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BORDER TOWN IN THE TARAI: SITES OF MIGRATION¹

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This paper relates the dynamics of three border towns, focusing on Nepal's southern Tarai as a belt of migration. This paper focuses on the contemporary geopolitical reality of the Tarai as a place in which both hill migrants congregate and through which migrants leave Nepal and travel to the Indian plains, in search of work, safety, and opportunity. The theoretical aspects of the paper touch on the questions of voluntary versus forced migration, and also, analogously or not, voluntary versus forced prostitution (De La Costa and Alexander 1993, Doezma 1998). It is grounded in a critique of the rhetoric of trafficking as the sole measure through which the development industry – both international and national – views the movement of women across the Nepal-India border (Fujikura 2001, O'Neill 2001), and opts rather to focus on the labor conditions of voluntary sex workers in Tarai migrant towns. Prostitution in border towns is a global reality – border crossings in the Tarai are no exception – and our reflections on this region of Nepal must include ways to ensure the proper treatment of sex workers.

Each Tarai border crossing poses a particular set of geographic, cultural, and political realities, with various histories – certain routes are more plied than others at different moments in time, which reflect variable labor and market economies in India (Rankin 2004) and, in more recent history, the Gulf, where an estimated half a million Nepali migrant wage laborers live and work (Seddon et. al 1998, Seddon 2005), almost all men.² Women who migrate are by no means all victims of trafficking rings (Frederick 1998, Hausner 2005), but those who are trafficked are nonetheless among those who migrate. As far as we know, trafficking destinations are not usually large towns on the border. But active sending

routes change over time (Liechty 2001), and will determine whether a particular border area is a place where high numbers of traffickers cross into India. Junctions with direct lines to railway stations to Mumbai, for example, are long-standing routes of established trafficking networks; others pose fairly new markets.

In the years at the height of conflict in Nepal, at the beginning of the millennium, violence between Maoist cadres and the Royal Nepal Army was worst in the Mid- and Far-Western Development Regions of Nepal, and this too affected the changing rates of migrant outflow at different border points. Many more young men were choosing to become labor migrants to India as an explicit alternative to joining the Maoists in western Nepal than in eastern Nepal.³ When my team conducted our fieldwork, in 2004, the number of migrants leaving Nepal through each border town that we looked at increased as we moved farther west, where the roots of conflict were coming to fruition (de Sales 2000, Friedman 2005) and where, at that time, the intensity of conflict between Maoist insurgents and Royal Nepal Army security forces was strongest (Lama-Tamang et. al 2003).

Nepal's Tarai: 3 Sites of Migration

The paper is not about the Tarai as a singular location but as a border area and place of active migration to India, as well as a destination itself, for migrants from other parts of Nepal. Understanding the Tarai in contemporary geopolitical terms means acknowledging its role, among others, as a series of points of exit and entrance, and therefore as a region of transience (Adhikari 2006). What I want to do is bring to light the realities of people's migratory choices at a pivotal moment in their lives, through the lens of the locations in which they occur. I am particularly interested in the question of women's experiences of migration; my research team elicited this information through ethnographic research in three Tarai bordertowns: Kakarvitta, Jhapa district, on Nepal's eastern border; Bhairawa, Rupandehi district, on Nepal's southern border, and Nepalganj, Banke district, also on Nepal's southern border, about 300 kilometers further west.⁴

The research was predominantly conducted with women crossing the border, but we also interviewed border guards and local community

members, who likely observed many comings and goings of women and their companions, and were well aware of the realities of migration and prostitution. Our methods were open-ended, informant-guided, ethnographic conversations. The research was not based on pre-formulated questionnaires or conducted in focus groups, but rather took the form of informal exchanges with migrants as they passed through the national border.

The border between Nepal and India is a porous one: many more crossing points exist than are formally policed or patrolled, and these movements are legal. The Tarai region is a place of old migration: most border town settlers are themselves people who migrated from the hills three to four decades ago, in the 1960s and 1970s (Thapa 1989, von der Heide and Hoffman 2001). We must not think of migration through the Tarai as a recent phenomenon (although it has certainly increased in recent years), nor of migrants as a new kind of population. These are questions that must rather be fitted into a longer history of regional labor migration, and a larger view of state relations between Nepal and India, and also of communal identity (Hutt 1997).

