Geographien Südasiens

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Between Exploitation and Economic Opportunity? Identities of Male Nepalese Labor Migrants in the Gulf Region

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CONTENTS

ABBREVIATIONS

CBS	Central Bureau of Statistics, Government of Nepal
DoFE	Department of Foreign Employment, Nepal
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HMG Nepal	His Majesty's Government of Nepal
ILO	International Labor Organization
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IMO	International Organization for Migration
ITUC	International Trade Union Confederation
SLC	School Leaving Certificate, final examination of the secondary school system in Nepal (following grade 10)
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UN	United Nations

FIGURES

1 INTRODUCTION

Shrestha: What mechanism do you have to help those people who are in trouble, who have come [to Qatar] to work, but are in trouble?
Sharma: To help them, we first request the company, […] and some companies allow them to go home, some don't. As long as the company does not grant the [permit], that Nepalese has no chance of leaving the country.
Shrestha: But then it is completely like an open jail, isn't it?
Sharma: It *is* an open jail. It is not *like* one, it *is* one.

(BBC Media Action, 2013)

The above quote is taken from an interview with Maya Kumari Sharma, the Nepalese ambassador to Qatar at the time. As part of a report on national television, popular Nepalese journalist Narayan Shrestha had questioned this leading representative about the current situation of Nepalese migrant laborers in Qatar. While the interview was broadcast in the Nepali language in late April of this year, it was only several months later, when the British newspaper 'The Guardian' published a report on "Qatar's World Cup 'slaves'", that the ambassador's statement was brought into the international limelight (Pattisson, 2013). Aside from contributing to an avalanche of global media attention on the situation of foreign laborers in Qatar, the incident had serious consequences for the ambassador. One day after the article was published, the Nepalese government recalled Sharma, with an official spokesperson stating that her "comments and behavior [had been] out of the diplomatic norms" (qut. in Sharma & Hepinstall, 2013).

You could say that in these summer months of 2013, the world suddenly began paying attention to something which had actually been going on for many years. Within only a few decades, countries in the Arab Gulf experienced massive transformations in their economies, societies, infrastructures, and population. Cities such as Doha, Abu Dhabi, and Riyadh have risen to become virtual beacons of wealth, glamor, and modernity. What has long remained out of Western media attention is that this rapid development has largely been facilitated by the employment of millions of non-native Arabs, South East Asians, and South Asians, who have been working as foreign laborers throughout the Gulf region. It is only in the light of the upcoming soccer World Cup of 2022, which is going to be held in Qatar, that international media have truly turned an eye on this massive transnational labor arrangement.

Since the 'Guardian' reported on human rights violations and a death toll of 44 Nepalese workers within several weeks, the spotlight has been particularly turned on the scores of Nepalese workers who have been employed in the region. Within only few days, the predicament of Nepalese foreign laborers was investigated by news outlets all over the world. Countless articles and video reports have told appalling stories of men who died as a result of inhumane and hazardous working conditions (among others, see AFP, 2013; Booth et al., 2013; Eberle et al., 2013; Montague, 2013; Smith-Spark et al., 2013; Rosenthal, 2013). As a result, the past months have seen a lively global debate on the issue, including statements of various stakeholders, politicians, and the spread of online activist projects (see Nyangmi, 2013). Sharan Burrow, the General Secretary of the International Trade Union Confederation, publicly described the Gulf countries as "fundamentally slave states", being at the bottom end in regards of workers' rights (qut. in Montague, 2013). Suresh Man Shrestha, secretary of the Nepalese Ministry of Labor, was quoted stating that "[e]very day, one to three bodies of Nepali migrant workers are sent back to Nepal", and that within one year, "726 bodies have returned, mostly from the Middle East" (qut. in Smith-Spark et al., 2013). By contrast, Qatari authorities have denied all accusations and retorted that most of their workers' deaths had occurred due to 'natural causes' such as heart-related incidents (ibid.). They refrained, however, from answering how such 'natural causes' of death could be so widespread among previously health-screened 20- to 35-year-olds.

While reports of bonded labor, slavery, abuse, and exploitation have gained massive global attention, Nepalese labor migration continues. Every year, large numbers of men and women leave their country in search for work abroad – not only in the Gulf region, but also in India, Malaysia, Japan, South Korea, Australia, as well as parts of Europe and America. The phenomenon is so ubiquitous that in any Nepalese city, every person you meet on the street can name at least one relative or friend who currently works in a foreign country or has just returned from one. In every second household, at least one person is currently absent from home – most of them men, and many of them abroad (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2009: p. 151). When entering a rural village, one often meets women, elderly people, and children, while the male population is curiously invisible. At the same time, Nepal seems to experience a construction boom, with newly built houses popping up around every corner. With this physical proof of the money their husbands and sons have earned abroad, many Nepalese continue to see foreign employment as their prime ticket to wealth, their best shot at development, or simply as a lifestyle that has become completely normal to them.

The goal of the present thesis is to investigate the practice of male Nepalese labor migration to the Gulf region. It is based on empirical research conducted in Nepal during autumn and winter of 2012. While remaining empirically grounded, this work also attempts to contribute theoretically to a political geographical perspective on transnational labor migration. As such, it suggests a critical postcolonial approach to the study of transmigration and transnational labor. This implies an explicit focus on the power effects and politics of differentiation which underlie both the practices and meanings of a transnational labor arrangement. It is argued that the recently introduced concept of 'regimes of mobility'[1] can prove an exciting theoretical framework for this endeavor. By considering the intertwined dimensions of practices, meaning, and power, and by allowing conceptual space to both micro and macro scale analysis, the 'regimes of mobility' approach can provide a close-up, yet comprehensive investigation of Nepalese labor migration.

The design of the empirical study mirrors this attempt of doing justice to both detail and larger interconnections. As such, the research questions are aimed at three interdependent hermeneutical areas which are defined as constituting pillars for the Nepalese regime of mobility:

1) What are the practices of Nepalese transmigrants, particularly in regards to maintaining transnational families?
2) In which ways are social constructions and subjectivities transformed and (re)negotiated under conditions of transnational migration?
3) In what ways is the transnational setting permeated with effects of power and difference, and how do these interact with the (re)production of meaning and practices?

These objectives do not really represent three distinct subject areas, but rather reflect different levels of depth and subsequent steps of analysis. After the topic is initially approached from a descriptive perspective, the following chapter turns more analytical by drawing conclusions about smaller and larger formations of meaning and representation. While this dimension cannot be explored without paying attention to inequality and difference, the third step of analysis aims to take an explicit look at the expressions and effects of power. Altogether, the research endeavor is underlined by a general interest in the conceptual question of structure and agency. Therefore, the relationships between macro and micro perspectives, between force and choice, exploitation and opportunity, and between stasis and change are recurring themes throughout this thesis.

The present introductory remarks are followed by an exploration of the conceptual framework which guides this work. Approached in a three-fold manner, the chapter starts off by setting the postcolonial foundation of this project. This includes an outline of postcolonial studies, central theoretical positions, and the corresponding conceptualization of power and difference. On this basis, different forms of meaning, including identity and subjectivities, are explored and specified through an intersectionality approach, before the conceptual question of structure and agency and their role in the theoretical position of this thesis are defined. Subsequently, a postcolonial perspective is applied to the study of transnational migration. Following a short outline of our world's current processes of globalization and transnationalization, the study area of transnational migration is introduced. Here, particularly those aspects which could benefit from further conceptual development are highlighted. Supporting a study of migration which incorporates an approach critical to power, previous scholarship is summarized to outline perspectives on differential mobility, a global exploitative system of labor, and narratives and imaginaries of migration. Finally, these elaborations are combined by proposing the 'regimes of mobility' angle as a possible political geographical approach to transnational migration. After differentiating the concept from the terms 'border regime' and 'migration regime', it is defined in more detail, and further investigated along the axis of structure and agency.

In a next step, the scenario of Nepalese labor migration to the Gulf is outlined. This chapter includes a short overview of the Nepalese history of migration, recent trends, and financial and economic considerations. On this basis, a closer look is taken at the particular case of the Gulf States. After an outline of the historic development and recent trends of foreign labor in the Gulf region, more detailed insights are given into existing literature and findings on Nepalese laborers in this region. This includes the recent media attention and accusations of slavery and abuse, but also enters a more analytical perspective by focusing on dimensions of meaning and power. Subsequently, the research design of the study is presented by outlining the empirical methods, the incorporated sources, and the procedure of analysis.

Following the elaboration on research methods and procedures, the empirical findings and their analysis form the bulk of this thesis. This section sets off with an initial overview of the sample, before providing a descriptive insight into the daily practices of Nepalese labor transmigrants. In order to stay close to migrants' own voices, and not to impose a too analytical and Eurocentric view on their expressions, the experiences of three individu-

1 The 'regimes of mobility' approach was first introduced in June, 2013 by social anthropologists Nina Glick Schiller and Noel B. Salazar (Glick Schiller & Salazar, 2013).

als and their respective family members are retold. On the one hand, these are the personal narratives as given by 'real people'. On the other hand, they are also representative of certain social groups and migration experiences. Following this ethnographically inspired moment, the second chapter dives deeper into an analytical investigation of socially constructed meanings on migration, mobility, social categories and roles, narratives of Nepalese nationality, and of their place in the world. While this step of analysis acknowledges the constant interplay of meaning and power, the final chapter throws an explicit spotlight on unequal power relations and effects of difference. Here, the findings which have been collected throughout the thesis are summarized, complemented with additional insights, and investigated from a perspective explicitly critical to power. Again, the analysis remains oriented towards the opposing poles of structure and agency. It illuminates some effects of power from a close-up perspective, and investigates how practices, meaning, and institutional frameworks interlock and thereby create a powerful restrictive structure of inequality and difference. However, the chapter also highlights room for agency and recognizes that all regimes of mobility are under constant transformation. For this reason, the final pages of this thesis focus on the particular examples of agency among Nepalese transmigrants, and point out more recent events and their potential contribution to the creation of more diverse systems of meaning. Following this three-fold empirical analysis, the concluding chapter provides a brief summary of its core observations, notions, and interpretations. The thesis closes by suggesting potential further questions of analysis, which exceeded the scope of this particular work, but could be relevant starting points for future research endeavors.

2 THEORETICAL POSITIONS

2.1 Postcolonial Perspectives

2.1.1 Postcolonial studies

Since its emergence in the second half of the 20th century, Postcolonialism has left its clear mark on social science. Initially, the term 'post-colonial' was used to refer to the 'post-independence' era that followed the period of worldwide decolonization (Blunt & Wills, 2000: pp. 168). Prominent works that shaped the expansion of postcolonial studies include Frantz Fanon's "The Wretched of the Earth" (1963) and Edward Said's "Orientalism" (1978). A highly political and critical attack on colonial rule, Fanon's work was very much part of the colonial struggle towards independence. More than a decade later, Said took a different stance by showing how the most persisting mechanisms of exerting colonial power were not only military and institutional rule, but in fact the subtle, yet fundamental ways in which people conceptualized the world. In its early phase, Postcolonialism was largely concerned with the colonial history of formerly colonized states, their struggle for independence, the effects of several centuries of colonial rule on their cultures and societies, and the continuing colonial legacy they carried from this experience. However, the last three decades have seen an increasing shift of focus from a "temporal aftermath" to a "political aftermath" (Blunt & Wills, 2000: p. 169). Rather than analyzing the colonial history of certain states, postcolonial studies today examine how our formally decolonized world continues to be shaped by quasi-colonial structures and mechanisms of domination and exploitation (Glasze, 2013: p. 50). Therefore, postcolonial studies are not at all bound to the historical period of decolonization, and have certainly not become outdated. In fact, the current, formally decolonized period is frequently seen as giving rise to new and subtle, but all the more dangerous forms of colonialism. In a time shaped by global patterns of 'neocolonial' power relations, postcolonial perspectives have thus become more relevant to today's questions than ever (Sidaway, 2000: p. 602). They have proven a useful standpoint from which to expose, critique, deconstruct, and even transcend the hegemonic structures which frame the ways we perceive and conceptualize the world around us (ibid.: p. 594).

As the reading of Postcolonialism has increasingly shifted from "after colonialism" to "beyond colonialism" (Blunt & Wills, 2000: p. 169), postcolonial studies have expanded their focus well beyond former colonies and traditional forms of colonial rule, and have turned to cover a wide range of topics, geographical locations, and time periods (Sleman, 1991: p. 3). While summarizing a field as diverse as postcolonial studies certainly poses a challenge, one can say that it is in fact this integration of a wide variety of theoretical strands which is characteristic for postcolonial scholarship. As the works of Homi Bhabha, Gayatri Spivak, and Stuart Hall indicate, postcolonial theory frequently draws on neo-Marxist, psychoanalytic, and poststructuralist paradigms, and has strongly intersected with cultural, feminist, and literary studies, as well as history and numerous disciplines of social science (Calhoun, 2002: p. 374). Whereas approaches influenced by Marxism have largely focused on politico-economic structures of dependence and exploitation, scholarship drawing on poststructuralist and feminist paradigms has turned its attention to the symbolic, discursive, and performative levels of power. By throwing the spotlight on epistemic violence, it has exposed how power manifests in the concepts, categories, and values that shape our views of the world (Glasze, 2013: p. 50; Rodriguez, 2003: p. 19).

Despite the variety of approaches and positions that feature in this scholarship, there are several common threads which define postcolonial theory. As Ian Buchanan (2010) summarizes, postcolonial perspectives are based on an anti-essentialist approach to identity, possess a pluralist and anti-hegemonic political outlook, equate representation with power, and privilege difference over sameness (p. 373). One remarkable feature of Postcolonialism is its pronounced political and normative orientation. Aware of its own embeddedness in society, postcolonial scholarship does not stop at exposing patterns of domination, but highlights its own role and responsibility in changing social reality and influencing hegemonic structures. Part of the normative agenda of Postcolonialism can be subsumed under the term autonomy, a principle highlighting the self-consciousness and self-regulation of the individual, but also the self-government and self-determination of collectivities (Brydon, 2004: pp. 694-95). As this entails the right to express oneself, to speak and to be heard, Postcolonialism pays particular attention and lends its voice to the experience of the colonized, the oppressed, and the minority (Radhakrishnan, 1993: p. 767). Social and individual autonomy has been a project of valorizing exilic, cosmopolitan, and diasporic positions (Brydon, 2004: p. 699). In doing so, Postcolonialism refers not only to subaltern individuals or groups, but also to meaning: Perspectives which are marginalized in dominant systems of representation and "transcend […] Western/Northern perspectives and […] hegemonic interpretative positions" are emphasized (Munkelt et al., 2013: p. xiv). Thus, Postcolonialism can be defined as a resistant counter discourse against hegemonic ways of constructing the world and particularly its marginalized parts, which continue to be subject to neocolonial domination (Castro Varela & Dhawan, 2003: pp. 271-72). This also includes an awareness of the Eurocentrism which continues to pervade the social construction of the world for many of its residents, and a rethinking of these dominant categories of thought. Instead of privileging Western concepts as the norm,

indigenous forms of knowledge and meaning should be appreciated without being romanticized (Morrell & Swart, 2005: pp. 97-98; Brydon, 2004: pp. 701-02). In this endeavor, the role of culture as "the shared ways in which people perceive and act" (Plüss, 2012: p. 259) needs to be acknowledged as well. As not to fall in the same Eurocentric trap, postcolonial studies themselves should stay aware of different cultures of meaning and knowledge production (Levitt, 2012: p. 498). Generally, postcolonial theory frequently problematizes the specific positionality that pervades any scientific critique. Particularly feminist geography has strongly advocated the conscious and critical reflection of the researcher's position in society (Castree et al., 2013: pp. 496-97). Rather than following the futile task of trying to eliminate one's own positionality, pragmatic suggestions to embrace and even harness the latter include Hall's (1992) concept of 'arbitrary closures' (see Glasze, 2013: p. 55).

From the mid-1990s onwards, human geography experienced a switch to cultural theory, which included paying closer attention to discourse, representation, and visuality. This period also saw the rise of postmodern influence on human geography, which led to a turn from 'meta' or 'grand theories' to 'minor theory', which is "more circumscribed in its epistemological ambitions and more aware of its 'local' origins" (Castree et al., 2013: p. 512). With its powerful and accessible integration of neo-Marxist, poststructuralist, and feminist perspectives, Postcolonialism has played an influential role in this 'cultural turn' and the formation of a 'new cultural geography' (ibid.: p. 290). Despite its strengths, the entry of postcolonial perspectives into human geography has also been met by critical voices. For instance, they contend that with its wide range of theoretical foundations, disciplinary backgrounds, and study interests, a field of study this diverse can hardly be seen as a coherent theoretical perspective. Yet this argument is based on a deeper question, as it refers to the role and task expected of social theory, and thus can easily be turned from vice to virtue. As Postcolonialism rejects the strive for one 'grand theory' and favors new and marginal ways of making sense of the world, its reduction to a monopolistic discipline would not only be futile, but also against its very own principles (see Radhakrishnan, 1993: p. 762). However, its scholarship indeed can be criticized for stagnating at a rather immature point in development. At a time when imperial narratives may have been successfully questioned, one might observe that little has happened beyond this stage, and postcolonial 'ground rules' for dialogue and ways to move forward are still being negotiated. In regards to its normative agenda, Diana Brydon (2004) contends that the postcolonial project has been far from successful: "Despite a proliferation of texts, special issues, research resources, and introductions to the field, postcolonial theories have yet to make a difference beyond the academy" (p. 692). Whether this criticism is justified or not, it certainly holds true that the postcolonial project is far from completed, as it remains a vital approach for understanding the patterns of domination and exploitation which continue to shape society. As they are instrumental for the research presented in this thesis, several theoretical pillars dominant in postcolonial thought are going to be explored in more detail in the following chapters.

2.1.2 Power and difference

As Postcolonialism focuses on structures of domination and hegemony, concepts of power are at the core of postcolonial theory. The definition of power relevant for this research project is largely influenced by the works of French theorist Michel Foucault. Considered one of the most prominent scholars contributing to poststructuralist or, as it is sometimes known, 'French theory', Foucault introduced an at its time very novel concept of power. Breaking with fundamental assertions of traditional social sciences, it proved to be highly influential on numerous disciplines and study areas, including Postcolonialism. Instead of conceptualizing a repressive structure rigidly sitting above society, Foucault suggests to view power as an omnipresent principle which pervades all areas, scales, and dimensions of social life (Strüver, 2011a: p. 4). As such, power does not emerge from one source or place and then spreads to others, but is seen as a multi-centric, net-like organization of relations:

> "Power relations permeate all levels of social existence and are therefore to be found operating at every site of social life – in the private spheres of the family and sexuality as much as in the public spheres of politics, the economy and the law." (Hall, 2001: p. 77)

Foucault (1977) compares the "micro-physics" of power to "a capillary movement" (p. 27): this polymorphic principle circulates through localized patterns, strategies, mechanisms, and effects from grand structures of hegemony "right down to the depth of society" (ibid.), where it is rooted in forms of behavior, meaning, and local relations. Contrary to other theories, the Foucauldian definition does not consider power a mere repressive force. As it is immanent in all aspects of society and social relations, it is also a productive principle, which creates difference, and thereby literally produces the social in the first place (Strüver, 2011a: p. 4). We then "are all, to some degree, caught up in its circulation – oppressors and oppressed" (Hall, 2001: p. 77). It is the phrase 'to some degree' that should be highlighted here. When investigating domination and exploitation, the real question should not point at whether something or someone is endowed with power or not, which ultimately leads to a crude dichotomy of 'the ruler' vs. 'the ruled', but should rather investigate the degrees and patterns according to which power is being distributed.

A society without power relations can thus only be an abstraction. However, it is important to note that Foucault does not speak of power as a static, unchanging structure. Instead, he imagines a fluid principle, which is continuously transformed and constantly (re)negotiated. On a larger scale, the multitudes of power relations interlock in systems or operate against each other, thereby weakening, strengthening, and inverting each other (Strüver, 2005a: pp. 64-65). As all aspects of social life – large-scale relations and institutions as well as meaning, subjects, and underlying principles of behavior – are products of power, it is not to be considered something that merely occurs during the interaction between people. Rather, it should be understood as a powerful effect of structuring reality, which goes hand in hand with processes of description, categorization, and normalization (Glasze, 2013: p. 51).

2.1.3 Meaning and representation

The postcolonial approach to meaning and representation, as well as the concept of power described previously, cannot be fully comprehended without revealing its ontological and epistemological foundations. They originate in social constructivism, which holds the presupposition that all meaning we ascribe to the world around us is created and negotiated by society. Social constructivism has led to a profound shift in the very foundations and ambitions of social science, and was picked up and elaborated extensively by structuralist and poststructuralist thinkers. Among others, their contributions included a social constructivist reading of Ferdinand de Saussure's ideas on language. The 20th century French linguist defined language as a system of signs, which never hold any inherent meaning, but only receive the latter based on their difference to other signs in the structure. When applying de Saussure's logic to society and social reality, society itself can be re-defined as a system of signs, in which meaning is not produced because of some inherent internal essence, but purely as an effect of difference (Glasze & Mattissek, 2009: pp. 20-22). This fundamental re-orientation has led to a massively transformative 'linguistic turn' and has laid the foundation for various other so-called 'turns' in social science. In the previous decades, it has also become instrumental in the development of various sub-disciplines and theoretical approaches, including cultural studies, (post)feminist theory, and postcolonial studies (Glasze, 2013: pp. 47-49). Clearly, the concept does not deny the physical existence of material objects, beings, and events. However, it is always and only their meaning which we can access – meaning which is socially constructed. In other words: the only way social science can access and study the world around us is via the meanings we ascribe to it (Hall, 2001: p. 73). As all aspects of social reality, meaning is rather defined by what is around something, than what that thing seems to consist of. Even though we might assume it to be the 'natural' order of things, meaning is always historically and spatially contingent (Mills, 2003: p. 44). As structural conditions change, the ways we make sense of the world are constantly contested, renegotiated, and transformed (Strüver, 2005a: p. 62).

In postcolonial theory, the concept of 'representation' holds a pivotal role. In its basic sense, representation refers to the meaning we associate with something. However, it is important to remember that the representation of an item is not the *same* as that item. This basic principle of the difference between a thing and its representation applies to any aspect of social reality. We can never access reality itself, but only its representation – the meaning we associate with it (Buchanan, 2010: p. 405-06). The concept of meaning and representation is so central to postcolonial theory because the order in which meaning is ascribed is not arbitrary, but determined by power. By examining meaning, we actually access the power relations lying behind it. In his theory of power, Foucault (1977) highlights this inseparable link between meaning and power by defining 'knowledge' as the meaning endowed with so much authority that it is considered to be the truth: "there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations" (p. 27). As they are so mutually dependent and in fact constitute two sides of the same thing, he introduces the term 'power/knowledge' and describes the alliance of these two principles as a 'regime of truth':

> "Each society has its regime of truth, its 'general politics' of truth; that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true, the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned [...] the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true." (Foucault, 1980: p. 131)

The question of representation is thus a highly political one. Regimes of representation produce meaning, they determine who can speak, what can be said about what, and whose voice is heard (Hall, 1996a: p. 612; Rodriguez, 2003: p. 18). From this perspective, the colonial experience is one where the colonized is positioned and subjected in dominant regimes of representation: "They had the power to make us see and experience *ourselves* as 'Other'. Every regime of representation is a regime of power formed, as Foucault reminds us, by the fatal couplet, 'power/knowledge'" (Hall, 1990: pp. 225-26; italics in original). Since all aspects of social life, including relationships, institutions, and practices, are products of power, representation does not only define what is thought, but also what is done how and by whom. Knowledge is always enacted, manifests in 'real' practices of domination and subjugation, and translates into institutional regulations which further cement regimes of repre-

sentation (Hall, 2001: p. 76). In terms of analyzing power empirically, this means we can access regimes of representation by listening to what people say, but also by watching and examining what they do, and thus the ways meaning translates into practice.

Along with cultural studies and (post-)feminist theory, postcolonial concepts have played an important role in creating a 'cultural turn', which has transformed anglophone geography[2] since the 1980s and led to the development of a 'new cultural geography' (Glasze, 2013: pp. 44-48). In human geography, the reception of Foucauldian ideas has particularly contributed to a re-evaluation of space. The discipline experienced a critical 'spatial turn' based on Henri Lefebvre's (2002) assessment that "space is a (social) product [and] every society […] produces a space, its own space" (pp. 137-38). The realization that space emerges and becomes meaningful only through the social implies that the social in turn is constructed spatially (Strüver, 2011a: p. 10). Being a product of social construction, space then, too, is permeated with power. One way this materialization of power can be retraced quite clearly is the formation of spaces of inclusion and exclusion, where the access to certain rooms is privileged or restricted (Strüver, 2005a: p. 90). These perspectives on meaning and knowledge explain the postcolonial take on the researcher's subjectivity. If all meaning is socially constructed, scientific knowledge has to be understood as contextual and contingent as well. This realization has not only produced a new approach to positionality, but has caused a profound change in the self-conception of social science.

2.1.4 Identity and subjectivities

One particular form of representation important for a postcolonial perspective is identity. Again, an approach informed by poststructuralism breaks with traditional notions of identity, which assume the latter to define and reflect the very essence of a subject's existence (Hall, 1996a: p. 597). Those ideas stemming from the Enlightenment era conceive the subject

> "as an individual who is fully endowed with consciousness; an autonomous and stable entity, the 'core' of the self, and the independent, authentic source of action and meaning. […] And this identity of the subject with what is said gives him or her a privileged position in relation to meaning. It suggests that, although other people may misunderstand us, *we* always understand ourselves because *we were the source of meaning in the first place.*" (Hall, 2001: p. 79; italics in original)

Postcolonial theory rejects such essentialist concepts, but supports ideas of the post-modern subject as having no fixed, 'original', or permanent identity. Instead, it sees identity as a form of meaning, which is produced and transformed within and in relation to representation (Hall, 1996a: p. 612). Identity is therefore created through various reference systems, which overlap, contradict, and question each other. The subject is constantly overdetermined, i.e. he or she has access to a variety of different storylines and subject positions, which do not originate from any individual, but are based in regimes of representation. These subjectivities operate like blueprints or 'building blocks' for the subject to assume an identity by forming a seemingly consistent "narrative of the self" (ibid.: p. 598), despite the frequent fragmentations and hybridizations that can occur during this process. However, like all meaning, identity is historically and spatially contingent, and thus constantly changing: "The subject assumes different identities at different times, identities which are not unified around a coherent 'self.' Within us are contradictory identities, pulling in different directions, so that our identifications are continuously being shifted about" (ibid.).

As poststructuralist theory considers meaning to be an effect of difference, it holds that a subject's identity is not defined by an internal 'Self', but by its distinction from an external 'Other'. Thus, identity does not exist without the definition of what it is not. The creation of difference and the attribution of something as 'Self' or 'Other' is a direct effect of power (Glasze & Mattissek, 2009: p. 29): Identities "emerge within the play of specific modalities of power, and thus are more the product of the marking of difference and exclusion, than they are the sign of an identical, naturally constituted unity" (Hall, 2005: p. 17). As processes of identity construction are contingent on the way the subject is addressed and represented, they frequently form an arena for a politics of difference, i.e. struggles around the authority of meaning (Ha, 2000: p. 6). Postcolonial studies have highlighted this struggle to be one of the most powerful effects of colonization, where the colonized is defined as the 'Other' and juxtaposed against a normalized 'Self'. In this regime of representation, the 'othered' subject appears so naturally abnormal, inferior, and undesirable, that the colonized him- or herself perceives it to be the truth (Hall, 1990: pp. 225-26). This principle applies not only to individuals, but is also instrumental in the construction of collective identities. Identities based on a common nationality, ethnicity, or gender are then nothing but narratives of sameness with whom subjects identify: "these are contained in the stories which are told about it, memories which connect its present with its past, and images which are constructed of it" (Hall, 1996a: p. 613). As Benedict Anderson states

2 In German geography, these perspectives have only received significant attention since the late 1990s (Glasze, 2013: p. 44).

in regard to the nation, group identities are inherently imagined, and should thus not be examined regarding "by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined" (2006 [1983]: p. 6). People thus participate in the idea of a communal identity as it is represented in narratives of tradition, culture, and nature.

As meaning itself, identities are not fixed, but constantly shift and transform. Therefore, Hall (1990) suggests to conceive of identity as 'identification', "a 'production', which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation" (p. 222). As identity is (re)produced in interplay with regulatory regimes, via hegemonic and antagonistic narratives and practices, difference and identity need to be acknowledged as a set of processes, rather than possessive characteristics of individuals (Anthias, 2008: p. 16). Thus, identity is not something people *have*; it is something they *do* (Strüver, 2005a: p. 41). Continuously (re)produced and performed in different arenas of life, identities are constituted by regulatory practices, matrices of normative expectations, rules, and behaviors, which affect the ways in which social practices are framed and engaged in (McDowell, 2008: p. 504). West's and Fenstermaker's (1995) concept of 'doing identity and difference' highlights the daily practices, interactions, and other social processes which produce identity categories and subjectivities. In empirical research, the concept suggests to assume a micro-perspective and to examine the ways in which identities, imaginaries, and ambivalences are performed through everyday practices (Strüver, 2005b: p. 324; and 2011a: p. 7). As an intersection of culture and power, identity narratives and their performance can be studied in order to access both the personal and the political. In order to avoid binary concepts of difference when doing so, Glick Schiller (2012) suggests a scholarship of relationality. Since identity should be understood more adequately in its multiplicity and multi-dimensionality, it should be seen as a process of multiple relationalities that develop cultural practices within networks of power hierarchies (pp. 528-29).

In this power network, the concept of a subject from which meaning and identity originate becomes obsolete. As the subject is not at the center of meaning production, it loses most of its previous importance. Whereas scholars from different backgrounds have argued extensively on whether the subject should be completely erased from the picture or not, it can serve as an operational entry point to access the process of identification and its translation into practice (Hall, 2001: p. 79). However, it is also here where the concept of subjectivity proves especially useful, as it represents a narrative string available to be included in a subject's process of identification, yet is not contingent on the existence of that particular subject (Castree et al., 2013: pp. 496-97).

2.1.5 Intersectionality

Whereas the previously described conceptualization of identity remains quite abstract, the intersectionality approach can provide an easier form of access by breaking identity down to social categories or roles. These categories place subjects in a narrative determining their purpose, mindset, and appropriate behavior, and thus operate as social allocators. Furthermore, the paradigm offers a highly political outlook on identity: As social categories serve to legitimize practices of exploitation, marginalization, and disenfranchisement, they are defined as a crucial axis along which power operates and social inequality manifests (Walgenbach, 2012: p. 23). The core characteristic of the intersectionality approach is that social divisions are considered to be contingent on each other and therefore cannot be analyzed as isolated entities, but need to be recognized in their mutual interconnectedness. As social categories interact, strengthen or weaken each other, they create different and sometimes multiplying effects of marginalization and discrimination. By turning the spotlight on the interactions between social divisions, the intersectionality paradigm provides an integrated analysis of identity formation and its effects of power and difference (Anthias, 2008: p. 5). With its similar theoretical outlook, an intersectional perspective proves compatible with poststructuralist and postcolonial theories on identity and power, but also provides a more easily accessible toolbox for empirical research (McDowell, 2008: pp. 491-92). At the same time, it is far from reductive, as it not only acknowledges the multiplicity of social categories, but also enables a multiscalar analysis of identity (Walgenbach, 2012: p. 25).

The origins of the intersectionality paradigm lie in feminist theory, where it was first proposed by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), who introduced her concept by comparing society to a traffic intersection:

> "Consider an analogy to traffic in an intersection, coming and going in all four directions. Discrimination, like traffic through an intersection, may flow in one direction, and it may flow in another. If an accident happens in an intersection, it can be caused by cars traveling from any number of directions and, sometimes, from all of them. Similarly, if a Black woman is harmed because she is in the intersection, her injury could result from sex discrimination or race discrimination." (p. 149)

As the above citation suggests, the social categories that have largely been analyzed are those of gender, race/ethnicity, class, nationality, and sexuality (Walgenbach, 2012: pp. 1-2). Initially, Crenshaw used the term 'intersectionality' in slightly different contexts: (a) as an intersecting of categories and hegemonic structures (e.g. racism or sexism); (b) as a specific social location in between overlapping systems of subordination, which she termed intersectional locations or experiences; or (c) as a political concept of identity which highlights the mul-

tiplicity of identity (ibid.: pp. 13-14, 21). In previous years, the concept has been specified in different directions, including Nina Degele's and Gabriele Winker's (2009) suggestion to approach intersectionality on three scales: a level of social structure, a level of identity, and a level of representation. Despite its various sub-definitions, the intersectionality approach has widely come to be understood at least in its core meaning, reminding scholarship to consider the mutual contingency and interdependence of social categories.

However, the approach has also been criticized for posing the danger of a determinist view, as focusing on seemingly static social categories of 'race' and 'gender' can conceal the (re)construction and (re)production all structures continuously undergo. Scholars of intersectionality have explicitly rejected any essentialist perspectives and have highlighted that even though the concept works with social categories, it does not stand in the way of their possible deconstruction. Furthermore, they suggest that social divisions should rather be seen as a fluid network of heterogeneous categories, where none of them has clear-cut borders or could exist in isolation from the others (Walgenbach, 2012: pp. 19-20). As Floya Anthias (2008) states: "Intersectional approaches have tried to move away from this additive model by treating each division as constituted via an intersection with the others […]. In this way classes are always gendered and racialised and gender is always classed and racialised and so on" (p. 13). Yet it may be granted that Crenshaw's original analogy of the crossroads and the term 'intersectionality' itself do suggest an image of distinct and independent categories, which might intersect, but still retain their distinct core. To avoid this misinterpretation, Walgenbach (2012) suggests speaking of interdependent rather than intersecting categories, as the former term expresses their being mutually constituted by each other, where none can exist nor be analyzed without the other (pp. 18). Whereas it should be clear that the multiplicity of processes and effects between power, meaning, and representation cannot be adequately encapsulated in a few single categories, the intersectionality approach appears to be a useful tool for operationalizing identity and making it empirically accessible.

For years, intersectionality studies have been largely confined to the categories race, class, and gender. Particularly when investigating non-Western societies, it quickly becomes clear that the paradigm could profit from transcending this well-established triad. The study of previously neglected categories can hold significant value in understanding social structures and processes of power and meaning. Aside from age, sexuality, and nationality, Peggy Levitt (2012) highlights religious affiliation as a category which has long been neglected. In her opinion, scholars need to overcome the Ethnocentrism that stems from a secular society "where religion is an aberration rather than a normal part of daily life" (p. 494), and realign their lenses to seemingly unconventional factors and processes of structuring society. However, it is certainly due to its origins in feminist theory that intersectionality studies have continuously kept a spotlight on gender. As one of the main principles of social differentiation, gender is not a set of antiqued structures or roles, but in fact one of the most fluid areas of society. Gender inequalities, roles, and relations are constantly negotiated, and narratives of masculinity and femininity are continually rewritten (Mahler & Pessar, 2001: p. 442). As such, it constitutes a highly "dynamic cultural terrain wherein forms of domination may be contested, reworked, and even potentially transformed" (Mills, 2003: p. 42). It is all the more unfortunate, then, that gender studies are still often dominated by strictly feminist issues. Especially in power-sensitive questions of domination, exploitation, and abuse, numerous studies focus on the female experience, whereas the positions of men are often curiously neglected. This holds especially true for the study of global or particularly non-Western contexts, where male perspectives are conspicuously underrepresented or even absent (for exceptions to this rule see Margold, 1995 and Mills, 2003). As Robert Morrell and Sandra Swart (2005) summarize: "There has been little analysis of men or masculinity in the Third World, especially not with a consideration of postcolonial perspectives" (p. 91). If scholarship continues to equate the female role with a disenfranchised victim, while reducing the male role to a privileged, dominant aggressor, it is caught in the very traps of representation it should overcome. Analyzing the multiple interconnections of social categories while revealing their constructed nature thus appears to be a crucial challenge in the further development of both intersectionality and gender studies.

