6	7.1	29.3
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Lalitpur (Semi-Urban)	468,132	24,386	5.2	1.5	38.6

(Sharma 2014)

Table 15. Chitwan Respondents Summary on Selected Demographic Data, Nepal, 2016-17

Ethno-Caste Category	Number of Respondents	Median Age	Median (approx.) Age at Marriage	Median Years Married	Median Education Grade Completed	Median Years Husband Abroad
Brahmin/Chhetri	21	34	20	13	11 (SLC)	11
Dalit	10	36	14.5	22	5	7
Hill Ethnic	14	36.5	20.8	17.5	8	14.5
Newar	3	36	21	10	8	1.5
Terai Ethnic	13	31	17	16	7	7
<b>Total Chitwan</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>7.5</b>
Women	48	33.5	18	13.5	8	7
Men	13	41	24	15	10	10

Table 16. Ethno-Caste Representation, CVFS, Nepal, 2008

Ethno-Caste	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Dalit	530	10.72	10.72
Terai Ethnic	1,018	20.59	31.30
Hill Ethnic	844	17.07	48.37
Newar	320	6.47	54.84
Brahmin/Chhetri	2,200	44.49	99.33
Muslim	15	0.30	99.64
Other Indian	18	0.36	100.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>4,945</b>	<b>100.00</b>	

Table 17. Education Level Distribution, CVFS, Nepal, 2008

Education Level	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Limited Literacy	1,732	35.02	35.03
Some Schooling	2,220	44.89	79.92
Credentialed	993	20.09	100.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>4,945</b>	<b>100.00</b>	

Table 18. Education Distribution by Grade Completed, CVFS, Nepal, 2008

<b>Education Year Completed</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Cumulative Percent</b>
0 (No School)	1,391	28.13	28.13
1	49	0.99	29.12
2	102	2.06	31.18
3	190	3.84	35.03
4	187	3.78	38.81
5	331	6.69	45.50
6	257	5.20	50.70
7	416	8.41	59.11
8	409	8.27	67.38
9	340	6.88	74.26
10	280	5.66	79.92
11 (SLC)	562	11.37	91.28
12 (IA/+2)	304	6.15	97.43
14 (BA)	99	2.00	99.43
16 (MA)	28	0.57	100.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>4,945</b>	<b>100.00</b>	

## **Appendix B: Methodology**

### ***Partnership with Institute for Social and Environmental Research (ISER)***

The Institute for Social and Environmental Research (ISER) in Chitwan, Nepal administers the Chitwan Valley Family Study (CVFS), which I referenced when building my interview protocol to ensure I use phrasing that is culturally comprehensible in Nepal and for comparison between my sample and the CVFS data. ISER provided me with translators, transcription, a guesthouse to stay in, and transport to interviews, which they helped set up. The fees for all of this were covered by my Fulbright Fellowship.

ISER has been operating as a research institute with the aim of developing knowledge and building capacity in Chitwan for more than two decades. It was formed as a joint endeavor among Nepalis and an American researcher with ties to the region and nearby agricultural and technical university (Rampur University). ISER's research program and reach has grown over the years and it is an important job provider in the region, particularly for educated young people.

The CVFS households are drawn from a large swath of Western Chitwan, demarcated by the land between Bharatpur/Narayanghat city (the capital of Chitwan District) to the north and the district-boundary Narayani river on the west, the road to the tourist city of Sauraha on the east, and the Chitwan National Park to the South. It is about 30 km long and 15-20 km wide triangular shaped region that takes about one and a half hours to go north to south, and one hour to go east to west on a motorbike, depending on road quality and season; it is depicted in Figures 2 and 3 (next page). The western border is the Narayani river, across which is Lumbini district. The southern border is Chitwan National Park, which borders India in an open border, across which is a nationally protected tiger reserve that manages land cooperatively with Nepal.

Figure 2. Chitwan District and CVFS Study Area, situated within map of Nepal

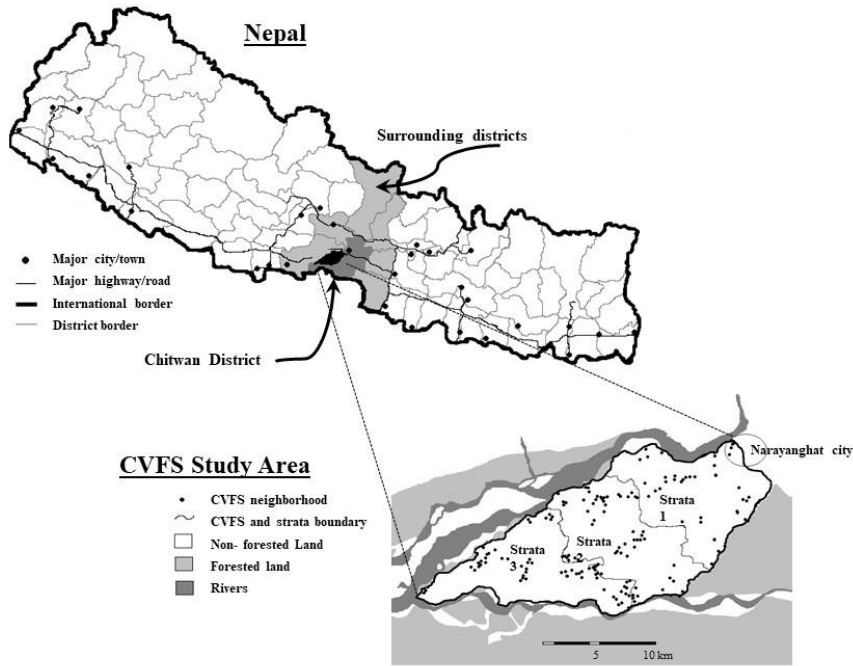
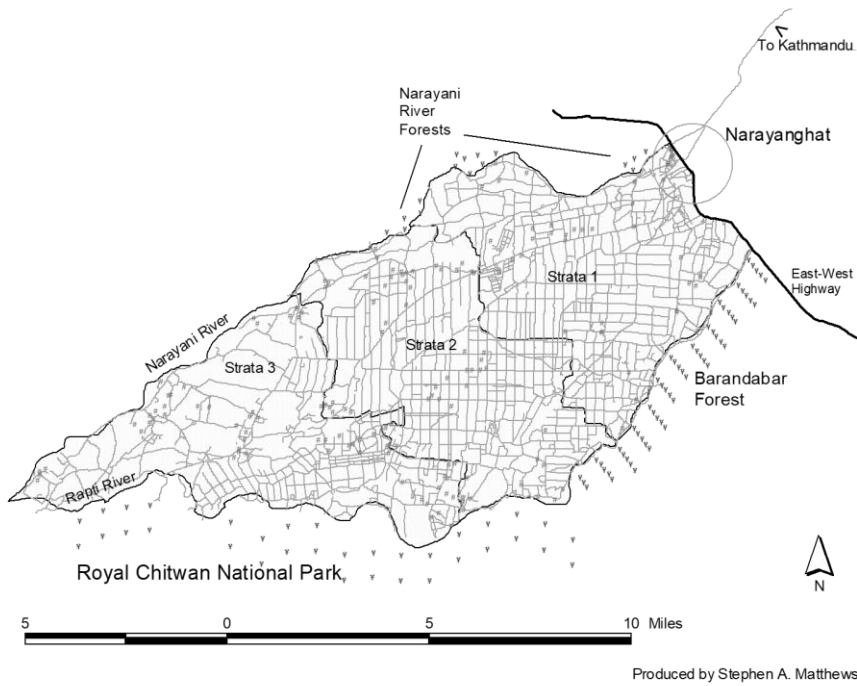