In what follows, I discuss the three sites of border research, in turn, giving snapshots of each, focusing on the dynamics of migration, and particularly on the realities of border town prostitution. I end with a number of policy recommendations, emphasizing (i) the importance of educating women on processes of "safe migration" so that they may more productively and securely move to and through border towns; (ii) the need to establish refuges or rest homes for women who have been abused, trafficked, or thrown out of their communities, and the potential usefulness of existing border patrol facilities for this purpose; and (iii) the need to ensure that border town sex workers are protected, not demeaned, by armed forces. The easy equation that prostitutes need not be treated well – they sell sex, after all – means that the greatest difficulties for sex workers may come from members of those institutions that are paid to protect women and communities more broadly: the police force, the army, the insurgents.

i. Kakarbhitta-Siliguri

The Kakarbhitta-Siliguri border falls on an old trade route to Darjeeling, Sikkim, Shillong, and Calcutta. Migration between

Kathmandu and these parts of eastern India – and the kind of town such movements give rise to – is a well-known story here. One hotel owner told us, “You see, Kakarbhitta is a place of migrants. Fifteen years ago, people from Meghalaya and Assam started coming and settling down here. Here you find all castes and kinds of people.”⁵ This is a common tale in Tarai border towns, and we see how it has become part of residents’ identity as well.

Most of the women traveling from Kakarbhitta through the border to India were not migrating but shopping, because goods are cheaper in India. Although border traffic is steady, migration did not appear heavy across this border at the time we did research there, in November 2004. Most women who were traveling through the border and not returning with goods were returning to their cross-border marital homes after the Dashain and Tihar festivals, usually with children, sisters, sisters-in-law, husbands, or brothers in tow. Very few Kakarbhitta informants were leaving Nepal for India for good, or for the first time. Migration through this border did not seem to have been particularly affected by conflict; at the time the research was conducted, Nepal’s eastern areas were less affected by violence and forced recruitment than western regions, and this likely accounts for less out-migration through Kakarbhitta. Migrant flow was much heavier through the southern border points that lead to the vast plains of India.

Many commercial workers cross the Kakarbhitta – Siliguri border daily in pursuit of work that comes when a large, mobile population needs to be catered to: people shopping for cosmetics and trinkets to sell in small shops and market places; merchants shopping for vegetables and foodstuffs that could be cooked and sold in transitory *chai*-shops; and women crossing the border – in both directions – to do household chores in hotels and restaurants, and to sell sex to migrant workers, truck and bus drivers, local residents, and travelers temporarily freed from small-town scrutiny. Bengali women come to Nepal, and Nepali women go to Siliguri. Local hotel owners told us that women would cross the border for the day, servicing clients, and return home in the evenings.

What came out very clearly over the course of this research is the vast difference between trafficking across a border – the assessment of which was the original inspiration for the study we conducted – and

street-based or brothel-based prostitution in a border town. Kakarbhitta is a Maiti Nepal border post because of it falls on the route to Calcutta, where the brothel industry relies on powerful networks that traffic Nepali women (Frederick and Tamang 2005). The prostitution that takes place in Kakarbhitta town itself, however, appears not to rely on trafficking networks at all, but rather on women choosing to participate in a voluntary market for sex. This is a critical difference – that of consent – and succinctly demonstrates how viewing women’s migration exclusively through the lens of trafficking both inhibits women’s freedom of movement across an open border, and fails to ensure that public health provisions and social protections are provided to border town sex workers in their proper context.

Because it is an old, well-plied border crossing between two poor regions (eastern Nepal and the plains of West Bengal), Kakarbhitta has something of a reputation as a brothel town. The hotel owner where we stayed told us, “There is a lot of prostitution in this town although people are slightly cautious these days. It is not as open as it used to be. But what I have heard is that a recent trend is developing: village children – school children 14 or 15 years of age – also engage in sex work. See, the hotels have to pay rent. Look at my hotel – it has been mentioned in the Lonely Planet; it is more expensive than the other hotels and most foreigners come and stay here but still I find it difficult to pay the rent sometimes. How do the other hotels manage? They have to have some side business”.