2.1.6 Structure and agency

Among the theoretical concepts introduced in the previous chapters, there has been a reoccurring question, which – although posed implicitly – has not been addressed explicitly. It is the problem of 'individual agency' and surrounding structures, and the relationship between these seemingly opposing poles. This issue certainly is one of social science's oldest questions, but at the same time has remained a vital topic of discussion, as it sets the defining pillars of virtually every theoretical construct. Looking for answers in postcolonial theory, one finds strands informed by rather agency-focused (neo-) Marxist concepts as well as by structure-heavy poststructuralist perspectives. The opposing ends of the spectrum suggest either a highly self-reflexive subject who thinks, speaks, and acts completely autonomously, or a structure so all-encompassing and overpowering that everything, including the subject, is a mere effect of the latter. While each perspective certainly has its strengths in providing answers to particular research questions, this thesis argues for a more balanced position on neither of

both extremes. An intriguing plea for such a fruitfully ambivalent perspective is given by Hall (2005), who argues that the poststructuralist decentering of the subject should not be understand as the abandonment, but as a re-conceptualization of agency:

> "By 'agency', I express no desire whatsoever to return to an unmediated and transparent notion of the subject or identity as the centred author of social practice [...] However, I believe that what this decentring requires [...] is not an abandonment or abolition of 'the subject' but a reconceptualization – thinking it in its new, displaced or decentred position within the paradigm." (p. 16)

Revealing both his Marxist and poststructuralist influences, Hall (1991) agrees with Marx' statement that (wo)men make history, but adds that they do not do so according to their own conditions (p. 43). As agency and structure can be seen as mutually contingent and constituting each other, numerous scholars have made the argument against the binary opposition between structure and agency. They suggest overcoming the perspective of seeming opposites, and instead embracing both principles as two sides of the same coin (see Bruslé, 2010b: p. 21; McDowell, 2008: p. 493).

Based on the assumptions made in the previous chapters, structure determines and shapes the ways and mode in which any agency is possible. In turn, structures are not static and fixed, but are continuously contested and transformed by agency. In other words, subjects are products of socio-spatial conditions, yet simultaneously (re)produce those conditions through practice (Strüver, 2011a: p. 2). It is here where the concept of 'doing identity' proves useful again: It reminds us that identity categories and subjectivities are in fact social processes (re)created in constant interaction. This co-constitutive, ambivalent relationship of structure and process can, for instance, be retraced in the social category of gender. As Patricia Pessar and Sarah Mahler (2003) note: "People do 'gender work'; through gendered practices and discourses they reproduce and/or contest hierarchies of power and privilege" (p. 814). Like other categories, gender should thus be conceptualized simultaneously as a structure and a process, which frames and determines meaning, thought, and behavior, but at the same time contests, recreates, and transforms the ways society is structured.

Since the idea of an autonomous subject as the center of social practice is rejected, it is in fact not the 'subject' who is in the focus of interest, but rather the processes and practices which construct subjectivities and in which subjects constitute themselves (Strüver, 2011a: p. 8). When translating theory into research, postcolonial studies could then certainly benefit from an ethnographical approach to understanding people's practices and "how they construct their world to produce a social order" (Castree et al., 2013: pp. 139). At the same time, it should not fall back into an agency-heavy perspective, or result in methodological individualism (Bailey, 2001: p. 421). The goal should rather be a fruitful connection of macro- and micro-analyses, where a postcolonial perspective combined with an intersectionality approach allows to examine the mutual interaction between (large-scale) hegemonic structures and (small-scale) identity categories (Strüver, 2011b: p. 204). In this regard, Strüver suggests a materialized constructivism, which allows empirical access to daily practices and materialities of social agency by assuming an interactive, discursively and performatively constituted, materialized subject, which is constituted by – and in turn constitutes – the social and the spatial (2011a: p. 11). Representation can then be perceived as not only linguistic and visual representation, but in fact as a 'performative practice' (ibid.: p. 1). By highlighting their materiality, yet keeping the focus on representation and meaning, the discursive constitution of social reality in text, images, as well as day-to-day practices can be examined (Glasze, 2013: p. 60). It is thus argued in this thesis that only through the step of recognizing both agency and structure as well as their mutual constitution, social science can truly grasp the potential stemming from a linguistic and cultural turn. By assuming a "more-than-cultural" and "more-than-representational" perspective (Strüver, 2011a: pp. 7-8), the seemingly disparate dimensions of society, material practices, and the subject can be fruitfully connected.

2.2 Political Geographies of Migration

2.2.1 Globalization and transnationalism

About three decades ago, numerous scholars assessed that the world around them had gone through radical changes, and prompted social science to keep up with this rapid transformation theoretically and empirically. Since that time, it has been unanimously accepted that our lives today are shaped by globalization – processes of mobility and movement which cut across national boundaries, integrate and connect nation states, economies, and communities in a new relation between space and time. In a world that has become more interconnected and where conditions of social life have changed radically, key assumptions of social science, which had been unchallenged throughout modernity, have become untenable. Those overcome positions include the idea that the nation state is the primary container of social processes and that territory, the national, and culture are intrinsically connected (Sassen, 2007: p. 1). In fact, the deterritorialization of social processes, the dissolution of localized traditions and the dislocation of national and cultural identities are among the main upheavals which were attributed to globalization (Hall, 1996a: p. 619). However, global interconnectedness and human mobility

are not new phenomena at all, but have always been part of our world. The process of increased globalization was set in motion several centuries ago and has thus been "deeply rooted in modernity" (ibid.). National societies have never been the strictly bounded systems they were long considered to be, and the social has always been determined by interconnection and exchange. What has really changed, then, is the scope of these processes, as well as their acceleration over the last years. The massive transformation of our global political order to inter- and supranational configurations of power and an international division of labor has put numerous concepts of modernity on the test bench and prompted social science to form entirely new perspectives (Brah, 2003: p. 614). Even though our times are frequently attributed to a post-modern era, the main arena of postmodernity is located in our minds.

The new conceptualizations of a globalized world frequently discussed the changing role of space. Among other scholars, geographer David Harvey (1989) contributed significantly to the discussion of globalization and postmodernity by referring to a recent "time-space compression" (p. 284), whereas social-cultural anthropologist Arjun Appadurai (1996) stirred up the debate with his concept of a world made up of 'scapes'. Arguing that science needed to let go of dichotomies like 'global/local', 'North/South', and 'metropolitan/non-metropolitan', he suggested society should be conceived in terms of globe-spanning flows or 'scapes', which constantly transform and carry capital, information, images, people, ideas, and technologies. Globalization has thus been equalized with a powerful de-conjunction of the social and the spatial (Pries, 2001: p. 3). For some, homogenizing global forces have rendered space and place increasingly insignificant. However, geographers and many others have voiced criticism against this seeming deterritorialization, stating that early concepts of globalization underestimated the importance of the spatial:

> "If globalization is only the annihilation and the homogenization of space, we could forget the spatial dimension. But if globalization and new forms of regionalization and localization are two faces of the same coin, we have to reflect much more on space and the relation between the social and the (geographic) space." (ibid.: p. 29)

Indeed, a rising number of scholars have highlighted the transformed and actually expanded role of the spatial in a world of connectedness and mobility. As Saskia Sassen (1996) states, the most important aspects of global processes are their localized forms (p. 636). She suggests that the global and the local cannot be seen as separate entities, but need to be studied together, as global dynamics are translated into practices and organizational forms on various scales (2007: pp. 6-7). Numerous other scholars have pointed out that social processes cannot be clearly ascribed to one particular spatial scale, and it is in fact processes of 'glocalization' that should be in the spotlight of research (Appadurai, 1995, 2011; Hannerz, 2002; Glick Schiller et al., 1995: p. 49). In fact, scale itself should be understood as a heterogeneous, contested process, as the global and the local constitute each other (Swyngedouw, 1997: pp. 140-41; Glick Schiller, 2010: p. 119). As "the productive intersection of imagination and practice", the category of place should not be discarded, but re-theorized (Römhild, 2003: p. 187). Since Doreen Massey's (1991) request for a "a global sense of the local, a global sense of place" (p. 29), social science has experienced an influential 'spatial turn', which has contributed to more mature notions of the spatial and the concept of scale.

As the term 'globalization' has been notoriously overused, retained little distinct meaning, and has appeared inadequate for many, the past decades have seen the rise of numerous study areas aimed at finding better conceptualizations for the global interconnections and mobility of our time. Research fields which have paid particular attention to questions of community and identifications include transnational scholarship, diaspora studies[3], and concepts of cosmopolitanism.[4] Transnational processes are seen as part of the general phenomenon of globalization, but focus on the "diminished significance of national boundaries in the production and distribution of objects, ideas, and people" and the growing role "of world cities that serve as key nodes of flexible capital

3 The terms transnationalism and diaspora are often used interchangeably. While the concepts overlap and intersect in various regards, they developed from different theoretical backgrounds. Whereas transnationalism encompasses a variety of social processes across national borders, the diaspora originally refers to religious or national groups who live outside an (imagined) homeland. However, more recent diaspora studies have focused on the occupation of multiple locations and the multi-directionality of circulating flows, thereby diffusing the former boundaries between the two fields of study. Topics typically covered by diaspora theory include notions of belonging, exile, and displacement, cultural memory and trauma, and the construction of (hybrid) identities (see Brydon, 2004; Faist, 2010; Hua, 2005).

4 The idea of the cosmopolitan as a 'citizen of the world' suggests a shift in people's mindsets and their mode of identification. Generally, cosmopolitanism entails an awareness of one's own cultural dispositions and the perception of other individual's dispositions as equally valuable. In this way, cosmopolitan consciousness relativizes identity categories and is open to difference. Scholars of cosmopolitanism have argued the mindset is intrinsically linked to mobility, regardless of a person's class or status position. For many, the concept entails a clear normative agenda and is based on both scientific observations and a programmatic ideal of social change (see Brydon, 2004; Glick Schiller & Salazar, 2013; Strüver, 2011b).

accumulation, communication, and control" (Glick Schiller et al., 1995: p. 49). The concept highlights the spatial contingency of social processes, while rejecting an essentialist, naturalized view of space and place. This includes a rejection of methodological nationalism, the implicit assumption of the nation state as a natural and bounded arena of the social (Glick Schiller, 2012: p. 524). The transnational includes human migration, but also the travelling of information, ideas, and meaning, as well as economic and financial resources. While all those processes cross national borders, they are also rooted in the local and are embedded in localized political, economic, and social contexts (Strüver, 2011b: pp. 201-02). As opposed to the term 'international', the transnational explicitly includes non-state activities and structures, and is therefore often read as 'globalization from below' (Bauböck, 2010: p. 296). Generally, transnationalism is understood as a network-like, globe-spanning social formation of ties, interaction, mobility, and exchange. The concept is also connoted with a certain mode of cultural reproduction, which includes the multiplication of identifications, the fluidity of practices and meaning, and new forms of political engagement (Vertovec, 1999: pp. 447-52). Transnational scholarship recognizes that while our world is shaped by universalizing tendencies, particularizing processes have not lost their influence on the social either (Faist, 2010: pp. 15-16). By emphasizing the interplay between local and global, and focusing on questions of community, identity, and the border-crossing of non-state agents and structures, transnational scholarship has done an important step in positioning itself in social science. However, transnationalism still faces the risk of being used as an empty 'container-like' term with little distinct conceptual value. However, as will be illustrated later, it actually provides a useful foundation for a new study of mobility and migration.

2.2.2 Transnational migration

While transnational research highlights the importance of non-state agents in global interconnectedness, transnational migration scholarship turns a particular spotlight on the massive role migrants play in the process of transnationalization. In a world where the number of international migrants has surpassed 214 million and continues to rise rapidly (IMO, 2010: p. xix), migrants are defined as the crucial agents of transnational processes. As globalized economies and institutional structures are actually based on the labor and daily practices of small-scale, sometimes invisible 'transmigrants', transnational migration is frequently understood as 'transnationalism from below' (Strüver, 2011b: p. 202). While 'transnationalism from above' is often equalized with institutions, nation states, companies, regulations, and economic relations, the day-to-day transnational lives and experiences of individuals are considered to be the decisive force of transnationalization (Mau, 2007: pp. 53-54). All the while, the approach remains open to both agency and structure, as it acknowledges that transnationalism truly emerges from an interplay of processes 'from below' and 'from above' (Boyle, 2002: p. 534). However, the conceptual achievement of transnational migration scholarship is bringing migrants back into the discussion, which – for a time – was dominated by a focus on abstract flows and scapes (Faist, 2010: pp. 11-12). While transnational migration processes are not always immense in scale, their accumulative effects of social transformation are massive (Hannerz, 2002: p. 88). Being both facilitated by and (re)producing globalized socio-economic processes, migrants are among the most transformative carriers of globalization and transnationalization (Strüver, 2011b: p. 193; Plüss & Kwok-Bun, 2012: p. 2). Although mobility is by no means a new phenomenon, our times are considered an age of migration, where migratory processes are more pervasive and socio-economically and politically significant than ever before (Castles & Miller, 2004: p. 278).

In opposition to conventional migration scholarship, the concept of transnational migration provides an entirely new theoretical and empirical angle. Instead of perceiving migration as a one-way process, which ends with the physical relocation of the migrant, transnational migration scholarship defines migration as an open-ended process which goes far beyond the actual event of resettling. As Nina Glick Schiller, Linda Basch, and Cristina Szanton Blanc (1995) summarize, the approach holds that transmigrants do settle and are physically grounded at one place, but also remain engaged and globally connected with other localities:

> "Transnational migration is the process by which immigrants forge and sustain simultaneous multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement. In identifying a new process of migration, scholars of transnational migration emphasize the ongoing and continuing ways in which current-day immigrants construct and reconstitute their simultaneous embeddedness in more than one society." (p. 48)

As the strength and frequency of such transnational connections can differ, some scholars have suggested to distinguish between different forms of transnational migration. This includes the terms 'core transnationalism', where transnational activities form an integral and frequent part of daily practices, and 'expanded transnationalism', where migrants engage transnationally only on special occasion (Levitt & Jaworsky, 2007: p. 132). Despite these variations, most scholars agree that transnational linkages in migration have risen to a critical scale, which renders them one of the most exciting and relevant contemporary research areas (Boyle, 2002: pp. 532-33). Regarding the reasons for this transformation of migratory practices, it is important to acknowledge that recent technological developments in transportation and communication have certainly helped to enable such processes, but their role should not be overestimated. In this way, Glick Schiller et al. (1995) highlight that transnational

migration has been "facilitated rather than produced by the possibility of technologically abridging time and space" (p. 52). In their opinion, the phenomenon should rather be interpreted as a response to economic and social changes, which have rendered it difficult or undesirable for many migrants to fully or exclusively incorporate themselves in their country of resettlement (ibid.).

Like general transnational studies, transnational migration scholarship takes a firm stand against methodological nationalism. It rejects the equalization of the nation state with society and its conceptualization as a 'container' of the social, which has pervaded traditional migration studies (Glick Schiller, 2010: pp. 110-11). Instead of seeing institutional structures and processes as the main analytical category for the study of migration, transnational migration scholarship calls for a new paradigm of social theory and research beyond these conceptual boundaries (Anthias, 2008: p. 6). This position is certainly no attempt at downplaying the role of local and national contexts in restricting, managing, and shaping transnational processes (Dahinden, 2010: p. 71). However, it argues that such structural entities need to be considered from an aware and constructivist perspective. Yet it can be quite difficult to truly overcome these types of naturalized boundaries. For instance, even transnational researchers can be accused of a tendency to limit their analysis to migrants' source and destination countries, and thereby homogenizing those two national contexts. As Levitt (2012) declares, "[a]ssuming that social life automatically takes place within nation states is a hard habit to break" (p. 495), which makes it an ongoing challenge for transnational migration scholarship, as well.

There is one further position which distinguishes a transnational view on migration from traditional approaches. Transnational migration is defined as a continuous, open-ended process, which goes far beyond the one-time settling from one place to another. Instead, this physical movement merely marks the emergence of a continuous boundary-crossing interconnectedness, a 'transnational social space' (Mau, 2007: p. 43). In this way, migrants create a virtual tri- or multi-angular social structure between them, the locality of their origin, and their destination context (Faist, 2010: pp. 13-14). Those fields can be imagined as multiple, interlocking networks of interaction, social relationships, and mobilities, which facilitate the exchange of ideas, practices, and resources (Mau, 2007: p. 89). As multi-layered and multi-sited arenas for the social, they are continuously contested and reproduced (Levitt & Jaworsky, 2007: pp. 131-32). It is thus not only migrants who contribute to the formation of transnational communities – in turn, this communal structure shapes the lives of migrants and continuing processes of migration (Bailey, 2001: p. 413). As such, transnational social spaces are both outcomes and preconditions for transnational processes (Pries, 2001: p. 5). Since transnational migrants basically participate in social life in two or more local contexts, the transnational spaces they produce touch the lives of locally rooted non-migrants as well, thus having a far-reaching transformative effect on society.

As a core unit of the social, the family frequently plays a crucial role in creating transnational communities. In this thesis, the split-household transnational family, which refers to "the distribution of core members in two or more nation-states" (Yeoh et al., 2005: p. 308), is of particular interest. Considered as one of the most important institutions that contribute to the formation and operation of transnational social spaces (ibid.: p. 312), the family is a valuable window for examining transmigratory practices, but also for accessing subjectivities, meaning, and relations of power as they are transformed in a transnational experience. Since transnational family practices are "both deeply personal and embedded in broader relations of power" (Boehm, 2012: pp. 10-11), the binary of 'intimate' and 'impersonal' is challenged and the boundaries between 'public' and 'private' spheres dissolve. Like other social units, the family needs to be understood as a process: Being realized through practice, relationships, intimacy and social identities are negotiated and reproduced across transnational spaces. In this process of 'doing family', transnational relationships are maintained by sharing "imaginar[ies] of belonging" and producing "narratives of self and kin" (Yeoh et al., 2005: p. 308). In no arena but that of the transnational family does it become as clear that absence and presence are not only determined by one's physical location, but by a person's sense of belonging (Duchène-Lacroix, 2009: p. 96). Faced with the challenge to achieve 'intimacy across borders' – a sort of 'long-distance intimacy' – transnational families rely on powerful sets of imagination and ascriptions to create a feeling of being simultaneously 'here and there' (Parreñas, 2005: p. 319). These 'virtual intimacies' are vital for maintaining transnational families, and can serve as an emotional 'security net' for their members, irrespective of their physical location (Huang et al., 2008: p. 6; Sijapati, 2010: p. 142). Moreover, studies performed in Asian contexts have pointed to the protruding role of the family as the central unit of social practice. In societies shaped by rather collective values, discursively constructed ideals of the family and the 'greater good' have been shown to often usurp migrants' individual desires and to have a profound influence on their identities (Yeoh et al., 2005: p. 309). In this sense, the notion of a 'transnational corporation of kin' even suggests conceptualizing transmigration as a collective familial strategy of socio-economic ascent (Huang et al., 2008: p. 4). Interpreted from a less favorable standpoint, the imaginaries of belonging produced in transnational families can also be used to exert control over certain family members. In this way, the transnational family is a location where social inequalities can be reproduced and even amplified. Furthermore, a family's ability to even create transnational narratives of intimacy and belonging depend on numerous contextual factors, including financial, technical, and social conditions, and is thus profoundly shaped by effects of difference and inequality (Parreñas, 2005: p. 334).

2.2.3 Towards new paradigms of mobility and transmigration

As mentioned previously, the concept of transnationalism has been faced both with enthusiasm and negative criticism. During the last two decades, the term has become fashionable in a variety of meanings and contexts, and has increasingly been abused as "an empty conceptual vessel" (Guarnizo & Smith, 1998: p. 3). As Levitt (2001) points out, "the term 'transnationalism' [has been] used to describe everything under the sun, which seriously diminishes its explanatory power" (p. 196). Aside from being accused for its lack of conceptual clarity (Al-Ali & Koser, 2004: p. 1), transnational scholarship has also been contested for its tendency to remain on a descriptive level and refraining from critical or analytical questions. In Cathy McIlwaine's (2008) opinion, the approach "refers predominantly to the nature of linkages between countries rather than underlying causal processes" (p. 2). The most vital deficit, however, is the failure of transnational studies in addressing and theorizing questions of power (Glick Schiller & Salazar, 2013: p. 186). This also applies to transnational migration scholarship in particular, which has been strangely disconnected from contemporary developments in social theory (Glick Schiller, 2010: pp. 110-13).

Along with other migration scholars, this thesis suggests it is indeed important to find new and more adequate conceptualizations of the social processes that surround us, but it is equally vital to be aware "that migration is a constant, not an aberration in human history" (Castles, 2004: p. 278). Early concepts of transnationalism defined these processes as something entirely novel and unprecedented, being part of a dramatic change of our world. However, there actually are numerous examples of transnational processes and migratory practices in history, including financial remittances, the emergence of particular identity formations, and even political networks (Glick Schiller et al., 1995: p. 51). In light of these arguments, a rising number of scholars have proposed an entirely different way of conceptualizing mobility, which does not interpret migration as "an abnormal interruption in 'normal' sedentary life but [as] an integral aspect" of social existence (Salazar, 2011: p. 586). They suggest that social science has been experiencing a 'mobility turn', which "has sought to challenge both the 'sedenterist' and 'nomadic' production of knowledge" (Blunt, 2007: p. 1). As a result, a new mobilities paradigm has spurred the transcending of disciplinary boundaries and has asked new theoretical questions (Hannam et al., 2006: pp. 1-2). Along this paradigm, scholars have tried to find more mature ways of defining mobility by viewing neither locality nor migration as an aberration, nor focusing on one while forgetting the other, but by studying the relationship between these two modes of living. In most scholarship, migration is framed as an extraordinary period which interrupts the ordinary state of residence at one location. Consequently, it is frequently seen as a disturbance, which automatically seems to result in identity crises and cultural uprooting. As Regina Römhild (2003) points out, this perception implicitly relies on a perception of space as a 'container' and culture as territorially bounded (p. 180). By "fram[ing] outcomes of transnational processes as hybridity, scholars of such 'mixity' have often implied that previous stages of cultural production were unblemished by diffusion" (Glick Schiller & Salazar, 2013: p. 185). The 'new mobilities' paradigm thus highlights the importance of both mobility and locality for the study of migration. While the aspect of physical movement does play an important role, Dahinden (2010) points out that "in order to become 'transnational', migrants must touch down somewhere" (p. 69). In this light, mobility and stasis are not opposites, but different modes of social life at interplay with each other. Reducing the study of migration to the question of 'why people migrate' – a matter ubiquitous in traditional migration studies and the focus of numerous theories[5] – only continues this binary and reflects the naturalization of sedentary modes of living.

It is therefore suggested that transnational migration scholarship needs to ask different questions, and should work on expanding its theoretical potential from its current "embryonic" state to a firm and potent paradigm (Bailey, 2001: p. 414). As mentioned, one of the most promising areas of further development certainly is the question of power. While the importance of inequality and difference have been mentioned in a number of influential works since the early years of transnational migration scholarship, few empirical studies have ventured beyond a mere descriptive level. However, in its implicit theoretical foundations, transnationalism has actually drawn heavily on poststructuralist epistemology: It emphasizes the situatedness of knowledge, challenges naturalized meanings and binary concepts, promotes anti-essentialism, plurality, and hybridity, and highlights the researcher's positionality. It is then quite surprising that in terms of applying its epistemological groundwork into practice, "transnationalism [still] awaits its full poststructural 'coming out'" (ibid.: p. 423). This thesis argues that the study of transnational migration can and should be fruitfully merged with poststructural and postcolonial perspectives. This is by no means a new suggestion: it has been nearly two decades since Stuart Hall (1996b) observed that "[t]hese two halves of the current debate about 'late modernity' – the post-colonial and the analy-

5 Traditional theories investigating the reasons of migration include Ravenstein's law of migration, the concept of push and pull factors, migration-systems theory, theories of cumulative effects of migration, migration networks, and chain migration, to name only a few (see Castree et al., 2013; Castles & Miller, 2004).

sis of the new developments in global capitalism – have indeed largely proceeded in relative isolation from one another, and to their mutual cost" (p. 254). However, it is also widely observed that "explicit postcolonial interpretations of mobility drawing on empirically grounded work still remain quite scarce" (McIlwaine, 2008: p. 1). For this reason, the following chapters provide an insight into the political salience which surrounds practices of transmigration. By exemplifying how these processes can be analyzed from a perspective sensitive to power and difference, the potentials of a postcolonially informed political geography of transnational migration are demonstrated.

2.2.4 Differential mobility and global labor

In the early phase of transnational scholarship, migration was often enthusiastically praised as a tool of empowerment, which allowed the poor and marginalized all over the world to overcome states of destitution and powerlessness (Levitt & Jaworsky, 2007: p. 131). In previous years, a narrative which constructs our globalized era as one where boundaries dissolve, and people, cultures, goods, and ideas are exchanged freely and span our world equally, has become quite fashionable in social sciences (Salazar, 2011: p. 585). While anti-colonial and feminist traditions have demonized globalized processes and labor migration as capitalist and imperialist tools of exploitation, transnational studies have tended to paint the latter in a positive light, focusing on the agency of migrants in crossing borders and creating a 'transnationalism from below' (McDowell, 2008: pp. 493-94). However, already in the beginnings of transnational migration scholarship, Glick Schiller et al. (1995) pointed out that those processes are far from egalitarian. They observe that the growth and intensification of global interconnectedness are in fact accompanied by a resurgence of a politics of differentiation (p. 50). From a neo-Marxist perspective, Doreen Massey (1991) comes to a similar conclusion, when she realizes that mobility and control over it have contributed to a new 'power-geometry' of time-space compression:

> "For different social groups, and different individuals, are placed in very distinct ways in relation to these flows and interconnections. This point concerns not merely the issue of who moves and who doesn't, […] it is also about power in relation to the flows and the movement. Different social groups have distinct relationships to this anyway differentiated mobility: some people are more in charge of it than others; some initiate flows and movement, others don't; some are more on the receiving-end of it than others; some are effectively imprisoned by it. [...] [I]t does seem that mobility and control over mobility both reflects and enforces power." (pp. 25-26)

In light of her observations, Massey suggests the study of a 'politics of mobility and access'. This approach is not limited to the unequal distribution of access to mobility, but also includes the effects which the mobility of some can have on others by undermining or strengthening their position. Again, it is important here to step beyond a simple binary which equates mobility with power and immobility with a loss thereof. As Sarah Mahler & Patricia Pessar (2001) note, there are also groups who move very much without ever being 'in charge', while others do not move at all, yet are deeply affected by said processes (p. 446). In order to highlight the ways people's opportunities and freedoms are determined in relation to mobility and transnational space, sociologist Anja Weiß (2005) suggests the concept of 'spatial autonomy'. She argues that spatial autonomy and the quality of places to which migrants have access are a major factor of social stratification (p. 708). Mark Salter (2003) goes one step further by setting mobility in the context of a global politics of difference and interpreting it as part of a neocolonial scheme:

> "In this post-Cold war, post-modern, postcolonial era, we see a bifurcation in the contemporary regime of international movement. Citizens of the developed North have a freedom of movement that is legitimated by domestic and international government structures. Citizens and refugees of the developing South, however, are restricted in their movement both domestically and internationally." (p. 2)

It is not only the access to mobility, but also processes of transmigration themselves which need to be considered as shaped by unequal power relations. In recent years, scholars of economic and development studies have praised labor migrants and their remittance economies as key agents of international development. By contrast, Glick Schiller (2010) points out that border regimes, the global division of labor, and new modes of subjectification are only a few of the many facets of mobility which are fundamentally shaped by inequality and difference (p. 117). While mobile societies of today may have experienced the formation of new, post-traditional identities, categorical inequalities have not vanished, but merely taken on different forms (McDowell, 2008: p. 504). It is therefore necessary to understand transnational migration "as a product of uneven fields of power" (Glick Schiller, 2010: p. 120). This applies not only to recent trends of controlling migration and subjecting migrants to multiple restrictions, but also to the effects and workings of a global division of labor. As Sassen (2008) observes, global labor markets usually emerge at the top and the bottom ends of economic systems, while middle sectors often remain quite centered on the national scale. Whereas the top level includes relatively small numbers of high-earning managers and specialized professionals, global cities are essentially kept alive by the massive

amount of low-paid and manual workers at the bottom end of the spectrum (p. 458). Although this is not necessarily a new observation, the last years have seen a "dynamic of valorization" which increases the gap between the devalorized and overvalorized sectors of economy. In fact, Sassen (1996) considers this transformation so dramatic that she identifies it as part of a new economic regime (pp. 632). While migrants in unskilled or semi-skilled labor are crucial for creating and maintaining a global economy, they are rendered invisible and with little opportunity of ever becoming an empowered workforce (Sassen, 2001: p. 322). From a postcolonial perspective, this economic regime can be understood as a neocolonial mechanism of subjectification, which positions the already disadvantaged as "offshore proletariat" and the "serving classes" (ibid.). Either way, a small, highly skilled transmigrant elite is countered by "a low-skilled rump of undifferentiated 'warm bodies' for bottom-end jobs" (McDowell, 2008: p. 495), who serve as the "ground staff in the globalization process" (Rerrich, 2002). Comprising the lowest wage sectors in the globe's wealthiest economies, migrants transnational practices can be understood as "countergeographies of survival" (Sassen, 2008: p. 466). In this regime, categories of social differentiation are transformed and gain new importance: aside from being profoundly gendered, international labor is segmented along categories of class, nationality, and ethnicity (Poster & Wilson, 2008: pp. 295, 304).

Another factor critical in understanding transnational patterns of labor migration is the massive commercialization of these processes, which has led to a veritable 'migration industry' (Boyle, 2002: pp. 533-34). Aside from the 300 to 400 billion dollars of annual global remittances, an army of private enterprises, including recruitment agencies, international money transfer companies, and providers of other multiple services profit from transnational labor migration (Levitt & Jaworsky, 2007: p. 134). Scholars have also pointed to the relations between sending and host countries, and the ways regulations like temporary visas and even illegal migration benefit national governments by freeing them from social welfare costs (Bailey, 2001: p. 418; Strüver, 2011b: p. 197). In turn, sending countries are positioned as competitors on a global marketplace, who try to offer migrant labor services under most attractive conditions, and tend to agree even to disadvantageous contracts (Knerr, 2010).

From a postcolonial perspective, this army of low-skilled labor migrants can be seen as the new colonized and enslaved of our time: Subjected to racialization and classifications in their countries of residence, they are 'othered' just like colonial subjects (Morrell & Swart, 2005: p. 91). They are embedded in power hierarchies, which manifest in physically repressive migration regimes, socio-economic discrimination, and even physical marginalization in form of 'ethnic colonies'. Occupying the 'shadows' of their immigration community, they are the definition of the postcolonial 'subaltern' (Ha, 2000: p. 5). The fact that the bulk of low-scale labor migrants is filled by members of formerly colonized countries is only one more parallel in this story. If scholars identify with the normative agenda of Postcolonialism, the critical analysis of neocolonial regimes of labor migration even becomes a moral obligation:

> "When migration scholars emphasise the benefits of transnational migration and remittance economy development to all concerned – without addressing the severe and permanent restriction of rights that increasingly accompany this form of labour – they support a regime of hyperexploitation. Short-term labour contracts resurrect older forms of indenture with limited rights and mobility. […] The global system of power in which this new arrangement of labour takes place – and its human costs – are all too rarely addressed within migration studies." (Glick Schiller, 2010: pp. 123-25)

Aside from an examination of global systems of subjectification and exploitation on a macro-level, political geography can also benefit from an ethnographic perspective. In fact, scholars have argued that focusing on personal narratives, memories, stories and experiences of migration should be taken more seriously in and beyond geography (Blunt, 2007: p. 3). Accessing migrant experiences on a micro-scale enables the researcher to recover marginalized voices. By giving space to migrants' own meanings, an ethnocentric bias can be avoided and new ways of processing and theorizing transmigration can be found (Sharma, 2009: p. 304). The analysis of these inherently unequal social processes can thus benefit from a postcolonial approach which stresses the everyday (re)production of migrant practices and subjectivities (McIlwaine, 2008: p. 1).

2.2.5 Subjectivities in migration

Representing a particular kind of social process, transnationalism is closely interconnected with the production of meaning and subjectivities. While regimes of meaning serve as outlining structures for transmigrants' ways of thinking and acting, those meanings are in turn continuously constructed and negotiated in social practice (Mahler & Pessar, 2001: p. 447). A postcolonial transmigration approach to meaning should particularly assess how consciousness and subjectivities re-transform under transnational conditions and how they interact with other elements of social practice (Bailey, 2001: p. 414). In its epistemological groundwork, transnational migration scholarship already holds promising potential for asking questions of identification and power, and problematizing fixed conceptualizations of race, class, ethnicity, nation, and culture (Gardner & Grillo, 2002: p. 181). As transnational studies reject the normalization of the nation-state and highlight the contingency of national

boundaries, their study of subjectivities should critically assess the negotiation and importance of categories like nationality, ethnicity, and citizenship (Strüver, 2011b: p. 203).

Since postcolonial theory conceives of meaning and power as two faces of the same coin, a corresponding approach to meaning under transnational circumstances automatically includes a close examination of power, as it permeates all aspects of the social. In this vein, Caroline Plüss and Chan Kwok-Bun (2012) suggest that subject identifications should be taken as central indicators for the reproduction of social inequalities. They argue that migrant identities can serve as a useful window to retrace the multiple power effects which interact in the construction of transnational migrants' experiences (pp. 1–2).[6] For a closer look at the interplay between representation and power, a socially and spatially multi-scalar and intersectional perspective on subjectivity is essential (Strüver, 2011b: p. 203). In this way, the transnational is conceptualized as scapes of multiply intersecting effects of inclusion and exclusion: "The migrants' transnational positions express and reflect their places in the hierarchies of overlapping processes of displacement and othering (inferiorization)" (Plüss, 2012: pp. 259-60). By focusing on the multiple dimensions of representation which discipline and position migrant subjects, and shape the ways they think and act, an intersectional approach can expose the interrelations between spatial mobility, identity construction and transnational structures of inequality:

> "In the case of migrant workers, questions to address include: how are connections and practices across spatial scales transformed when the subject being made is a migrant? How are the gendered/classed/racialized identities of migrant workers subject to renegotiation on entering a different space? How do traces of the regulatory structures of 'there' affect being 'here'? How do previous cultural assumptions about gender attributes and capacities […] work out across space and time?" (McDowell, 2008: p. 496)

Although much research remains to be done, previous studies have suggested that transmigration gives rise to new and multiple modes of constructing meaning and subjectivities. As migrants are embedded in multiple local and social contexts, they are subjected to competing regimes of representation, which include varying meanings, social roles, and practices. This multiplication causes social categories and ascriptions of meaning to diversify, which provides subjects with a greater array of possibilities to identify themselves, and tasks them with an even more fervent renegotiation of meaning and practice (Kelly, 2012: p. 54). Being positioned in different hierarchies at the same time, migrant subjects are able to shift between multiple identities, alliances, forms of in- and exclusion, and ambiguities of meaning (Castles, 2004: p. 289; Plüss, 2012: p. 266). As the values of certain socio-structural traits vary in transnational settings, transmigrants are confronted with being assessed by different scales at the same time. While a migrant laborer might occupy the bottom end of the social hierarchy in his host society, his mobility might simultaneously earn him social respect and access to higher social positions in his home context (see Strüver, 2011b: p. 199). As Levitt and Jaworsky (2007) summarize, the same traits and practices can thus have very different values, meanings, and effects in diverse national and social settings:

> "[Transmigrants] may move up with respect to the home and host countries, move up with respect to one and down with respect to the other, or experience downward mobility in both contexts. Migrants have to make sense of two often conflicting socioeconomic and status ladders, and to locate themselves somewhere along them using measurements that reflect the multiple places where they live […]." (p. 139)

The subjectification to contradictory systems of classification and valorization forces transmigrants to constantly (re)define, (re)invent, and perform their identities in the face of changing contexts. This shifting between locally-defined and transnationally-assumed identifications can create tensions and raise the question whether transnational migrants are "neither here nor there" or "both here and there" (Huang et al., 2008: p. 7). Although transnational processes certainly complicate the negotiation of meaning, it is important to remember power as being a positive and productive force. As one's marginalization means another's dominance, the pairing of social categories and practices can have both disempowering and empowering effects. While studying the positive valorization of race in transnational contexts, some scholars have highlighted the role of 'ethnicity as a resource' (Strüver, 2011b: p. 194). Even more than race, the question of gender has received considerable attention from transnational migration scholarship. In a global economy which is profoundly gendered, transnational labor experiences in particular have shown to transform gender norms and subjectivities (ibid.: p. 198; Mills, 2003: p. 42). Particularly in the negotiation of gendered roles, the importance of close social networks such as the family needs to be considered (Sijapati, 2010: pp. 141–142). Via the transnational family, migrants' experiences shape not only subjectivities accessible to them, but touch down in local communities. In this way, numerous studies have illustrated the ways transmigration can redefine masculinities and femininities in vari-

6 In regards to transmigrant identities, Floya Anthias (2008) suggests a distinction between concepts of 'identity' and 'belonging'. While 'identity' refers to narratives of the 'Self' and the 'Other', the notion of 'belonging' emphasizes experiences of inclusion, exclusion, access, and participation. Belonging does not only include membership, rights, and duties, but also the social places constructed through identifications. As it refers to social bonding and its manifestation in practice and emotion, the concept attempts to access the deepest and most naturalized aspects of migrant identifications (p. 8).

ous contexts (see Kelly, 2012; Aubriot, 2010: p. 54; Margold, 1995; Mills, 2003). For instance, Margold (1995) observes that labor migration has become an integral part of the identity of the 'successful male' among men in Kerala and Chinese Malay. While their migration leads to a rise of respect and prestige in their home contexts, they are faced with a dramatically inferior social position in the host country, which can lead to a traumatizing 'crisis of masculinity':

> "[T]he experiences of the Ilokano worker abroad [...] are not only degrading and humiliating; they also constitute a painful inversion of the men's premigratory experiences in their homelands, which are characterized both by the according of prestige to travelers and by a malleable and fluid masculinity embedded within a larger system of gender symmetry." (p. 274)

As transnational experiences may transform social identities or reinforce traditional roles, they affect the consciousness of both migrants and non-migrants. For instance, migratory practices can become so normalized that they are assumed as a lifestyle – a mode of living where the migrant does not really settle in any local context, but rather 'settles in mobility' (Morokvasic, 2009: p. 43). Scholars have pleaded for a holistic approach to transmigration, which considers migrants' entire transnational experiences and acknowledges the multidirectionality in the construction of meaning (Plüss, 2012: pp. 265-66). They point out that inequalities can not only be reinforced, but also reversed in and through transnational contexts. At the same time, transnationalism does not necessarily lead to the growth of cosmopolitan and open minds, as it has often been proclaimed to. Quite to the contrary, in a transnational setting highly governed by hierarchy and difference, social categories can be reinforced and identity boundaries hardened. When migrants are 'othered' along labels of ethnicity, nationality, and religious affiliation, those categories resurge as important axes of identification (Kelly, 2012: p. 69). In this way, the transnational experience can easily lead to the recurrence of various "isms, including nationalism, patriarchism, sexism, sectarianism and ethno-nationalism" (Faist, 2010: p. 15).