Figure 3. Western Chitwan District and CVFS Study Area, Nepal



(Matthews, ISER)

A team of ISER researchers cover the area on motorbikes taking surveys and using a number of small district offices as their headquarters. ISER divides the area into three stratum, north to south: Strata 1 is urban or semi-urban, Strata 2 is more rural but has access to more paved roads and urban centers, and Strata 3 is the most rural and farthest out from the city and closest to the Indian border and national park. My own research stayed within these boundaries and did not sample from CVFS neighborhoods to avoid fatiguing those respondents who already respond to questionnaires monthly.

ISER's main office is in Strata 1 in the village of Fulbari, just outside the larger village Mangalpur, about 9 kilometers from Bharatpur city. ISER is generally known to those who live in Fulbari and Mangalpur, and many people would ask me, when I went on long walks in these villages, if I was part of the "office". The buildings of ISER are large structures that are visible across the flat and open fields from many areas. Surprisingly, some neighbors (even those who lived within a single field-length) did not know what ISER was and would ask what we do there. The name did not carry very much recognition among villagers beyond the two closest villages. Often, when doing interviews, individuals would assume (most likely because of my presence as a foreigner) that we represented an NGO and therefore some would ask if we were paying them for interviews or information. Respondents did not receive recompense, except in homestays, where they were paid just over the typical "going-rate" for the region, as determined by the few homestays organized for western tourists to Chitwan National Park.

### *In the Field: Chitwan*

At ISER I paid for my transportation, my translators by the day, and for transcriptions by the interview. The scale of pay is high and was quoted in US Dollars, which reflects the western researchers they cater to. The dynamics I had with my translators was interesting because it was both a co-worker relationship but also monetized. This likely affected the relationship I had with my translators—I was paying them for a service that was necessary as I would have been unable to get the data that I did without them. But our relationship worked as a partnership as much as it can with the presence of money; they have expertise in the area and made recommendations on what was best and where to go, but I had approval over decisions and was consulted. For example, when it was difficult to find enough “before migration” interviews in the Hill ethnic ethno-caste category, I made the decision about what to do based on the options they laid out. They did not always relate to me as a PI, my relationship with my translators varied between familial to team-like to professional. In general, ISER staff hedged at treating me more like a student than faculty. For instance, I was never offered alcohol with dinner until there were other American professors present at the guest house, where I was hesitantly offered beer with dinner, after a furtive glance at the American professors to see if they had a negative reaction.

I worked with three ISER translators in total. The first, Prem, was a senior researcher at ISER and he facilitated my first five focus groups in Chitwan and brought me to my first homestay. He has a quiet, slightly awkward, but ultimately calm and serene demeanor that puts people at ease. He was a terrific focus group facilitator because of his patient way of listening and asking follow-up questions in an open-ended way. I had prepared the focus group interview guide and could follow along as the conversation evolved, although my focus groups with him were soon after my arrival, when my language skills were more limited. After those focus



groups, we would listen together to the recording and he verbally translated while I took notes. I later received formal transcriptions of these discussions that I reconciled with my notes.

Neera was the second translator I worked with. She lived nearby to the ISER facility in the main town center in Mangalpur. Neera is a Gurung (Hill ethnic) woman who spoke limited English. She is kind and patient and always dresses in very nice clothing (even when a bit impractical for the dusty or muddy roads). Neera is one of the few women I knew to drive a motorbike. She and I had immediate and good rapport based primarily on smiles, laughing about my clumsy dismounts from the motorbike, and her acting like an “auntie” to me. We frequently went together to get tea at her friend’s tea stand in the mornings before heading out to conduct interviews. We sometimes stopped by Neera’s house, which was under construction and required her to check on the progress of that project. Because I went to her home, I also came to know her 15-year-old daughter, who speaks impeccable English. Her daughter helped set up a focus group among her peers at her school. In interviews, Neera had a way of making women feel at ease and projected active listening, which was especially noticeable in the final two focus groups, which focused on women’s experiences and ideas about equality. Our limited ability to debrief as we left interviews was sometimes an issue, occasionally I would want to verify my understanding of something and there would be a communication barrier.

The third translator was Resham, who is a Darai (Terai ethnic). He translated half of my interviews. He speaks more English than Neera and has a somewhat jolly and direct disposition. I would occasionally be frustrated with him because, when doing couples interviews, he would focus on the men who were present, which would encourage them to talk more than the women we were there to interview. Sometimes he would even talk over women, as they finished what they were saying, although this did not usually appear to bother them, suggesting that it is not

uncommon. Resham was good at probing follow-up questions and using intonation to ask in a warm way, even if he sometimes would move through conversations quickly. I noted that all instances of a misunderstanding of a question (by respondents) that used a hypothetical scenario were in interviews Resham translated. However, not all of his interviews contained the misunderstanding, therefore I view this as a gendered effect, not a mistranslation. When misunderstood, respondents often espoused strong opinions about a woman hypothetically migrating without her family. When understood as I intended, respondents thought I was asking whether the hypothetical woman lived in Nepal or the US (with her family). While this data was interesting, I did not use it in my analysis because of its unreliability, although it did inform my thinking about gendered standards of migration. This gendered effect of mistranslation was something of a happy accident and helped me understand differences in translators by gender.