Another informant told us, “According to police station data, there are 300 hotels in Kakarbhitta. Let’s say 50 are clean: all the rest are involved in prostitution. There are hotels that do not cook any food; the hotel is just a façade for carrying on sex work.” When asked about migrants who come to work in the hotels, she replied, “What help do they need in the kitchen when no food is being cooked? What to do, sister; it has reached a point where we sometimes feel ashamed to say we are from Kakarbhitta.”

Following a series of raids, the local Hotel Association had recently circulated a petition condemning prostitution as a practice in their establishments. A cabin restaurant visited by our research team was completely empty, possibly as a result of the recent raids. Prostitution is

a convenient issue on which both police and Maobadi want to “crack down,” citing sex work as a social ill: while five women caught with men in hotels were being held as prostitutes at the border police station at the time we were there, the Maoists had recently cut the hair off a prominent local madam.

ii. Bhairahawa-Sunauli

At the Bhairahawa border, as in Kakarbhitta, many local residents travel back and forth to India daily for purchasing goods. The number of people especially men—migrating to India for work through the Bhairahawa border is extremely high, however: border patrols estimated that as many as 1000 people cross the border to India daily, more than half of whom are labor migrants. Moving westward through our three border points, the difference in labor migration between Kakarbhitta and Bhairahawa was remarkable.

Our Bhairahawa researcher estimated that most migrants were men between the ages of 18 to 30, migrating in a group of 5 to 15. Many had come to visit relatives over the holiday and were returning to India to work. About half of the men (but many fewer women) identified conflict – particularly the demands of the Maoists – as the primary reason they had moved or were moving to India. The other half identified economic reasons as their primary motivation: they told us that “no matter how hard they worked in the fields, it was not enough for their families to eat two meals a day.” What is clear is that the political and economic sides of the coin are not far removed from one another: political instability causes economic devolution, and economic devolution causes political instability. People experience the combination of events; how they report them depends on how palpably they feel the effect of each, and on how much they trust us, the questioners.

The girls and women migrating through the Bhairahawa border, mostly from the surrounding districts Gulmi, Palpa, and Arghakanchi, were very uneducated. Few had been to school or could read or write; those who had gone to school had dropped out at class five. A few girls knew how to use the telephone. Our researcher found that they did not know anything about their destinations. Five girls did not know the names of their own villages, or the name of the places they were headed in India. None had the contact addresses of their destinations, nor did

they have any money on them. Women who were going to visit their husbands did not know what kind of jobs their husbands were doing in India. These women were entirely reliant on male family and village members, with no resources, address contacts, or information. They had no idea how to go about making contact with prospective employers, relatives at home, or institutions that could help or protect them if things go wrong, like the police, the Nepali Embassy, or a transit home. Many said that whether they worked or not, how long they stayed in India, whether they would be able to study, and whether and when they would return to their home villages were decisions their husbands alone would make.

Almost all the girls and women we spoke to said they trusted their families, and although a few first-time travelers said they were scared, most told us that they felt no fear as long as they were with their companions. “When I’m traveling with my own brother-in-law, why should I be nervous?” one young woman who did not know the name of her home district asked. A woman from Gulmi said she did not feel scared to migrate as her “husband had not left her for a second.” Others confessed their fears; one woman moving to Lucknow to be with a new husband said she was scared to move to a big city, but as her husband lived in Lucknow, she had to live with him whether she liked it or not.

Many women we spoke to stated their confidence in husbands they had not met in years. This reflects a deep cultural value in Nepal – not limited to the Tarai – that women should look up to and place faith in men, and shows how encouraging women’s independence may be a critical part of preventing trafficking and assuring safe migration. The essence of successful anti-trafficking programming lies in teaching girls to believe they have some role to play in their travels, in learning their geographies, and in questioning the circumstances of their movements, even if this means taking on responsibilities that men normally bear.