2.2.6 Narratives and imaginaries of migration

Examining subjectivities is only one avenue of analyzing the interplay of power and meaning in transnational settings. Another access point is through the narratives and imaginations which shape people's minds and practices. In fact, what people imagine is continuously transformed and (re)constructed, which caused Arjun Appadurai (1996) to define the imaginary itself as a social practice, and to highlight its role in transnational fields:

> "[T]he imagination has become an organized field of social practices, a form of work (in the sense of both labor and culturally organized practice), and a form of negotiation between sites of agency (individuals) and globally defined fields of possibility. […] The imagination is now central to all forms of agency, is itself a social fact, and is the key component of the new global order." (p. 31)

It is therefore important to see imagination not as distanced from transmigratory practices, but to understand it in fact *as* a practice of transcending the local and bridging physical and sociocultural distances. Imaginaries are thus not just passively received, but actively appropriated and acted on in terms of co- and counter-imaginations (Römhild, 2003: pp. 159-60). In this way, they play a massive role in the creation and upholding of transnational cultural and migratory flows: "The possibility of 'other lives' enters the local scene [...], thus challenging the given repertoire of lived lives and revealing its restrictions" (ibid.: p. 159). An approach including the imaginary expands the concept of mobility and can enlighten our understanding of transnational mindsets. When a person is physically bound to a locality, their imagination can still be in movement. In turn, while being physically mobile, "one's imagination can be focused on a singular place" (Salazar, 2011: pp. 576-77). A particularly important form of the imagined is the geographical imaginary, "a taken-for-granted spatial ordering of the world" (Gregory, 2009: p. 282).[7] Determined by dominant regimes of representation, geographical imaginaries are effects of power, and therefore involve both 'bordering and ordering': they do not only create seemingly natural divisions of the spatial, but also valorize the latter and place them in global sets of hierarchies. It is then the task of politi-

7 The term is not to be confused with the concept of a 'geographical imagination'. While the former describes largely unconscious and undisputed spatial divisions and hierarchizations, the latter refers to a new perspective within the discipline. The concept was first suggested by David Harvey (1973), who tied it to the established idea of a 'sociological imagination'. Harvey demanded a geographical imagination enabling people to realize the roles of space and place in their lives and society. In later years, the term has been developed further to denote postulations for a future geography, including a stronger attention to post-structuralist and anti-essentialist concepts, a conceiving of the world beyond cognition and consciousness, and a renewed interest in nature (Gregory, 2009).

cal geography[8] and postcolonial migration scholarship to analyse dominant imaginaries, which do not only fundamentally shape our understanding of the world, but are closely interconnected with mobility:

> "[I]maginaries [are] socially shared and transmitted (both within and between cultures) representational assemblages that interact with people's personal imaginings and are used as meaning-making and world-shaping device [...]. People hardly journey to terrae incognitae anymore these days but to destinations they already virtually 'know' through the widely circulating imaginaries about them." (Salazar, 2011: pp. 576-77)

Imaginaries of place and mobility continue to be pervaded by long-standing colonial narratives of a world naturally divided into a superior North/West, which is opposed to an inferior South/East (Römhild, 2003: p. 160). Such concepts define imaginaries of mobility and paint migration as the only avenue of vertical mobility: "The images and ideas of other (read: better) possible places to live […] circulate in a very unequal global space and are ultimately filtered through migrants' personal aspirations: Migration thus always presupposes some knowledge or, at least, rumors of 'the other side'" (Salazar, 2011: p. 586). As imaginaries of mobility construct and define people and places, they create multiple representations of 'otherness' – thereby transforming, dissolving, or reifying intersecting social categories (ibid.). By offering new livelihood opportunities and transforming the rules of upward class mobility, imagined migration does not only define the thoughts and practices of migrants, but can change the entire order of class and gender relations in a local context (Kelly, 2012: pp. 53-54). In the case of migrant laborers, social categories are often used in interplay with geographical imaginaries to subject and discipline workers. The reproduction of inferiorating narratives justifies and upholds systems of cheap and segmented labor, exploitation, and the violation of migrants' humanity (Mills, 2003: p. 42). Thereby, transnational contexts often expose migrants to a field of contradictory imaginaries, where they are torn between narratives of the 'better place' and their experiences of severe inferiorization in the host country:

> "The fact that migrants often have a tendency to present themselves as successful and to conceal their economic and social problems further fuels the culture of migration. Both potential migrants and those who stay behind, however, often perceive economic opportunities and quality of life 'out there' as greater than they actually are [...]. [P]ersonal accounts of destitution [...] are no deterrent [...] because every potential migrant either hopes to be luckier or to embrace the hardship […]." (Salazar, 2011: pp. 588-89)

As Salazar illustrates, such contradicting experiences are strongly fed by imaginaries of place and mobility. Aside from constituting a key aspect in the cultural contradictions of transnational migration, those mechanisms are also responsible for the upholding of migration flows.

8 So far, this task has been the core interest of critical geopolitics, which focuses on the spatialization of international politics through a particular representation of the world. The field has contributed significantly to the study and deconstruction of geographical representations, borders, regions, and territories. Its perspective and findings are thus connected with the analysis pursued in this thesis, but feature a different focus in its approach to scale and research (Glasze, 2013).

2.3 Regimes of Mobility and Migration

In the previous chapters, the theoretical foundations, core positions, and research potentials of a postcolonial approach to transnational migration have been illustrated. This thesis argues that the wide range of discussed phenomena can be adequately comprised in a 'regimes of mobility' approach. By providing a holistic, yet multi-scalar framework for the interplay of power and meaning in contexts of transmigration, the concept can be a valuable contribution to a political geography of transnational migration. Aside from highlighting its poststructuralist and postcolonial foundations and its critical perspective focused on power, the term 'regime' enables stepping beyond a reductive model of actors and victims, institutions and individuals, subjects and objects (Strüver, 2011b: p. 198). To some degree, the concept 'regimes of mobility' is inspired by the notions of border regimes and migration regimes, yet there are also some important distinctions which should be noted.

2.3.1 Border and migration regimes

Studies on border regimes focus on national borders and their role in controlling and restricting mobility. In this approach, the border is seen from a critical and constructivist perspective, and is considered to comprise far more than just its physical form. As they include different tools of migration control, such as visa systems, immigration checks, detention, and deportation, border regimes operate well beyond the physical borders of a state. Regulations and institutions of migration control are frequently extended into neighboring countries, which renders borders deterritorialized, fragmented, and highly flexible constructs (Kasparek & Hess, 2010: p. 16). From an ethnographic perspective, scholars have additionally paid attention to the symbolic and cultural dimensions of borders. In this way, they are seen as socially constructed, performed, and constantly negotiated practices of social in- and exclusion. While they shape subjects' lives and experiences, they are in turn challenged, shifted, overcome, and transformed by those subjects' practices on a daily basis (Römhild, 2006: p. 175). In their physicality, borders are materializations of power relations, while in their symbolic and cultural form, they can be analyzed as a dynamic process of 'doing borders' (Brah, 2003). In order to incorporate practices and meanings into a theory of the 'autonomy of migration', Vassilis Tsianos and Sabine Hess (2010) suggest an ethnographic analysis of the border from the perspectives of migrants (pp. 244-48).

Frequently, however, political apparatus and state institutions do more than just restricting mobility. It is here where the study of migration regimes steps in, which focuses on the various mechanisms nation states employ to manage and organize flows in and out of the country (Boyle, 2002: p. 533). While border and migration regimes are not always distinguished from each other and sometimes referred to synonymously, the terms connote distinct meanings. Whereas border regimes aim at preventing migration by sealing off regions and people, migration regimes refer to the regulation and 'ordering' of immigration and emigration processes (Römhild, 2006: p. 183). Instead of a generic exclusion of migrants, migration regimes exert control over the 'who' and 'how' of migration, thereby creating a tool of selective and differential inclusion. The term further connotes the proximity of these seemingly public processes to a private, commercial, and 'managerial' sphere (Kasparek & Hess, 2010: p. 17). The governing of migration flows comprises institutional structures, regulations, and anticipative strategies against border crossing, but also includes the social perceptions and meanings ascribed to places, migrants, and migration processes (Tsianos & Hess, 2010: p. 250).

Migration and border regimes can thus be described as dense effects of power relations between various social actors, institutions, and practices (Strüver, 2011b: p. 198). This critical perspective is especially relevant in regards to migration management, as public discourse frequently constructs the latter as an unpolitical tool of governance. However, this governance is defined by normative guidelines, which are in fact highly political, thereby promoting implicit hegemonic meaning/power formations: "In this sense, migration management may be depoliticised (as it avoids the explicit political issues raised by migration), but is nevertheless fully political" (Geiger & Pécoud, 2012: p. 19). As migration regimes can perpetuate mechanisms of migration control under the disguise of 'management', a critical assessment of its institutions and a deconstruction of corresponding practices and narratives becomes even more important (ibid.: 12–13, 19).

2.3.2 Regimes of mobility

Many questions asked previously in regards to migration are picked up and revisited by the 'regimes of mobility' framework, whose basic theoretical contentions are both presented and expanded in this chapter. The approach originally introduced by Glick Schiller and Salazar (2013) expands its scope far beyond the actual moment of migration and its management by state-based actors. Stemming from the 'new mobilities' paradigm, it suggests a comprehensive framework which theorizes mobility, the dynamic between mobile and sedentary modes of living, and the role of transnationalism through a critique of power. Acknowledging the multiple scales and dimensions on which mobility and power interact, it explicitly incorporates the various aspects and effects of meaning and power in their interconnectedness with transmigratory practices:

> "[T]he issue offers a regimes of mobility framework that addresses the relationships between mobility and immobility, localisation and transnational connection, experiences and imaginaries of migration, and rootedness and cosmopolitan openness. The introduction highlights how, within this framework and its emphasis on social fields of differential power, the contributors to this collection ethnographically explore the disparities, inequalities, racialised representations and national mythscapes that facilitate and legitimate differential mobility and fixity." (Glick Schiller & Salazar, 2013: p. 183)

As understood in this thesis, this critical approach to the politics of mobility and migration goes well beyond the legal boundaries that regulate migration, and instead turns to highlight the "embodied politics of identity and difference" (Blunt, 2007: p. 2). Due to its fundamental rejection of methodological nationalism, the framework is able to overcome state-bound hegemonic dichotomies of internal vs. international movement, the 'native' vs. the 'foreigner', as well as mobility vs. stasis (Glick Schiller & Salazar, 2013: p. 183). Instead, its focus lies on retracing the dynamic between practices of mobility and immobility. By placing these concepts "within a theory of unequal globe-spanning relationships of power" (ibid.), the meanings ascribed to them and their role in the reproduction of mobile and immobile practices can be critically assessed.

Regimes of mobility are then fundamentally constituted by imaginaries, subjectivities, and other forms of meaning, thus being produced by power effects and constantly transformed in transnational contexts. In other words, they refer to the collection of governing and disciplining mechanisms, structures, and strategies that produce hegemonic narratives of mobility and immobility, as well as migrant and non-migrant subjectivities. Power effects on both mobile and non-mobile subjects can then be retraced in the inequalities and opportunities created through the intersections of multiple social categories (Plüss, 2012: pp. 260-61). This requires a multidimensional and multi-scalar perspective, as "migration is […] viewed in a broad discursive spectrum from virtue to vice, and perceptions of both mobility and immobility are influenced by regional, national and international political discourse" (Glick Schiller & Salazar, 2013: p. 190). Furthermore, it demands a close look at day-to-day practices and constructions of meaning, as imagination and identity are not conceptualized as static entities, but as negotiated, performed, and "embodied practice of transcending both physical and sociocultural distance" (Salazar, 2011: pp. 577-78). By analyzing transmigratory contexts as structured by power, the 'regimes of mobility' framework enables not only a focus on the hegemonic readings of mobility and migration. Due to its ethnographic approach to everyday transmigratory practices and constructions, marginal and oppressed voices can be recovered and counterpointed against grand narratives of mobility (McIlwaine, 2008: p. 6).

2.3.3 Between structure and agency

Scholars have suggested that postcolonial approaches to transnational migration scholarship should deal with the "joint theorisation of agency and structure" (Bailey, 2001: p. 420) by stressing the fluidity and links between both concepts. Along with Linda McDowell (2008), who rejects "the binary opposition between structure and culture, suggesting instead the need to combine both approaches" (p. 493), it is argued that the 'regimes of mobility' approach can theorize transmigration both in terms of state power, regulatory frameworks, global flows of labor, gendered divisions of labor, and mechanisms of neocolonial exploitation, and at the same time consider the (re)production of meaning in transnational spaces and the connections between classed, raced and gendered performances of identity . By establishing connections between those different forms of explanation, the intersections of structure and agency can be elaborated on a theoretical level.

Thus, the 'regimes of mobility' framework can help to examine structural manifestations of power as well as social agency. This includes a focus on the ambivalence of social processes – e.g. the role of negotiated subjectivities, which operate as both structures of inequality and expressions of agency. It also entails a connection of micro- and macro-analytical levels, since migrants' daily practices produce transnational formations as well as global patterns of capitalism, and are in turn determined by the latter (Strüver, 2011b: p. 199). When focusing on the specific practice of transnational labor migration, as is the case in this thesis, the relation between structure and agency is associated with questions of exploitation or opportunity, and of forced or voluntary migration. Many depictions of migrant labor arrangements settle at one end of the spectrum, either constructing migrant practices as family livelihood strategies determined by straightforward logics of 'push and pull', or victimizing them as feeble puppets in a global game of capitalism and power. However, as Anke Strüver (2011b: pp. 196-99) suggests, a more differential approach to transnational labor is possible. On the one hand, structures of inequality and difference as well as grand imaginaries of place and mobility need to be deconstructed. On the other hand, migrant agency via 'working the system', negotiating, and transforming those structures should be highlighted. By combining the micro-geographies of the subaltern with a macro-geography of transnational configurations of power/meaning, the 'regimes of mobility' approach can serve as a powerful framework for the joint theorization of structure and agency.

3 NEPALESE MIGRATION

As a small landlocked country in South Asia, Nepal is sandwiched between the People's Republic of China and the Republic of India. With a current population of about 26.5 million[9], Nepal's inhabitants are distributed quite unevenly on a harsh high-altitude mountain range, a traditionally settled hilly region, and the today most densely populated Southern lowlands known as *Terai* (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2012: p. 3). The country, where at least 123 different languages are spoken, is known for its cultural diversity and complex social structure. With 81 percent of its population associating themselves with Hindu religion and only 9 percent declared Buddhists, Nepalese society has been deeply shaped by principles of Hinduism (ibid.: p. 3-4). This includes a rigidly hierarchical structure, which is not only based on the traditional caste system, but has also incorporated a large number of different ethnic groups, who have traditionally been given a low status in society. While the caste system was officially abolished in 1963, hierarchies and discrimination have persisted in Nepal for centuries, and social life continues to be structured along numerous status divisions (Lawoti, 2007: pp. 25-26). Only few years after the formation of a constitutional monarchy in 1990, Nepal experienced a violent insurgency headed by a Maoist guerilla group, which turned into a 10-year-long civil war. Since its end in 2006, the country has been declared as a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, secular, and federally restructured democratic republican state (Government of Nepal, 2007), but in fact, massive political and social struggles continue to trouble the country. Although Nepal is the world's second richest country in water resources, many people face problems with drinking water, electricity, and irrigation. As the United Nations Human Development Index places Nepal at rank 157 out of 187 countries (UNDP, 2013), issues framed under the term 'development' remain among the core topics of both political agendas and academic scholarship. Since 83 percent of the national population live in rural areas (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2012: p. 3), Nepal is frequently perceived as an agrarian society. However, during the last 15 years, transnational migration has gained massive influence on Nepal's economy and society. Currently, its national income largely relies on foreign aid, tourism, and remittances sent from migrant laborers abroad.

3.1 Historical developments and recent trends

Until about a decade ago, the practice of international labor migration from Nepal received little public and academic regard (Graner, 2008: p. 217). Only when the scale of migration and the economic and social changes it caused became too large to overlook, media and scholars began to pay closer attention. In its earliest years, the spread of migratory practices was interpreted as a negative new development and a veritable "Passport to Misery" (Khadka, 1998; Graner & Gurung, 2003: p. 297). However, it is important to note that mobility and migration are far from new phenomena in Nepal. While countries of the Middle East and other more distant locations have become core destinations today, Nepalese society had been shaped by practices of internal mobility to the fertile *Terai* region, the economically strong capital Kathmandu, and India long before that (Aubriot, 2010: p. 46).

In fact, labor migration has been a feature of Nepalese livelihood strategies for 200 years (Gill, 2003: p. 1). During the 18th century, the then-independent mountain kingdom of Gorkha conquered nearby areas, which caused its soldiers to gain the reputation of fearless warriors and surrounded them with various stories and legends about their bravery (Thieme & Wyss, 2005: pp. 60-61). Since the early 19th century, some of those soldiers preferred to be employed in the army of Sikh ruler Ranjit Singh in the Northern Punjabi city Lahore. These soldiers came to be known as '*lahure*'. After Nepal had lost the war with British India in 1814, the latter began to recruit the famously brave *'Gurkha'* soldiers – a practice which remains until today (Graner & Gurung, 2003: p. 298; Ghimire et al., 2011: p. 42). Initially, the Nepalese government was not in favor of this practice, as it feared the entry of revolutionary ideas against the country's autocratic *Rana* regime. However, government policy changed in the late 19th century, and young Nepalese men were increasingly encouraged to join the British army (Thieme & Wyss, 2005: pp. 60-61). Around the same time, large-scale civilian migration began as well, since many Nepalese decided to escape landlessness, scarcity in resources, and discrimination by migrating to the adjoining regions Assam, Bengal, Darjeeling, Sikkim, Garhwal, Kumaon, and Meghalaya. They largely found work in the booming construction work, coal mining, and tea estates. By the end of the 19th century, half of the population in Darjeeling was of Nepalese origin (ibid.). From the 1950s onwards, Nepal's "tradition of migration" (Nath, 2009: p. 106) expanded further, as soldiers of the British *Gurkha* regiments were more frequently stationed in Malaysia, Singapore, Hong Kong, Brunei, Fiji, and the United Kingdom (Ghimire et al., 2011: p. 43). Furthermore, many Nepalese began to migrate to more industrialized areas in India, such as Delhi, Mumbai, and Bangalore, where it was easier for them to find employment (Thieme & Wyss, 2005: p. 61). Since foreign labor regulations were loosened in post-1990 democratic Nepal, migratory practices have been marked by a transition "from global warriors to

9 According to different sources, data on Nepal's national population varies quite significantly, for instance with the UNDP (2013) estimating current numbers at 31 million. While the information provided by the Central Bureau of Statistics (2012) was retrieved as part of the National Census of 2011, it is important to note that this data, too, was merely based on preliminary estimates.

global workers" (Yamanaka, 2000). Especially since the late 1990s, migration destinations have diversified dramatically. Aside from India, which keeps an open border with Nepal and continues to hold the largest number of Nepalese laborers today, important host countries include members of the Gulf States, Malaysia, Japan, and South Korea (Thieme & Müller-Böker, 2010: p. 107).

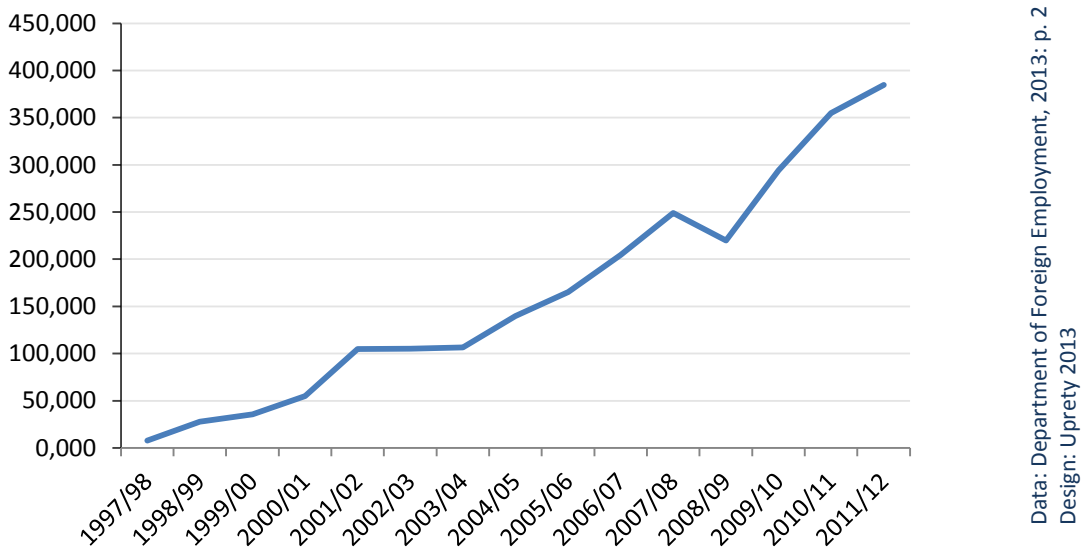

Figure 1: Numbers of Nepalese leaving the country for foreign employment.

While labor migration has been an integral part of Nepalese society for a long time, it is also undeniable that recent years have seen an astounding dynamic in the rise and transformation of migratory practices. For the past decade, the numbers of labor migrants flying abroad per year have risen continuously (Department of Foreign Employment, 2013: p. 2). Considering its practices of internal and international migration, Nepal can be easily called a nation of migrants: Currently, a total of 3.3 million adults[10] are absent from their household, which account for 20 percent of the nation's adult population (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2009: p. 183). 29 percent of all households have at least one of their members currently staying abroad. However, internal mobility continues to be widespread as well, with more than 19 percent of all households having at least one absentee who currently lives somewhere else within the country (ibid.: p. 151). While the latter category largely concerns migrations from rural to urban areas (ibid.: p. 157), they have also been shown to frequently precede international labor, as cities like Kathmandu and Pokhara serve as a stepping stone towards further destinations (Bruslé, 2010b: p. 18). Currently, more than 1,300 Nepalese leave the country for foreign employment every day (Shrestha, 2011). As nearly 82 percent of all absentees are men, "migration is predominantly a male practice" (Thieme & Müller-Böker, 2010: p. 108). In order to prevent abuse and exploitation of women workers, a ban on female labor migration was imposed in 1998 and has been repeatedly lifted and reimposed since then (ibid.). As of today, women below 30 years of age are not allowed to enter Malaysia or the Gulf countries for foreign employment. While these rules have not prevented such practices to occur via illegal channels, female labor migration continues to play a relatively smaller role. By contrast, mobility has without doubt transformed the lives of Nepalese men in a fundamental way: A staggering 48 percent of young men between 15 and 29 years and more than one third of men between 30 and 44 years are currently absent from their households (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2009: p. 161).[11]

Legally, Nepalese labor migration has been regulated by the First Foreign Employment Act issued in 1985. The act, which refers to all destinations except for India, was initially supposed to control migration rather than facilitate it (Graner, 2008: p. 218). After an early amendment in 1989, it was only in the late 1990s when the Nepalese government began to foster foreign labor as a coping strategy to compensate for the losses in its drastically declining carpet industry. Whereas it is theoretically possible for Nepalese to apply for employment on an individual basis, most workers travel abroad via private recruiting agencies (Ghimire et al., 2011: p. 11). Despite

10 'Adults' are defined by the Central Bureau of Statistics (2009) as individuals above 15 years of age.

11 Regarding statistical information on migrant numbers and amounts of financial remittances, reliable data is extremely difficult to come by, as even the same government institution has published various contradicting data (see Central Bureau of Statistics, 2009; 2012). However, the information provided here was compared with multiple other sources and deemed the most accurate.

government regulations, illegal labor migration to alternative destinations, including Iraq and Afghanistan, is a large phenomenon as well (ibid.: pp. 20-21; Graner, 2008: p. 221).

3.2 Remittances and economic aspects

Since the massive increase of foreign labor migration, the financial remittances which workers send home to support their families have played a core role in Nepalese economy (Graner & Gurung, 2003: p. 296). Since 2003, remittances have become the nation's number one currency earning (Graner, 2008: p. 217). For some time, this important role was explained with the weakness of the Nepalese economy during the civil war. However, while the national economy has experienced some improvement in the last years, remittance amounts have kept up with this growth (Singh, 2013). For several years, the annual inflow has made up about 23 percent of the country's gross domestic product (GDP), which currently translates to about 359.6 billion Nepalese rupees or 2.7 billion Euro (Nepal Rastra Bank, 2012: p. 14). Based on these numbers, migrant remittances have played a significantly larger role for Nepalese economy than in other South Asian states. By comparison, migrant earnings currently take a share of 11.8 percent of the GDP in Bangladesh, 7.9 percent in Sri Lanka, 6.0 percent in Pakistan, and only 3.9 percent in India (World Bank, 2011: p. 32). Moreover, official statistics do not include money which has entered the country through informal channels, such as friends and the widespread so-called *'hundi'* system, which are estimated to amount to at least half the number of formal remittances (Singh, 2013). Thus, the earnings transferred to Nepal altogether could possible make up around one third of the GDP (Ghimire et al., 2011: p. 28). Among all destination countries, remittances from Qatar and Saudi Arabia account for about 21 and 15 percent of total sendings, respectively. Along with Malaysia, they constitute the three destinations with the highest amounts of annual transfers (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2009: p. 165). Taking the earnings sent from all Gulf States together, they reach nearly half of total annual remittances (Shrestha, 2011). While these numbers give an indication to the large extent of Nepalese labor migration, it should be considered that big shares in remittances do not necessarily reflect the quantity of migrants involved in those practices. Due to the massively unequal wages labor migrants receive in different host contexts, higher earnings of foreign workers in Japan or South Korea cause a proportionally stronger impact on the national economy than those sent by the vast numbers of laborers in the Middle East (Seddon et al., 1998: pp. 9-10).

While the spread of labor migration was initially met with skepticism, many scholars and politicians have since acknowledged the important role of Nepal's 'remittance economy' both on a national scale and "as a source of income to many households and local communities throughout the country" (ibid.: p. 3). The Nepalese state profits from migrant earnings in form of taxes and commissions, and particularly benefits from destinations like the Gulf States, as these have the highest shares of remittances sent through the formal banking system (Graner, 2008: p. 218). As opposed to a critical and victimizing perspective, recent years have been dominated by an approach focusing on economics and development: Labor migration has increasingly been depicted as the newest and most effective form of reducing poverty (see Ghimire et al., 2011: pp. 28; Guilmoto & Sandron, 2001; de Haas, 2005; Lokshin et al., 2007; Khatri, 2010; Skeldon, 2008; Wagle, 2009). Recent studies have held that the true importance of migrant practices is still underestimated, because many households continue to be classified as 'agricultural', even though the bulk of their income is derived from remittances (Graner & Gurung, 2003: p. 296). Consequently, Tristan Bruslé (2008) suggests to consider rural Nepalese livelihood strategies as 'agrimigratory', since "labor migration represents a vital part of rural systems without which life, for most people, would not be sustainable" (p. 241). While economic impacts of foreign labor have been studied extensively in previous years, the social transformations set off by transmigratory practices and their role in spatial and social systems of differentiation have not received enough attention so far (Bruslé, 2010b: p. 21).

3.3 The Gulf States and migrant labor

The Gulf States comprise the countries Saudi Arabia, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, and Iraq. Since the gradually rising incomes from oil exports in the 1950s, most Gulf nations filled their new demand of laborers by hosting migrant workers from abroad. In 1972, the number of foreign employees in the Arab oil states had already reached 650,000. After the oil price hike in the 1970s, many Gulf countries experienced a huge increase in their wealth, economies, and infrastructure projects, causing the numbers of laborers to climb up to five million in 1980 (Meyer, 2004: pp. 433-35). Initially, most of those workers came from neighboring Arab countries such as North Yemen, Jordan, and Egypt, but also from India and Pakistan. When the oil prices fell drastically during the 1980s, the consequent negative effects largely affected laborers from Arab countries, because South and Southeast Asians were considered a much cheaper and more reliable labor force. In times of low budgets, they were recruited even more than before, while migrants from other Arab countries were unemployed and sent back. This trend of 'de-arabization' only intensified with the Gulf War of 1990/91 (Bruslé, 2010a: para. 6). Since then, numbers of Indian, Pakistani, Filipino, Indonesian, Bangladeshi, Sri Lankan,

and Thai workers have increased dramatically (Meyer, 2004: p. 435). During the last fifteen years, Gulf economies have started to include quite significant numbers of Nepalese laborers, as well.

Today, most of the Gulf States host such large numbers of migrant workers that their national economies have become extremely dependent on foreign labor. This is particularly true for its rising global cities, such as Dubai, Abu Dhabi, Doha, and Riyadh, which rely heavily on immigrant workers (Malecki & Ewers, 2007: pp. 469-70). In the United Arab Emirates, 7.3 million people, accounting for 89 percent of its 8.2 million population, are from abroad (United Arab Emirates National Bureau of Statistics, 2013). Other states feature similar numbers, such as Kuwait with a 65 percent foreign population (Castles & Miller, 2004: pp. 159-60), and Saudi Arabia, where its total of 29.2 million residents include 9.3 million or 32 percent foreign laborers (Central Department of Statistics and Information Saudi Arabia, 2013). A particularly vivid example is provided by the small emirate Qatar. Especially since 2005, the former British protectorate has entered a new phase of development, which has included the transformation of its capital Doha into a modern metropolis. Currently, the home of less than 300,000 national citizens has the highest per capita GDP in the world, with an annual growth rate of 19.4 percent (CNN, 2012). Within a few years, the numbers of foreign workers have doubled from 700,000 to 1.4 million (Paschyn, 2012: p. 17). While about 20 new immigrants continue to arrive in Qatar every hour, migrant workers already comprise 94 percent of its workforce and have rendered its population dominated by men, who make up 76 percent of residents (ibid.: p. 19; Human Rights Watch, 2012: p. 1).

A particular characteristic of Gulf economies is their dual labor system: While nearly every member of their relatively small domestic labor force is employed in public service, their private sectors are completely made up of foreign workers (Bruslé, 2012b: para. 10). As employees of public offices, nationals usually earn highly subsidized incomes, which Günter Meyer (2004) interprets as less based on employees' performance than a sort of 'pension' derived from public oil export earnings. Consequently, the salaries of nationals frequently are about 15 times higher than those of foreigners with a comparable job (p. 438). However, the labor market is not only separated along the duality of national citizens and foreigners, but in fact is marked by an intricate hierarchy based on nationality and ethnicity:

> "Foreign workers are ranked by place of origin, receiving differential payment and treatment. [...] The categories also roughly reflect salary differences, with other Arabs ranked above Asians, and with gradations within these groups as well. Thus the other Arabs of Lebanese, Palestinian, and Syrian origin command the highest wages and salaries, Egyptians and Sudanese receive half as much, and South and Southeast Asians receive one-third as much." (Leonard, 2003: p. 133)

Due to the strict nationality-based hierarchy of the labor system, migrants' only way of integrating into the market is by filling the specific place ascribed to them (Bruslé, 2010a: para. 7). This has caused the formation of highly specialized flows, where each position in every sector of the economy is only available to a certain group of migrants. In the case of female health workers, this means that "Filipinas and Egyptians fill middle status registered nurse positions, while Sri Lankan and Pakistani migrants fill unskilled orderly and janitorial positions in the health care facilities. Americans and Europeans fill senior hospital administration, doctor and head nurse positions" (Malecki & Ewers, 2007: pp. 475-76).

The stratified labor system is only one of many symptoms sprouting from a highly unequal power structure. Like other world cities, Dubai, Abu Dhabi, Doha, and Riyadh are being built on the backs of cheap laborers, but are created to exist merely for the privileged (ibid.: p. 470). In fact, this is a paradox many Gulf societies as a whole struggle with: Without the employment of foreign workers, their economies would crumble. Yet the large inflow of migrant laborers, having frequently overtaken the national population in numbers, has increasingly been considered a threat (Bruslé, 2010a: para. 11). In countries whose politics of immigration "are geared towards nonintegration" already (Bruslé, 2012b: para. 15), xenophobia and sentiments of a cultural invasion have rendered discriminating representations of migrant groups and corresponding practices even more powerful. The traditionally rigid treatment of foreign laborers includes the prohibition of free settlement, the massive infringement of basic rights, and the virtual non-existence of political privileges, including the denial of citizenship or family reunion (Castles & Miller, 2004: p. 175; Malecki & Ewers, 2007: p. 476). As many citizens of the Gulf have perceived the massive inflow of South Asian men as a threat to cultural values and national identity, national governments have answered with "politics of spatial zoning and […] the de facto eviction of low qualified migrant workers from mainstream places" (Bruslé, 2012b: para. 15). This includes the so-called 'family day' policy, which prohibits single men from entering local malls and parks on Friday, which is the weekly holiday. As those restrictions are explicitly not enforced on Western male bachelors, the practice directly targets Asian laborers (Human Rights Watch, 2012: p. 25). A further tool of exclusion is the spatial segregation of foreign workers by placing them in far-off industrial camps. All these methods have the effect that despite their large numbers, immigrant groups leave almost no imprint on Gulf societies and culture (Paschyn, 2012: p. 17). Therefore, many Gulf cities are home to "a growing share of disadvantaged populations" (Sassen, 1996: p. 636), who are effectively rendered invisible.