The translator team has an intimate knowledge of the region and which villages and neighborhoods tend to be populated with which ethno-caste groups. This was helpful in getting interviews that across ethno-caste. Their knowledge comes from interviewing for the CVFS and managing the interviewers for the CVFS that fan out across Western Chitwan. When taking lunch in field offices scattered across the three strata, we often saw these interviewers in the offices between interviews.

Most often, my interviews came from ‘cold calling’ in an area we sought out specifically because of the population that lived in the area. Occasionally interviews were arranged ahead of time. When we cold called, we would go to a targeted neighborhood and find a house with people outside (which is where people generally gather) and ask around if there were people who had migrated, who had returned, or were hoping to go (depending on what we were looking for) at the home or in the neighborhood. At first, this worried me because I was worried about being

rude or too forward, but it became clear that this was within the bounds of normalcy and my translators had done this many times before. One time, early in my fieldwork, a sudden heavy rain came while riding in a remote part of Strata 3 and Prem and I took shelter on someone's covered porch. She brought us tea and chairs and other motorbike riders joined us over the 15-minute monsoon before the rain stopped, we thanked the host and left. I share this story to illustrate the extent to which it is not strange to show up on someone's porch nor is it strange for that person to immediately begin hosting their guest, whether expected or not.

Traveling around to different neighborhoods was also interesting for understanding the geographic and social composition of both the strata and among the households with migrants. In wealthier neighborhoods, with new houses and larger lots, there were many potential families to interview. In poorer neighborhoods where the houses were smaller, not made from concrete, and not adjacent to fields, we found few people who knew of anyone abroad. Migration is a classed phenomenon, where some families lack resources to go abroad and wealthier families are able to send young workers to more "choice" destinations with higher wages and better treatment (Sharma, et al. 2014). Returned migrants told me that the EU (often via Portugal where it is easiest to get a residence permit) is best, then Korea or Japan (both of which require proficiency in those languages which precludes uneducated workers from trying), then Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Malaysia, Saudi Arabia, then India. Both Saudi Arabia and Malaysia are known to treat workers poorly. Working indoors in the Persian Gulf, as a security guard or driver for example, is more prestigious than outdoor labor such as construction or landscaping. Such understanding of prestige by destination is widely understood in Nepal, contributing to class differentiation among migrants and also, likely, to people not being forthcoming about failed attempts at migration.

Earlier in the interview process it was easier to find interviews because we were still populating the data from each group across the migration trajectory so we were flexible in which groups we focused on. Later on I needed only specific groups and migration-statuses to keep an even spread, so it became harder to find people. It was hardest to find the “before migration” families, partly because if a family member was trying to go abroad, they were perhaps not telling others in case they failed in their attempt. Even my own host brother told me he did not think he would migrate but, on my last day in the homestay, he went to the city for an interview for a job in Dubai, which he did not get. I asked him about it later and his evasive answers and apparent shame around this helped me see why some people keep this private.

When it was hard to find a specific group or migration status respondent, we sometimes had to try a few houses, slowly gathering information for a snowball sample from there. Occasionally people would direct us toward neighbors. More than once someone led us by foot or motorbike to a person they knew. We had a high rate of agreement for participation. Refusals often took the form of individuals being too busy but suggesting we could come back later if we wanted or offering a suggestion on another house to visit. When a person was busy but said we could come later, we sometimes did this and other times did not. When we approached houses as a cold call, we called into the front door and then, if there was no answer, often walked around the house to the backyard, where women are likely to be either cooking or cleaning or working in the field or garden.

When we approached a house, we asked if they have someone in their family abroad and then the details of the family to see if it was a fit. Ethno-caste was not generally asked but was known or inferred by my translators from a host of social indicators, some of which I was aware of and others I was not. I was often able to discern ethno-caste by name, neighborhood, style of

dress, religious decoration, and general appearance and would double check with my translator when we left the interview. Ethno-caste was confirmed by my translators at the end and only one incorrect inference was made in 50 interviews in Chitwan.

When a respondent agreed to participate, chairs were whisked out immediately and I was usually ushered to sit first and immediately, and in the preferential seat (the highest, most comfortable, or first available). Despite that this could be uncomfortable for me, it would have been rude to refuse. Respondents usually took the last choice seat, which may be on the ground, often on a foam pad, or in the sun. Where possible, respondents and my translators tried to keep me in the shade in the hot autumn and in the sun in the cold, foggy winter. The chairs were usually molded plastic lawn chairs or little wooden and macramé stools that are very common in every household. Sometimes the only seating was a foam mat on the floor or just the ground. Once we were established, the IRB permission was read out loud (because of low rates of literacy I used verbal ascension instead of written forms) and when respondents agreed, I started the recorder. Usually before this we did a brief intake that included name, age, educational attainment, number of children and their ages, household census, place of birth, and their husband's migrant destination, age, and educational attainment. All recordings contain no identifiable information.

Sometimes during interviews our presence resulted in a small crowd of curious family or neighbors. If they were particularly talkative, either talking to or over the respondent, we asked for space. Often the individual would back up about a yard or more, but sometimes they would leave all together. Occasionally, we relocated with the respondent to a more remote area on the property or indoors for privacy. Children were often around and sometimes mothers breast fed kids to keep them placated (even kids as old as 4 years old). Sometimes they gave them their

smart phones, toys, a packet of cookies, or a notebook and pencil for entertainment. Some kids sat quietly in their mother's laps for the length of the interview.

*In the Field: Comparison Districts*

When I was in Pokhara, Nepal's second city, for four weeks I worked at the ISER office, but I was there independently. I found and met with my own translator, Alisha, a Magar Hill ethnic woman from Kathmandu who was a university student. I was referred to her through a close contact, who knew her aunt. She spoke excellent English and had an interest in being a social worker – she was able to get class credit for our research trip and the data we collected together is available for her use. I paid for her bus ticket to Pokhara, where she met me and we did interviews for a few days. Then we went to her family village in Tanahū District, to stay with her aunt, an older divorced woman who lived alone. For these interviews I used a slightly different interview protocol, one more focused on women's experiences and perceptions of inequality; these can be compared in Appendix C. Alisha would ask a question and roughly paraphrase the answer to me and the interview followed a more semi-structured pattern in this way. Afterwards we would go through the recording and she would translate. These data are different but comparable with the Chitwan data, but also stand on their own.