A number of women said they were enjoying their trips, and were excited to cross the border, viewing their migration as an opportunity to be in a new setting. “Safe migration” means that women should be encouraged to watch what their companions are doing, and how they handle the exigencies of travel, rather than stand passively by. In this way, women might gain experience and independence, rather than

remain reliant. This is a matter of gaining confidence, in part, as well as experience, so that travel, short- or long-term migration, and labor can all fall more easily under women's own purview.

iii. Nepalganj – Rupediya

The most heavily-plied border town of our research period was undeniably Nepalganj. Upon arriving in Nepalganj, one member of my research team reported, "It looks like all of Nepal is emptying out of Nepalganj!" Bus station officials told us that they had added extra buses to accommodate the extra flow: 60 30-person buses – around 1800 people – were leaving from the government bus station daily. (Recall that our research period was just after the Tihar holidays, when numbers of migrants were particularly high.) Even with post-holiday traffic, however, this figure indicates an extremely high level of migration to India through Nepalganj. As in Bhairahawa, a relatively small percentage of migrants (our researcher estimated 5-10%) were women and girls, almost all of whom were traveling with male family members to meet their husbands or brothers. Conflict had clearly impacted many informants' lives, but in most cases they did not identify violence as the main reason for migration, although many said the situation was complicated and uncertain.⁶ As in Kakarbhitta and Bhairahawa, labor migration through this Tarai border point is a long-standing phenomenon; too few employment opportunities and too little land are problems that preceded the conflict, and indeed gave rise to it. Almost everybody hoped they would be able to return to Nepal at some point in the future, and even appeared mournful at the thought of not being able to.

The population of Nepalganj itself has certainly increased in recent years, because of conflict. If migrants to India more often cited economic reasons as their primary motivation for moving, migrants newly resettled in Nepalganj more often cited the conflict itself (although these two motivations should not be viewed as entirely separable entities). Women migrants to Nepalganj told us quite explicitly that they had had to leave home because Maoists had demanded too much food and money. Families migrating to the city of Nepalganj are likely more wealthy, and from higher castes, than those crossing the border from Nepalganj into India for work, who largely come from very poor families (Hausner

2006); most told us they did not have enough cultivable land to feed the family for the year. More wealth means that a family is first, more heavily targeted by Maoists, but also more able to reestablish itself in a new city, with the upfront economic investment that requires.

Nepalganj has also been concentrated somewhat, as people from outlying areas have moved in; surrounding districts were no longer considered safe. A woman who had moved from Bardiya, a half-hour away, said that Maoists had not allowed her and her husband (who had since migrated to Saudi Arabia, which had increased Maoist demands for money) to run their small *bhatti*, or liquor shop.⁷ In Nepalganj, she said, opportunities were higher. She herself had become a sex worker: "After all," she told us, "a bazaar is a bazaar. We can earn money here somehow." Quite a number of recent women migrants to Nepalganj were family members of men who had migrated to the Arab States; some had found work as prostitutes.

As in other border cities, prostitution in Nepalganj is quite high – it is a border town, an army base, and an increasingly populated urban center of refuge from the conflict-ridden western and far western regions of the country. About half of the roughly 150 sex workers in the local prostitutes' support organization were recent migrants. One sex worker complained to us, actually, that the increasing number of sex workers meant that local rates of services were going down – what used to cost Rs. 500-1000 now cost a tenth of that sum, or Rs. 50-100. Nepalganj sex workers work out of small tea and liquor shops, as well as little *paan* stalls, where they meet and solicit customers, many of whom are Indian men crossing the border expressly to find Nepali women. Indeed, Indian men seem to be willing to pay more for a Nepali woman, and were therefore the preferred clients of the Nepalganj prostitutes we spoke to.

A number of sex workers we spoke with had been abandoned by husbands or had been widowed; others were married to men who didn't earn enough (rickshaw drivers, for example, who earned Rs. 80-100 per day), and who might turn a blind eye to their wives' source of supplemental income. Many came from abusive family backgrounds. A small number of more educated women said they were sex workers because it was fun, a kind of entertainment. Most said they would never encourage women to work in the profession; one woman said that when

she met new sex workers, she suggested they leave as quickly as possible. All the sex workers with whom we spoke were looking for alternative sources of income generation: most wanted to open a shop or start a small business.