3.4 Nepalese migrants in the Gulf region

In comparison to other South Asian countries, which began 'exporting' labor to the Gulf region as early as the 1970s, Nepal joined this trend quite lately, as labor contracts with those countries were only established from the mid-1990s on. At first glance, the role of a small Himalayan country in international labor migration might appear insignificant when compared to large sending countries such as India and the Philippines. However, within the last 15 years, the rapidly growing practices of labor migration have not only become one of the most influential phenomena in Nepalese society, but have also left their distinct mark on Gulf economies. For Nepalese migrant workers – especially those of lower education levels – the Gulf and Malaysia have emerged as their prime destinations (Ghimire et al., 2011: p. 10; Graner & Gurung, 2003: pp. 313-14). In comparison to labor flows to other countries, migration practices to the Gulf region have revealed an astounding dynamic: While a total of 200,000 to 400,000 Nepalese were estimated to work in Gulf locations in 2003, those numbers are considered to have reached between 1.3 and 2.6 million in 2010 (ibid.: p. 299; Bruslé, 2010b: p. 16). However, due to large-scale irregular labor and insufficient statistic data collection, reliable data on exact numbers remains scarce, which results in a large range of different estimates: For instance, representatives of the Nepalese Ministry of Labor have recently assumed that nearly 800,000 Nepalese currently reside in Qatar alone (Smith-Spark et al., 2013). By contrast, host government authorities have presented far more conservative calculations: In 2011, Qatar reported hosting only 350,000 Nepalese workers, followed by Saudi Arabia with about 250,000, the United Arab Emirates with nearly 180,000, and Bahrain with 20,000 Nepalese (Ghimire et al., 2011: p. 13). However, even the most cautious estimations suggest that Nepalese have already become the second largest group in Qatar at least (Knerr, 2010). Representing 16 percent of its residents, they are more numerous than Qatari nationals, and only outmatched by the large group of Indian migrants (Paschyn, 2012: p. 18).

Since many Gulf States have relied on foreign workers for decades, Nepalese migrants have entered a distinctly hierarchical labor market, with a position prepared for them at the very end of the scale (Graner, 2008: p. 219). Consequently, studies have shown that 63 percent of Nepalese in the Gulf and Malaysia are employed as unskilled staff, such as construction workers or cleaners, and 36 percent as semi-qualified workers, including masons, carpenters, and drivers. Altogether, nearly the entirety of Nepalese migrants are employed either in un- or semi-skilled positions, and are paid accordingly low salaries (Bruslé, 2012a: p. 53). Low jobs and payments are matched by the social categories Nepalese have to face: Following a principle Mary Beth Mills (2003) explains in referral to gender, Nepalese labor is constructed as "socially and economically worthless" (p. 43), which entails disciplining workers by devaluing them and their performance. Consequently, Nepalese laborers are "victims of the ethnicization of worker's categories" and virtual "captives of their representations"[12] (Bruslé, 2012a: p. 57).

As mentioned initially, Qatar's hosting of the upcoming soccer World Cup of 2022 has turned increasing international attention on the predicament of Nepalese workers. While some media outlets had reported about cases of human rights violations and hazardous working conditions in the past years (see Amnesty International, 2011; Chatriwala, 2012; CNN, 2012; ITUC, 2012; Pattisson, 2012; Sidner, 2012), it was not until autumn of 2013 that the topic truly received public attention. However, as harsh reports from organizations like Human Rights Watch (2012) and Amnesty International (2013) have highlighted, the singular cases mentioned in the news are merely one facet of a much more far-reaching system of exploitation and abuse. Furthermore, while media attention has recently been turned to Qatar, similar circumstances can be found in Saudi Arabia and other countries in the Gulf region. According to numerous sources, a large number of Nepalese migrants in various Gulf States frequently faces reduced wages, the complete denial of payment for months in a row, arbitrary wage deductions for unexpected 'additional costs' (e.g. for accommodation, food, etc.), lack of medical care, insufficient or absent safety provisions at the workplace, denied access to free drinking water in the desert heat, the absence of holidays, poor and overcrowded living accommodations, the routine confiscation of identity documents, and the denial to move freely or leave the country (Bhattarai, 2005: p. 63; Human Rights Watch, 2012: pp. 3-4; Khatri, 2007: pp. 13-14). Usually, it is not only employers in the host country who are involved in such practices, but also the private recruitment agencies which arrange the work agreements in Nepal. The services typically delivered by agents include the provision of employment, visa, airplane ticket, arrangements at the place of work, as well as a service fee. In legal terms, the migrant and the agency sign a contract which contains specific information about the type and duration of the employment, facilities provided by employer (e.g. accommodation, food, health care), working hours, and wages (Thieme & Wyss, 2005: p. 77). These conditions usually appear highly attractive and drive many prospective migrants to take up loans in order to afford the packages offered by their agency. However, contracts are routinely falsified and frequently rendered invalid at the migrant's arrival. Bijaya Babu

12 Quoted text in French original: "L'ensemble des Népalais est victime de l'ethnicisation des catégories de travailleurs […] l'impression d'être captif des représentations est tout aussi forte."

Khatri, a journalist from the Nepalese daily 'Kantipur' was quoted stating that more than 80 percent of labor migrants do not get the salary agreed on in their work contract (qut. in Bhattarai, 2005: pp. 61-62). The role of so-called 'manpower agencies' in capitalizing on migrants' suffering and reaping massive benefits even just from operating within their legal boundaries is no news at all – both in Nepal and beyond (Bruslé, 2010b: pp. 17-18; Malecki & Ewers, 2007: p. 476). When those private enterprises emerged as one of the most booming sectors of Nepalese economy, a rising number of anecdotal stories about fraud and horrible working conditions has occasionally been publicly problematized (Graner, 2008: p. 219), but has led to little factual changes so far.

"Each day, more than a hundred Nepalese workers go to their embassy to complain about unpaid wages, exploitation, a runaway sponsor, poor housing conditions or inhumane treatment" (Bruslé, 2012b: para. 2). In summer 2013, 30 Nepalese men sought refuge at their embassy in Doha "to escape the brutal conditions of their employment" (Pattisson, 2013). While the Nepalese government has made some feeble attempts of protecting migrants' rights, including the introduction of minimum wages, little has changed in their realities (Ghimire et al., 2011: pp. 13-14). This comes as no surprise, since the Nepalese Department of Foreign Employment charged with the supervision of fraud complaints has previously provided exactly "two legal officers that scrutinise the cases" (ibid.: p. 27). The situation in the respective host countries is not very different: For instance, Qatari labor laws provide some protections of workers' rights, but are implemented inadequately and rarely translated into practice. With only 150 labor inspectors monitoring the conditions of 1.2 million workers, employers are rarely controlled and have virtual impunity. Furthermore, even if workers manage to state their complaints on the national hotline, which only accepts statements in Arabic and English, they are bound to have little success: In 92 percent of reported cases, laborers had to either continue working or forfeit their rights and leave the country (Human Rights Watch, 2012: pp. 5-7). The reasons for their lack of success certainly include the absence of effective legal regulations, as both Nepal and the Gulf States curiously have not ratified the International Labor Organization's Convention No. 97, which sets out to ensure migrant workers' equal treatment to the national citizens of their host country (Mahat, 2009: pp. 6-7). However, scholars have also pointed to the unequal relationship between Nepal and its respective host countries. So far, the Nepalese government has only taken timid steps towards ensuring better conditions for its citizens. The frantic backpedaling which occurred after ambassador Sharma's unfortunate remarks has been one more example of the care the Nepalese state takes not to disgruntle its partners in the Gulf. This scenario leaves Nepalese workers, recruiting agencies, and government institutions alike with "a lack of bargaining capacities" (Graner & Gurung, 2003: p. 319). As Bruslé (2010b) summarizes, the weak role of the Nepalese state "is detrimental to migrants, who mostly have to rely on short-term profit based private companies. The numerous cases of fraud can be attributed to such limited government actions" (pp. 17-18).

Even though it is justified to problematize the widespread cases of fraud and broken contracts which Nepalese labor migrants have had to face, these occurrences are only part of the picture. Instead of portraying Nepalese laborers as victims of singular illegal cases, it needs to be acknowledged that their situation is very much rooted in the legal practices and social set-up of Gulf societies. Their highly hierarchical and inherently unequal social structures create a scenario where disenfranchised 'foreigners' are faced with virtually omnipotent employers. This is particularly true for Qatar and Saudi Arabia, where immigrants are still subjected to the *'kafala'* sponsorship system. This legal provision delegates control of migrants to individual citizens, who become legally responsible for them and are entitled to confiscate passports, cancel and issue visas, and register the latter as absconders – practices which basically result in the migrant's utter dependency on his or her sponsor (Bruslé, 2012b: para. 3; Human Rights Watch, 2012: p. 4). In previous years, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, and Bahrain have discarded their *'kafala'* systems and granted workers certain freedoms, including the option to change employers without their consent after working under one's original sponsor for a certain period of time (ibid.: p. 71). However, the sponsorship system remains active in Qatar and Saudi Arabia, the two countries with the largest numbers of Nepalese laborers. Combined with the relentless pressure to pay back the loans many migrants have taken on to travel abroad in the first place, an intricate system of forced labor emerges:

> "After traveling thousands of miles, [migrants] said they had little choice but to accept work they had not agreed to perform, and unsatisfactory conditions and practices that included employers withholding wages (typically as security to prevent them from quitting), illegal wage deductions, or salaries far below those promised. Some said they signed contracts under coercive circumstances, while others never saw an employment contract at all." (ibid.: p. 3)

As Nepalese workers are dependent on their sponsor to issue their exit permit – a 'service' which is frequently refused or performed only after additional payment, many of them are stuck in a state of bonded labor. International authorities such as the United Nations and the International Labor Organization agree with this assertion: According to international law, workers' extreme dependence due to the owing of recruiting fees, the lack of choice of their employer, and no custody of their passport are all classified as key indicators of forced labor (ibid.: pp. 71-76; United Nations, 1990: Art. 10-11).

Again, the restrictive laws Nepalese migrants are subjected to in several Gulf States are mirrored by subtle, yet much more pervasive power disparities, which discipline their daily practices and very social existence. These includes the previously mentioned 'family day' rules, but also refer to practices of spatial segregation: The majority of migrants is obliged to live in remote and isolated labor camps, a means of excluding them from mainstream society and public space. As a consequence, even overwhelming numbers of foreigners are effectively silenced and "leave an imperceptible, fleeting and very temporary mark on the city; which reflects their low position in a divided society" (Bruslé, 2010a: para. 28). In Qatar, these camps, which host 90 percent of Nepalese laborers, are the complete opposite of the metropolitan, modern image of its capital Doha. As such, Bruslé describes them in terms of Giorgio Agamben's (1998) 'spaces of exception', "where exclusion is the norm" (Bruslé, 2012b: para. 5). According to Bruslé, laborers' practices of creating weekly meeting points and 'bazars' at public places should not only be perceived as 'place-making', but also in terms of Henri Lefebvre's (1991) 'appropriation of space': If the access to public space is regulated by systems of inclusion and exclusion, "occupying [that] space no matter how temporarily is definitely a form of political assertion" (Bruslé, 2010a: para. 26). Furthermore, Bruslé suggests a conceptualization of labor camps in the sense of Foucault's (1984) 'heterotopies' or 'other spaces', whose sole purpose is to render foreign laborers invisible (Bruslé, 2012b: para. 5-19).

3.5 Migration and meaning in Nepal

In the past two decades, transnational labor migration has been identified as a major driver of social change not only in Nepalese society, but in many parts of Asia (Yeoh et al., 2005: p. 308). However, in the Nepalese context, migration has frequently been described as a deviation from the norm, which only occurs because of social problems, such as persisting poverty, economic decline, a scarcity in natural resources, raging unemployment (especially among youth), and the state's political instability (Bohra & Massey, 2009: p. 623; Ghimire et al., 2011: p. 10; Thieme & Müller-Böker, 2010: p. 107). While all these factors have certainly played an important role in the emergence, persistence, and transformation of migratory practices, this perspective has its shortcomings: Implicitly, Nepalese migration is portrayed as a temporary, tragic, and less-than-ideal strategy, which needs to be remedied. As Elvira Graner and Ganesh Gurung (2003) point out, this line of argument has already been followed decades ago: As early as 1928, a British forest official already voiced his fear of a "drain of the country's menhood" to India (qut. on p. 297). In this light, Jeevan Raj Sharma (2009) rejects the widespread tendency of pathologizing migration by framing Nepal as an agrarian society and agriculture as the most important livelihood option for its population. As one-sided depictions of Nepalese mobility as a problem have marked rural development discourses for a long time, Sharma identifies a "governmentality of migration", which he interprets "as powerful representations that legitimize interventions and practices, which sideline migrants' experiences and silence their voices" (p. 304). Even though in recent years, scholars have paid increasing positive attention to the phenomenon and even championed Nepalese migration as a historic path towards development, one important realization can be taken from Sharma's critique: Instead of framing labor migration as generally undesirable or praising it as the savior of Nepalese economy, scholars should conceptualize migration as much more than a mere economic phenomenon. By acknowledging its significant socio-cultural dimensions and retrieving the variety of social meanings associated with it, social life in Nepal can instead be recognized as a fluid gradient between mobile and sedentary practices.

From a perspective focusing on everyday social constructions, both internal and international migration emerge as widespread and highly normalized practices, which have come to constitute a Nepalese "culture of migration" (Bruslé, 2010b: p. 20). Along this 'culture', labor migration has been established as a gendered phenomenon: "For generations, going [abroad] for work has been considered […] simply as the thing men do, a practice integral to the sustenance of the livelihoods of their households" (Sharma, 2009: p. 311). Whether they were periodically leaving their villages as traders and herdsmen, soldiers, or low-skilled laborers, migrating has become a normalized, long-standing tradition for Nepalese men (Thieme & Wyss, 2005: p. 87). In this light, Bruslé (2008) suggests that going abroad has become an influential initiation rite for Nepalese boys:

> "It is a 'rite of passage' that must be gone through in order to become an adult. When young men get married and families rely on them, migration becomes compulsory. It is thus seen as a constraint (*bhadyata*) that one has to cope with, and at the same time it is considered to be a habit (*bani*), a kind of tradition (*calan*) which one has to embrace, albeit reluctantly." (p. 242; italics H.W.)

By contrast, the ideal female role is that of the wife and mother staying at home, whereas the notion of female labor migration continues to be viewed with a critical eye. Possibly answering to this gendered configuration, many studies on Nepalese migration have been shaped by a reverse bias, which eagerly depicts both mobile and immobile women as dominated victims, who have to carry a "double burden […] in our society" (Ghimire et al., 2011: p. 17). While structures of inequality remain one of the most interesting aspects of migration studies, scholarship should not fall into the trap of equating 'gender studies' to female advocacy exclusively. A more balanced perspective can acknowledge the multiple privileging and disempowering effects of intersecting social

categories without falling into one-dimensional stereotypes. Such openness can also give space to newly emerging practices, including family strategies where both husband and wife migrate, while leaving their children in the care of relatives (see Yamanaka, 2005).

4 RESEARCH DESIGN

4.1 Empirical methods

As mentioned initially, the empirical research project conducted for this thesis was guided by the following research design (see Figure 2):

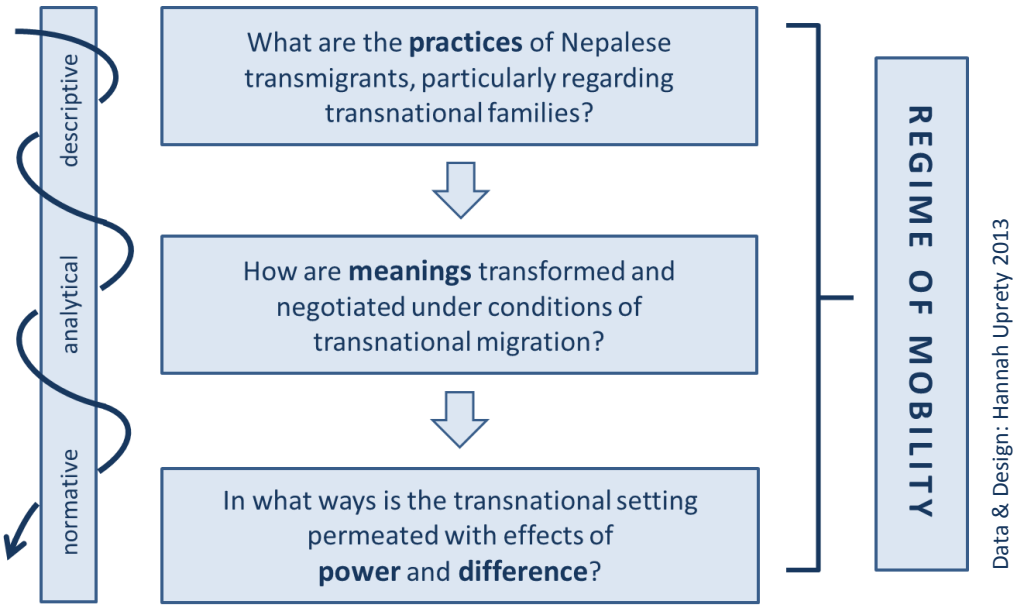

Figure 2: Research questions and respective levels of analysis

Previously, qualitative, in-depth research methods have been suggested as the right approach to understanding transnational migration (Smith & Bailey, 2004: p. 358). In order to access the narratives and subjectivities produced by migrants and their families, and to get an insight into the power relations that constitute this meaning, the empirical approach was influenced by social anthropological and ethnographic elements. This included a retracing of the daily practices of transmigrants. This initial step set the groundwork for retrieving the meanings which they associated with said practices, and illustrated how the transmigrants made sense of their migration experience and mobility in general. As stated before, the (re)enactment and (re)negotiation of practices and meanings under transnational circumstances are not limited to migrants, but extend into their (locally grounded) social networks and thereby transform entire societies. As a central unit of both migrant practices and the construction of subjectivities, the migrants' family networks, which became transnational through their member's mobile experience, were defined as relevant for the study. For this reason, the project was not only aimed at interviews with former migrants, but also included interviews with their respective family members.

Since transnationalism inherently deals with migrants' local experiences at multiple places and their practices of interconnecting the latter, numerous scholars have suggested to perform empirical research at the various locations where transmigrants 'touch down' (see Marcus, 1995; Pries, 2001: p. 28; Levitt & Jaworsky, 2007: p. 143). Initially, such 'multi-sited research' was intended for this project, thus including both research among migrants' family members in Nepal, and among migrants currently employed in their host country. Ironically, this plan had to be discarded due to visa restrictions, which made it impossible to enter any of the host countries. For this reason, the study was conducted among former migrants currently residing in Nepal, and their respective family members. This design proved to carry several advantages, as interview partners had already left their employment and were no longer economically and morally dependent on their employers. Therefore, they could be interviewed in a safe setting, which allowed them to speak about their experiences freely and without concerns about potential consequences. Since the migration of all migrants had occurred within the previous 5 years, their experiences were still very much part of their lives, but could also be told from a place of retrospection. The interviews were led along semi-structured questionnaires (see Annex, chapter 8.1: pp. 125). The general research questions were operationalized into various topic areas, but also explicitly included free sections which allowed informants to express their own perspectives and opinions without being restricted by the interviewer.

The empirical research comprised face-to-face qualitative interviews with twenty-five males. Twenty of them had worked in one or more Gulf States sometime in the five years previous to the interview, while five were still employed in one of those countries at the time of the study. Among those five active laborers, two of them were interviewed during a vacation period which they spent in Nepal, while conversations with the remaining three were led via Skype. For twelve of those migrants, additional interviews were led with one of their family mem-

bers, respectively. Except for one, those family members were exclusively females, with six of them being the respective migrant's wife, and four of them the latter's mother. The empirical study was performed during September, October, and November of 2012, with the three additional interviews via Skype being conducted in early 2013. Initial access to informants was established through personal networks as well as with the support of several private recruitment agencies based in Kathmandu. Departing from a first group of respondents, further interview partners could be contacted via a 'snowball sampling'. As the interviews were designed to access deep and personal perspectives and interpretations of transnational experiences, particular care was taken to only question individuals who had explicitly volunteered to participate. However, most persons who were approached with an interview request reacted positively towards it.

The interviews were conducted in Nepali, the official language of Nepal and mother tongue of all respondents. As the large majority did not have a functional understanding of English and the topics of conversation were largely of a private and complex nature, the language of conversation being Nepali was a vital prerequisite for the study. While the researcher is fluent in Nepali, the assistance of a native Nepali speaker was essential in terms of navigating the conversation through linguistically challenging passages and identifying nuances of meaning. Furthermore, the fact that the research team consisted of one male and one female played an instrumental role in creating an atmosphere of trust and emotional accessibility for both male and female interview partners. Since the project was conducted with an explorative outlook and an emphasis on each respondent's perspective, the interview manual provided ample space for their own voices and expressions. Furthermore, it was attempted to create an atmosphere conducive to casual and private conversation. As far as possible, interviews were conducted at the informants' own home or hotel room, with no additional individuals present. However, since many interview partners shared very small-scale spaces with several friends or family members, this level of privacy could not always be achieved. Interviews with the migrants lasted between 50 and 120 minutes, with an average revolving around 80 minutes per interview. Interviews with the migrants' family members were a bit shorter and lasted about 65 minutes on average.

4.2 Qualitative analysis

In late 2012 and early 2013, all interviews were fully transcribed, partly with the support of a native Nepali-speaking transcriptionist. Subsequently, twelve migrant interviews and four among family members, altogether making up 40 percent of all interviews, were selected and fully translated into English. This was done in order to enable a more direct analysis, and to ensure that detailed meanings were translated correctly and not lost in the mass of material. For easier readability, the introductory sections of the interviews, which largely contained biographical information, were summarized and paraphrased. Initially, these interviews served as the main source for an introductory, yet deep insight into the material. As the qualitative analysis progressed, the remaining, original transcripts were analyzed as a complementary source to enhance, disprove, and differentiate findings from the initial phase, thereby following a hermeneutic spiral.

As the empirical phase and used field manuals were clearly guided by research questions, the scope of the findings was predetermined to some degree. However, both research objectives and questionnaires were deliberately designed to maintain an explorative and open outlook. This approach was followed during the entire phase of research and analysis, as the theoretical framework of the thesis was developed in interdependence with the process of analysis. Such an inductive study design allowed the researcher to be theoretically grounded yet remain guided by the material, rather than 'making the material fit' to initial theoretical assumptions. Furthermore, this approach gave room to the postcolonial principle of not imposing Eurocentric perspectives on empirical data, but also considering potential cultural differences that might be vital in interpreting findings.

The data collected during the interviews was complemented by an extensive literary research on the subject matter both prior to and during the empirical research phase, with the main sources including academic literature, publications from the development sector, as well as a wide range of recent newspaper articles. Close attention was paid to current events and public discussions about the topic, and also the way the latter has been dealt with in popular culture and media. While this information was not part of the formal analysis, its role as an illustrating framework for adequately placing and interpreting the empirical findings proved to be highly valuable.

4.3 Limitations and positionality

Despite all efforts to create a comprehensive and thorough research design, every project experiences some limitations, which should be disclosed and openly deliberated. As one of the limitations of this study, one might consider the number of 35 interview partners, whose insights clearly cannot provide an all-encompassing picture of male Nepalese labor migrants. Furthermore, the snowball sampling implicated that half of all interviewed

migrants were based in the district of Dhading, which is located in the central region of Nepal. Therefore, the social context of this particular region will be privileged over other parts of the country. However, the study was explicitly designed with a qualitative approach, which values the depth and quality of acquired insights, while deprioritizing representative numbers.

Furthermore, the qualitative and ethnographically oriented design entailed that conversations included highly sensitive topics, which frequently brought up disturbing or even traumatizing experience, as well as personal sentiments of (in)dignity, loss of prestige, and shame. In such emotional interview settings, the honesty and openness of the interview partners is to be perceived as a gift, since the researcher can only hope to be allowed the privilege to partake in an individual's private experience. In this regard, the researcher's positionality needs to be acknowledged and considered as an important factor in data collection. Therefore, it was identified not as a disturbing bias which needs to be eliminated, but rather as a valuable tool of ethnographic research which is vital in accessing certain information. As it is inevitable to take no social role while interacting with other people, the research team frequently entered the role of a 'sister' or 'brother', which established a relationship of privacy and trust between interviewers and interviewees. However, the study took also place in a highly stratified social setting which was perfused with neocolonial narratives of difference. Consequently, the researcher's race and nationality created an initial moment of respect and distance, which could only be overcome to some degree by speaking the local language and interacting as a 'real' and 'accessible' individual, rather than as a representative of one's social group. Nevertheless, positionality needs to be problematized and considered. This also includes the researcher's "fluid, mobile and privileged subject position" (Bailey, 2001: p. 420), which frequently stands in sharp contrast to the social and spatial immobility experienced by many informants.

5 DISCOVERING A NEPALESE REGIME OF MOBILITY

5.1 Transnational Practices: an Ethnography of Migrant Experiences

5.1.1 Initial outline

Whereas the information collected throughout the project was never intended to meet the requirements of a representative survey, a wide range of different individuals, social groups, and migration experiences could be accessed. For instance, interview partners were of a variety of different age groups, thus representing different phases of life. Altogether, migrants' average age at the time of their first departure was 26 years, ranging from seventeen to 34 years of age. However, two separate age groups could be identified fairly clearly, with an older group of migrants (twelve individuals above 25 years) presenting an average age of 31, and a younger group (thirteen individuals below 25) with a mean age of twenty years. Nine of the interviewed migrants were unmarried at the time of their departure. Nearly all of the sixteen men who were married had between one and four children (two on average). As contact with informants was established through social networks and a snowball sampling, the majority of interviews were led in the districts Kathmandu, Lalitpur, and Dhading in Nepal's central region. As a consequence, sixteen of 25 interviewees had their current home in this area. However, with interviews being led among recruitment agencies in Kathmandu and Lalitpur, some variety could be ensured, with two to four informants being based in the Far Western, Western, and Eastern region, respectively. All the while, there is little indication that the geographic origin of individuals played a considerable role in the findings. In terms of the caste or ethnic identification of migrants – which remains an important stratifying factor in Nepalese society – the Chhetri caste was slightly overrepresented, with ten migrants being members. Otherwise, six former migrants identified as Brahman, and another six were members of various ethnic groups: Tamang (three individuals), Newar, Magar, and Rai.

In terms of migrants' destination countries, Qatar and Saudi Arabia dominated the group with thirteen and eleven individuals, respectively. By contrast, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, and Kuwait were the respective destinations of only four migrants. By definition, the sample included only migrants who had returned within the last five years (2008 at the earliest).[13] Their time abroad took place between 2003 and 2013 (including three interviews which were taken while migrants were in ongoing employment). While three individuals had traveled to two different destinations during that time, all other migrants had only experienced one migration up to that point. The average duration of their employment abroad was three years and three months, with the longest stay being seven years, and the shortest four months. As for the types of their employment, interviewees mirrored general statistics of Nepalese migration: While thirteen individuals had been employed in unskilled positions, such as construction, cleaning, storekeeping, or other forms of labor, twelve of them had spent at least some of their time in semi-skilled positions, including that of a driver, cook, waiter, hotel boy, or house-wiring assistant. Among all migrants, only one person, who had worked as a supervisor, had had the privilege of filling a skilled and leading position.

5.1.2 Experiences of labor migration: a typology

As elaborated previously, the empirical analysis of transnational migration from a critical postcolonial perspective can benefit from an ethnographic approach. By aiming at an emic, micro-level, and culturally sensitive understanding of daily practices and meanings, room can be given to migrants' and non-migrants' own views. Listening to the constructions of the 'subaltern' can shed light on the larger interplays of power and meaning in transmigratory contexts, while at the same time maintaining a sense of concreteness, depth, and detail. For these reasons, the analysis of this empirical project sets off with an ethnographically inspired portrayal of three different migration experiences. While each of them is based completely on the migratory practices of three different individuals, this portrayal is also an initial typology, with each person standing representatively for a certain group of migrant, social role, and labor experience. In this way, this chapter provides at least some fragments of the 'stories' that could be unearthed in the project, and keeps true to the comprehensive and chronological way in which they were told by each individual. Since many of their realities included violations of their rights and dignity, allowing those voices to be heard is part of a postcolonial agenda. While experiences of general abuse and humiliation were quite openly communicated with the research team, it became clear that many former migrants were much more reluctant to share their very private and vulnerable accounts with a broader audience. It is thus a sincere moral obligation to reproduce their narratives in a personal and unaltered, yet anonymous and

13 This prerequisite was not fulfilled in one interview, where the migration had taken place between 2003 and 2004. In this case, the individual (m19) was included in the sample, because he shared an exceptional and particularly interesting migration experience.

unsensational manner. As an initial 'dive' into the micro-level of transnational migration, migrants' stories constitute a firm foundation for subsequent analytical conclusions.

5.1.2.1 Aswin's story

Seventeen years ago, Aswin (36) got married to Bimala (32), who was only fifteen years old at the time. As their parents did not approve of their marriage, the two of them left their rural home in Eastern Nepal and went to make a living in Kathmandu. Today, they have a teenage son and a young daughter. Both Aswin and Bimala previously worked at a sewing/tailoring company, where they "sewed clothes which went to America" (m14: para. 213). However, with rising inflation rates and Nepal's difficult political situation, their wages became too little to sustain their family. While they struggled even with getting food on the table twice a day, Aswin felt that he had to find a way to provide for his children not only in terms of food, but also in terms of their future: "I would feel dead if I couldn't send my children to a good school." (ibid.: para. 2) Even though Bimala tried to talk him out of it, he went to look for work abroad. After he was unsuccessful with several agencies and even deceived by one of them, his sister's husband, who had been employed in Saudi Arabia, finally helped him to receive a working visa. After taking a loan of 100,000 Nepalese rupees (740 Euro)[14] to pay the recruitment agency, he went to Saudi Arabia at age 33. According to his contract, Aswin was supposed to work as a cleaner in a hospital in Riyadh. He was supposed to work eight hours per day and receive a salary of 800 Saudi Riyal (156 Euro) per month. However, "everything went wrong" (ibid.: para. 3). When his group was taken to the work site two days after their arrival, he realized that he had to work as a laborer in construction. As he spoke neither Arabic nor English, he had to rely on the help of a co-worker and his sister's husband to complain that his agreement had not been kept. While his supervisors initially put him off by promising that he would only be employed there for a few weeks, nothing changed for eighteen months. Instead, Aswin's working conditions became even harder and more dangerous. He worked at least ten hours per day in the desert heat, carrying heavy iron rods and cement blocks up to a nine-story building. Sometimes he had to work day and night shifts back-to-back, leaving him on duty for 24 hours in a row. Even though he received his promised salary of 800 Riyal, Aswin never felt that his payment was appropriate to the job he was doing, as he was not compensated for his overtime and he found his tasks nearly unbearable. Due to the hazardous working conditions, he developed numerous health problems and injuries, some of which he continues to suffer from. While catching iron rods which were thrown to him from several stories above, he cut and broke his finger, but never received medical treatment for it: "I thought [the boss] would take me out of my job if I went to the hospital. So I wrapped a piece of plastic around [the finger] and continued working" (ibid.: para. 209). As an interruption to their regular work schedule, Aswin and a Nepalese colleague were occasionally given the chance to work as cleaners in a nearby hospital. As he and his friend were determined to leave a good impression, "the two of us usually finished the work of four people" (ibid.: para. 4). Their efforts might have paid off, because after eighteen months, both of them finally transferred to the job they had hoped for since their arrival. Although Aswin was happy about this, his new employment does not sound like a huge improvement. While he had previously cherished the weekly holiday Friday, his new job allowed for only one free day per month. His working hours were even worse, with a regular day lasting from 6 am to 10 pm and frequently including unexpected night shifts. He recalls that once, he had to clean a toilet which had not been used for two years, and was given an aggressive chemical to manage the task. Uninformed about the dangers of this substance, he used the chemical in the closed room and damaged his respiratory system. Nearly unconscious, he was found by his supervisor and needed to be treated in the hospital for several days. Aside from his Nepalese colleague, Aswin did not feel comfortable with his Indian colleagues, who he felt cheated and dominated by. Despite all these experiences, he preferred his new employment by far, because it was indoors and not as physically exhausting as his previous job. Before, he had constantly suffered from fever, cough, and chest pains, but after his move to the hospital, these health problems subsided. As he constantly feared that his boss might send him back to his initial workplace, Aswin never complained about anything.

During his entire stay of two and a half years, Aswin lived in a big room provided by his employer, which he shared with eleven other men. They did not have many facilities, but Aswin loved their functioning air condition: "It was like heaven for me." (ibid.: para. 5) On his free days, when he usually went to the 'market', a place where he met many other Nepalese. Initially, he was happy about meeting his fellow countrymen, but after he was cheated for money several times, he became more cautious. He was closest to another man from his home region, whom he describes as "one of my own, my friend" (ibid.: para. 67). According to his experience, it was difficult to become friends with anyone but fellow Nepalese, as he felt that his Indian, Indonesian, and Filipino co-workers dominated him, and "the Saudis don't care about us. They called us only when there was work." (ibid.: para. 33).

14 For easier comparison, the financial amounts mentioned in the following were translated to Euro, applying the current exchange rates as of Dec 1, 2013. However, as the values of all mentioned currencies have fluctuated considerably over the last years, and it is not vital at this point to maintain absolute preciseness, the EUR equivalents were brought up or down to round figures. While this was done to ensure easy readability, the values were not approximated beyond a range of one to two EUR.

In his opinion, his abuse had to do with his being Nepalese, but also with his being Hindu. After he had frequently been offered to convert to Islam, but had always denied, he felt he was abused constantly, while his Muslim co-workers were treated fairly (ibid.: para. 7).