My host auntie, as a well-liked community member, took us around to people she knew had migrant husbands for our interviews and facilitated introductions. Many of the women were somewhat laconic and I asked to meet with a talkative woman, regardless of migration status. I was taken to a mother of a migrant son who ran the only store in town, had a lot to say, and was involved in local politics as a leader.

The village in Tanahū was visibly affected by migration, there were very few men between the ages of 17 and 40 around. I was interested to live in a homestay where the absence

of a man was due to divorce and not migration as a comparison. Alas because divorce carries stigma (especially for women), I was unable to obtain very much information about her divorce and did not press the matter when given a terse answer. My host auntie was not met with scorn or stigmatization and, from what I understand, her ex-husband was abusive and she is not faulted for leaving him. She had no one to share in her work, however, and she commented that she was much weaker since her hysterectomy, which is relatively common for rural women in Nepal due to prolapsed uteruses related to hard labor soon after childbirth. When my host auntie is no longer capable of maintaining her house and land, she will move in with family in the city.

In Pokhara I interviewed the neighbors and friends of another “auntie,” the older sister of a host-mother in Chitwan that I had met at a family event. I also cold called a non-profit development organization aimed at teaching women skills while employing them to produce high-quality woven handicrafts. This resulted in six interviews with women and an informal interview with the founder. I was amazed we were able to show up unannounced be allowed to interview workers. I felt conflicted about this and wondered if this was because they thought this might result in positive press. On one hand it was a boon to my research and very interesting to see the work performed at this factory and the sense of importance and pride in their work that these women felt. On the other hand, I wondered if the workplace could have been doing more to protect or insulate the women from people wanting their time. Even though I did not have ill intentions and each interview was just 15 or 20 minutes, I felt aware that the workers could have had more protection from their managers. Alternatively, these women work in a textile factory and have the freedom to take unplanned time off of work for an interview. None hesitated to agree or asked permission from their manager, which suggests fair working conditions.

### ***Analytical Approach***

I will elaborate more on my analytical approach that I touched on in Chapter 1. Richards (2015) distinguishes between three forms of qualitative data coding: descriptive, topical, and analytical. The coding of my own data has gone through these stages and forms. Richards describes *descriptive coding* as more quantitative (2015:106) because it is about storing information about the cases. This process matches information to cases than it is about selecting material to code. *Topical Coding* is “labeling text according to its subject” to create codes that explain, at a more categorical level, what is occurring in the text. Meanwhile, *analytical coding* is the central aspect of the inquiry that leads to interpretation, theory generation, or affirmation. Saldaña (2009) similarly divides the process of coding into different processes or stages that get closer and closer to the heart of material. However, he describes it as *cycles* of coding where the *first cycle* may include codes for attributes, structures, descriptions, values, and in vivo codes. The *second cycle* codes for patterns or focused codes that are used to categorize coded data as an analytic strategy. Both strategies describe starting descriptively and attending to different aspects of the data and slowly and systematically honing in on the deeper analytic story. In my own analysis, I followed these approaches in similar ways, I will describe my process in regard to Richards’ framing, but I mention Saldaña’s approach because I used different cycles or waves of data within each stage of Richards’ coding approach.

For *descriptive coding* I first organized the documents, my spreadsheet of all the respondents, and my notes on chores and where migrants were working and what they were doing for work. I built out what resembles a small data set, with demographic and descriptive information for each. I began slicing it in different ways; I sorted the data to see how metrics varied by ethno-caste group, household type, location of migration, length of migration, age at



marriage, and so on. I tabulated responses to formulaic questions to generate an understanding of variation in responses by those same variables. I categorized chores and answers to questions about daily, weekly, and monthly chores for men and women in different ways. This process was beginning to quantify, organize, and group my vast data and respondents in ways to help direct my focus for how to make meaning of all the components.

My approach to descriptive coding helped me understand the parameters of my data for *topical coding*. The process of topical coding and categorizing my data occurred in a three waves or cycles. This process helped me understand that topical coding for my interviews, which were fairly formulaic, would need a logically organized coding scheme. For the second wave, I refined and expanded those codes to be more systematic and descriptive. I applied these codes only to the Chitwan interviews to see how well it fit or worked before using on my full data. The process of bringing these codes to more interviews helped me see where I had redundancy, too much specificity, or a useless code. I then refined these codes for the third wave. The third wave of my topical coding was done differently because I was very familiar with the content of the interviews by this point. After coding all Chitwan, Kaski, and Tanahū interviews and focus groups, with these codes I applied them to my homestay and observation notes. The participant observation codes required the generation of more codes, particularly those commenting on space, time use, and interactional styles.

By the end of the first cycle of coding my data descriptively and the three waves of topical codes, I had an exhaustive understanding of what is contained in my data in a way that is searchable and logical. But it was neither efficient nor deeply analytical. The process of *analytical coding* helped me better articulate that patterns and processes occurring. While the first cycles codes were describing what was being said or occurring in concrete terms, analytical

codes describe processes of social change related to power, control, opportunity, constraint, and interactions. They are analyses of what is occurring alongside the concrete statements being made. I mapped my codes and the relationships between descriptive, topical, and analytical codes to assemble a picture of what was happening and how certain concepts, beliefs, and positions were related across time, space, and groups. Mapping different relationships between concepts (rather than investigating a concept as a standalone island of information) allowed me to describe the patterns of relationships between modes of operating and certain outcomes or statements. All stages and forms coding was done in ATLAS.ti and some data and *descriptive codes* were managed in Microsoft Excel tables.

#### ***Data Collection: Interviews, Focus Groups, Homestays***

My research sample, taken with attention to diversity across ethno-caste, region, and migration status, allows me to make comparisons and is a relative strength of my data. The drawbacks are that my interview data are not my richest data, although they have breadth. My interviews function more like an annotated survey much of the time, and I often use it as such. My ethnographic observations, coupled with this data, are where my deeper analytical story lies.