Although there is a long history of prostitution in the area (including Badi women), police and other public offices have clamped down on prostitution in the last few years. Police had raided the major hotels and restaurants a few months before our research, and most hotels in the area had since refused to hire new women employees. Sex workers told us that the RNA and police were their main clients, however, as well as their main adversaries.⁸ Even though hotels would not publicly hire women employees in November 2004, a client could still bring a prostitute to his room. Not hiring women is a policy that clearly discriminates against women laborers because of false assumptions that all women migrants are prostitutes: such a policy means, of course, that more women will become prostitutes, because there are fewer labor options. Ultimately, the refusal to hire women so as to avoid public scrutiny most severely affects women migrants, the very people such public scrutiny intends to protect.

Policy and Programming: A Few Recommendations

In the rhetoric of the development industry, women's experiences are largely cast in terms of the need for protection from sexual predators:⁹ protect girls from trafficking (even if it means prohibiting migration); save women from prostitution (even if it is engaged in voluntarily as a viable means of income). In this article, I too call for ways to ensure the safety of -- or to protect -- migrating women and girls, but without, I hope, the patriarchal or patronizing mechanisms that assume that women are not in control of their own movement, or their own sexuality. Rather, I wish to insert these realities of women's lives -- moving with or without family members to find work; opting to migrate to a town where new economic opportunities might open up; choosing to become a sex worker in order to make enough money to live -- into our view of Tarai border towns. Acknowledging these arenas of women's agency -- and these aspects of life in the Tarai -- is one way programmers and policy makers can help ensure women are socially protected, not in the sense of being

tightly restricted in their movements or behaviors, but rather in the sense of being free from harassment and judgment on the basis of their sexuality.

1. Establish education centers at borders: retrain border guards as safe migration educators, not interceptors.

Women we spoke in regions all over Nepal -- migrants and prostitutes, educated and uneducated -- hoped most fervently for education for their daughters, arguing that the independence and knowledge brought about with higher levels of education is the best social protection possible. The poor levels of education among women and girls crossing the border mean that they are entirely dependent on their male companions, and often unable to muster resources of any kind should trouble arise. Improving national levels of education for girls -- and educating women and girls on the means and modes of migration specifically -- would mean that they would be more prepared for their journeys, and their destinations.

A number of organizations, most prominently Maiti Nepal, have trained women border guards to be on the lookout for cases of potential trafficking. This training and placement can be very useful to preventing trafficking, but not quite in the way it is now operating. Fighting trafficking will not happen effectively at borders, because there is no way to know whether, in any one case, a patroller is effectively stopping a trafficker or inhibiting a migrant woman's mobility. Stories of policemen and women taking bribes so as not to raid certain border town hotels (or not to stop certain people going through the border) are rampant. In Bhairahawa, one policewoman was accused of sending girls to India for money herself. And in large part because Maiti Nepal's advocacy efforts have been so successful, traffickers know they must go through "*chor bato*" -- thief roads -- when they are actually smuggling girls to India. As a Kakarbhitta customs officer told us, "Frankly speaking, there is a great deal of smuggling going on -- both goods and people -- but not through this route. They go through "*chor-batos*" -- through the jungle or border villages. Now that the river is dry, they cross the border by walking through the riverbed."

Rather than act as investigators and police, border guards from women's organizations like Maiti Nepal, Saathi, and ABC Nepal should

act as educators and information brokers. Girls need to know how to check offers of potential employment or marriage, and become accustomed to the idea of acting independently. Education about how to migrate safely, such as how to keep records of contact addresses which can be shown to someone for help; the importance of having one's own money; and learning about borders, travel routes, and names of places, could be very helpful. A Bardiya woman working in a Nepalganj hotel did not know how much her salary was, as her brother collected it for her. The importance of teaching girls how to control their own money – and indeed that this might be a value at all – cannot be overstated.

Education materials forming the basis of a safe migration curriculum should be incorporated into girls' and women's empowerment efforts in both home villages and urban centers (SCN and S.A. 1996), as well as in border areas. As one long-term advocate of the issue told us, the best results come from programs that encourage girls to "check it out. An offer of marriage? Check it out. An offer of employment? Check it out. Who are these people? Where do they want to take you?" By encouraging scrutiny, critical thinking, and independence, girls will feel more resourceful and empowered, and be better able to protect themselves.