In his first year as a migrant laborer, Aswin occasionally called his family from a roommate's cell phone. After he had bought a used phone from a co-worker, he began talking with them on a daily basis. Aside from phone conversations, Bimala and her husband also developed a free way of communication: calling each other without actually picking up the phone. For Aswin, this habit of sending each other 'missed calls' played a huge role in his life: "We have something between us, that when I gave her a missed call, and if she didn't return it, I had to think that she was in trouble. If I didn't get a missed call in return that whole day, I used to call the next day […]" (ibid.: para. 87). Both explain that they could not fall asleep at night if they had not heard from the other. In Aswin's opinion, it was this connection during their time of separation which brought them even closer together. However, he was initially determined not to tell his wife about the trouble he was facing: "In the beginning, I lied, because she would worry, and ultimately, her pain is mine." (ibid.: para. 101) Only after eight months of labor, he decided not to hide his feelings anymore, and told her about his struggle. Bimala recalls the way he suffered and quotes him saying, "I cannot continue working 24 hours straight, I want to come back home." (f08: para. 38) Even though Aswin wished he could return home, the loan of 100,000 rupees he had taken to get there in the first place kept lying heavily on his chest. In his opinion, he had no choice but to continue earning money: "My children would have died of hunger. They would have been called beggar's children, my son would have turned bad, and my wife might have entered some illegal work."[15] (m14: para. 25) Because he felt he was the only person his family could rely on, Aswin continually spurred himself on to work at least another three or four months. Because he had to spent about 200 Riyal (40 Euro) on food, he could usually save around 500 Riyal (100 Euro) every month. Additionally, he earned 40 to 50 Riyal (8-10 Euro) a month by doing some sewing work for his co-workers, which he used to pay for his phone calls home. Via a rotation system he established with a group of friends, he sent his savings home every four to five months. This way, it took Aswin eighteen months to pay off his debt. As Bimala explains, the family could still not get by from her husband's income alone, which drove her to work as a laborer in construction herself:

> "I also worked as hard here as he worked there, but my suffering was not seen by anybody. He sees my suffering, and I see his. That's all. If I hadn't worked hard, the money he sent us once every five months wouldn't have been enough. […] As he worked there day and night, I worked here night and day, as well." (f08: para. 112; 138)

For the same reasons her husband had kept quiet to her, Bimala hid what she was doing until their son finally broke the silence. In Bimala's opinion, there was no need to burden her husband any further, since he had already faced enough pain. Indeed, Aswin suffered quite deeply from his financial insecurities. For several months, he had trouble sleeping at night and felt constant chest pains, something he only recovered from after his debt had been paid. Despite his negative experiences, Aswin does not regret his decision to go abroad: "[If I had stayed here,] I would have been of a lower level than what I am today. I would have been one of the kind you can sell for a few coins." (m14: para. 148). Bimala sees their experience in a more negative light:

> "We heard how much income you can get there, that you would earn so much abroad, that people who go abroad bring home lots of money. But these kinds of things have been a false hope. When you have experienced things, you realize and you learn. But we, too, had thought, if he went abroad, he would get lots of money and it would become easy for us to eat and live." (f08: par. 148)

In Bimala's opinion, it might have been better for her children if their father had stayed at home. She especially worries about her son, who has developed a difficult relationship with his absent father. In her opinion, his current drug problems could have been prevented if Aswin had been there to raise him. In general, Aswin agrees that it is far better for a man to live with his wife and children. While he considers the food and living conditions abroad acceptable, he dreads the loneliness in the workers' apartment and prefers home by far: "even if I ate gold there and poison here, it would be better here. Here is my entire family, and there I am alone. No matter how tasty it would be, it wouldn't taste good. Here with my family, I am happy even if we eat something bad" (m14: para. 184). However, he sees it as his duty as a father to put his personal wishes aside and make sure his family is alright: "What I have is my wife. […] Her happiness is my happiness. […] I haven't thought about my own benefit at all. If my family is happy, that is a benefit for me." (ibid.: para. 156; 193). It is these obligations which are driving Aswin to leave for Saudi Arabia again, where his old job is waiting for him. Despite his previous experiences, he is optimistic, because his employer has now assured him additional compensation for overtime work. If everything goes well this time, Aswin hopes he can finally fulfill his most important wish: "There is one thing I

15 Original: "swasni dui number ma lagthe hola". The colloquial shorthand 'Number two' is used to refer to illegal activities, including stealing and prostitution.

have to manage in my live, that should be a home, one small house, where I can share my joy and pain, where my son and daughter can be happy, on our own land. That's why I have earned money all the day before I came to stay here. That is my one big wish." (ibid.: para. 119) The earnings from his previous stay abroad have allowed them to buy a piece of land and some bricks. This time, Aswin is determined to attain his family's dream, no matter how hard or long he has to fight for it:

> "If I go now, I know I won't come back before 7 years. As long as my wife hasn't finished building a house, I will not come back, that's the decision my wife and I have made now. We have thought, when she says, 'the house is finished, husband, come home' – that is the day when I will come back. I feel that we have to fulfill that." (ibid.: para. 150)

5.1.2.2 Dipesh's story

With two younger sisters and a little brother, Dipesh (21) is the eldest son in his family. When he was seventeen years old, he left school and traveled to the United Arab Emirates (UAE), where he worked for fifteen months. While his family was neither especially rich nor in financial trouble, Dipesh, whose father had worked abroad in the past as well, wanted to earn some additional money for himself. As a teenager, he had tried various small jobs, including selling books on the street, and assisting at a factory and a restaurant. However, he felt that staying in Nepal did not get him any further, and going abroad would be the right way "to do something" (m05: para. 47). His mother Sarswati (39) explains it was his dream to buy a motorcycle and lead a more 'modern' lifestyle with his friends in Kathmandu which made him so determined to leave. Although his parents tried to convince him to continue his education and finish at least twelvth grade, Dipesh had set his mind on going abroad, and even forged his identity documents, as he had not reached the legal age for labor migration. Since her son insisted, Sarswati gave in, helped him with everything he needed, and even took a loan to pay his recruitment agency. According to his job agreement, Dipesh expected to work in a textile company, where he would have to keep record of clothes packages and would not have to perform any hard physical labor. When he arrived in his host country, everything was different. He worked at a furnishing house, where he had to carry, repair, and deliver heavy furniture to clients' homes. Additionally, all kinds of manual work were part of his schedule, including cleaning and carpeting, and basically everything his manager ordered. While he worked at least nine hours per day, there were also special 'sale days' where he worked for eighteen hours, or had to stay in the store for 24 hours in a row. He did not receive any overtime compensation for this, and was not allowed any sick days. He was allotted a tiny room, which he shared with seven other people, altogether sleeping in two four-story bunk beds. While food and accommodation had been supposed to be free, the group had to buy their own food and pay room rent, which left Dipesh with a monthly salary of 900 Diram (180 Euro). He sent his earnings home every three to four months, and called his mother to let her know she could pay something back to the moneylender. However, as Sarswati admits, both were careful not to let her husband know, as they feared he would spend his son's entire earnings on alcohol. It was thus a very close and trusting relationship Dipesh kept with his mother. Still, he did not share with her the difficulties of his labor experience: "Because they would have felt tension at home. […] I always told them that everything was good. When I was sick, I still told them that I was fine." (ibid.: para. 249) It was only after eight months when Sarswati inquired more about his conditions, and he opened up to her: "In the very beginning, he had said it was good. He just said that so I wouldn't get worried, but later he said, mommy, it's difficult, it's really difficult. He said it's hard." (f01: para. 24) As the idea of her son's suffering was and still is a very emotional topic for her, she did not hesitate to call Dipesh back home. From Sarswati's perspective, her boy's difficult experience away from Nepal increased the love between them even more, and getting him home safely was worth any price to pay. As soon as Dipesh had earned enough money to pay off his initial debts, he decided to come back home. Since he returned before the end of his two-year contract, he had to pay one month's salary as well as his plane ticket to be allowed to do so. Therefore, he does not feel the experience did him a lot of good: "The company profited, [...] but I myself didn't have any benefit." (m05: para. 365) By contrast, his mother finds some advantages in his stay abroad, as she feels her son has somewhat grown up:

> "Before, he didn't understand things. When he needed money, he said 'I need something', […] he would insist very much […]. Whatever he wished for, I have been doing for him. Now that he has gone abroad and come back, he doesn't want to spend money thoughtlessly, doesn't say 'I will buy this', doesn't waste money. He has started to understand a lot. I think he has faced pain and learned to understand. […] I feel that he has understood that it is hard to earn money. […] Before, he lived on the care of his parents and he might have thought that the things came up from anywhere and anyhow. He has become mature and understanding since he has gone there." (f01: para. 56)

However, she has also worried the experience might have changed him for the worse. Her husband had started drinking after going abroad, and she is afraid the same is going to happen to her son, who has been out drinking with his friends a lot. It is her biggest regret that Dipesh did not continue his education and learn a proper profession. Up to 12th grade, he had been a talented and good student, but by going abroad, she feels he discarded all

his opportunities. The road of unemployment, alcohol and drugs that might lie ahead of him scares her deeply. Dipesh himself feels he is now ready to take on more responsibility for his family: "As a son, you should work hard all the time. You have to earn money. You need to provide for everyone at home, your father, mother, and little siblings. You shouldn't cause them any worry." For this reason, he is planning to go abroad again soon. This time, he asked the agency to find him a job in Malaysia. He was told he could work there as a security guard and earn a lot of money: "I am going in order to earn money, nothing else. I have already dropped my education. I don't want to study again. And I don't have any job. From my previous work, I also don't have any special skills for myself. […] Now I have taken a training for a security guard for one month." If his employment abroad goes well, he thinks he might later start a small business, like a clothes store, a bakery, or a small factory. The most important thing he feels he should do, however, is to build a house for his family and to enable his sisters' further education. Sarswati wishes these plans will come true, as her biggest dream is to leave their crowded three-room apartment and live in a little house they could call their own. As she does not believe her husband will contribute anything to that plan, she has put all her hope in her eldest son. The thought of buying a motorcycle has not crossed Dipesh's mind in a long time.

5.1.2.3 Arjun's story

Arjun (28) was twenty years old when he went to Saudi Arabia. His family had been struggling economically, and Arjun felt he needed to take responsibility and provide for his younger brother and sister. As he saw no options for him in Nepal, he asked a friend from his village for help, who pulled some strings and had him receive a work agreement in no time. After paying 85,000 rupees (630 Euro), Arjun was soon part of a group of young Nepalese on their way to the Saudi city of Dammam. Upon arriving at the airport, they were picked up, had to hand in their passports, and were dropped off at their living quarters. Arjun was assigned a small room, which he describes as so messy and filthy that the boys instantly began cleaning it up and fixing the air conditioning. Whereas he had been told in Nepal that his job would include a room shared with two other people, they were 27 people altogether, who slept in two adjoining rooms. Before his departure, he had expected to receive an overall salary of 1300 Riyal (250 Euro) for twelve hours of duty in a car wash. And he had not been lied to in one regard: he worked as a car wash assistant. However, his shifts turned out to be sixteen hours daily, with no change in his salary. When Arjun complained at the company and called his Nepalese agency, his agent told him he should get used to the situation, as he was already there and there was no point in returning now. Soon thereafter, his phone was out of service, so Arjun and his group found themselves on their own. There was one thing their agent had been right about: they were already there, and they had come to Saudi Arabia to earn money – so they decided to give in. However, Arjun's job turned out to be extremely difficult. Aside from the skin damage he got from working with aggressive chemicals without any hand protection, he describes his conditions as almost unbearable:

> "We were also forced to work so much. […] It wasn't possible to lie down and sleep. Our duty lasted until twelve o'clock at night. After work was finished, we had to shower, and after we had cooked food and eaten, our sleeping time was often at two o'clock at night. And after we had slept at two o'clock, we had to get up at six o'clock in the morning. Look… at what time should we have slept? The work we did there is unspeakable. The owner himself forced us to work there. At the very beginning of each duty, he just came, sat in the office, and kept watching us. If our work wasn't good, he beat us badly from behind and scolded us so often." (m09: para. 232)

Six months after their arrival, Arjun and his group, who had had not received their salary for several months, decided to run away from their company and look for work illegally. In order to find new employment, he bought himself a fake identity card, which he said was fairly easy to do, as plenty of migrants of all origins as well as Saudi locals were involved in this business. Over the course of the next four and a half years, Arjun established many personal contacts, who helped him move through a variety of different jobs. Always looking for better conditions and higher salaries, he spent time subsequently working at a guest house, a potato chips company, a famous international soda company, a plastic factory, a steel company, and an electronics manufacturing house. During his most successful time, Arjun managed to earn as much as 1900 Riyal (370 Euro), but his usual income amounted to about 1400 Riyal (270 Euro). The horrible working conditions he had encountered in the beginning were something he never wanted to endure again: Whenever problems at his workplace appeared, he left his job behind and moved on to find a new one. However, his being illegal did not come without risks. Once, he was nearly seized by a police officer, which had him quit his job and run away in a panic. After four and a half years, he did not want to endure the constant fear of being found out. As the local police was infamous for beating and torturing illegal migrants, he paid 1200 Riyal to an informal agent, who arranged his peaceful arrest. After 40 days in jail, Arjun was taken home. At that time, he had lost a large amount of weight, as the food served in prison had been "the worst [he] had ever had in [his] whole life" (ibid.: para. 10). Even though Arjun felt intense pressure in his earlier months, when he was without good employment and had to pay off a large amount of debts, he

soon adjusted to his surroundings and his status of being an illegal. Once he had found support in a network of Nepalese 'brothers', everything became much easier:

> "I got to know many friends and brothers and everyone there. Within one compound, many Nepalese friends were working, and so we got to know each other. If everyone around you is your friend, you won't have any problems. It is automatically pleasant. […] Sometimes, I felt as if I was in Nepal. It was really nice." (m09: para. 50)

In his new accommodations, he usually shared a TV with his friends, and evenings were frequently filled with sounds of a Nepalese TV channel running. As most of his co-workers were Indians, he spoke a lot of Hindi, but also learned Arabic. While he got along well in most of his surroundings, he had bad experiences with his Arab and Saudi supervisors:

> "They used to ask us which religion we belong to. When they knew we were Hindu, they behaved differently towards us. They didn't treat us well at all. As if we were no human beings. They used to scold us, spit on us, and say the Hindu religion was not good and that the Muslim faith was better." (ibid.: para. 4)

However, Arjun somehow expected this kind of treatment, so compared to his initial experiences, he concludes everybody behaved alright towards him. Because he had come abroad for one purpose alone, he saw no point in suffering or feeling homesick: "I'm a person who had come there to earn money. It was my obligation. There was no benefit in me thinking these things. […] I didn't miss my family that much. I am that kind of person." (ibid.: para. 134) Every few days, Arjun gave his family a phone call. In the three minutes they usually talked, he rarely mentioned his personal experiences: "I didn't tell anybody at all. […] no matter what misery I was in, I told them that everything was fine." (ibid.: para. 114) His father, Hasta Bahadur (57) is content with the way things went. Although he sometimes had a feeling that Arjun was not especially happy, he was relieved his son never brought it up:

> "He didn't tell anything, and we didn't ask anything. […] It is good not to say it. He has faced lots of trouble. If he had told us about that, we would have felt a little bit unpleasant. Now, if we don't hear anything, we feel relaxed. If you see someone, you love him very much, if you don't see him, the love is a bit less, isn't it like that?" (f02: para. 17; 463)

In this way, Arjun's family never even knew that he was imprisoned. In turn, they did not tell Arjun anything bad that had happened at home, so he had nothing to worry about. At home, everybody was confident that he was doing fine. The phone calls were only used to talk about 'essential things', which included Arjun's advice on how to run the household and how to spend the 50,000 to 70,000 rupees (370 to 550 Euro) he sent home every three months. Despite being physically absent, Arjun became the one in charge of family transactions: "I frequently used to give them advice. Even though I was abroad, I was the one who used to coordinate everything at home. It was in my responsibility. […] they told me that this and that problem had happened, and I told them to do this and that." (m09: para. 128)

Since Arjun has returned from abroad, Hasta Bahadur could not be prouder. Not only did his son show much more endurance and strength than many other boys his age, but Arjun has also changed deeply: "He has travelled so much. He has visited this country, foreign countries, everything. He used to be a person who never left home; now there is no place he hasn't reached." (f02: para. 178) As he has now become the most experienced person in the family, Hasta Bahadur has handed all the responsibility over to him. Arjun himself is quite content with his achievements, as well. Due to his earnings, his family was not only able to pay off their debts and finally get along with their daily expenses, but also managed to buy a piece of land, build a small house, and pay for their daughter's wedding. Compared to before he had left, his family's situation has improved very much. Furthermore, he feels he also benefitted on a personal level: "I got to know friends from a lot of countries there, I adjusted to other people, I got the chance to work together with them, I learned and understood things, and my memory power has increased since I have been there. That's the benefits I had from this." (m09: para. 214) Although he acquired several skills and trades during his work abroad, Arjun sees no profitable future in applying these at a job in Nepal. Instead, he has quite detailed plans for the future: He is thinking of going abroad once more, this time to Malaysia. He has pondered investment and profits, and has decided he will need at least 200,000 rupees (1500 Euro) to start his own cow farm and dairy business. By going abroad again, Arjun hopes "to find some good things for us, to uplift our economic situation a bit higher, a bit better" (ibid.: para. 124). Despite the success he has had, Arjun wants to highlight one thing: although he managed to 'work the system', it was always his employers "[who] took the biggest benefit. Otherwise, they wouldn't take you there [laughing]" (ibid.: para. 224).

5.2 Meaning in Mobility

Regimes of mobility operate via the constant interaction of practices and meaning, which are both effects and producers of power. While the previous micro-ethnography of migrant experiences has provided a descriptive insight into Nepalese transmigratory practices, it also opens the door for a deeper analytical examination, which focuses on the meanings that frame these practices and are in turn (re)negotiated by them. It is argued that practices of transmigration do not only transform migrants' narratives and identities, but – via regimes of mobility – interact with broader systems of meaning and representation. From this perspective, Nepalese migration to the Gulf cannot be analyzed in isolation, but needs to be acknowledged as part of a larger regime of mobility, which is again only one element in a wide-spanning system of interacting and overlapping regimes of mobility and representation. In our particular case, this entails that meanings and practices of Nepalese labor migration to Gulf countries are embedded in broader formations of thought, including the (re)construction of mobility and stasis throughout and beyond Nepalese society. This embeddedness implies a two-way interaction: Practices and notions of migration are determined by dominant meanings in society, yet in turn introduce new and transformative experiences and concepts.

By drawing its insights from both migrants and their sedentary family members, the present research zooms in on this highly fluctuating area, which frequently includes contradicting meanings and their struggles for authority. Examining narratives and subjectivities as they are perceived and (re)negotiated by individuals switching between mobility and stasis allows to identify the dominant storylines which constitute this regime of mobility, but also gives space to the smaller voices – "constructions from the margins" (Silvey, 2006: p. 27) – which constitute the more changeable and transformative elements of meaning. In an analysis attentive to effects of unequal power and difference, this chapter compiles a wide range of narratives and subjectivities instrumental in the continuation of labor migrant practices, and the ways these meanings are both determined by and in turn transform broader cultures and regimes of representation. Thereby, it also draws on an intersectionality approach, which interprets identities and practices as defined by intersecting social categories and roles. The empirical process of accessing subjectivities, narratives, and imaginaries was to some degree based on interviewees' deliberate and conscious definitions, yet relied just as deeply on implicit notions, values, assumptions, and patterns of thought, which could be identified and elaborated further along in the analysis.

5.2.1 Narrative of the better life

Migration scholarship – both in the Nepalese and other contexts – has long been interested in the 'why' of migration. Frequently, such examinations focus on what migrants themselves state as the reasons for their mobility. The fact that especially in studies of labor migration, livelihood perspectives are very dominant, suggests that migrants' own explanations largely point to financial matters. The empirical findings of this research confirm that suggestion: Upon inquiry, the rationales typically mentioned by migrants were (1) to pay off debts; (2) to afford basic daily expenses, such as food, clothes, and shoes; (3) to ensure the primary, secondary, or higher education of their children or siblings; (4) to pay for the medical expenses of sick family members; (5) to collect the financial means to properly perform a wedding or other religious festivals (e.g. Dashain, Tihar); (6) to acquire land for farming, housebuilding, or investment; (7) to gather the financial means to start a business; and (8) general financial security. While migrants' goals depend on their family's particular situation, investments are also subjected to a ranking according to their socially ascribed importance:

> "If they are studying, it should be for the education, if not, then it should be saved. […] If you don't have a house, it should be to build a house. If you don't have land, it should be to buy land. If you have land, you should put it in the bank." (m15: para. 52-55)

However, upon closer investigation, an approach which counts particular 'reasons' for migration and frames them all as part of a 'livelihood strategy' falls short on explaining why transmigratory labor practices take up an important role in the first place, and how they spread and continue in a social setting. For instance, it appears that migrants' earnings are rarely applied to one or two particular financial endeavors, but rather used for numerous small expenses "here and there" (m22: para. 64). Boiled down to the essentials, many migrants go abroad with a more general intention to exert some positive change on the lives of their family members: "I went with the goal that even though I worked hard, at home, everyone in my family shouldn't face so many hardships" (m17: para. 271). As a matter of fact, this line of argument points to a much deeper formation of meaning, which has persisted in Nepalese society for decades and has defined both rationales for and practices of labor migration: the ideal of development. In the early 1990s, Stacy Leigh Pigg (1992) already identified development –

more specifically, its Nepalese equivalent *bikāṣ* – as one of the most transformative forces in Nepalese society.[16] She asserts that the *bikāṣi,* the 'developed one', has become a powerful new category of difference, which has gradually superseded traditional systems of differentiation, including as powerful ones as the age-old caste system (pp. 498-500). Aside from highlighting the pervasiveness of this concept, Pigg illustrates how development has come to be equalized with the 'other' place, while the local village has become the epitome of 'backwardness' and the unmodern. As a result, *bikāṣ* can only be achieved by stepping out of the local context and reaching somewhere 'beyond' (ibid.: pp. 493). As the present research has shown, the ideal of development does not only govern social divisions, but is in fact an omnipresent principle, which permeates all aspects of thought and practice in Nepalese society: Stripped away from particular wishes and circumstances, all rationales for migration are fundamentally defined by a teleological orientation towards a 'better', a 'modern' life. The true pervasiveness of this principle is somewhat mirrored in the overwhelming reoccurrence of always the same phrases: Governing every social action, they all point to life as a project, as the constant striving 'to do something' (*kehī garnu*) and 'to move ahead' (*aghī baḍhnu*). Achieving 'progress' (*pragatī*) has thus become the core purpose of Nepalese life:

> "Even though I am so uneducated, I have to send my children to school, and I have to *move them a bit ahead* […]. I am sending those children to school, I will let them do their SLC. I hope that they will *do something* afterwards." (m06: para. 179; 283)
> "How can we live well? We have one child. How can we prepare a good future for her? We are uneducated. But how can we let our child *move forward*? You think a bit more about this." (m12: para. 82)

The fundamental motivation for all migrants is to raise their standard of living, and to be able to do and be all these things that are associated with being developed.[17] It is for this reason that curiously, once initial reasons for one's migration have been fulfilled, new ones appear instantly. Clearly, many migrant families interviewed in the project only managed to achieve some or even none of their initial goals. Frequently, migrants' working conditions were so difficult that they were left with little income or returned with an even higher mountain of debt. Also, circumstances at home change: With family members falling sick or unexpected costs arising, remittances are often being used up 'here and there'. However, even for migrants like Arjun, who "have totally done everything" they had hoped for (m09: para. 212), there always remains something more to do. Whether or not one's initial departure was justified by distinct goals, the list of reasons never ends. This observation is confirmed by a recent Nepalese survey, which has yielded that labor migration is far from a one-time thing, as the majority of migrant returnees plan to go for foreign employment again (Shrestha, 2011). With constant room for *pragatī*, labor migration becomes "like an addiction" (m23: para. 1), a reoccurring practice, which, once established, one can always return to.

But why is 'doing something' virtually tantamount to going abroad? As mentioned previously, Piggs (1992) identifies *bikāṣ* as the foreign, that which always comes from the 'other' place (p. 499). In fact, development is everything that Nepal is not. After decades of slow economic change and a turbulent political scenario, it is hard to find any Nepalese who has not lost faith in the country: "Tell me, where is this development? There isn't any" (m12: para. 286). To be a Nepalese is imbued with a feeling of utter resignation. In order to find improvement, the 'moving ahead' that everybody is striving for, one seems to have no choice but to look for greener pastures elsewhere:

> "Maybe there is something abroad, that's all I'm saying. Here in Nepal, there is nothing at all, son. […] It's totally broken, this Nepal. [...] It's totally bad.[18] […] There is nothing at all here. There is no employment here.

16 With her research in Nepal, Stacy Leigh Pigg (1992) contributed to the then-emerging 'Post-Development' studies, which gained significant attention during the mid and late 1990s. Largely inspired by postcolonial thought, this movement in the social sciences made a point of exposing development assistance as part of a neocolonial project, which has subjected supposedly inferior countries to a world order led by so-called 'developed' nations. Frequently, it included the search for alternative conceptualizations and organizations of the social. Despite initial enthusiasm, Post-Development perspectives have received considerable criticism for their own theoretical pitfalls and limitations in their further application. However, they need to be acknowledged as a highly variable field, with some works being closely aligned with poststructuralist and postcolonial theory, while others followed more essentialist and populist agendas. Relevant contributions of Post-Development include the critique of a 'development apparatus' and its manifestations in form of a veritable 'development industry', but most importantly the deconstruction of development as a teleological project and its deep transformation of social thought and practice (see Escobar, 1995; Rahnema & Bawtree, 1997; for a critical discussion see Ziai, 2006).

17 Pigg (1992) illustrates that development is not only an abstract concept, but that Nepalese society has 'quantified' bikāṣ to connote a staggering variety of material objects, including "new breeds of goats and chickens, water pipes, electricity, videos, schools, commercial fertilizer, roads, airplanes, health posts, and medicines". For a more detailed analysis of what it means to be developed in Nepal, see pp. 499.

18 In this instance, 'bad' is used to replace the virtually untranslatable word 'khattam', a colloquial term which denotes rotten food or something that is beyond saving.

> What's there? If there was, why would hundreds of thousands of people have to go abroad, if there was anything here." (f02: para. 243-260)

While in earlier years, seasonal migration from the village to urban areas was extremely widespread, this practice is not considered a viable livelihood strategy anymore. Along with raging unemployment and skyrocketing inflation rates, people's options have changed: Considering the high living expenses, low salaries, and precarious working conditions one faces in the city, even the once so popular Kathmandu has become a place people escape from rather than run to. In the same way that Aswin and Bimala cannot sustain themselves in the city anymore, many men consider internal migration to be no true alternative for going abroad (see m15: para. 367-372; m20: para. 272). Even after acquiring a trade or skill during their foreign employment, applying their qualification in a job in Nepal does not even cross their mind: "It's as different as the ground from the sky. […] If you've been abroad once and come back, you don't do that here" (m09: para. 218).

Figure 3: Typical job announcements as found in abundance in daily newspapers (Kantipur, 10/02/2012).

This decision is not merely done by those who see themselves in a financial dead end: Even after gathering some monetary means, most people refrain from making a productive investment by starting a small business in Nepal. After all, going abroad remains the more secure and viable option than making a risky investment in one's stagnating home country, where modernity never seems to arrive. This narrative especially resonates with younger men. Chronically under-challenged and with nothing to spend their potential on, a restless crowd of Nepalese youth is more than eager to become active and make a change. In a spirit of wanting 'to do something', their only avenue of 'progress' can be imagined in terms of the ubiquitous stay abroad:

> "'What's up, will you go again or not, what business have you been doing', that's what we ask, and all our thoughts are the same: We have to go abroad. They have come back after earning something once, and they have been using the money here, and now it's finished, so they say 'I have to go again'. Everybody thinks so. All of them say, 'let's go.'" (m09: para. 210)

The steady surge of billboards, advertisements, and recruitment agencies at every corner only reinforce this effect (see Figure 3). In a society overflowing with idealized perceptions of employment abroad, individual willingness turns into intense social pressure (see m06: para. 210-13). Beguiled by the high expectations for their migration experiences, many men do not know whether they eagerly follow others' examples of success, or are pushed to so:

> "They think, when I go there, I will get a good progress, I have seen others doing this, so I will do the same. […] There are also people who think that they will do big things after earning and taking home so much. They think, others have done it, so I will do it, too, I will also go. […] They go by thinking something great would happen." (f09: para. 188; 335)

5.2.2 Promised lands

By being intrinsically linked to *bikāṣ*, labor migration has become nearly synonymous with a rise in social status. This equation is so powerful that in fact, it works both ways: It is not only the desire to 'move forward' which

motivates migration – migration in turn triggers the wish for social ascent. Even if one's initial departure had nothing to do with social mobility, migrating without reaching a higher social status appears utterly pointless. As Bishuram (23), who went to Saudi Arabia only because he wanted to escape recruitment by Maoist guerilla forces, explains:

> "There were not so many problems in my family, but when you've gone abroad, you have to be understanding anyway, don't you. If I have gone abroad, I have to do my transactions by thinking: 'I will go and do something tomorrow.' If I say, 'I will relax when I've gone abroad,' then I can do that – relaxing – in Nepal as well. But that's not the point: When you've gone abroad, you should think what you could do, that you will buy some land from that money, that you will build some houses here." (m20: para. 74)

The narrative of success and progress abroad has become so naturalized that this 'truth' can even supersede one's own negative migration experience. Despite facing hardships and losses in their first stay abroad, many men do not give up on the concept of labor migration: After all, everybody 'knows' that going abroad means great progress – and it is only a matter of time before it works for them, too. It is this nearly unchallenged narrative which drives many former migrants to try their luck again and again, with the hope that they will finally attain the success that is supposedly in store for them. And to be sure, their efforts frequently pay off in some way: As soon as one has gone abroad, his family faces more respect in the village. To some degree, this can be explained in economic terms: After receiving remittances from abroad, many households can boast at least some increased financial stability. Consequently, the migrant's image transforms to that of a responsible, trustworthy, and successful person: "Nobody trusted him with a loan, now they believe him. Therefore, it is good that he went abroad. […] Now they believe him in every regard" (f02: para. 386-90). Previous research on Nepalese labor migration has highlighted such economic aspects by assuming that "migrants select possible destinations based on the amount of investment needed [… and] compare [them] to the expected earning levels" (Thieme & Wyss, 2005: p. 73). However, this thesis suggests that especially in rural areas, most people possess little knowledge of different options of employment abroad, let alone about comparing various potential costs and profits. By contrast, most interview partners based their choice of employment and destination on rather vague notions, including their knowing somebody who had already gone to a certain country or was there at the current time. As Arjun did, many men in the village simply put the reins in the hands of a local acquaintance 'with contacts', who then arranges everything for them. Other studies confirm these findings, holding that for most Nepalese, the choice of their labor destination is influenced by social networks revolving around their extended family, village, or caste (Bruslé, 2010b: p. 18).

Furthermore, migratory practices seem to be far less guided by rational cost-benefit considerations than defined by symbolic attributes and connotations of what it means to be developed. When it comes to social prestige, the symbolic value ascribed to one's migration appears to be at least as powerful as actual monetary numbers. For instance, this is revealed in the ways transmigrant families reproduce the narrative of migrant success: Irrespective of their real financial profit, households frequently spend remittances on items which are accepted as symbols of high social status and – most importantly – development. While there might be more profitable ways of investment, foreign income is therefore largely spent on things which can be seen and proclaim one's social rise. By showing physical proof of their *pragatī*, transmigrant families both live up to the social expectations they are confronted with, and reproduce them. A similar logic has been discovered by Bruslé (2010a), who describes migrants' practices of photographing themselves next to symbols of modernity as tools of proving their own social ascent:

> "Having oneself photographed in front of a swimming pool or a computer […] is a proof that from now on, […] these migrants belong to a new world. Even if they themselves do not own a computer or a swimming pool, their proximity with such expensive, modern items bestows prestige on them as well." (para. 27)

The excitement and admiration towards the modern, developed 'other' touches one more dimension of social evaluation in Nepal. Although the concept has not been illuminated so far, it carries a massive influence on the construction of migration as something worthy of respect: From a Nepalese perspective, the world is an ensemble of 'big' (*ṭhūlo desh*) and 'small' countries (*sāno desh*). In this scheme, the United States of America are undoubtedly the 'biggest' country, but are closely followed by places like London, Belgium, Germany, Switzerland, Norway, and Australia. Japan, Hong Kong, Israel, and South Korea appear somewhere below, but are still quite 'big' (*ṭhulai*). By contrast, Middle Eastern states, Malaysia, and India rank as rather 'small' countries (*sānai desh*). Not surprisingly, Nepal takes position at the absolute bottom of the list, representing the 'smallest' country you could possibly imagine. This hierarchy of migration destinations is indicative of a (neo)colonial worldview that has pervaded Nepalese thought. In this way, Nepalese society has fallen prey to the same effect that causes the colonized to internalize the narrative of the colonizer, to adopt the regimes of representation he is subjected to, and to see and perceive himself as 'other' (see chapter 2.1.3: p. 6; Hall, 1990: pp. 225-26). The concepts of *sāno* and *ṭhūlo desh* are so ubiquitous that they completely govern people's framing of Nepal as a country, the Nepalese as a nationality, and their role and value in the world. Compared to 'big' countries, which seem to be

inherently developed and 'ahead', Nepal defines itself first and foremost by its inferiority. It is here where migration steps in: As members of a 'small country', the Nepalese can only hope to 'move forward' by physically establishing contact with other places. The 'big' countries of this world thus become 'promised lands': places with endless opportunities, an epitome of the greener pasture. However, for most Nepalese, *ṭhūlo desh* like the USA, United Kingdom, or Germany seem to be so mystified and utterly unattainable that one's only option to reach them might be by 'knowing people':

> "To go to the US, you need people who can send you there, and you also have to know who sends you and how much it costs. I only know how to go to Korea, but how much it takes to Europe and what kinds of people go there, I don't know." (m17: para. 237)

Adding to their myth and obscurity, Nepal's 'promised lands' are associated with "big, big offices" which can only be accessed by "people with an ID", who "carry a green card", and "use computers" (m15: para. 328). For most of the individuals who participated in the empirical project, places like this seem like a dream. Compared to other members of their society, they experience a double effect of inferiority: on top of being citizens of a *sāno desh*, they are 'small people' (*sāno mānchhe*). The only lands promised to them are those where they can work with "spade and hook" (ibid.). Interestingly, the ways interviewees made sense of the social inequality in their country mirrored a merging of traditional and more recent systems of stratification. Social categories of caste, ethnicity, and land ownership are increasingly replaced by those of education and wealth: The privileged classes are "those people here who have more than enough, and land owners and educated people, people who have a qualification" (m06: para. 237). Increasingly, "it is very educated, very rich people who go to those kind of places, to big, big places" (f02: para. 364). As they allow or restrict access to 'big' countries, education and money have become not only the most important factors of social stratification, but are also perceived to be two sides of the same coin. Despite the entry of new marks of social difference, the Nepalese regime of representation has retained its essentialism. Curiously, financial means are not equated with privilege, but are rather interpreted as natural signs of a strong personal character:

> "Those who have some strict power, who have a strong backbone und are capable, they go to America, Japan, Korea. They go looking for money to spend even though they have enough income. The weakest and poorest ones cannot go there. They go to the gulf countries, but they take loan in order to go there." (m22: para. 230)

Mobility and immobility have thus been rendered powerful axes of social stratification. Social divisions and people's access to 'big' or 'small' places are explained by a persistent essentialism – suggesting that there is something inherently different between 'people like us' and 'them':

> "They are very different indeed. They are as different as the ground and the sky. How can I say how different they are? With a low economic situation, I cannot aim at Europe. People of prosperous families go there. […] People like us spend one lakh,[19] and we go in order so that we can run the expenses of a normal home. […] They go with the target of earning a lot of money and carry a big dream, we go there to run a normal home. To me, they are so different from each other." (m09: para. 202)

Due to the intricate hierarchy of 'small' and 'big' places, the potential of social ascent through migration is thus a multiple one. Less developed countries can open the door to 'better' destinations, whose larger incomes can again serve as a stepping stone towards very 'advanced' places: "In the past, I have gone to a Gulf country, now I am going to a country outside the Gulf, and let's see about other countries in the future" (m12: para. 298). In the case of Bhim Bahadur (29), his employment in the Gulf has helped him finance his university education. Today, the latter enables him to earn significantly more money in a 'bigger' country, which he plans to use for starting his own business in Nepal (m19: para. 281-284). It is such stories which construct migration as virtually the only way of achieving vertical mobility. In a society where the only chance of 'doing something' is by going abroad, alternatives to this mode of living become unimaginable. When asked what might have happened if he had not gone to Bahrain, the only answer Buddhiraj (25) can come up with is: "If I had gone to Kuwait instead of Bahrain, I maybe would have earned something. But if I hadn't left Nepal to go abroad, I probably wouldn't have been able to earn anything" (m17: para. 199). Thus, having plans for the future is frequently equalized with having plans for going abroad. Before even beginning his second foreign employment, Dhan Bahadur (28) has already considered potential host countries for a third stay abroad: "The next time I can go to Korea or to Singapore, or I could go to a Gulf country again. I will make up my mind later" (m12: para. 300). Even Ram Kumar (37), who has made very bad experiences and who clearly dreads going abroad again, cannot bring himself to rule out migrant labor

19 The terms lakh and karoḍ/crore are units in the Nepalese numbering system. Probably derived from ancient Pali or Sanskrit words, the terms refer to the numbers 100,000 and 10,000,000, respectively. As they are well-established numerical units in South Asian English, and the term 'one lakh' (*ek lakh*) has come to carry considerable symbolism in the Nepalese context, the original wording has not been altered.

completely. Instead, he keeps it as his personal 'Plan B', an extra card he can draw from his sleeve in case of a bad harvest:

> "I have planted a few vegetables here, but let's see whether those vegetables bring profit or loss. If the vegetables brought a loss, then whatever happens, if I thought I would go abroad and stay there for 2 or 3 years, I would go. If it doesn't bring loss, I will probably stay here." (m06: para. 283)

For many Nepalese men, labor migration is never fully off the table. In fact, an increasing number virtually 'hop' from one employment to the next. Their practice of 'settling in mobility' is not necessarily considered problematic: "If you can earn good money, it's good if all went abroad and lived there for three years. They could come back, go there again and get money again. If it's like that, it's nice" (m22: para. 172). However, with the spread of migrant labor practices, critical voices have grown as well. As Ichharam (28) explains: "The remittances are like a movie. They are there as long as you stay there, and later they are finished. It only gives temporary joy" (in m09: para. 195). In most migrants' opinion, their remittances might help their own families, but have little effect on the national development of Nepal: „It causes development in Nepal, and it doesn't. […] After people go abroad and send home money, it doesn't improve the whole situation, it only does something for their family, not for everyone" (m06: para. 233). Curiously, the most critical views have been voiced by migrants' wives and mothers. Countering dominant narratives of the 'promised land', they frequently allude to nationalist concepts of the Nepalese 'own' which should be preferred to anything 'out there':

> "Your own village, your own family, everything is here. For us, Nepal is Nepal. A foreign country is a foreign country. If you find something to do in your own place, it is good. But here, the money is little, and if you are uneducated, there are so many bad ones here, some haven't found employment, so that's why they have gone abroad." (f09: para. 228)

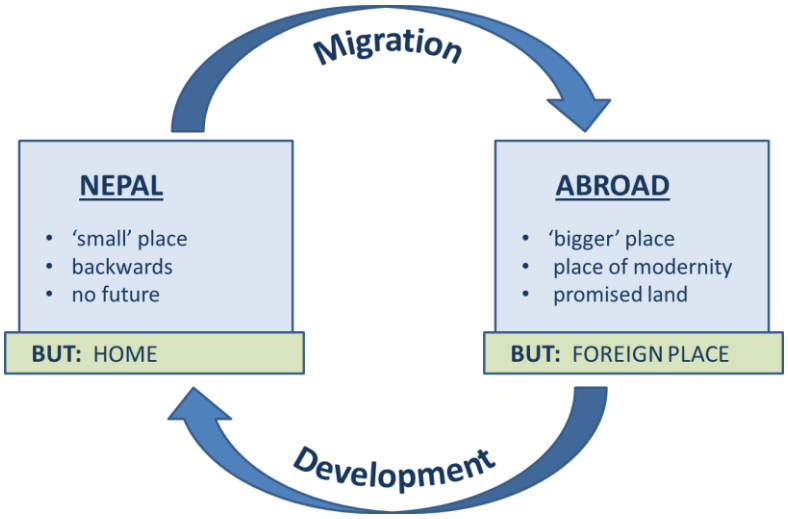

Figure 4: Opposing poles of Nepal and the 'promised land' abroad.