In Chitwan, all translators read the interview protocol out loud to respondents, rarely deviating to follow-up, only sometimes repeating or giving an example when the respondent expresses confusion. This resulted in each interview having very similar structure and patterns of response which made comparison of answers straightforward.

During interviews, I noted how we came to our respondent (cold call or referred by neighbor) as well as description of the neighborhood, house and setting, and anything of note. I also noted what the respondent was wearing, their general body language and demeanor, three

key adjectives about them to jog my memory on their disposition (including, at times, if they reminded me of someone I knew as a quick heuristic). I continued taking notes throughout the interview so that there was no clear indicator to respondents on what I found interesting in their statements or surroundings. On the few occasions a respondent seemed conscious of or worried about my notetaking, I put my pen down and wrote what I could remember afterwards.

The guiding questions and protocols for my interviews and focus groups were meant to establish concrete changes for women and families of male labor migrants. However, relying solely on self-report to understand how household labor is accomplished and what tasks comprise household labor is insufficient. As an American raised in a non-agrarian context, it would be impossible for me to conceptualize changes in daily lives without sufficiently understanding what household labor means and how it is accomplished in typical Nepali homes.

I lived with five Nepali families in homestays. Homestays across regions and groups helped me establish aspects of life and chores that were consistent and divergent by group and place. All homestays were at least three-days, a time period that Lareau (2000) noted as significant for families to resume normal behaviors with fewer attempts to appear a certain way before researchers. I did not have translators during homestays, but instead relied on my Nepali and family members with some English. At times there were things I did not understand or wished to know more about. However, homestays were a better source of understanding structures of days and household tasks, gendered division of labor, how negotiations over daily decisions occurred, and the relationship of a household to a neighborhood or community. As a result, even with imperfect translation or unanswered questions, I found them tremendously rich sources of data and understanding. For example, I am limited in my ability to understand what is exchanged in social or decision-making interactions but am able to capture the social conditions

under which they occur. I was also able to understand how traditions and approaches to life, religion, and chores varied by region, household, and ethno-caste group. I also noted time use and the differences between labor and leisure for men and women.

In Chitwan, homestays were arranged ahead of time by ISER and I would be dropped off and picked up on a motorbike by ISER staff or translators. Upon arrival, my hosts and I would have a slow conversation to get to know each other in Nepali and English, I had a small photo album I would sometimes use to show my host family what my family, friends, house, street, and university look like back home as an ice breaker. I observed daily life and patterns and would ask if I could help with the work so I could learn about women's lives—often I was told I was a guest and to rest, not work. As a foreigner, I could walk a strange gendered line where I was excused from feminine-typed tasks and also gained access to typically masculine-typed spaces and activities. This came through in my exemption from helping in household chores, in invites to tour around by motorbike with male relatives, in access to all male bonding spaces during a family ritual “first rice feeding” ceremony, and in being permitted to spend extensive periods of time with my host brothers without inviting gossip or *backbiting* about indecency. But this time with my brothers was not fully outside the realm of discussion by others; both my host mother and aunt “joked” and then suggested more seriously that I should marry my younger host brother and bring him to the US. My refusal was met with a “well, I had to at least try and ask” response.

Homestays could be exhausting because everything is data and it required paying attention and mentally noting large and small happenings. It was unclear what was contributing to my analytic story, what was contributing to my understandings of Nepal, and what was an interesting detail but ultimately not useful data for my research. I would occasionally jot down notes during the day but mostly would write my field notes by headlamp late into the night. In

my first homestay I shared a bed with my pregnant host sister-in-law for the first three nights and I could not write full notes until her husband returned from abroad and she went back to their home in a nearby large village center. After the homestay I would transcribe all my notes to my laptop and then write a summary reflection of the entire experience that captured my emotional responses and early analysis. Only when I returned from homestays did I realize the emotional and physical toll they took and these reflections proved interesting data for my analysis.

While in my homestays, I did my best to exist somewhere between another household member and a fly on a wall. I politely resisted the ‘guest’ dynamic my hosts would try and establish, but it was a challenge because of strong cultural attachments to hospitality. For some groups in Nepal, people only accept help (or payment) on the third offer, I used this principle to guide my own interactions such that if my offer to help in a chore was denied on the third attempt, I backed down and accepted my assigned role as “guest” to avoid being rude. I was also able to help in many chores, from sweeping to laundry, from crop sorting to rice harvesting, from meal prep to dish clean up. When not helping, I followed different members of the household around as they went about their days. In some families I integrated more fluidly as a temporary quasi-family member than in others.

Some families were eager to have a guest from another country, to show me what their lives were like, and to learn about my life, too. Others were happy to host but did not approach the experience as anything more than an atypical week, rather than a chance to build connections. In one household with three absent brothers and their wives all sharing a home with their younger sister and parents there was social discord that leaked into my notes with more prominence with each passing day. My position as a guest with needs, such as being fed or offers to bathe, became a way that one of my *baauju* (sister-in-law) would try and compete with her

sisters-in-law. It was uncomfortable, confusing, and difficult to be used as a pawn in social dynamics that preceded my presence in their household and I slowly began to recognize. I ended up sustaining a severe cut to my finger that required medical intervention and a tetanus shot. This happened harvesting rice while distracted by the dynamics in the household and I elected to terminate the homestay a day early. I will add that this homestay began two days after the 2016 presidential election in the US and it was a stressful time to be out of contact with my world at home; which likely contributed to the response I had to the tense dynamics in the home. In this way, despite the 8,000 miles separation between home and Nepal, it is impossible for me, as an ethnographer, to remove myself from my identities and life that exist outside of my research.

### ***Motorbikes and Masala: Ethnographic Reflection***

My ten months in Nepal were deeply meaningful and transformative to my understandings of social change, globalization, development, and the human condition across time and place. As I spent many hours bouncing along dirt roads on the back of motorbikes, I would think about how all my greatest insights, of belonging, of observation, of analysis, felt like they were done from the backs of motorbikes. The other location of deep significance was meals and food, captured in the catchall term of ‘masala’. Masala is the spice mixtures made on mortar and pestles that are in all the major foods that made up my diet: *daal bhaat* (lentils and rice), *momos* (dumplings), and curries. And the masala is the mixture of Nepali life as I saw it with my own American interpretation. Of course motorbikes and masala are just one heuristic for me to organize the themes of my fieldwork mentally, but it provides a useful thematic overview for my ethnographic reflection, which could be sliced any number of ways.