By highlighting the 'own' against the unknown 'foreign', women draw on constructions of 'Nepali-ness' as the safe and familiar, the closeness to one's family and friends, but also the responsibility men have for their country. As a result, these narratives compete with dominant concepts of the better place and the 'promised land' (see Figure 4). Nepalese men are thus exposed to conflicting sets of stories and values, and frequently struggle in dissolving this paradox. For instance, it is Arjun (24) who convincingly argues that "compared to how much trouble you have to face when you have gone abroad to another country, it is good in Nepal" – three days before he leaves the country for foreign employment (m15: para. 312). While the clash of two competing narratives is sometimes consciously problematized, it usually boils down to the following line of argumentation: "It is more important to live close by and serve here. But there is no money here. We have to go because earning is low" (m04: para. 389).

5.2.3 Gendered roles in mobility

A deeper understanding of Nepalese transmigration and meanings of (im)mobility is enabled by a closer look at the intersecting roles and subjectivities which influence this fundamentally gendered practice. The most traditional social category associated with the migrant laborer is certainly that of the husband and father. Previous studies of transnational families have highlighted the changing role of women, who are left behind and increas-

ingly take over traditionally 'male' responsibilities (see Parreñas, 2005; Ghimire et al., 2011: pp. 17-18). Without denying this trend, it needs to be noted that numerous wives in the present study actually remained very much under the authority of their husbands, who continued to make all important household decisions despite their stay abroad: "If I have said something once, [my wife] obeys. If I say that I cannot fulfill these kinds of things, she doesn't do them." (m12: para. 209; see also m06: para. 55). On the other hand, more egalitarian or female-centered models of decision making could be observed, as well. Consequently, transnational marriages appear to be one of Nepal's social arenas where a high variety of different models of gender division are currently being negotiated at the same time. Aside from the (theoretical) authority to make decisions, husband and father, who are generally perceived as one social category, are faced with the responsibility of providing for their family in terms of food, clothes, and education. By contrast, emotional closeness seems to be a task typically provided by the mother. It is this focus on the father's financial contribution which allows him to be physically absent from his children while still doing justice to his fatherly responsibilities: "Whenever there was something essential, I did everything for them. I completely fulfilled my duty while living abroad" (m12: para. 272). Consequently, the father and husband typically does not face any criticism for leaving his children at home, but is rather praised for putting his family's well-being before his own happiness. As an image of bravery and strength, emotional suffering and personal sacrifice are an integral part of a 'good' man's life: "First, rather I should get sick than my wife, that is a good thing. Another thing is, whatever I eat, my children should eat better" (m14: para. 152). According to this logic, it is the natural obligation of each father and husband to take the ultimate step towards his family's betterment – labor migration. As a result, the hardships he faces abroad are all part of a true father's sacrifice:

> "And I told them, […] don't be scared, I will come after I have earned a little more money, and I'm also making a future for you, it's not that hard for me, I am happy, too. For you, I am working my guts out, […] after I have paid so much money to come to this faraway place, I have to earn a little bit before I come back. […] If your body is healthy, it is more important to go abroad and bring home money so that your family can live in happiness." (m06: para. 185; 225)

As it has accompanied and justified the male practice of labor migration for generations, the trope of the suffering husband and father appears to be one of the oldest and most powerful narratives in Nepalese society. An older version of this role has been recorded in the classic, widespread folk song '*Asarai mahinama*', which portrays the life of a *Gurkha* or *Lahure* soldier, and has truly become a part of Nepalese consciousness:

> "My loved one says in tears
> The company's city is across the nine mountains
> […]
> What might my dear one be doing at this time
> What things might she be thinking, sitting on the porch
> Sometimes might be laughing, sometimes might be crying
> While she is missing me
> […]
> By now my son has maybe started walking
> Might be playing the whole day, might be missing me
> When night falls, he asks his mother
> Where is dad
> Where is dad"
> (Chujan Dukpa, n.d., "Asarai mahinama").[20]

As a benchmark of masculinity, practices of labor migration and their associated hardships have increasingly turned into a veritable rite of passage for young boys. To some degree, the journey of becoming a man is perceived as an experience of stepping outside one's comfort zone and 'discovering the world':

> "Young people have the desire to do some new things, that's why many of them leave. […] I used to wonder what that other village was like, that's how I felt. And they might also feel like, 'what are foreign countries like, what is Kathmandu like?' A brother of mine […] has gone abroad recently because he had never seen a foreign country." (m17: para. 175)

For young boys wishing to overcome their treatment as children and to be considered adults, working abroad appears to be the perfect way to defy their parents' skepticism, who sometimes see "[not] even a one percent chance he would stay there" (f09: para. 139), and to prove their independence: As Bishuram (23) explains, "I want to do something with my own sweat, I want to show something by earning money and doing something, […] I will do something not by using my parents' property, but […] with my own courage" (m20: para. 266). As a result, migrant labor is supposed to give young boys the necessary knowledge, experience, and wisdom they

20 For complete lyrics see Annex, chapter 8.3: p. 134.

need for a successful life. Since it actually is the suffering that makes a 'true' man, the potential abuse and exploitation young men might face abroad are no deterrent, but in fact a tool of learning:

> "Well, he has become a person who speaks well, he has become better, he understands things, how to handle the household activities. It has to be like this, this is how we have to do hard work, that's what he understands. […] He has realized this because he has faced troubles while working." (f09: para. 77-81)

It is for this reason that Sarswati has not considered her son Dipesh's labor migration a mistake: even though it pains her to think of the hardships he has faced, she is quite hopeful that he has improved from the experience (f01: para. 56). It is not only the parents who see foreign labor this way. 23-year-old Devraj is proud of the way his time abroad has transformed him:

> „Before, I used to fight, I used to do different stuff at parties, hung out here and there, didn't get along well with others […]. But now, a new life has begun. From now on, I won't behave like that. […] Now I have come to understand a lot. After you have come here, you are forced to change. You cannot live here with your behavior from Nepal. You automatically change." (m23: para. 90)

After their labor experience, young boys are not only bestowed with the prestige of having been to a 'bigger' place and having seen the world. While they might have left their country as children, they have returned as men. In this way, not only the responsible Arjun has taken over his father's role in the family, but also the young Dipesh has since been considered more trustworthy and 'mature', and is given more responsibility in household decisions. Because labor migration has become such a respected rite of initiation, more and more parents who worry about their boys' maturity choose to send them abroad on purpose. In this regard, the Gulf transforms from a Nepalese workplace into an 'education camp' for misbehaving youngsters. As Bhuwan Kumari (45) has made such good experiences with her son Devraj, she is planning to send his younger brother, who has given her grief, abroad as well:

> "I want him to go towards there, it's my hope that he will improve a bit there. I don't hope that he will earn and send some money or do something. I have tried to send him to the gulf countries so he would improve his future […] after going there." (f09: para. 333)

In their social surroundings, families who let their boys go abroad are usually met with approval rather than with criticism (f02: para. 202). If at all, it is the parents and migrant boys themselves who later realize potentially negative effects of their choice: while the short-term results of earning money at a young age feel empowering, many young men later regret that they missed out on further education (m17: para. 273; m20: para. 306-09). This is also the main concern which troubles Sarswati and Bhuwan Kumari:

> "A foreign country is not a place to live forever. He has to live in his own place, in his own village, and well, if he hasn't been educated, who will give him a job? […] If he had studied and gone to a big place, if he had done a bigger kind of work […] that would have been better." (f09: para. 153)

On the other hand, migration appears as the only avenue of gaining a different type of knowledge, a certain maturity of 'understanding things' (*kura bujhnu*), which make this experience invaluable for young boys: "in order to understand something, you have to go abroad" (f09: para. 317). Whether it is perceived as something temporary or transforms into a permanent lifestyle choice, labor migration at a young age has become a normalized custom. No matter if a family is under financial pressure or not – sending their sons away to work is just the normal thing to do: "It's already become a custom to go abroad. From everybody's home, one person has been going abroad. Even if I hadn't gone abroad, we would have still continued eating food, we would have lived here, but I am at that age where it is your goal to earn a little" (m15: para. 279). As 28-year old Ichharam's sister Apsara (38) summarizes her brother's decision: "They all went, so he went, too" (f05: para. 186).

In Nepalese society, labor migration continues to be coined as 'the thing men do', and only men *should* do. Consequently, the ideal female role is that of the immobile wife and mother. To be sure, recent years have seen a transformation in this regard, with increasing numbers of young women and mothers being employed full-time and migrating within the country. However, the area of transnational labor continues to be one where female migration is something to be rejected and frowned upon. Women's employment in the Gulf is considered to be especially unbecoming: as it is known that female workers frequently face severe exploitation and abuse, many interviewees wonder why one "would […] go to a place where there is this kind of behavior" (m22: para. 186). In fact, women who deliberately put themselves in such situations are accused of being impure and promiscuous:

> "A good female from Nepal never goes there. Whoever lives being true to themselves doesn't go there. […] Among a hundred, there's maybe one percent who hold their own prestige. […] If women go abroad, that means they sell their own truth, religion and their body. In their own country, they have to do some small work. Why shouldn't they rather just eat rice and salt?" (m12: para. 243-248)

Usually, women's skilled or study migration to 'big' places is evaluated as something much better – after all, how could going to a *ṭhūlo desh* possibly be bad? While female migration is not a large phenomenon in numbers, it thus appears to be particularly the bad experiences of women which have painted the Gulf in a more negative light, and have contributed to a more critical perception of this region as a relatively 'small' place. Even though migrating to 'better' destinations is generally accepted, the concept of a woman leaving her family behind remains a highly contested one. Despite generational differences in social concepts, a mother's role continues to be perceived as one centered on child rearing, with her providing the most important bond for a child:

> „It's better to raise your own child yourself. When the mother has left her child and gone, no matter how big the father's love, the child needs a mother. For you as well, no matter how much your father loved you, you needed your mother." (f03: para. 501)
> „[Women] assume that something big will happen after they go there. […] But especially leaving the child, leaving the family to go abroad is not good for a woman, that's what I think. […] When they have become wiser, when their children have grown up, then it is fine if they go." (f09: para. 220-24)

In this way, the female role is defined by an ideal of immobility. The trope of the emotional woman is one which frequently reoccurs to justify her social position, whether it is in regard to her tasks as a mother, or her being the weak character in need of male support:

> „A woman's heart is soft. She wonders, 'he has gone abroad, what has happened, how is he, where is he, is he alive or dead.' That's why it also means support for her if you keep calling her, so she knows, my husband is alive. […] The parents can console their heart. […] But the wife doesn't think like that. A woman's heart is different." (m12: para. 173)

A woman's 'inherent weakness', however, does not only make her someone who has to be protected, but also implies a certain myth of the unknown: "Even god doesn't understand women, and we are humans. How should we know them?" (m09: para. 264). Due to her lack of personal strength, there is an air of untrustworthiness and promiscuity around her. It is this aspect which many men consider as one of the main risks of labor migration. In the absence of their husband's control, women might easily stray from the 'proper' moral path:

> "You don't know any day where your wife might be going around, if she has turned bad. Some women get around, laugh and lie and flirt with other men even though they got married. Because their husband is abroad. There is nobody to scold them. So they don't care." (m09: para. 260)

In this light, transnational family practices are sometimes negotiated like a marital contract. The husband commits to the role of the financial provider by going abroad, while his wife pledges to stay faithful to him and not to misspend the family's money:

> "I have put faith in my family, I have given them support, I have also given them expenses, I have made it easy for the child to go to school, and because I had done this, she had been keeping my house and waiting for me. If I hadn't done all that, she would have already gone away. There are many other guys aside from me." (m12: para. 88)

5.2.4 Transnational relationships: distance and intimacy

The previous chapter has illustrated how transmigratory practices have affected the reproduction and negotiation of social categories and roles. As such, it lays the groundwork for taking a closer look at the performance of transnational families and relationships: Investigating how intimacy and closeness are maintained or redefined under circumstances of transmigration requires a deeper plunge into Nepalese culture. In order to understand the transformation of family practices, one needs to extract concepts and values which lie at the very core of social relations: How does a society shaped by transnational labor migration define and negotiate notions of family, closeness, and love? Furthermore, what are the personal narratives, imagined 'codes of practice', and 'emotional blueprints' that individuals can access and fall back on in order to deal with their migration experience?

Generally, the social construction of 'love' appears to be one where the latter does not suffer from physical distance, but actually grows from it. No more distracted by the daily frictions which occur when sharing one roof, members of transnational families start to treasure and idealize their relationships in ways they have never done before. Because their loved one has gone beyond the safe grounds of Nepal (read: home), every contact with each other becomes precious:

> "Whatever happens, the further you have gone away, the bigger your love gets. When you are close, you scold each other, you argue. You say, do this, do that. But when he has gone far away, the son loves the mother, the mother loves the son." (f04: para. 128; see also f08: para. 216)

Because not everybody feels comfortable speaking about love (*māyā*) explicitly, it is quite common in Nepal to resort to more tangible metaphors. Curiously, one of the most powerful images of a family's love and community is that of the shared dinner (*khānā*). Just as Aswin describes the affection he has for his family by explaining how he cherishes eating with them (chapter 5.1.2.1: p. 35), numerous other examples indicate that the way to the heart of many Nepalese truly seems to go through their stomach:

> "The love towards your home and your family is bigger than everything else, you don't love others abroad that much. Even if you don't eat good food [at home] and you eat good food when you go abroad, it tastes better at home." (m17: para. 257)

While transnational relationships are often accompanied by a growth in affection, this can also cause the physical distance to be perceived as even more painful and difficult to compensate. This is especially the case for unskilled laborers, many of whom have so little financial means that frequent communication with home is a luxury for them. While they might acknowledge that "[t]he more I talked on the phone, the better I felt" (m15: para. 216), the closeness to one's family members is a precious commodity which is frequently sacrificed for more basic needs: "We are not people who sit around and talk very much. […] It didn't come to my mind to be a person who goes abroad to work and then spends the money by talking on the phone" (m11: para. 156). From this perspective, the maintenance of transnational relations is revealed as a highly differential privilege, which not everybody has the same access to.

Even if migrants are able to stay in frequent contact with their family members, their ways of producing "intimacy across borders" are sometimes far from what a Eurocentric mind would imagine (Parreñas, 2005: p. 319). From the perspective of many migrant families, their love for each other is not necessarily followed by open communication. Quite to the contrary, the stronger one's closeness and affection for the other, the less he is likely to share unpleasant truths that might worry his counterpart. While Aswin was somehow relieved when he could share his difficult labor experience with his wife Bimala (see chapter 5.1.2.1: p. 35), Arjun's father Hasta Bahadur is convinced it is much better not to share distressing information with each other: "Now, if we don't hear anything, we feel relaxed" (f02: para. 463). From this perspective, it is an indication of one's love, personal sacrifice, and ultimately of a good relationship to spare one's significant other from sorrow. Yet this ideal is not always upheld. In the case of young Dipesh, who could not bear to keep his suffering to himself, the emotional support he received from his mother Sarswati served as a true transnational 'security net' which got him through months of exploitative employment (see Sijapati, 2010: p. 142). However, the ideal of a mutual 'vow of silence' continues to define the transnational family. It is the predominance of this value in Nepalese society which caused Buddhiraj not be told about his own grandfather's death (see m17: para. 120-29), and left Arjun's and Bishuram's parents oblivious to the fact that their sons were working illegally and spent weeks in jail (see chapter 5.1.2.3: p. 38; m20: para. 86). For many male migrants, this 'don't ask, don't tell' policy can be merged neatly into their social role of the 'silently suffering man':

> "So even though my job was hard, I told them, 'it is very easy, you don't have to worry, I'm living there in great happiness.' And even when I was a little bit ill, I didn't tell them that I was ill, because the children wouldn't have felt good about that and they would have gotten so very worried about me." (m06: para. 164)

While two thirds of all interviewed migrants were part of a transnational family revolving around their wife and children, they all held the unanimous opinion that no matter under which circumstances, leaving the country after being married should be avoided at all costs. In parts, this position is certainly rooted in the trope of the 'untrustworthy' wife, as mentioned before. Almost everybody knows at least one story of a woman who supposedly, some way or the other, betrayed her migrant husband and ran away with his money. However, the widespread recommendation to only go abroad before you are married might actually be rooted in deeper concepts of love and social relations. While it remains a difficult topic to address in conversation, many migrating men suffer greatly from the emotional strain of leaving their wife and children behind. From this perspective, a narrative is created which equates emotional attachment with a lack of strength and endurance:

> "It is better to go when you haven't gotten married. Because you won't be tortured by missing her. You don't love her. A lonely man is fearless. […] If you have a wife behind you, what should you do – you have to think for yourself, you have to think about home, you have to think about her… Compared to that, it's better for unmarried people to go abroad." (m12: para. 280)

The seeming conflict between maintaining transnational intimacy and achieving the 'fearlessness' necessary for a successful labor experience point to a broader dilemma faced by labor migrants. Many of them appear to be in a constant struggle between leading an active transnational lifestyle and deliberately distancing themselves from their home environment. As Bishuram explains, he had to make the conscious decision to stop being homesick, and instead to pour his entire focus on being in Saudi Arabia:

> "I used to be very distanced from [my family]. When you've gone there and you only remember your home, you cannot work. Because whether you think that they are far away or not, you have to work, and if you keep remembering them and thinking that they are far away, you will become thin from sadness. It's like that, it's no use thinking like that. You have to work by thinking: 'I am here now.'" (m20: para. 192)

Again, this step of emotionally distancing oneself and entering a world of labor is facilitated by the ideal of Nepalese masculinity. By slipping into the conveniently offered role of the stoic male migrant, many men attempt to strip themselves of all attachments that might slow them down or make their labor experience more difficult to bear:

> "Whatever it is, you always find your own land lovely. You like the place of your birth. But we are people who said, 'we'll earn', and left, so we also have to stomach it. When some things like this come, you have to endure them. After you've gone to a foreign country to earn money, you cannot miss your own land. You have to bear everything." (m12: para. 111)

This research has supported assumptions that in Nepalese society, the family continues to be one of the most central units of social practice, and that collective ascriptions frequently determine a person's identity and practices much more so than individual traits or desires (Yeoh et al., 2005: p. 309). In a setting where a large portion of one's self-perception is derived from interacting with social networks at home, the decision to cut off these connections weigh even more gravely. It is in this regard where the narrative of the 'fearless' migrating male provider falls in conflict with more traditional notions of every individual being inseparably tied to his or her family. For some, migration thus entails the necessary step of leaving behind old concepts of the family, and adapting to a world defined by development and money:

> "Whoever has money gets everything. If you don't have money, you don't have anything at all. If everything was enough just by looking at my parents' and my wife's faces, I wouldn't have had to go abroad." (m09: para. 186)

However, not everybody prioritizes their values with as much determination as the rational Arjun does. For many, positioning themselves somehow in the middle and taking the best of both lifestyles seems the best way to go:

> "One thing is that [a good son] has to have an income. He has to love very much. If he only has an income but doesn't give any love, it's not worth anything. If he gives love, but doesn't have an income, it doesn't work either. Both of those things have to happen." (f04: para. 267)
> "Both is important. If there is no family, there's nothing; if there is no money, there's also nothing. You don't fill your stomach just from seeing your family." (f01: para. 94)

In fact, the friction between the ideal of the intimate family on the one hand, and the narrative of the migrating male who provides for his family by finding development abroad on the other is crucial in contemporary Nepal: it manifests as one of the most defining questions which shape the way Nepalese society thinks about labor migration. While none of the participants in the study could dissolve this powerful paradox, most people are well aware of the dilemma they are faced with. Thus, it is probably difficult to find a better way of summarizing the thoughts which plague the minds of many Nepalese, than through the words of 35-year-old villager Lal Bahadur:

> "The other matter is, if you go abroad, even if it is little, you see money. It is a matter of two souls: The one thing is, I think that it is quite fine to live here with your family. It is good that you get to see your children, you get to see everybody. The other thing is, you don't get any money by living here. There is no earning here. When you go there, you miss your children, you miss your relatives and friends, you face pain, but even if it is little, you do get to see some money. Now, tell me, is that good or bad?" (m11: para. 237)

5.2.5 Exploitation or opportunity

In migration scholarship, the question whether people's foreign labor experience is perceived as 'good' or 'bad' is frequently connected to the oppositional pair of 'exploitation' and 'opportunity'. When returning to the narratives which frame Nepalese labor migration, the previous analysis of social roles and practices of the transnational family can provide valuable insights. It has illustrated how gendered categories and roles translate into subtle, but all-pervasive forms of social pressure, which do not only prescribe how life should be lived, but also how one's personal trajectories should be re-told and evaluated. For instance, the trope of the sacrificing father and husband constitutes a powerful framework which suggests Nepalese men how to make sense of their own difficult migration experience. In regards to the deep conflict between traditional family values and the narrative of the better life abroad, migrants frequently resort to a trope of obligation and coercion (*bhadyata*). Whether it applies to their personal experience or not, the narrative which is told almost in unison is that of the

Nepalese going abroad because they have no choice but to do so. In this light, labor migration as frequently painted as rather bane than boon of Nepalese society: Mothers staying at home bemoan that in many villages, there are not even enough men to perform traditional funeral rituals, and worry about their female relatives who live at home all alone, with nobody there to protect them from intruders or thieves. Unable to resist the lures of potential wealth abroad, the young generation seems to be losing its way by choosing money over the family: "You find a lot of people like this, nowadays, people like us love money so much they could die for it, they even leave their parents for money" (m20: para. 208). While everybody desires some benefit for their personal household, many highlight the negative effects on their country as one losing its capable workforce and essentially turning into a land of women, children, and elders. However, the most problematized aspect of labor migration does not seem to be the decision to leave home or transmigratory practices in general. Instead, the most talked about negative story of migration is that of the fraud, abuse, and exploitation which Nepalese workers as a group have to face:

> "The manpower agency tells them they can do it and manipulate them, they make it interesting for them by saying, it's like this, it's like that, and people say, oh, alright, and they go. And they also have to go." (m06: para. 235)
> "They want to earn money to make their family happy, to give them food and drinks. People have been going by saying, I can earn money. Now, they don't say, I will go there to die. They go saying, I can earn money. How much pain and trouble the Nepalis have faced. There, in this other place." (f09: para. 186)

More recently, voices have risen who say foreign exploitation causes laborers to use up their entire working capacity and come home broken men. While the general practice of unskilled male labor migration is frequently evaluated as something negative to lose, their personal suffering and loss seems almost completely natural to migrants themselves. At least after their employment abroad, they all appear quite aware and resigned to the fact that most of the profit goes to their employers. While Arjun nonchalantly concludes that this is just the deal you agree to, Ram Kumar draws quite a bitter résumé from his experience: „Well, I was the one with the disadvantage. […] The benefit was with the agency, but our family didn't benefit, the company profited but our family didn't profit, for us it got worse" (m06: para. 265-69).

Other studies of transnational labor migration have suggested that some migrants profit from their foreign labor experience by strategically using it as a door opener for later success. In this instance, Strüver (2011b) has suggested that female migrants in Europe consciously switch from 'career to care'. A similar mechanism is hard to find in the Nepalese context. If anything, the only step young men seem to consciously choose is to switch from 'education to employment'. Because raging unemployment renders their chances of finding a job even after getting a further education considerably low, many of them choose labor as a straightforward, fast, and supposedly secure way of gaining money. However, it is questionable whether such strategies have a positive long-term effect. Most Nepalese travel to the Gulf unskilled – and return unskilled. Those who have acquired a trade or professional training cannot benefit from it, because Nepal's economy provides them with no opportunity to put their skills to use and make a living from them. Despite all this, young boys tend to frame labor migration as a positive experience. In a country raging with unemployment, many male youth see foreign employment as the only way to fulfill their desire to use their personal capabilities and to 'do something':

> "Maybe it would have been bad for me if I had stayed here. If I had stayed here for four years, I wouldn't have any money, I would have been wasted. Like, let's say, in my family at home, they were worried […] But I went abroad and I am very happy about it, I benefitted from it." (m20: para. 397)

While investigating the social construction of labor migration as something done by choice or by force is interesting and relevant, it should not necessarily be equalized with the question of exploitation or opportunity. Whether something is labelled as a 'free decision' or 'force' is highly dependent on dominant narratives and social roles in a certain context. Even though the decision to migrate might be considered a voluntary one, it always remains influenced by pre-conscious social formations of meaning. For this reason, transmigratory practices in Nepal can never be evaluated in isolation: It needs to be acknowledged as part of a society which frames migration as a normalized step of personal fulfillment and professional achievement, and a path to social mobility that is essentially without alternative. Furthermore, one needs to consider that the analytic dualism of 'voluntary' vs. 'forced' might in fact be quite a one-dimensional and Eurocentric concept, which does not necessarily have the same relevance in a different social context. As Rachel Silvey (2006) remarks in her study of transmigratory practices, individuals frequently "are neither entrapped […] nor imprisoned" by these categories, but actually "tell a more expansive and flexible story about their transnational mobility" (p. 35).

5.2.6 Fragmented identities and the Nepalese communication gap

Previously, it has been described that many Nepalese migrants find it difficult to combine their foreign employment with a transnational lifestyle. Furthermore, there is a widespread hesitation to share their experiences with

loved ones at home. Frequently, men hold on to the narrative of "living there in great happiness" (m06: para. 164), while really, they are suffering from harsh working and living conditions. As elaborated before, this practice is somewhat rooted in the high-held value of protecting loved ones from sorrow. However, it is suggested here that the striking persistence of this 'vow of silence' can be explained by even more existential forces at play. For one thing, many migrants make the conscious choice not to talk about their true labor conditions in order to protect their own reputation:

> „If I tell that I have done this and that, it is a matter of making a bad image of myself. For example, inside my village – if not anywhere else – there are about ten people who respect me. If they knew the reality and thought that, oh, I went to take care of goats and camels and I boasted to them that I was a driver there. Why should I destroy my own image? Whatever falls on me, I have to carry myself. There is nothing good about telling my own family about this. […] You shouldn't talk about the incidents you have faced abroad. […] Something should be kept secret." (m12: para. 191-95)

As mentioned before, Nepalese society has been traditionally structured along the Hindu caste system, which has included an inextricable tie between people's caste, dignity, and their occupation. While traditional Hindu principles have lost some of their influence today, a person's social status still remains very much associated with what he or she does for a living. In their home context, many Nepalese would never even consider performing dishonorable tasks such as cleaning or rearing 'impure' animals, as it is simply below them. By contrast, working abroad is automatically regarded as something to be respected and appreciated. After all, one of the reasons why so many men go abroad in the first place is their striving for social mobility. Since most Nepalese migrants in the Gulf end up at the bottom of the local hierarchy, many of them work in jobs they would normally consider far beneath themselves. However, being unseen abroad, they can perform all those tasks not only without losing their dignity, but even while *gaining* the positive reputation of someone who has traveled the world:

> "Otherwise, if you want to work, we also have jobs even in Nepal. But in this Nepal of today, they think it is difficult to carry just a small luggage, so they rather want to go and are ready to brush the floor and to wash the dishes." (f09: para. 334)

Instead of letting their home environment know about the real circumstances of their work and risk losing social respect, migrants follow one maxim: everything that happens in the Gulf stays in the Gulf. Even though Nepalese literally have to scrub the floors of Gulf societies, the modernity, wealth, and *bikāṣ* of these 'bigger' countries still somehow rub off on them. Faced with the reward of social ascent in their home context, spending some time at the absolute bottom of Qatari or Saudi hierarchy is a price many are willing to pay.

On the other hand, some migrants' reluctance to talk about their labor experience and their inability to maintain transnationally active while being in foreign employment seems to be less of a strategic decision. Instead, it might point to the complete difference they perceive between their situation abroad and their home context – one so significant that it goes up to the point of them being utterly incompatible with each other. The humiliation and the total lack of respect many migrants face in the Gulf can result in an experience so traumatic that it feels impossible to communicate:

> "If I died, they would throw me into some canal, I would be gone and that would be it. It's like, let's say, if a dog has died here, they say, 'a dog as died', don't they. But if we die there, we have no value at all. That's what it's like." (m20: para. 178)

The intense dehumanization many migrants experience abroad puts them into a major dilemma, where they are stuck between two opposing narratives about who they are, what they can do, and how they should be treated. Maintaining a transnational connection then means being simultaneously subject to two utterly contradicting value systems. At home, migrants are praised as their family's heroes, who deserve respect and should be listened to. Abroad, they are taught it is normal to be spat at and to be "treat[ed] like dogs" (m06: para. 7; see chapter 5.1.2.3: p. 38). With each foot in a different regime of representation, migrants face a multiple fragmentation of their identity. As it is impossible to uphold a coherent narrative of the self, they are tasked with finding new practices and ways of identifying themselves. For many, this means keeping the two worlds of 'abroad' and 'home' separate from each other: As long as one's experience is not communicated, it remains somewhat less 'real' and can be ignored, repressed, and not acknowledged. By pretending that experiences of exploitation and abuse did just not occur, migrants create a 'communication gap' and essentially reproduce the narrative of the 'promised land'. It is only with people who are outside of one's personal social network (e.g. the research team) and those who have experienced similar situations (e.g. other labor migrants) that a sharing of personal traumas becomes possible. In this way, the Nepalese communication gap is often only overcome within a 'circle of those who know'. However, due to the variety of migrant trajectories that were part of this research, different strategies of dealing with the fragmentation of identity could be observed. Along with further steps of analysis, they crystallized into a typology (see Figure 5).

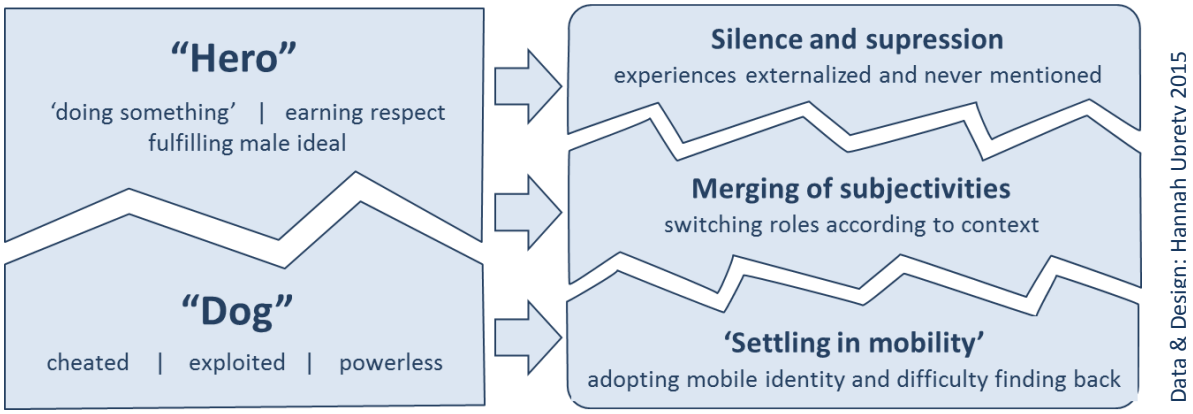

Figure 5: Typology of reactions to fragmentation of migrant's identity

Even years after returning to Nepal, the majority of interviewees had never communicated their humiliation and suffering with their social surroundings at home. By not fully acknowledging what happened, there appears to be no need to deal with it or problematize it any further. In this way, they could leave their time abroad behind them and focus on their (sometimes improved) reality in Nepal. Others seem to follow a similar approach of non-communication. However, they have somehow made a name for themselves abroad: They have come so much to terms with their 'new' identity that it is hard for them to find back into their 'old' role at home. It is those individuals who never really return to Nepal, and who frequently choose to go for foreign employment again and again. Faced with the challenge of integrating once more into their home environment and the family that has gotten so used to living life without them, they choose to 'settle in mobility' instead. A third, smaller group of individuals appears to follow a different strategy: They have somehow managed to accept both value systems as part of their identity. On the one hand, they have resigned to their low status abroad. On the other, they also embrace the positive ascriptions and respect they receive at home. By having gotten to know different regimes of representation, they are able to switch between different roles depending on the appropriate contexts. Frequently, this approach is accompanied by a conscious decision to break the myth of the 'promised land' and share one's personal experiences. In this way, Ram Kumar (37), who had to watch his own friend die next to him on their worksite in Qatar, does not get tired of warning others of going abroad under conditions they do not fully understand. In doing so, he is often faced with persisting narratives which frame destinations of labor migration as "the modern place *par excellence"* (Bruslé, 2012c: pp. 61-64). As "every potential migrant either hopes to be luckier or to embrace the hardship" (Salazar, 2011: p. 589), he complains that his warnings are often not heeded:

> „Well, I have told so many people and my friends who want to go abroad not to go if they don't know everything about it. The manpower agencies straightly sell us. They sell us like buffaloes out of the stable, but when I tell them, 'only go when you have understood everything', they say, 'he has returned because he didn't want to stay there'. But when it's about going abroad, people run over there. […] Some people agree with what I said, some have said, no, it's not like that, it's been like that. Because of the situation I worked in, I personally like I shouldn't tell anybody to go especially to Qatar. […] When I came to my room, I felt like I had survived, I don't tell them to go because it is so hard outside." (m06: para. 285)

Although the myths of the 'promised land' and the better life continue to define Nepalese practices, the communication gap has begun to crumble. In recent years, public discourse on labor migration has clearly diversified. There appears to be a gradual shift towards a more differentiated picture, which neither demonizes foreign labor, but openly problematized the human rights situation of Nepalese workers. Thereby, public discussion has been slowly superseding the "pervasive official discourse whereby migration is the solution for the country's future, notwithstanding the painful experiences endured by migrants" (Bruslé, 2010a: p. 19). Several years ago, arenas which gave space to migrants' own experiences, such as the radio program '*Paurakhi*', were scarce (Thieme et al., 2005: pp. 110–111). While the last years have seen valuable contributions to the critical discussion of labor migration (e.g. see Tseten, 2010), such debates have largely taken place in privileged arenas, which are not usually accessed by those who are truly affected by this practice. Recently, however, the discourse has spread to more diverse forums: Today, unskilled labor migration is discussed in national newspapers on a nearly daily basis, and has been featured in high-profile political talk shows on television. Most importantly, it has also taken over mediums which are more accessible to less privileged parts of society, as in the recently published folk song '*Chinta chaina kehi*'. This highly popular song has become a media phenomenon within only few months since its release, and has completely taken over rural mainstream culture. Working with humorous effects, but carrying a quite serious message, the song portrays a villager and his wife, who choose a life in Nepal against the glamor and modernity associated all those 'big' countries out there:

> "My America is here, my Japan is here, my Britain is here, too

Milking my buffalo, drinking two glasses of milk
This is my beer, this is my whiskey, too
[…]
I went abroad, I did not stay many days
Why to sell my blood and sweat
I have nothing to worry about
Here is my Qatar, here is my Dubai, too, here is my Malaysia
[…]
Some were taken away, some went themselves
So many girls were sold and bought
I have nothing to worry about
Here is also my India, here is also my Thailand, here is also my Germany
We eat mixed beans curry, husband and wife living together"
(Pashupati Sharma, 2013: "Chinta chaina kehi").[21]

5.3 Power and Difference

In the first two steps of analysis, the spotlight has been turned on the practices and meanings through which male labor migration to the Gulf is (re)produced and negotiated. In this final step, explicit focus is put on the effects of power and difference which contribute to this Nepalese regime of mobility. Investigating this dimension from a critical postcolonial perspective implies not only an analytical, but also a somewhat normative take on the subject. On the following pages, some of the rigid structures which frame migrant realities shall be illuminated – beginning on an institutional level, but also progressing to the disciplining of meaning and practices through hegemonic regimes of representation. Phrased in a less abstract way, this chapter is somewhat guided by two questions: Why do some Nepalese migrants in the Gulf face severe abuse and exploitation, while others do not? To what degree and in what ways are they 'in charge' of their migration and foreign labor experience? One way of grounding these questions conceptually is by investigating them along the lines of structure and agency. Returning to ideas introduced in the theoretical part of this thesis (see chapter 2.1.6: pp. 9; chapter 2.3.3: pp. 21), it is attempted to analyze both structures of power and difference as well as the potential for transformation and change. As the two principles are no separate entities, but only constituted through their mutual interaction, this chapter starts off by outlining some of the structural effects of inequality and difference which are most defining in Nepalese labor migration to the Gulf region. On this foundation, the transformation of those structures is investigated more closely by pointing to some avenues of transmigrant agency.

5.3.1 Structures of difference and exploitation

As described previously, foreign labor in the Gulf States is defined by a highly unequal social structure which largely profits the host countries (see chapter 3.3: pp. 25). Possibly the most visible effects of difference are those which manifest in institutional tools and mechanisms. Aside from legal rules and regulations, this system of exploitation is facilitated by numerous interlocking effects of structure. One of those effects concerns migrants' extreme financial dependency on their employers: After paying high fees to their recruitment agencies, which were frequently obtained by taking loans from moneylenders with exorbitant interest rates, migrants' intense financial pressures force them to accept nearly any working and living conditions they are offered. As the decision not to do so and to return home would mean to face an even heavier financial burden than before their migration, many workers feel bound to their employer's mercy – at least for the 12 to 18 months it usually takes them to pay back their initial loans. Consequently, Lal Bahadur summarizes the pressures migrants find themselves in: "You don't find that, that somebody says, 'come back', after you have left. It just doesn't happen that somebody says, 'come back'. Not in India, not in Nepal" (m11: para. 164). Further ways of exerting power over Nepalese migrants include an extreme restriction of knowledge: most laborers are given virtually no access to any form of information on the current status of their employment, their rights, legal options, and future perspectives. Due to the infringement of internationally accepted workers' and human rights, there is virtually "no scope for bargaining between employer and employee, including the right to form unions" (Khatri, 2007: p. 14). For many Nepalese, the sponsorship system, which frames their stay in Qatar and Saudi Arabia and which essentially creates a state of bonded labor, frequently serves as the most powerful barrier to individual agency: "I couldn't leave the company and start another job, because I heard that the police would seize me if I left the company. They had my passport, too. So I didn't do anything" (m06: para. 7). The bad housing and health conditions many workers have to endure are aggravated by established practices such as segregated housing in destitute labor camps, and numerous other methods of keeping them out of contact and separated from the na-

21 For complete lyrics, see Annex, chapter 8.3.

tive population. While all those mechanisms of inequality have been mentioned before, it is only when taking a step backwards that one fully appreciates the entirety of this intertwined ensemble of difference. Taken altogether, the emotional effects of this multi-level disenfranchisement are severe:

> "The Qataris, the Arabs from there don't care especially about the Biharis, Indians, Nepalis or Bangladeshis. The main people there are the Qataris, they think of us as dogs. Whatever they have eaten, they give us [the leftovers]." (m12: para. 41)

Aside from the problematic legal and institutional framework, almost every migrant interviewed in the study suffered from one or more cases of fraud. Even those who had left their country with all possible safety precautions, their supposedly complete and bullet-proof legal documents and work contracts were broken and invalidated within a matter of seconds. In nearly all cases, migrants found no way to hold their Nepalese agency or local employer responsible for the deceit they had faced. Once they experienced the feeling of utter powerlessness against these structures, most workers resigned to the idea that going abroad was essentially a lottery for them: "you will only know [what you get] once you have gone there. They make fools out of us. You will only know when you have gone there" (m22: para. 246). Even when all legal requirements are met, the degree to which Nepalese laborers profit from their employment is questionable: as mentioned before, their rise in terms of representation and status is usually not matched by material aspects. Aside from their financial benefits being quite low, migrants rarely receive any training that would allow them to return at least with certain skills that could be useful on the Nepalese job market. From an institutional perspective, the tools set in place by the Nepalese state in order to protect its citizens abroad appear to have a rather decorative function. In terms of workers rights' violations, both the Nepalese labor ministry and the embassies in Qatar and Saudi Arabia have remained virtually inactive. Currently, the foremost priority of the Nepalese government appears to keep the steady flow of migrant remittances running. As a state, Nepal is extremely dependent on its migrant host countries. Since any confrontation with the Gulf needs to be avoided at all cost, authorities have not fulfilled their responsibility of ensuring minimum wages, safe working conditions, and the freedom of their citizens. One of the most recent examples of Nepalese obedience is the éclat around the Nepalese ambassador Maya Kumari Sharma, and her critical words on the abuse of the '*kafala*' system. As the Nepalese government is massively restricted in what it can say openly and what it can do, it essentially becomes complicit in the maintenance of Gulf border regimes. Facilitated by the bilateral agreements which strictly regulate who can enter a Gulf country under which conditions and for how long, numerous mechanisms of inequality are 'outsourced' to Nepal, where they take effect long before migrants even reach the Gulf's physical borders.

While this research has included several men who considered their working conditions as acceptable and fair, many others nonchalantly reported their experiences of severe physical abuse and exploitation, including forced labor and physical beating (see chapter 5.1.2.3: pp. 38). Although most migrants had been used to hard physical labor prior to their departure, many of them faced such difficult working conditions that they were frequently sick, and in some cases continue to suffer from corresponding health problems (e.g. m20: para. 23-28). An interesting insight into the ways migrants' health and safety conditions are treated by local authorities is provided by Ram Kumar's experience, whose friend died while working on a pipeline construction site:

> "We had been transferred to day duty after we had been working at night. It was in the month of July, and at 8.30 in the morning it had gotten hot and […] he called me: 'Ram Kumar, I'm going to faint, something is happening to me.' […] If he had reached the hospital, he wouldn't have died, but about 2 minutes were left, the car had been going high speed, but he died on the way. And I had kept him on my lap, and the boss told me to leave him, [and at the hospital] he had told me not to say anything. He had told me I was not allowed to say anything to anyone, and I told him 'alright'." (m06: para. 275-77)

Institutional mechanisms and legal frameworks certainly play an important role in consolidating the restrictive system which Nepalese laborers are a part of. However, an even more powerful dimension which is vital in keeping this abusive regime running so effectively is that of meaning. The mechanisms of reproducing difference and inequality are rooted in the narratives and imaginaries which construct Nepalese mobility and labor migration. The myth of the 'promised land', the better life, and the persisting communication gap all gear into each other, causing many migrants to enter their host country with unrealistic expectations and not in the least prepared for what awaits them. Furthermore, structural hierarchies are mirrored and reproduced in the ways the Nepalese construct their individual and collective identities. From this perspective, the scandal around ambassador Sharma becomes much more than a diplomatic incident between two states, but in fact reveals the tight interplay of power and meaning in producing rules of what can be thought, can be said, and can be heard. As such, modes of representation, geographical imaginaries, narratives of (im)mobility and migration, and myths of the better life in the 'promised land' intertwine, and create a powerful regime of mobility, which transforms practices and meanings on all social scales and affects both migrant and sedentary members of society.

From this perspective, migrants feel obliged to stay and endure their working and living conditions not only because of financial pressures, but because they react to gendered roles of who they are supposed to be, social

expectations of success, and the risk of losing their social status. Furthermore, the persistent trope of Nepalese inferiority makes migrants easily ready to resign to the highly hierarchical system they are placed in:

> "Dominating, of course they dominate us. That's nothing special. When people see that you are scared, they try to dominate you. If they show you work to do, then just do it, that's it." (m12: para. 41)

The system of social stratification which Nepalese laborers are placed in is tightly bound to intersecting categories of difference, such as workers' nationality, ethnicity, and religious affiliation. Most clearly, interviewees perceived the hierarchies between migrants of different nationalities: While the native population is nearly absent from the private employment context, it is frequently substituted by 'Western' nationalities, Chinese or South Koreans, and closely followed by non-native Arabs. The lower part of the hierarchy is headed by Filipinos and Indians, with those of Pakistani, Bangladeshi, and Nepalese origin at the very end of the scale. What is remarkable here is that South Asian hierarchies, which are largely defined by the hegemonic power India, appear to be transferred into the local host context: Thus, the lower sections of the hierarchy are dominated by Indian staff, who are most commonly supervisors looking over an unskilled mass of Pakistanis, Bangladeshis, and Nepalese. Consequently, many workers do not even learn to speak Arabic during their time abroad: Since they rarely establish any contact with Arabic speakers – let alone locals – Hindi is the unofficial *lingua franca* of the Gulf workplace. The multiplying effects of intersecting social categories play a vital role in the subjecting and disciplining of migrant groups at their ascribed social position. It is part of the 'capillary movement' of power which keeps this system running so effectively (see chapter 2.1.2: p. 5). As methods of dominance and exploitation trickle downwards level by level, the abused get the chance to simultaneously become the abuser to those below him – and thereby perpetuate the ubiquitous logic of inequality:

> "I realized one thing: no matter how hard you worked, you wouldn't get a promotion there, because most of the Indians were in upper positions and they used to promote Indians to a higher level. Nepalese staff never got promoted." (m15: para. 4)

When arriving in their host country, the local hierarchies of labor and Gulf societies interlock with notions of development, 'big places', and narratives of Nepalese inferiority. In this way, Nepalese workers are positioned in a neocolonial regime of exploitative labor, where they internalize the narrative of their own worthlessness and learn to see themselves as the 'Other'. It is for this reason that – despite their massive population, which equals that of local citizens in Qatar – the 'small' Nepalese continue to feel they have neither bargaining power nor the right to ask for fair treatment, and remain virtually nonexistent.

> "In Qatar, I saw with my own eyes my many colleagues, but I also heard that it was said there are 400,000-500,000 people from abroad there, and they say, 'our country here is small, what should we do.'" (m06: para. 229)

The alliance between disempowering knowledge and structures of inequality is so effective that many Nepalese laborers do not question the marginalization, disenfranchisement, and disrespect they face. Instead, these are "considered by migrants to be perfectly normal" (Bruslé, 2010a: para. 12). Many men even accept their own dehumanization as something natural, a role they simply have to fulfill:

> "There was no work I did not do […]. There was no point in scolding them if they defecated outside the toilet. So I cleaned the feces by hand because I was the only one there to work. *We were like machines*. There was no point in me hesitating to do it." (m14: para. 220)

Part of the readiness with which many Nepalese integrate into local hierarchies has been attributed to the Hindu caste system, which might have caused them to internalize logics of strict social stratification for generations (Bruslé, 2010a: para. 17). However, their socialization in Nepalese society might be exactly one reason why some migrants accept the discrimination they encounter, while others do not. In fact, what can be observed is the transnational intersecting of social categories: The mechanisms of subjection and humiliation directed at them in the host context fall on all too fertile ground for those who have been socialized at the bottom of Nepalese social hierarchy. Those men who have already naturalized their low position in the social stratum and who are used to hard labor and exploitation frequently do not expect anything else when going abroad:

> "After I had come here, I told [my family] that I had worked this many hours, that sometimes I had worked through the entire night, and that it was like this and that. […]They weren't that especially worried. It's our habit to work here, as well." (m15: para. 188-92)

The multiple effects of intersecting social categories play a core role in solidifying these structures of inequality. However, it needs to be noted that intersecting systems of differentiation cannot only aggravate each other, but also have a mitigating effect. In this way, the participants of this research certainly benefitted from their male gender role. Many of them expressed their concern for the Nepalese women they encountered or heard about. In

the male-dominated societies of Saudi Arabia and Qatar, several migrants personally witnessed the physical, sexual, and emotional abuse of Nepalese women. Arjun P. tells the story of female migrants who, after being raped and becoming pregnant, were married off to male Nepalese laborers, who received payment for this 'service' (m15: para. 255-71). Bishuram even helped several abused girls to leave their host, receive support from the Nepalese embassy, and get back home (m20: para. 209-12). While Nepalese women migrants face the additional discrimination associated with their gender category, male laborers can draw some additional benefit from the fact that after all, they do what Nepalese men are supposed to do.

It is thus their individual and collective identities which cause many Nepalese migrants to feel that it is just not their place to demand equal treatment or respect. However, even those men who come to the Gulf with more self-confidence, knowledge, and the determination not to be discriminated against, do suffer from the psychological and emotional effects of their living and working conditions. Many migrants describe their former host countries as dangerous and uninviting places:

> "It's good for those who live there. It isn't good for us. We cannot go to Saudi and live there. It's not sure when somebody might kill you. If you have done a little mistake, it will be horrible. […] we can be trapped, too. It is dangerous. It is a very difficult place for Nepalese to live." (m22: para. 74)

The permanent sensation of living in an unsafe and hostile environment appears to curb migrants' personal agency up to the point of not feeling fully 'human'. This effect has also been described by Bruslé (2012b), who cites migrants stating: "'we're in prison (*kaidi*) here; we're in a cage (*pijara*). […] We stay in prison [for] two years and then we leave.'" (para. 49–50, italics H.W.).[22] Altogether, it appears to be the mutual reproduction and interaction of institutional frameworks, constructed meanings, and psychological tools which leave many migrants with the impression that the Gulf is just not a place to live – at least not for Nepalese:

> "And what can you say to an Arab. If you tell them they did something wrong, they can cut off your head. That country is a bad country. The gulf countries are bad countries." (m12: para. 66)

5.3.2 Agency within structure

Although the labor system in the Gulf is designed to promote inequality and difference, and even though the Nepalese regime of mobility is deeply defined by unequal effects of power, there always remains room for individual agency and the transformation of structures. In the face of financial responsibilities and social narratives of the migrating male and the better life abroad, every Nepalese man who goes abroad still makes this decision somewhat himself. When he is faced with exploitative and downgrading structures, he is still left with the choice to endure, to fight, or to return home. Furthermore, several interviewees have developed their personal avenues of agency, of remaining human and defending their right to be in charge of their lives. One of the most disempowering aspects interviewees saw in being abroad was their being stripped of their familiar social networks of support. After growing up in a society where friends and family are the most important prerequisite for social practice, the idea of being left to one's own devices is among the most difficult things many Nepalese men could imagine:

> "It is better to live with your family and do some work there. […] It is a matter of happiness to live with your family. You have your friends and brothers, you get to walk together with them, and if anything happens, your friends help you. Abroad, there is no help at all." (m23: para. 128)
> "If I go abroad, it's like this, I am alone with that work, there is nobody who supports me, there are no people who help me […]." (m20: para. 264)

Consequently, the creation of local or transnational communities in the host context has proven to be one of the most empowering strategies of Nepalese workers. As young Bishuram describes, he fell ill in the first days of his foreign employment, and only endured this time with the support of his new co-workers, who covered for him:

> „I was totally new and the youngest person there. There were some Nepali workers, too, who helped me very much. Those days, I didn't actually have to work there. They kept me in one corner and let me sleep. […] Otherwise I wouldn't have gotten a salary. Even the Bangladeshi, Pakistani, Indian workers helped me so much during those days when I was ill." (m20: para. 5)

22 Additionally to the feeling of dehumanization and being trapped, Bruslé also describes the extreme routinization of camp and work life as creating an increasingly passive mode of living. He observes that migrants frequently get so used to the restriction of their personal freedoms that when they do have some free time, they do not even know what to do with it. Consequently, killing time (*time bitaunu*) becomes one of their daily challenges and one of the paradoxes of Nepalese camp life (ibid.: para. 31-35).

Sometimes, old networks from home are reactivated in the host context (see m09: para. 5), but more frequently, new local unions of Nepalese 'brothers' are formed. In many cases, migrants seem to have formed a code of helping their 'own', which sometimes are the only reliable way of getting through a difficult labor experience:

> "I was meeting a person from my own village, like I was meeting an uncle from my home down there. And we helped each other. […] I also provided food for two friends of mine. […] when I saw their trouble, I told them, alright, you can get food in my room, come here. So for about 3 months, I called my friends there, brought food from the kitchen to the room, put it there and gave them to eat." (m06: para. 124)

Whenever any of the participants of this study achieved an improvement in their situation, it was due to the support from their friends or co-workers. For example, Ramesh arrived in Saudi Arabia with a group of about twenty men. When they did not encounter the working conditions they had been promised, they united and exerted collective pressure on their employer and recruitment agency:

> "So we didn't sign there. He forced us to sign the paper. But we were united. We denied his proposal. We called the agent again. […] We asked him to give us the same job as of the agreement paper. Otherwise, we had to be sent back to Nepal." (m22: para. 5)

Despite being attacked and criticized for it, the group remained firm. As no alternative employment could be found, they were eventually sent back to Nepal. After they had to spend four months in a transfer camp, going back was certainly not what they had hoped for. However, considering that Ramesh is the only one of all interviewees who received financial compensation from his recruitment agency, the mutual support and perseverance of his group can certainly be considered successful. Similarly, Bishuram developed an effective strategy with his new-found friends, where they decided to seek illegal employment and to always support each other:

> "We were a group of 8 people. We always worked together. If one got fired from the company, we all left that company. If someone was beaten up, the 8 of us fought back. We were like a team. Since then, we were not treated badly. We were illegal and we could do anything to anyone. So no company suppressed us or forced us to work." (m20: para. 12)

However, collective action does not always lead to positive results. In a host country with extremely restrictive labor laws, forming workers' groups and holding strikes can seriously backfire. When Ram Kumar and his co-workers held a strike demanding the working conditions issued in their contract papers, they faced threats and criminalization, with some of them being sent back to Nepal without any reimbursement:

> "We also had a strike there, we said we would not work, all the Nepalis there got together and blocked the site, and some of them were even sent back to Nepal. They sent them saying that those people had caused the disturbance, and when they came back, apparently the manpower didn't give them their money back either. […] they had told them: 'did we send you there to work, or did we send you there to look for trouble, you went there to work, but you didn't and instead you made a strike at the site, you are troublemakers, you don't deserve to get your money back.' As for us, whatever happened, we had ultimately arrived there, so we worked even though we had to endure the unbearable heat." (m06: para. 288)

In general, participants of the research have made bad experiences with official authorities and the very institutions that are supposed to protect them. Despite being well-informed, aware of his rights, and convinced he was doing everything 'right', Dhan Bahadur, who was supposed to work as a driver, but had to rear camels and goats in the desert, received no support from his embassy. After unsuccessfully trying formal ways of dealing with his problems, he decided that personal networks were a more effective avenue of action. It was thus only his feeling of being failed by his country which caused him to start working illegally:

> "I told them, look, I have come here with this and that manpower agency. I have been sent here to become a driver of this company. […] And I said, okay. If my own government cannot give service to its own child, we have to work according to our own wits. That's why I ran away and worked at a different home." (m12: para. 64)

Aside from Nepalese state authorities, there is a limited number of non-government affiliations in the Gulf, which are aimed at providing institutional networks and support for Nepalese workers abroad. For instance, the international 'Non-resident Nepali Association' (NRNA), an organization aimed at creating and strengthening Nepalese diaspora, has offices in several Gulf countries (Ghimire et al., 2011: pp. 45-49). A strong institutional representation of Nepalese laborers could contribute to a more active, less victimized workforce, and help getting migrants' voices heard. However, most of such associations are illegal in the Gulf, and thus remain quite scarce (see Bruslé, 2012d: pp. 600). Among the interviewed migrants, not one knew of a group or an organization which might have been able to represent him and help protect his rights during his labor experience. For a lack of institutional opportunities, migrants are tasked with developing their own informal networks. From this

perspective, not only their locally based circles of 'brothers', but also the formation of transnational networks can be interpreted as migrants' way to protect themselves from daily discrimination, marginalization, and exclusion. In this way, transnational practices of Nepalese migrants in the Gulf are to some degree a response to the fact that "full incorporation in the countries within which they resettle [is] either not possible or not desirable" (Glick Schiller et al., 1995: p. 52). However, these networks are extremely fleeting, as most migrants stay abroad for only a short time. The temporary nature of their employment stands in the way of the emergence of long-term networks and more permanent forms of self-organization and institutionalization.

Among all strategies of dealing with unequal structures abroad, migrants' decision to run away from their original employer and work illegally is probably the most risky and courageous one. Like other modes of agency, the step into illegal labor is usually facilitated by friends and other social networks. As in Arjun's experience (see chapter 5.1.2.3: p. 37), it was only through his Nepalese 'brothers' that he got out of his initial exploitative employment and learned how to 'work the system' in this foreign labor market. Most interviewees who had worked illegally appeared quite aware of the risks they had exposed themselves to. Although their daily experience was very much defined by safety precautions and the precariousness of their situation weighed heavily on some of their minds, those things were regarded a price worth to pay. After all, leaving their sponsor came with the freedom to choose their own employment and the option to earn significantly higher salaries. While many of those individuals had faced severe exploitation at the beginning of their stay, they somehow managed to turn their luck around and eventually had a very self-determined and successful migration experience. Among all interviewed migrants, Bishuram took his degree of agency even one step further. Aside from working for a company his group had chosen, he spent several years working as an informal broker who provided forged identity cards, arranged employment for other migrants, and was in 'contact' with the local police. While he had started as an outsider, an exploited laborer at the bottom of the food chain, he learned how to use the workings of the informal sector to his advantage, and made a local name for himself. While Bishuram assured that he never cheated on his fellow countrymen, people like him adopt a hybrid position: On the one hand, they remain suppressed in an exploitative system. On the other hand, they partly slip into the role of the oppressor by becoming an agent of the system themselves.

As power, meaning, and practices constantly reproduce each other, they are not only deeply interconnected, but also continuously transforming. Therefore, they do not only position and discipline the subject, but can in turn be changed and instrumentalized by individuals. Such strategies of using systems of representation to one's advantage can also be observed among Nepalese migrants in the Gulf. One social category which has been particularly politicized is that of religious affiliation. Generally, "migration scholars […] have long overlooked the importance of religion in social life" (Levitt & Jaworsky, 2007: p. 140). In the context of this research, however, migrants' religious denomination has emerged as a highly relevant category of social difference. Many interviewees described experiences of being discriminated against based on their Hindu faith and of being pressured to convert to Islam:

> "They told me, I will give you two thousand Riyal if you take the Muslim faith, and agree to the Muslim faith and also read and pray every Friday, they said, go – but I said no, I would rather die, I cannot sell my faith." (m12: para. 47)

For Nepalese laborers, religious affiliation has thus become one part of identity which is increasingly redefined, reinvented, and performed in a transnational setting. In what could be called a small-scale politics of identity, many Nepalese use their religious label, if not their denomination, as a strategic tool for avoiding discrimination and gaining privileges. Bishuram explains how he and other migrants have consciously navigated between religious categories:

> "They behaved differently towards us. Once they knew we were from a Buddhist or Hindu country, they started to behave badly towards us. […] I preferred to tell them that I was Christian rather than Hindu or Buddhist, because they used to treat Christians better. I met about seven or eight Nepalese people who had converted to the Muslim religion." (m20: para. 9)

Another category of migrant identity which appears to shift under conditions of transnational labor is that of nationality. For most Nepalese in the Gulf, their local networks of friends seldom extend beyond their own national group. Among the participants of this study, statements like this were most common:

> "We always live with Nepalese. With the Nepalese, it's nice. Talking with the Indians doesn't work out; their program and our program don't match. We only say hi and hello to them." (m23: para. 44)

In a system where laborers' nationalities are directly translated into a certain status in the social hierarchy, this category becomes highly politicized, and regains relevance as an important marker of difference. As many migrant workers learn to equalize Indians with the superior staff who supervise and dominate them, their narrative of the 'Self' is increasingly matched by the Indian 'Other'. Resulting from a social setting where "the

Nepalese [are] friends with the Nepalese, the Indians with the Indians" (m15: para. 111), boundaries between different national groups harden, and inter-group violence is not uncommon (see also m22: para. 31-34):

> "We were dominated by the Indians there. We used to have many groups, so no one could dominate a single one among us. We also fought with other groups. Sometimes, we had a fight with other Nepali groups and sometimes with Indians too. It was very natural for us. Group fights were common there." (m15: para. 4)

Notably, most interviewed migrants experienced the hardened boundaries between nationalities as something completely normal. Most frequently, inter-group conflicts were interpreted as a natural result of the difference in their languages:

> "Well, it's like that, there are many people, so there can also be fights. The Indian and Nepali language don't match, so if you put people from two countries in one room, they fight because their languages don't fit together." (m17: para. 61)

These findings are especially remarkable because they contradict the assumption that experiences of transmigration automatically facilitate cosmopolitan attitudes. Instead of naturally leading to openness and the dissolution of identity categories, transnational experiences can actually intensify identity-based boundaries, when placed in a system defined by hierarchy and inequality. This observation suggests once more that migration scholarship needs to pay attention to effects of power and difference in transnational settings.

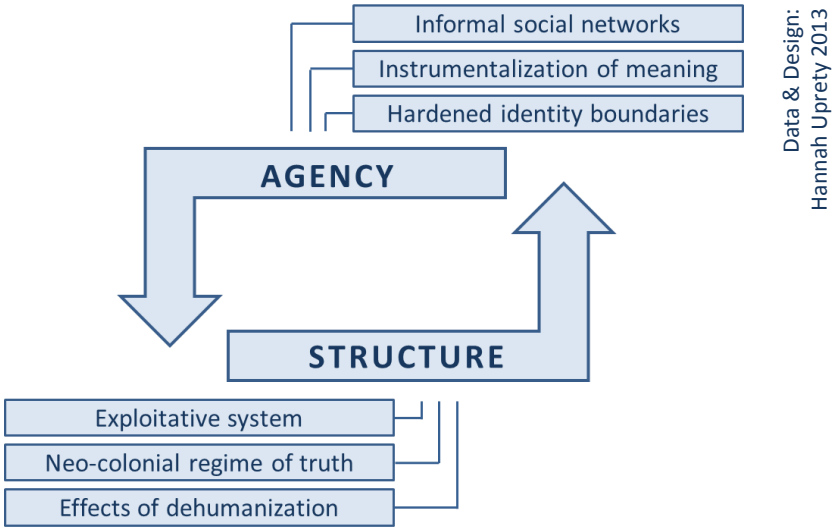

Figure 6: Interplay between structure and agency among Nepalese migrants in the Gulf.

On the previous pages, both the operation of discriminating structures and examples of Nepalese agency have been outlined (see Figure 6). Among all those effects, neocolonial formations of meaning and widespread practices such as the communication gap can be identified as the most powerful mechanisms of both agency and structure: They are instrumental in the continuous reproduction and sustenance of the Nepalese regime of mobility, yet also hold great opportunities for change initiated by migrants themselves. Since migrant experiences are not communicated openly enough, thousands of men undergo the same experience again, and are left more or less on their own. By retelling stories of success and 'social upliftment' to each other, narratives of the 'promised land' and the better life abroad are reproduced over and over again. As a result, many Nepalese strangely perceive the Gulf as a place more egalitarian than Nepal, where they can finally achieve something if they only work hard for it (see m14: para. 172). In this light, the most significant sign of agency and change is probably migrants' stepping forward and breaking their silence. Recently, this trend towards a diversification in the social construction of mobility and stasis, labor migration, and destination countries has also been mirrored on an institutional scale. For several years, it has been theoretically mandatory for all migrants to attend orientation classes prior to their departure, which inform them about the general situation in their host country, their individual rights, and educate them about safety and health issues. After this regulation was never fully put into practice, the Maoist-led government of Baburam Bhattarai recently introduced a system of certification and controls, which has rendered attendance of these classes an absolute requirement for leaving the country (Ghimire, 2013). While this is certainly only a small step of a long way, it lays the foundation for giving more space to migrant experiences, hearing their own voices, and allowing them to reclaim some of their individual agency.

6 A GLANCE BEYOND

The main endeavor of this thesis has been to argue for a political geographical approach to migration by combining transnational migration scholarship with a critical postcolonial perspective. More specifically, transmigratory practices were framed as part of broader regimes of mobility. In order to illustrate possible ways of theorizing and researching migration from such an angle, some basic conceptual premises have been identified.

These include a transnational outlook, which defines migration not as a one-time event that ends with a migrant's resettling in a new location, but rather as an ongoing process of physical mobility and social interaction, which crosses national borders. Thus, transmigration is acknowledged as a long-term transformation of society, which is intertwined with globalization, but also highlights the role of the spatial and particularly the local. Furthermore, it is vital to follow a 'new mobilities' paradigm, which recognizes novel and changing phenomena in transnational migration, yet does not lose itself in undifferentiated enthusiasm. Most importantly, it does not frame migration or mobility as an aberration from a supposedly 'normal' state of stasis. Instead, both mobile and sedentary lifestyles are defined as part of a continuum and an integral aspect of social existence. Informed by postcolonial theory, this approach also needs to conceive of migration as a highly politicized arena. Consequently, it holds various forms of meaning, which are continuously reconstructed, negotiated, and performed through practice, at the forefront of its analysis. Thereby, subjectivities are conceptualized as 'building blocks' for individual and collective identities, but also narratives and imaginaries of geographical place, mobility, and migration. In this regard, the value of intersectionality studies has been emphasized. Investigating meaning along intersecting social categories, such as gender, nationality, and race, allows a closer examination of its interconnections with power. The latter is one of the core pillars of the 'regimes of mobility' concept. Largely relying on Foucauldian definitions, power is understood as a principle which permeates all scales and dimensions of the social. Aside from its conceptual framing, the corresponding focus on effects of inequality and difference implies a normative and anti-hegemonic agenda. As such, a political geographical 'regime of mobility' approach has been suggested to privilege difference and to emphasize alternative and marginalized meanings.

The theoretical foundation of this thesis has served as a framework to describe and decipher the transmigratory practices of male Nepalese workers in the Gulf region. It has been shown that in the Nepalese context, migration has had a long tradition, and has become an integral part of people's daily practices and social concepts. At the same time, the recent waves of unskilled labor migration to the Gulf region and to Malaysia have reached an unprecedented scale and quality. This novel configuration deserves to be investigated from new and different angles, including its role in an international division of labor. In this regard, a brief overview of Gulf societies has shown that the respective states have relied on the strategy of foreign labor for decades. It could be illustrated that the Gulf's 'divided cities' are prime examples of a new economic regime, which goes along with the increasing devalorization and overvalorization of certain economic sectors (see Malecki & Ewers, 2007: pp. 470; Sassen, 1996: p. 633). Along with workers from other origins, Nepalese migrants are the invisible 'ground staff' in these processes.

In the empirical project, the practice of labor migration was accessed through the eyes and voices of migrants and their families. The ethnographically inspired approach has allowed remarkable insights into the Nepalese regime of mobility, by starting off from real, day-to-day stories in the words of 'normal people', thus retaining their own perspectives and expressions. Only on this basis, a subsequent deeper step of analysis has uncovered the interplays of dominant narratives and local, marginalized constructions. By doing so, structures and ongoing effects of power and difference could be revealed. Altogether, the regime of mobility has been identified as made up of meanings and practices, including larger narratives of migration, geographical imaginaries, and gendered social categories. These two dimensions remain in continuous mutual interaction – with narratives and subjectivities keeping transmigratory practices running, and said practices in turn reinforcing and negotiating regimes of truth and meaning. In this analysis, room was also given to cultural difference: without attributing everything to this principle, cultural imprints and configurations were acknowledged as contributing factors to "the ways in which people do the same things differently" (Plüss, 2012: p. 268). Furthermore, the regime of mobility was identified as profoundly determined by unequal power structures and effects of difference. Their pervasion of all dimensions and scales of practices and meanings explains how 400,000 Nepalese can still feel utterly powerless in Qatar, and how it is absolutely unthinkable for the Nepalese government to voice critical statements towards the Gulf region. It has also been highlighted that power does not only manifest in repressive structures, but is a fleeting and transformative principle. In this way, both structures and agency are part of the same regime of mobility. Some instances of individual agency have been illustrated, including migrants' empowering through informal social networks, and their strategic instrumentalization of differential social categories. It has also been shown that transmigration does not necessarily lead to more cosmopolitan attitudes, but – in a setting where difference strongly translates into power – can even harden identity boundaries. The regime of mobility investigated in this work is nowhere near static, but in fact a process, a journey which Nepalese society has embarked on, and at the same time one which is deeply embedded in global processes.

By focusing on migrant practices and their own constructions, the material groundedness of meaning has been emphasized. Recognizing the ways socially constructed notions are performed and transformed every day, this thesis has attempted to do justice to the recent 'materialist turn' in social science. Thereby, it has tried to contribute to a somewhat material constructivism, which analyzes the interplay of meaning and power, yet also includes practices, the performance of meaning, and its physicality. In this sense, tying the analysis to migrants' own perspectives and expressions has been part of an ethnographically inspired intention of staying grounded and of rising beyond a "human geography which [bears a] tenuous relationship to social relations and social practices as they are lived and experienced by many people" (Hamnett, 1997: p. 127).

In terms of the Nepalese context, this research has intended to provide valuable insights into the transmigratory practices of male labor, but has also raised a number of further questions. For instance, it remains unclear in what ways this form of migration has interacted with other social and political processes in the country. The last decade has been a turbulent one for Nepal, with a culminating Maoist insurgency, a civil war and the subsequent downfall of its monarchic system, as well as a powerful movement of disenfranchised ethnic groups and a corresponding rise of ethnic identity politics. In these regards, it is interesting to investigate how migratory practices have influenced identity-related politics in Nepal. In other words, it is remarkable how a country with so many of its citizens living and earning abroad can form a new nation state and functioning democracy (as it is currently trying to do). With so much fluctuation and transience in Nepalese society, who is actually there to participate in the 'new Nepal' and to listen to its political leaders? What common purposes and interests remain, which – according to Anderson (2006 [1989]) – are a necessary prerequisite for national identities to form and persist? Another exciting endeavor would be to step beyond the borders of male labor migration, and to investigate other forms of mobility and their role in Nepalese and larger regimes of mobility. For instance, it could be of interest and political relevance to explore the similarities and differences between unskilled and study migration – both of which are widespread phenomena in Nepalese society. Another fascinating avenue of research might be overcoming the barrier between migration studies and studies of other phenomena of mobility (see Salazar, 2011). In Nepal, particularly the interrelations between labor migration and tourism come to mind: as a matter of fact, those areas are the two most important and profitable sectors in its national economy. In this way, the Nepalese are currently engaged in the remarkably paradox undertaking of both inviting foreigners into their country, and simultaneously shipping their own citizens abroad.

This thesis has attempted to hold a firm stand and clear postcolonial message, but also to refrain from framing Nepalese labor migration in a one-sided whitewashed or scandalized manner. Instead, positive as well as negative experiences of labor migration have been retold. By revealing both effects of empowerment and of inequality and exploitation, every reader is encouraged to make up his or her own mind. Moreover, this work has hopefully spiked further interest in the 'regimes of mobility' framework, and has raised questions as to how Nepalese migration is part of larger transformations in this world, and the future direction this practice is headed to.