In my research, the spaces that comprise my “field sites” were broad and varying. When in the field doing interviews, focus groups, or homestays, the field was more immediately the household, neighborhood, village, and region where I was. The boundaries of the social field are dictated by the people who lived there, by where they would go or not go and it was my job to try and understand those delineations. The way houses and villages are set up in Chitwan is a constant unfolding of clusters of houses, the village a person belongs to is as much about ethno-caste as it is about location or proximity to others. Such boundaries are both obvious (at visual inspection of layout) and not obvious (it takes time and familiarity to realize that some areas are not a place of socializing and others are). Mentally mapping these social fields in homestays was an important part of building my understanding of each place I was staying.

As an outsider to Nepal, I was learning and gaining information about the cultural context daily, in large and small interactions. For example, one time on the crowded “micro” (a privately owned and operated mini-bus that operates in urban environments), the conductor shifted the gender composition of the first two rows (which face each other and are very close together) after passengers disembarked and new ones boarded. The conductor took time to instruct different passengers to switch places so that women were next to women and men next to men. What is interesting about this is that it seemed relatively arbitrary to me—these rows sit facing each other and sharing the amount of leg room intended for just the forward-facing front row because the first row is a backwards-facing after-market bench that the driver installed to increase capacity. These 14 seaters regularly had upwards of 20 passengers. This gender separation was nominal and created a situation where men’s and women’s knees were slammed against each other and occasionally interlocking and where there is more eye contact with the

person across from you than next to you. That we were moved at all, and in the places we were put, told me about how gender is negotiated in every day public and anonymous encounters.

Being aware and analytical in my interactions and observations is a style of gathering data that suits my preference and personality to be an observer, especially in new places. While I can be quite extroverted and am happy to jump into a situation socially, I prefer to observe first. I like to understand what things mean to people, how they are used, and how interactions around people and objects are patterned. I prefer to have time and space to reflect and iteratively work through my thoughts and come to realizations over time. While in Nepal I was going through the world with both eyes open trying to mentally take notes for all kinds of things, as they add to my understanding of the context and place.

The aim of my dissertation has been to understand the social fields of the women who remain behind from their husbands during his migration— this means asking a lot of questions about their lives and also noticing what is not present in their lives. Where do they go and not go? Who do they spend time with? Who don't they spend time with? What places require permission to go and where can they move freely? What facilities and services are available to them? Where and how do they work? Where and how do they spend leisure time? Each time I was in a homestay I was operationalizing their social spaces to contextualize their responses and the data attached to them. In interviews, I did this in a smaller way, understanding who was around (neighbors, villagers, family), if they had a store, if they had a field or animals. Understanding all of this helps me understand the nature of their tasks, their days, and how lives change with the absence of their husbands. When they have to leave the house for an errand, how close or far is it? Does that change what they or others might think of that errand and movement? What do they think of me and what does that tell me about their assumptions and ideas?



At the time of my fieldwork, I was 30-years old and unmarried. 30 is an age where I would normally have several kids and maybe even teenagers in Nepal. It is important to note that many 30-year-olds in Nepal look older than I did, having lived lives defined by hard physical labor and living in a harsher climate. It is not considered rude to ask someone their age, so I was asked my age a lot and people were often very surprised I was 30. I believe I did not “look” 30 to them and that the absence of a husband or kids (the follow-up questions to nationality, age, and name) made me something of an anomaly to people. The women who were my age seemed older than me because of this. They looked older, with more wrinkles and bodies aged by hard living and hard work. My youthful looks in comparison, my different (generally western, occasionally Nepali) style of dress, and my status as a single woman made me feel younger. Women my age (and younger sometimes) treated me like a little sister or niece. Women I was more than 10-years older than treated me like a contemporary. I visited a festival with host-cousins who treated me like a peer but I was twice their age. It was a strange social position to occupy, but I took the cues from how others perceived me and reacted accordingly.

It was to my advantage to fall in as a daughter or sister or cousin in people’s perceptions of me. My placement was flexible to who I was living with. In some homestays my most immediate peer group were teenagers, which often left me feeling gawky and out of place and markedly different, feelings that reminded me of my own adolescence. It is important to note that teenagers in Nepal are different in the US, they are more integrated with family and community and seem less plagued by self-consciousness and awkwardness and angst that are tropes and trademarks of American teens. Conversely, many seem to walk with confidence and feel comfortable in their positions in family, friends, and community without compensating for insecurity with ostentatiousness as can happen in the US. In focus groups with youths, the girls

were more talkative and rambunctious than the boys. The teenage girls that were very shy in my fieldwork were often less educated and already in marriages and had stopped school before reaching the equivalent of high school in the US. In other households I was seen as a few years older, like a young daughter or sister about to be married. I was never given “full woman” status for I was neither married nor a mother and those are what help women come to power and identity in Nepali households (Ahearn 2001; Bennett 2002; Kandiyoti 1988).

I have talked a bit how I was perceived in villages or people I had just met. To Nepalis that cared about me, I was like a young family member that needed to be watched out for. My host brothers would be sure I had motorbike rides to and from their house instead of having me take the bus when I visited. Yet, by virtue of being in Nepal alone for research, I had also demonstrated bravery, self-reliance, and courage that earned me respect. My pursuit of a higher degree generally excused me from further admonishment from Nepalis about my old age and marital status. Often, I would say that after the degree I would be married, but first had to finish school. This answer was usually satisfactory, sometimes I would explain that it was different in the US and say that only half of my friends who were my age were married and fewer had kids.