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8 ANNEX

8.1 Questionnaires / research guidelines

8.1.1 Former Migrants

1. General Information

- What is your name? तपाइको नाम के हो ?
- How old are you? तपाइ कति बर्ष हुनु भयो
- How many people belong to your close family? तपाइको परिवारमा कति जना सदस्यहरु छन ?
  If married: How long have you been married? विवाहित भएको भए कति वर्ष भयो ?
- Where do you live? तपाइ कहा बस्नु हुन्छ?
- In which country/countries in the Middle East did you work? मध्ये पूर्वको कुन देशमा काम गर्नु भयो?
- When and for how long did you work there? कहिले अनि कति समय त्यहा काम गर्नु भयो?
- What previous jobs did you have (before going abroad)?
- According to your experience, how long do most Nepalis usually stay in the Middle East? (2) तपाइको आफ्नो अनुभवमा नेपालीहरु प्राय कति समय मध्ये पूर्वमा काम गर्छन?
- How did it come about that you worked in this country? (What events led to you working in this country?) के कति कारणले अनि कसरी तपाइलाइ यो काममा यो देशमा आउनु भयो? (तपाइ यो देशमा यो काममा आउनुको के कति कारण रहेको छ अनि कसरी आउनु भयो ?)

2. Working conditions

- What deal did you make with the agent? (e.g. regarding fees, passport/visa, occupation, duration of the stay) (3) तपाइले विदेश जानु भन्दा अगाडि म्यानपावर कम्पनीसंग के कति कामको समझदारी भएको थियो? (शुल्क, पासपोर्ट, कामको किसिम, कामको अवधि इ.)
- What occupation(s) did you have abroad? (What jobs did you do?) (3) तपाइले विदेशमा कुन कुन काम गर्नुभयो?
- How many hours did you work according to your contract/visa? How many hours did you actually work? (3) तपाइको कामको भिसा अथवा कामको समझदारी अनुसार कति घन्टा काम गर्नुपर्ने थियो अनि काम गर्ने ठाउमा वास्तवमा चाहि कति घन्टा काम गर्नु परयो?
- How/what were your working conditions abroad? Would you rather describe your work as easy or difficult? (3) विदेशमा तपाइको कामको अवस्था के कस्तो थियो? काम सोचेको र भनेको जस्तो सजिलो अथवा गाहो के थियो?
- How were your living conditions? काम गर्दाको अवस्थामा बस्ने कोठाको अवस्था कस्तो थियो वा बसाइ कस्तो थियो?
  If not answered already: Who provided you the apartment to live in? How much did you pay for it? What facilities were available in your flat? How big was the flat? How many people shared the flat? (3) आवश्यक उतर नआएको खण्डमा: कसले बस्ने ठाउको व्यवस्था गरिदियो? कति पैसा तिर्नु हुन्छ कोठाको लागि? के के सुविधा रहेको छन कोठामा? कोठ कति ठुलो छ? कति जना बस्ने गरेको छ एउटा कोठामा?
- Did you feel paid adequately? (3) तपाइको काम अनुसार पर्याप्त तलव पाएको जस्तो लाग्छ? के तपाइले मासिक तलव प्रत्येक महिना पाउनुहुन्छ?
- Did you feel treated adequately? (3) के तपाइप्रति गरिने व्यवहार तपाइलाइ ठिक लाग्छ? किन अनि कसरी?
- What experiences did you make with your agent in Nepal? (3) तपाइको नेपालको म्यानपावर संगको अनुभव कस्तो रहयो?
- What experience did you make with your agent/employer abroad? (3) तपाइको विदेशी कम्पनिसंगको अनुभव कस्तो रहयो? अनि के कस्तो फरक पाउनुभयो?
- Was it possible to change your work or workplace during your time abroad? (3) विदेशमा काम गर्दाको समयमा काम र काम गर्ने ठाउ परिवर्तन गर्न सम्भव थियो?

- Would you have liked to stop your employment during your time abroad? Would this have been possible? (3) विदेशमा काम गर्दाको समयमा काम छोडन पाइन्थ्यो कि पाइदैन थियो? काम छोडेर अर्को काम गर्न मिल्थ्यो?
- Were there any people you could contact in case of problems? / Who could you talk to in the case of any problems (e.g. medical, work- or visa-related)? (3) काम गदैजादा कुनै समस्या परेको बेलामा कसलाइ सम्पर्क गर्नुहुन्थ्यो? (समस्या: स्वास्थ्य, काम, वा भिसा वा पासपोर्ट सम्बन्धि इ.)
- What did you like about your work? तपाइलाइ आफनो कामको बारेमा के मनपर्थ्यो? अनि के मन पर्दैनथ्यो? What didn't you like? (3)

3. Finances

- How much money did you usually send home? (1)(3) तपाइले कमाएको तलवबाट कति जति पैसा घर पठाउनु हुन्थ्यो? (प्रतिसतमा) अनि कति कति समयमा? (मासिक, त्रैमासिक, वा..)
- How was it decided how much money you sent home? (1)(2) तपाइलाइ किन त्यति पैसा घरमा पठाउनु पर्छ जस्तो लाग्यो? वा के कति कारणले त्यति पैसा घरमा चाहिन्छ जस्तो लाग्यो?
- What would have happened, if you hadn't sent any money? (2) यदि तपाइले घरमा पैसा नपठाउने हो भने घरमा के हुन्थ्यो होला?
- How much money did you keep to live abroad? Was this sufficient/Would you have preferred to keep more money for yourself? (3) विदेशमा बस्दा आफुलाइ खान बस्नको लागि कति पैसा राख्नु हुन्थ्यो? के त्याति पैसा पर्याप्त हुन्थ्यो? वा केही बढी पैसा राख्न मन लाग्थ्यो?
- Who received the remittances/money while you were abroad? Who took care of the money? (1) तपाइले पठाएको पैसा नेपालमा कसले पाउथ्यो? कसले पैसा जम्मा गर्ने गरेको थिया?
- In your opinion, for what purposes should your money have been used? (2) तपाइको विचारमा कमाएको पैसा के के उद्धेश्यका लागि खर्च गर्नुपर्दछ?

4. Personal relations abroad

- How much contact did you have with the locals abroad? How would you describe this contact? (1)(3) विदेशमा काम गर्दा त्यहाको स्थानिय बासिन्दाहरु संगा कतिको सम्पर्क हुन्थ्यो? त्यो सम्पर्क कस्तो हुन्थ्यो?
- How welcome did you feel abroad? (1)(3) तपाइ विदेशमा काम गर्दा कत्तिको रमाइलो अनुभव गर्नुभयो वा कत्तिको एक्लो महशुश गर्नुभयो?
- What nationalities where the people you met during your time abroad? What groups of people did you usually have contact with? (1) कहाको मानिसहरुसंग भेट हुन्थ्यो काम गर्दाको समयमा? कस्तो प्रकारको मानिसहरु संग भेटघाट हुने गफसफ हुने गर्दथ्यो?
- Did you learn (a) foreign language(s) during your time abroad? If yes, which? (1) त्यहा काम गर्दाको बेलामा विदेशी भाषा सिक्नु भयो? सिकेको भय कुन भाषा सिक्नुभयो?
- Which language did you usually speak during your stay? (1) त्यहा बस्दा धेरैजसो कुन भाषा बोल्नु भयो?
- Where there any Nepali or South Asian media, social offers or groups available in your place? If yes, which? To what degree did you use those? (If not mentioned, ask specifically: newspapers, radio stations, facebook, social events, meeting points, markets, also mobile phone contracts/cards to call abroad). (1) त्यहा बस्दा नेपालको बारेमा बुझ्ने सुन्ने संचार माध्यम जस्तो पत्रपत्रिका, रेडियो, अनि फेसबुक, सामाजिक जमघट, भेला, बजार, इ. हुने गर्दथ्यो? यदि हुन्थ्यो भने तपाइले के कति भाग लिनु भयो या प्रयोग गर्नु भयो?
- How much contact did you have to other Nepalis abroad? How important was this contact for you? (1) कति नेपाली हरु संग सम्पर्क हुन्थ्यो त्यहा काम गर्दा? नेपाली भेटनु कतिको रमाइलो अनि महत्वपूर्ण लाग्दथ्यो?
- What people were the most important for you during your stay abroad? (1) तपाइले विदेशमा काम गर्दा को बढी नजिक रहयो? (कोठाको साथि, घरको सदस्य, कम्पनीको संगै काम गर्ने साथि, वा अरु कोही?)

5. Family relations

- How often did you have contact with the people in your family? How often/much did you have contact with whom? (1) तपाइले आफनो परिवार संग कति पटक सम्पर्क गर्नुहुन्छ? अनि को संग गफ गर्नुहुन्छ?
- Via which media did you have this contact? (1) कुन माध्यम बाट सम्पर्क गर्नुहुन्छ?
- Did you have a certain pattern or a rhythm according to which you had contact with your family? (1) कति दिनको फरकमा वा समयमा कसरी आफनो परिवारसंग सम्पर्क गर्नुहुन्छ? मिसकल आएर फोन गर्ने हो की?
- How easy/easily possible was it for you to contact your family? (1) कतिको सजिलो अनि कठिन भयो तपाइको परिवारसंग सम्पर्क गर्न?
- How easy/easily possible was it for your family to contact you? (1) तपाइको परिवारले तपाइलाइ सम्पर्क गर्न कतिको सजिलो वा कठिन भयो?
- During your time abroad, how much did you hear / get to know what was going on at home/in your family? (1) तपाइ विदेशमा काम गर्दा तपाइको परिवारमा के के भइरहेको छ भन्ने कुरा कसरी थाहा पाउनुहुन्थ्यो?
- How much did you tell the people in your family about your life and work? Why/What were the reasons for this? (1) तपाइको कामको अनि विदेशी जीवनको बारेमा तपाइको परिवारलाइ कति कुरा भन्नुहुन्थ्यो? किन के कारणले?
- How much do you tell other people in Nepal about your life and work abroad? (1) (alt: how much do you talk about your life and work abroad nowadays?) तपाइको विदेशमा गरिएको कामको बारेमा अरु साथीभाइसंग कतिको कुरा गर्नुहुन्थ्यो? वा कति गर्नुहुन्छ?
- Do you believe your family has a correct idea/impression/image of what your living and working situation abroad was like? How do you feel about that / Do you find that good or bad? (1) तपाइको परिवारलाइ तपाइको कामको बारेमा तपाइको परिवारलाइ कति कुरा थाहा हुन्थ्यो? कुरा भन्दा तपाइलाइ कस्तो लाग्यो, राम्रो कि नराम्रो?
- What role / what tasks do you have in your family ? (1) तपाइको आफनो परिवारमा कस्तो भुमिका छ ? वा कति जिम्मेवारी रहेको छ?
- During your stay abroad, how much / which influence did you have on the decisions made in your family? (1) तपाइ विदेश बस्दा परिवारको निर्णयमा तपाइको सहभागिता कति हुन्थ्यो अनि कस्तो सहभागिता हुन्थ्यो?
- How close was your relation to the different members of your family during your time abroad? (1) तपाइ विदेश बस्दा परिवारको सदस्यहरुसंग तपाइको सम्वन्ध कस्तो हुन्थ्यो?
- What helped you in keeping a close connection / relation to your family? (alt: how did you manage to keep a close connection / relation to your family?) (1) के कारणले तपाइलाइ परिवारसंग सम्वन्ध राख्न मन लाग्यो? कसरी परिवार संग सम्वन्ध राख्न सक्नुभयो?

6. Construction of Migration

- In your opinion, why do so many Nepalis go to work abroad? How do you feel about this trend / development? (2) तपाइको विचारमा किन धेरै नेपालीहरु विदेश जान्छन? यो धेरै जना विदेश जाने चलन कस्तो लाग्छ तपाइलाइ?
- Why do mostly young men (like you) go to work abroad? (2) किन धेरै कम उमेरको केटाहरु विदेश जान्छन?
- How do you feel about women going to work abroad? (2) तपाइलाइ कस्तो लाग्छ छोरी मान्छे पनि विदेश काम गर्न जाने चलन बढदैछ?
- What do you think about the recent law which forbids women under 30 years to work abroad? (2) अहिले सरकारले ३० वर्ष भन्दा मुनीको महिलालाइ विदेश काम गर्न जान मनाही गरिएको बारेमा तपाइलाइ कस्तो लाग्छ?

- How was the decision made that you would work abroad? Did you make this decision quite voluntarily or did you feel a bit urged to do it? (2)(3) तपाइले के कारणले विदेश काम गर्न जान्छु जस्तो लाग्यो? तपाइले आफैले विदेश जाने निर्णया गर्नुभो कि कसैले तपाइलाइ त्यस्तो गर्न लगाए?
- In the future, would you (like to) go to work in the Middle East again? Why? (2) भविष्यमा तपाइ फेरी गल्फ देशमा काम गर्ने मन छ? किन?
- What would have happened if you hadn't gone abroad that time? (2) त्यो समयमा विदेश नगाको भए तपाइको जिवनमा अनि परिवारमा के हुनेथियो?
- What are the duties a good son/husband/father should fulfill? (2) एउटा छोरा, वा बुवा, वा श्रीमान भएर के काम अनि कर्तव्य हुनुपर्छ?
- How well did you fulfill these duties during your stay abroad? (1)(2) विदेशमा बसेर तपाइले आफनो कर्तव्य वा काम कति राम्रो तरिकाले निभाउनुभयो?
- What is more important as a son/brother/husband/father: to stay close to the family and care for them, or to send them financial support from abroad? (2) कुन कुरो महत्वपूर्ण हो तपाइको लागि: बुवा, वा छोरा, वा भाइ, वा श्रीमान, भएर परिवारको नजिक बसेर हेरचाह गर्नु वा विदेशमा बसेर पैसा कमाएर परिवारलाइ सहयोग गर्नु?
- It is better to marry before, during, or after working abroad? (2) तपाइलाइ के लाग्छ: काम गर्नुभन्दा अगाडी, पछाडी वा काम गर्दै गर्दा विवाह गर्नु राम्रो हो?
- In your opinion, what is better: to migrate within Nepal for work or to go abroad for work? (2) तपाइको विचारमा कुन राम्रो हो: नेपाल भित्रै काम गर्न कतै जानु अनि विदेश जानु?
- Do you see a connection between work migration and the development (bikas) of Nepal? If yes, which? (2) तपाइलाइ काम गर्न विदेशिनु र नेपालको विकासको विचको सम्वन्ध छ जस्तो लाग्छ? लाग्छ भने कुन ठिक लाग्छ?
- "The working migrants abandon Nepal." – What do you think about this statement? (2) काम गर्न सक्ने युवाहरु नेपाल छोडदैछन, तपाइलाइ कस्तो लाग्छ यो प्रक्रिया?

7. Retrospective Considerations

- In your opinion, what kinds of people apply to work in the Middle East? (2)(3) तपाइको विचारमा कस्ता मानिसहरु साउदी देशमा काम गर्न जान खोज्छन?
- In your opinion, what are the differences between migrating in the Middle East (e.g. Saudi Arabia, Qatar, United Arab Emirated), (South) East Asia (e.g. Singapur, Japan, South Korea) and Australia? (3) तपाइको विचारमा तलको कुन देशमा काम गर्न जान के के फरक छ: साउदी देशहरु, वा सिंगापुर, जापान, कोरिया, वा, अस्ट्रेलिया?
- What connections to you have with your work country today? (e.g. people, interest) (1) अहिले तपाइले काम गरेको देशसंग (साथीभाइ, चाहना इ.) कतिको सम्वन्ध छ?
- Would you describe your living conditions abroad as better or worse than in Nepal? Why? (3) तपाइको विदेशमा काम गर्दा बेलाको बस्ने खाने अवस्था नेपालको भन्दा राम्रो वा नराम्रो कस्तो थियो? अनि किन यस्तो भएको होला?
- Why did you originally work abroad? Did you achieve those goals? (2)(3) वास्तवमा किन विदेश काम गर्न जानुभएको थियो? त्यो उपलब्धी प्राप्त भयेा त?
- Could you take any personal (positive) gains from your work abroad? If yes, which? (3) विदेश काम गर्दा तपाइको व्यक्तिगत रुपमा के के विकास भयो वा राम्रो कुरा पाउनु भयो? अनि ति कुन कुन हुन?
- Do you believe that you will have professional advantages because of your work experience abroad? (3) विदेश काम गर्दाको अनुभवले तपाइको आफनो जिवनमा के कति व्यवसायिक फाइदा पुगोको विश्वास गर्नुहुन्छ?
- What would you like to do in your life in the future? भविष्यमा तपाइ के गर्न चाहनुहुन्छ?
- Whom did your work abroad benefit? Whom didn't it benefit? (3) तपाइको विदेश काम गर्दा कसलाइ फाइदा भयो अनि कसलाइ भएन?

8.1.2 Family members

1. General Information

- What is your name? तपाइको नाम के हो ?
- How old are you? तपाइ कति बर्ष हुनु भयो
- How many people belong to your close family? तपाइको परिवारमा कति जना सदस्यहरु छन ?
- Where do you live? तपाइ कहा बस्नु हुन्छ?
- In which country/countries in the Middle East did your son/brother/husband work? मध्ये पूर्वको कुन देशमा तपाइको छोरा, श्रीमान, वा दाजुभाइले काम गर्नु भयो?
- When and for how long did he work there? कहिले अनि कति समय वहाले काम गर्नु भयो?
- How did it come about that he worked in this country? (What events led to him working in this country?) के कति कारणले अनि कसरी उसलाइ यो काममा यो देशमा आउनुपरयो? (उसलाइ यो देशमा यो काममा आउनुको के कति कारण रहेको छ अनि कसरी गएको थियो ?)
- How was this decision made? Do you think your son/brother/husband made this decision quite voluntarily or did he feel a bit urged to do it? (2)(3) विदेश जाने कुरो कसले निर्णया गरयो? उसले आफैले गरेको हो की कुनै अरु कारणले निर्णया लिनु बाध्य पारयो?

2. Working conditions

- What occupation(s) did your son/brother/husband have abroad? (What jobs did he do?) (2)(3) तपाइको छोरा, दाजुभाइ, वा श्रीमानले विदेशमा कुन कुन काम गर्नुभयो?
- How many hours did he usually work? (2)(3) कति घण्टा उसले विदेशमा काम गर्नुभयो?
- How/what were his working conditions abroad? Was his work rather easy or difficult? (1)(2)(3) विदेशमा उहाको कामको अवस्था के कस्तो थियो? सजिलो अथवा गाहो के थियो?
- How were his living conditions? (1)(2)(3) काम गर्दाको अवस्थामा उहाको बसाइको अवस्था कस्तो थियो वा बसाइ कस्तो थियो?
- Do you feel he was paid adequately? (3) उहाको काम अनुसार पर्याप्त तलव पाएको जस्तो लाग्छ? के वहाले मासिक तलव प्रत्येक महिना पाएको जस्तो लाग्छ?
- Do you feel he was treated adequately (at work)? (3) के वहालाइ गरिने व्यवहार तपाइलाइ ठिक लाग्छ? किन अनि कसरी?

3. Finances

- How much money did he usually send home to you? (1)(3) प्राय उहाले कति पैसा तपाइलाइ घरमा पठाउनु हुन्थ्यो?
- Who sent you money from abroad in the past? Do you get money sent from abroad nowa-days? (1)(3) कसले विदेशवाट तपाइलाइ विगतमा पैसा पठाउथ्यो? अहिले पनि विदेशवाट पठाएको पैसा पाउनु हुन्छ?
- How was it decided how much money your son/brother/husband sent home? (1)(2) यति पैसा वहाले पठाउनु पर्छ भन्ने निर्णय कसरि हुन्थ्यो?
- What would have happened, if he hadn't sent any money? / What would you have thought, if…? (2) यदि वहाले घरमा पैसा नपठाउने हो भने घरमा के हुन्थ्यो होला?
- Who in your family managed the money your son/brother/husband sent from abroad? (1) विदेशवाट पठाएको पैसा तपाइको परिवारमा कसले कसरी खर्च गर्ने भन्ने कुरा गर्नुहुन्थ्यो?
- What did you spend the money on? (1) पैसा के मा खर्च हुन्थ्यो?
- Who usually decided how the money would be spent? (1) पैसा केमा कति खर्च गर्ने भन्ने कुरा प्राय कसले निर्णया गर्थ्यो?

4. Personal relations

- How often did you usually talk with your son/brother/husband while he was abroad? Who usually talked the most with him? (1) तपाइले वहा वा उ संग कहिले कहिले कुरा गर्नुहुन्थ्यो? अनि कसले वढी कुरा गर्दथ्यो?
- Via which media did you have this contact? (1) कुन माध्यम बाट सम्पर्क गर्नुहुन्थ्यो?
- Did you have a certain pattern or a rhythm according to which you had contact with your son/brother/husband? (1) कति दिनको फरकमा वा समयमा वा कस्तो तरिकाले वहासंग सम्पर्क गर्नुहुन्थ्यो? मिसकल गरेर वा अरु केही तरिकाले ?
- How easily possible was it for your son/brother/husband to contact you? (1) कति सजिलो हुन्थ्यो उहाले तपाइ संग सम्पर्क गर्न?
- How easily possible was it for you to contact him? (1) तपाइलाइ वहासंग सम्पर्क गर्न कति सजिलो भयो?
- How much did you tell your son/brother/husband about the events going on at home? (How much about good things, bad things?) Why? (1) घरमा के के भइरहेको छ भन्ने कुरा कति भन्नुहुन्थयो? राम्रा कुरा वा नराम्रा कुरा?
- During that time, do you believe you had a correct idea/impression/image of what your son's/brother's/husband's living and working situation abroad was like? Do you think it is good or bad to know that much/little? Why? – How much do you know now? (1) तपाइलाइ वहाको कामको बारेमा कति कुरा थाहा हुन्थ्यो? तपाइलाइ त्यति थाहा पाउदा कस्तो लाग्यो, राम्रो कि नराम्रो? किन? अहिले कति थाहा छ त?
- How close did you feel to your son/brother/husband while he was gone? (1) उहासंगा कति नजिक महशुस गर्नुभयो जव वहा विदेस वस्दा?
- How did you manage to stay close to him? (1) तपाइले कसरी वहाको नजिक रहन सक्नुभयो?
- What role / what tasks do you have in your family ? (1) तपाइको आफनो परिवारमा कस्तो भुमिका छ ? वा कति जिम्मेवारी रहेको छ?
- What role / what tasks does your son/brother/husband have in your family ? (1) वहाको आफनो परिवारमा कस्तो भुमिका छ ? वा कति जिम्मेवारी रहेको छ?
- Did those roles somehow change when he went abroad? How have they been since he returned? (1) वहा विदेश गएसी वहाको भुमिकामा केही परिवर्तन आयो त? वहा विदेसवाट फर्केपछि तपाइलाइ वहा कस्तो लाग्यो? उस्तै वा फरक? भुमिका वा काममा?

5. Construction of Family & Migration

- How did your neighbours/family react when they heard your son/brother/husband went to work abroad? (2) जव वहा विदेश जानु भयो तव तपाइको परिवारको अरु सदस्यले वा छिमेकीले के के भने?
- How did you feel about your son/brother/husband working abroad while he was gone? (2) वहा विदेश गएसी तपाइलाइ कस्तो लाग्यो?
- How do you feel now? (2) अहिले कस्तो लागिरहेको छ त?
  If not already said: Are you proud of him? If yes, why? तपाइ वहा देखेर कस्तो लाग्छ? आदर, सम्मान, वा जिम्मेवार व्यक्ति?
- What would you think about your son/brother/husband, if he hadn't gone to work abroad? (2) वहा विदेश नगाको भए तपाइलाइ वहा कस्तो लाग्थ्यो?
- What should a good son/brother/husband do? / What do you expect from a good son/brother/husband? (2) एउटा असल छोरा, वा दाजुभाइ वा श्रीमान ले के गर्नुपर्छ? तपाइ के आस गर्नुहुन्छ वहा बाट?
- How well did your son/brother/husband fulfill these duties during his stay abroad? (1)(2) विदेशमा बसेर वहाले आफनो कर्तव्य वा काम कति राम्रो तरिकाले निभाउनुभयो?
  ALT: How/in which ways is your son/brother/husband fulfilling this duty?

- What is more important as a son/brother/husband/father: to stay close to the family and care for them, or to send them financial support from abroad? (2) कुन कुरो महत्वपूर्ण हो तपाइको लागि: बुवा, वा छोरा, वा भाइ, वा श्रीमान, भएर परिवारको नजिक बसेर हेरचाह गर्नु वा विदेशमा बसेर पैसा कमाएर परिवारलाइ सहयोग गर्नु?
- It is better to marry before, during, or after working abroad? (2) तपाइलाइ के लाग्छ: काम गर्नुभन्दा अगाडी, पछाडी वा काम गर्दै गर्दा विवाह गर्नु राम्रो हो?
- What defines a family? / What is necessary to make a family / to call a family a family? (2) परिवार भनेको के हो? परिवारलाइ परिवार बनाउन के के आवश्यक छ?
- In your opinion, why do so many Nepalis go to work abroad? How do you feel about this trend / development? (2) तपाइको विचारमा किन धेरै नेपालीहरु विदेश जान्छन? यो धेरै जना विदेश जाने चलन कस्तो लाग्छ तपाइलाइ?
- Why do mostly young men (like you) go to work abroad? (2) किन धेरै कम उमेरको केटाहरु विदेश जान्छन?
- In your opinion, do most Nepalis go to work abroad, because they decide to do so voluntarily or because they feel forced to do so? (2)(3) तपाइको विचारमा धेरै नेपालीहरु आफनो खुसीले वा वाध्यताले विदेश जान्छन?
- How do you feel about women going to work abroad? (2) तपाइलाइ कस्तो लाग्छ छोरी मान्छे पनि विदेश काम गर्न जाने चलन बढदैछ?
- What do you think about the recent law which forbids women under 30 years to work abroad? (2) अहिले सरकारले ३० वर्ष भन्दा मुनीको महिलालाइ विदेश काम गर्न जान मनाही गरिएको बारेमा तपाइलाइ कस्तो लाग्छ?
- In your opinion, what is better: to migrate within Nepal for work or to go abroad for work? (2) तपाइको विचारमा कुन राम्रो हो: नेपाल भित्रै काम गर्न कतै जानु अनि विदेश जानु?
- Do you see a connection between work migration and the development (bikas) of Nepal? If yes, which? (2) तपाइलाइ काम गर्न विदेशिनु र नेपालको विकासको विचको सम्वन्ध छ जस्तो लाग्छ? लाग्छ भने कुन ठिक लाग्छ?
- "The working migrants abandon Nepal." – What do you think about this statement? (2) काम गर्न सक्ने युवाहरु नेपाल छोडदैछन, तपाइलाइ कस्तो लाग्छ यो प्रक्रिया?
- In your opinion, what kinds of people apply to work in the Middle East? (2)(3) तपाइको विचारमा कस्ता मानिसहरु साउदी देशमा काम गर्न जान खोज्छन?
- In your opinion, what are the differences between migrating in the Middle East (e.g. Saudi Arabia, Qatar, United Arab Emirated), (South) East Asia (e.g. Singapur, Japan, South Korea) and Australia? (3) तपाइको विचारमा तलको कुन देशमा काम गर्न जान के के फरक छ: साउदी देशहरु, वा सिंगापुर, जापान, कोरिया, वा, अस्ट्रेलिया?

6. Retrospective Considerations

- What has changed in your family since your son/brother/husband has returned? (also: regarding relationships → how was your relationship before, how is it now?) (1)(2) वहा विदेशबाट आएसी तपाइको परिवारमा के के परिवर्तन भयो त? एक आपसको सम्वन्ध, प्रेम सम्वन्ध वा कति फरक छ पहिलेको र अहिलेको सम्वन्ध?
- Whom did your son's/brother's/husband's work abroad benefit? Whom didn't it benefit? (3) वहाले विदेश काम गर्दा कसलाइ फाइदा भयो अनि कसलाइ भएन?
- In what ways did you personally benefit from your son/brother/husband working abroad? (3) वहाले विदेशमा काम गर्दा तपाइलाइ व्यक्तिगतरुपमा के के फाइदा भयो?
- What good things has this work abroad brought for your family? What bad things? (2)(3) वहाले विदेशमा काम गरेर तपाइको परिवारमा के के राम्रा कुराहरु भए वा के के नराम्रा भए?
- What do you wish/plan for your family in the future? (3) तपाइ भविष्यमा के गर्ने योजना छ? वा के गर्ने इच्छा छ?

8.2 Statistical overview of interview partners

ID	Age	Age time of dpt.	Home district	Relationship	Children	Destination	Point of time	Duration (years)	Occupation	Caste/ Group	Interv. family members (ID)
m1	37	30	Ilam	married	2	Saudi Arabia	2005-2012	7	Construction, waiter	Rai	
m2	24	20	Dhading	married (after)	-	Qatar	2008-2012	4	Cook	Newar	f3 (mother)
m3	33	30	Dhading	married	1	Saudi Arabia	2009-2012	3	Heavy driver	Tamang	f7 (wife)
m4	28	21	Dhading	single	-	Saudi Arabia	2005-2009	4	Laborer	Chhetri	f5 (sister)
m5	20	17	Dhading	single	-	UAE	2010-2011	1,50	Storekeeper	Chhetri	f1 (mother)
m6	37	34	Dhading	married	4	Qatar	2009-2010	2	Laborer	Dalit	
m7	36	34	Dhading	married	2	Saudi Arabia	2010-2012	2,5	Laborer, driver	Lamichane	f6 (wife)
m8	28	21	Dhading	married	2	Kuwait, Qatar	05-07, 08-09, 10-11	4	Driver	Tamang	
m9	28	20	Dhading	married (after)	-	Saudi Arabia	2006-2010	4	Car wash, labor	Hamal	f2 (father)
m10	40	34	Dhading	married	2	Qatar, Saudi Arab	2006-08, 09-12	6	Laborer, monitoring	Pandit	f4 (wife)
m11	35	33	Tanahu	married	3	Qatar	2010-2012	2	Laborer	Magar	
m12	28	24	Kanchanpur	married	1	Qatar	2008-2010	2	Driver	Singh	
m13	35	26	Kathmandu	married	1	Qatar	2003-2008	5	Waiter	Bandari	
m14	36	33	Kathmandu	married	2	Saudi Arabia	2009-2011	3	Laborer	Pariyar	f8 (wife)
m15	24	20	Jhapa	married	2	Qatar	2008-2012	3,5	Laborer	Pariyar	
m16	39	32	Nawalparasi	married	3	Saudi Arabia	2005-2007	2,5	Driver	Mahato	
m17	25	19	Kaski	single	-	Qatar, Bahrain	2006-08, 08-10	4	Housewiring	Khanal	
m18	35	31	Kanchanpur	married	2	UAE	2008-2010	2	Supervisor	Sigdel	
m19	29	19	Kathmandu	single	-	Qatar	2003-2004	1,5	Laborer	Kuwar	
m20	23	18	Sunsari	married (after)	-	Saudi Arabia	2007-2011	4,5	Laborer, broker	Katuwal	
m21	24	22	Kathmandu	married	1	Saudi Arabia	2011-2013	2	Driver, laborer	Lama	f12 (wife)
m22	30	29	Dhading	married	4	Saudi Arabia	2011	0,3	unemployed	Chhetri	f10 (wife)
m23	23	21	Dhading	single	-	Qatar	2011-2013	2	hotel boy	Pathak	f9 (mother)
m24	23	20	Dhading	single	-	Qatar	2010-2013	3	Storekeeper	Kharel	f11 (mother)
m25	32	30	Siraha	married	-	Qatar	2010-2013	3	Helper, Laborer	Mahato	
Average 26											

8.3 Nepalese folk songs on migration

Asarai Mahinama (Chujan Dukpa, n.d.)

Asarai Mahinama Pani Paryo Rujhaune
In the month of Ashadh (Rainy month), it rained heavily.
Eklo yo mero man kasari bujhaune
How to console my lonely heart
Bhantin hai maichyang le rundai bhara ra
My loved one (Maichyang) says by crying
Nau danda pari cha company sahar
The company's city is across the nine mountains
Bichodko belai ma
At the time of the tragedy/separation
Manai baralne nyauliko boli
The voice of the great Barbet (Bird Nyaul) makes my heart go astray (wander)
yehi bela maichyang k gardai holi
What might my dear one be doing at this time
Pidima basera k k kura sochdi ho
What things might she be thinking, sitting on the porch
kahile hansdi ho kahile rundi ho
Sometimes might be laughing, sometimes might be crying
Malai nai samjhera
While she is remembering me (by missing me)
Chamchamai bagne khahare khola
A flowing river (stream) (in the rainy season)
Aba ta chora kudne bho hola
By now my son has maybe started walking
din bhari kheldo ho malai nai bhuldo ho
Might be playing the whole day, might be missing me
sangh pare pachi aama lai soddho ho
When night falls, he asks his mother
koi baba bhanera
Where is dad

Chinta chaina kehi (Pashupati Sharma & Sita KC, 2013)

Male:
Kam paiyena degree pass garera
Did not get work after passing degree
Vaisi pali gau tira jharera
went to the village and reared the buffalos
Chinta chaina kehi
I have nothing to worry / There is nothing to worry about
Malai Amerika yei malai Japan pani yei malai belayet ni yei
My America is here, my Japan is here, my Britain is here, too
Lainau vaisi dunchhu, dui gilas dudh khanchhu
Milking my buffalo, drinking two glasses of milk
Malai beer pani yei malai whiskey pani yei
This is my beer, this is my whiskey, too
Malai posilo ni yei
This is nutritious for me

Female:
Budha pani jhan kura bujdini
My husband understands me so much
Thula vaisi palya chhan dudh dini
We have reared big buffalos, giving milk
Chinta chaina kehi
There is nothing to worry about
Malai Bahrain pani yei malai Israel pani yei malai Kuwait pani yei
This is also my Bahrain, this is also my Israel, this is also my Kuwait

Ghiu bechna laijanchhu, thekiko moi khanchu
I take ghee to sell, drink mohi [yoghurt with water]
Malai Fanta pani yei, malai malai Coke vaneni yei
This is my fanta, too, this is my so-called coke, too
Malai posilo ni yei
This is nutritious for me

Male:
Bakhra palchhu ramrai cha bajar
I rear the goats, the market is good
2 ota boka bechyo ki 20 hajar
Selling two goats gives 20 thousands
Chinta chaina kehi
There is nothing to worry about
Malai Korea ni yei malai Hongkong pani yei malai Australiye ni yei
This is my Korea, this is my Hong Kong, too, this is my Australia
Kodo pisna janchu, dyammai dhindo khanchu
I go to crush the millet, eat exactly dhindo [dhindo made out of kodo considered poor people's food]
Malai momo pani yei, malai pizza pani yei malai mitho pani yei 2
This is momo for me, its pizza for me, it is delicious, too

Female:
Taja bechya chha, khyaya chha
We've been selling fresh and eating fresh
Kauli venta golveda laiyachha
Planted cauliflower, eggplant, and tomato
Chinta chaina kehi
There is nothing to worry about
Malai Singapore ni yei, malai Belgium ni yei Canada ni yei
This is my Singapore, this is my Belgium, this is my Canada
Pyaro chha yei mato, khanchu gundruk ghato (dhindo)
I love this soil, I eat gundruk and dhindo [typical Nepali food]
Malai chicken curry yei, malai mutton curry yei malai mitho pani yei
This is my chicken curry, this is my mutton curry, it is delicious, too

Male:
Bidesh gaye dherai din basina
I went abroad, I did not stay many days
Kina bechne ragat ra pasina
Why to sell my blood and sweat
Chinta chaina kehi
I have nothing to worry about
Malai Qatar pani yei, malai Dubai pani yei malai Malaysia yei
Here is my Qatar, here is my Dubai, too, here is my Malaysia
Payel chappal kinchhu, kachhad berchu hidchhu
I buy payal sandals, wrap my shawl around my waist and walk around
Malai dingo jutta yei, malai jinko paint yei, malai suhaunu pani yei
These are my dingo shoes [pointed shoes], this are my jeans pants, it suits me, too

Female:
Koi lai laiye, koi afai hidiye
Some were taken away, some went themselves
Kati cheli bechiye kiniye
So many girls were sold and bought
Chinta chaina kehi
I have nothing to worry about
Malai bharat pani yei Thailand pani yei, malai German pani yei
Here is also my India, here is also my Thailand, here is also my Germany
Khancham geda gudi, baschham budha budhi
We eat mixed beans curry, husband and wife living together
Malai Salman Khan ni yei, Sharukh Khan ni yei malai handsome pani yei

My Salman Khan is here, my Sharukh Khan is here, he is also handsome for me