I was often surprised at what Nepalis thought I could or could not do. For example, I was asked if I could swim, drive a car, and cook. All of which are regular activities of mine that I do not consider exceptional. Women rarely know how to swim in Nepal, many Nepalis do not know how to drive cars, and many Nepalis assume westerners cannot cook. My skills in these areas led to people being impressed, if a little doubtful that I was being honest. When I was allowed to cook for my friends and hosts after asking if I could prepare them a meal as a thank you and to introduce them to the closest approximation of burritos I could manage with Nepali ingredients, my host sister stood behind me the whole time as if supervising me. A similar event occurred in

the research center when the cook was ill and I asked to cook for myself instead of order food from town, which would have been cumbersome for whoever was sent to pick it up. The security guard hovered two feet behind me the entire time as if ready to intervene and take over if my simple meal of pasta and sautéed vegetables went awry. When I finished cooking, he sat next to me and watched me eat and then clean up, as if supervising those tasks too; it was uncomfortable. Alternatively, when I did not know how to do things, such as cut rice with a sickle or ride a motorbike with a heavy backpack (something I figured out by my second homestay), people were surprised in a way that made me feel inept and like I was lacking a very basic skill, as if I had asked how to tie my shoes. The experience of living at ISER and in a region where I rarely saw other westerners was isolating, at times. In those moments, the way I was perceived and treated, as either inept, anomalous, or like family, had a tremendous effect on my own sense of myself. I noted my personal feelings as I took fieldnotes, both to understand my own perceptions of these data and also as data in themselves. Mead's (1934) concept of the 'social self' was very evident to me in these times as I began to see myself very differently than ever before because my external context (and my place within it) had changed so much.

Throughout my ten months in Nepal I often felt like an outsider because I was seen that way. But compared to most westerners in Nepal, who are tourists, I was an insider and usually my first use of Nepali would shift me into a strange liminal space as an inside-outsider. I was regarded with attention and curiosity wherever I went and I came to expect it and was on-guard for it, replies about who I was and where I was going ready on my tongue. In Nepal, if someone is curious about where you came from, where you are headed, where you live—they will just ask. And so it became difficult, in Chitwan, to go for a walk without answering questions every

few minutes. It was strange to come back to the US and blend in, I had grown so used to feeling noticed that it was an adjustment to feel ordinary; a relief and also a strange sense of invisibility.

Feeling so seen made me even more conscious of being humble and gracious, knowing that others talked about me and my actions. Generally, the ISER staff members were very normal towards me in the field, but sometimes at the research center I felt like a celebrity. People I had not met would say hello or want to walk with me, would ask for my Facebook name. To this day any time I interact with a Nepali friend on Facebook I am met with a slew of requests from people I do not know. After a focus group at a school nearby town, where some of the kids knew me (and I had played soccer with a few) I was surrounded by children asking me questions, some slipping their hands into mine as I tried to back away and get air. All this contributed to a feeling that people expected something from me but I did not know what that was. At times I felt I was seen more like a game than a person. But, given the solitude of my time at the research center, generally I welcomed social interactions and most were positive, I chose to focus on feeling the welcoming intentions behind moments that might otherwise have felt invasive.

## Appendix C: Protocols

### *Interview Protocol: Chitwan District*

These questions are for families experiencing migration. The questions for families aspiring to have a migrant or with a returned migrant had slightly different forms and tense-use but are generally the same.

1. Since we're just meeting for the first time, it would be helpful to get a little bit of a sense of what your life is like, such as who you live with at home and where the rest of your family, both natal and marital, live.  
[Probes if given a short answer]:
  - a. How long have you been married for?
  - b. Do you have children?
  - c. Where do your in-laws live?
  - d. Where do your parents live?
  - e. Do your brothers or sisters live nearby?
  - f. Do you both have the same caste or ethnic identity? What is it/are they?
2. Where and when were you born?
3. In [your caste/ethnicity] are there clear and strict ideas about what women should do and what men should do in their families and communities? What about in your family?
4. Has your husband/father/son migrated? Where did he go? When did he leave?
5. How often do you talk to your husband/father/son? Tell me about the ways you keep in touch.
6. What do you talk about with him when you talk?
7. Do you make decisions without him? Which ones?
  - a. What is it like to make decisions while you're in distance?
8. What has changed in your household since your husband/father/son migrated?
  - a. What has stayed the same?
  - b. Who does the tasks that he usually does?
9. What are some of the activities that women in families like yours do in Nepal every day?
  - a. Every week? Every month? Occasionally?
    - i. How is this different with your husband/father/son gone?
    - ii. How might they change when he comes back?
    - iii. [For Women] Do you do anything that was explicitly your husband/father/son's tasks before he left?
      1. Do you think you will continue to do this work when he returns?
      2. What might the conversation about that sound like?
10. What are some activities that men in families like yours do in Nepal every day?
  - a. Every week? Every month? Occasionally?
    - i. How is this different with your husband/father/son gone?
    - ii. How might they change when he comes back?
    - iii. [For men] How would they/do they get done if/when you migrate?
      1. Would you expect to do these tasks again when you return? How would you feel if your wife/daughter/mother continued to do these when you returned?

11. Do you feel like migration has changed the way your family or people in your area do their everyday tasks?
  - a. Does migration change some of the social rules your family once followed?
    - i. Is it important to you to follow these ideas? Is it important to your spouse? To your parents? To your in-laws? To teach your children?
12. If you were to not follow these social rules, would anyone say anything to you about it? What would they say? Who would be most likely to say something?
13. When your husband/father/son migrated, who handled the money he sent?
  - a. When he returned, did that change?
  - b. What about attending meetings in the community that he used to attend?
  - c. What about the things he used to do around the house or farm?
14. Do any of these changes in particular the way men and women think about what it means to be a man or woman?
  - a. If so, which ones?
    - i. What changed about what you think about women or men? Why?
    - ii. Do you think your children might behave as adult men and women differently because of this? Why or why not?
15. Do you think about yourself in your family differently now? How so?
16. Do you think about your spouse or the meaning of family differently?
17. If I told you that I met a Nepali women that made most of the decisions in her households, had her husband helping with many chores, and she earned enough money to live on, while also being involved in a community organization, would you think this woman is more likely to be living in Nepal or America?
  - a. If she's living in Nepal, tell me about what you think her family is like.
    - i. What would it take for a woman to help get this arrangement?
  - b. If she's living in the US, tell me about what you think her family is like.
    - i. What would it take for a woman to help get this arrangement?
18. Do you think it is good, bad, or neither good nor bad that what men and women do in families changes when they have a family member leave Nepal?
  - a. Why? Can you explain?
19. Do you think these changes are likely to occur across all the castes and ethnicities and regions of Nepal?
  - a. What about Nepalis living in other countries?
20. Do you feel your children will grow and their family lives will be similar to yours?
  - a. What will be the same?
  - b. What will be different?
  - c. Why? Can you explain more?
21. When you picture the typical Nepali family living in the US, are they like yours? What are they like?
  - a. How are they like yours?
  - b. How are they different?
  - c. Is it important to be like them? Why?
22. I am going to give two statements that describe different kinds of people. Think about which one better describes you and see if you can think of a story that helps show which of these describe you best.
  - a. "I rather try something new, even if I don't know how it will turn out"

- b. "I like to do things the way I always do"
23. People have different ideas about how or why things happen to them. Do you agree or disagree with this statement: "lekheko matrai painchha, dekheo paidaina" [meaning: you can only have the things that are written on your forehead not the things you can see]?
24. How much is this description like you? Is it "A lot like you" or "Somewhat like you" or "Not really like you at all"?
- a. "I like to be free and not depend on others"
  - b. "I look for adventure and like taking risks"
  - c. "I want to have an exciting life"
  - d. "It is important to me to behave properly and avoid doing things people say are wrong"
  - e. "People should follow the rules, even if no one is watching"
  - f. "Every person should be treated equally"
  - g. "Thinking up new ideas and being creative is important to me"
  - h. "Tradition is important to me and I try to follow the customs handed down by my religion or family"
25. Do you think that household activities and labor are shared equally in your household?
- a. What would an equally shared household be like, in your opinion?
  - b. Do you know anyone who has this? What makes it work for that household?
26. Is there anything else that you want me to know or to tell me?
27. Do you have any questions for me about the research?

## *Hills Interview Protocol: Kaski & Tanahū Districts /Focus Group Protocol: Gender Equality*

### Demographic

1. Since we're just meeting for the first time, I have a few questions about your home life.
  - a. How old are you?
  - b. How long have you been married for?
  - c. How many children do you have?
  - d. Do you live with your in-laws?
2. What is the highest year of school you've finished? What about your spouse?

### Migration

3. I want to get some details about the migration of your husband.
  - a. Where did he go?
  - b. When did he leave?
  - c. When did he return?
  - d. While he was away, how often did he visit? How often did you talk?
  - e. What did he do for work there?

### Agriculture and Work

4. Did anything change about how much, how often, or how you accomplished agricultural work when you husband left?
  - a. What has changed since he returned?
  - b. If you were to leave agriculture, what would you do for income and food?
5. Do you ever work for daily wages?
  - a. Do you work more or less often for wages since your husband returned?

### Women's Lives

6. People tell me that everything has changed with migration. Can you tell me a little bit more about what that means? What changed in your household and community?
  - a. Did it change more when he left or when he returned? How so?
7. Do women in Nepal have more opportunities, fewer opportunities, or the same amount as when your own mother was your age?
  - b. What might be causing these changes?
8. What challenges do women face in Nepal?
  - c. Does migration make these challenges different than before?
9. What is good for women in Nepal?
  - d. Does migration make these good things easier or harder to find?
10. What do women in Nepal need to be successful?
  - e. Sometimes people tell me women need support at home to be successful. Can you tell me about a time you or a friend was supported at home?
11. Tell me about a time you felt capable, or strong, or powerful.
12. Tell me about a time you felt constrained, or limited, or stuck.
13. In your opinion, what is equality between men and women?



### ***Focus Group Protocol: Household Changes***

1. Who in your families has migrated? Where did they go? How long have they been gone?
2. How often do you talk to your husband/father/son? Tell me about the ways you keep in touch.
3. What do you talk about with him when you talk?
4. Do you make decisions? What is it like to make decisions while you're in distance?
5. What has changed in your household since your husband/father/son migrated?
  - a. What has stayed the same?
  - b. Who does the tasks that he usually does?
6. Do you feel like migration has changed the way people in your area do their everyday tasks?
  - a. Does it change some of the social rules your community once followed?
    - i. Is it important to you to follow these ideas? Is it important to your spouse? To your parents? To your in-laws? To teach your children?
7. Do any of these changes in particular the way men and women think about what it means to be a man or woman?
  - a. If so, which ones?
    - i. What changed about what you think about women or men?
      1. Why?
      2. Do you think your children might behave as adult men and women differently because of this? Why or why not?
8. If you were to not follow these social rules, would anyone say anything to you about it? What would they say? Who would be most likely to say something?
9. Do you think about yourself in your family differently now? How so?
10. Do you think about your spouse or the meaning of family differently?
11. If I told you that I met a Nepali women that made most of the decisions in her households, had her husband helping with many chores, and she earned enough money to live on, while also being involved in a community organization, would you think this woman is more likely to be living in Nepal or America?
  - a. If she's living in Nepal, tell me about what you think her family is like.
    - i. What would it take for a woman to help get this arrangement?
  - b. If she's living in the US, tell me about what you think her family is like.
    - i. What would it take for a woman to help get this arrangement?
12. Do you feel your children will grow and their family lives will be similar to yours?
  - a. What will be the same?
  - b. What will be different?
  - c. Why? Can you explain more?
13. Do you think it is good, bad, or neither good nor bad that what men and women do in families changes when they have a family member leave Nepal?
  - a. Why? Can you explain?
14. Do you think these changes are likely to occur across all the castes and ethnicities and regions of Nepal?
  - a. What about Nepalis living in other countries?
15. When you picture the typical Nepali family living in the US, are they like yours? What are they like?

- a. How are they like yours?
  - b. How are they different?
  - c. Is it important to be like them? Why?
16. People have different ideas about how or why things happen to them. Do you agree or disagree with this statement: “lekheko matrai painchha, dekheo paidaina” [meaning: you can only have the things that are written on your forehead not the things you can see]?
17. Is there anything else that you want me to know or to tell me?
18. Do you have any questions for me about the research?

## VITA

Andrea (Ande) Reisman was raised in Weston, Massachusetts. She completed her Bachelor of Arts degree Magna Cum Laude and with University Honors in Peace and Conflict Studies at Colgate University in 2008. She also had a minor concentration in Middle Eastern Studies and Islamic Civilization. She completed her Master of Arts degree in Sociology from the University of Washington in 2012. She is a 2016-17 Fulbright Fellow to Nepal on a US Student Research grant where she conducted fieldwork for this dissertation. In 2018 she earned a certificate in Qualitative Methods from the University of Washington. This dissertation is her final requirement for a Doctor of Philosophy degree in Sociology from the University of Washington.