2. Establish safe havens for migrating women and girls: support transit homes in border towns and resource centers in destination cities.

A. Support transit homes

Currently, transit homes have been established to accommodate those girls intercepted at the border, who must wait for parents or guardians to pick them up and escort them home or to a legitimate destination. But large, well-run, and well-funded transit homes can accommodate many more girls than are stopped at the border. In some cases – certainly the Kakarbhitta transit homes – local communities have taken over the homes for a much better purpose: places of refuge for runaway girls, usually from domestic violence from either husbands or parents-in-law. None of the three girls at the Kakarbhitta transit home, for example, had been formally intercepted, and none had been engaged in prostitution.

These transit homes are clearly useful, but they would be more useful still if they publicly acknowledged that their primary purpose was to serve as a refuge for women who need or want to leave their domestic situations. Awareness about the broad uses of a transit home would also help the girls who live there, who said no one came to visit them, perhaps out of a stigma that all the girls and women affiliated with Maiti Nepal were prostitutes or had HIV or AIDS. The communal support available in transit homes, especially with a well-trained and dedicated staff, is an important way to ensure productive counseling, rehabilitation, and reintegration efforts of all kinds; these are successes that should be built upon.

B. Establish migrant resource centers

A number of informants told us that well-established and well-publicized "contact points" in Indian cities could be very useful for migrating women, and a transit home *writ large* in an urban center might well serve this purpose. One programming suggestion that has not yet been acted upon but which holds great promise is the establishment of Migrant Resource Centers, which could provide legal, educational, and refuge facilities for migrants from all areas in major urban cities. These centers, with phones and message boards, could serve as the "contact point" – for both families wanting assurance of a daughter's safe migration and possible employers – desired by so many migrants with whom we spoke.¹⁰

From a donor perspective, a migrant resource center is very efficient, as migrants from all countries and in all circumstances can be catered to under a single administrative structure. Women from many different areas of the subcontinent working in neighboring brothel areas would also be able to convey information to one another about how to get assistance that is not limited to women from a particular country. An ideal model might be transit homes in subsidiary cities and resource centers in large cities, although they would in the end perhaps serve very similar roles.

3. Ensure protective mechanisms for prostitutes, and encourage viable alternative income generation possibilities.

Mechanisms to protect prostitutes rather than penalize them would be quickly felt. Those NGOs that provide vocational training and

rehabilitation are greatly appreciated: the local support organization for sex workers in Nepalganj, for example, supported in part by GWP (General Welfare Prathisthan) appeared to be a model network, providing condoms, a drop-in center, and a phone center. A center that provides such services is a prototype that might be built upon for women migrants more generally. In Bhairahawa, too, local sex workers were very supportive of one another.

Although there is much debate on this point, legalizing prostitution would probably be the most protective mechanism for prostitutes: above-ground unions might be the best way to make sure labor conditions are sound, for example; women who are abused by clients could take proper legal redress; and sex workers might be relatively free from the harassment of police. Police can be a big problem for prostitutes. Some donors have insisted that male policemen undergo a course in gender-sensitivity training; whether or not this is acted upon, police should be roundly penalized for harassing sex workers. Police policies and procedures should be explicit about the penalties of mistreating prostitutes, and all policemen should be held strictly accountable to these.

In areas where they did not already exist, a number of women suggested establishing collective welfare funds as a critical part of building solid community support among sex workers. NGOs providing alternative jobs – beyond sewing or knitting, which are not viable means of income and which perpetuate rather than challenge gender stereotypes – should be supported, as many girls and women said they yearned for economic options. Ideally, loans could be provided as seed money in order that women could start small businesses. A long-time advocate in this area said women could easily be encouraged to work in business, as they already have advanced skills as negotiators and in managing transactions. They can hold their own, and even talk back to clients if need be; with years of experience, they can negotiate with customers as equals. Women themselves suggested opening *paan pasals* or small grocery shops; small-scale factories for chocolate, candles, or soap; or communication centers.

Finally, the women we spoke with explicitly requested that NGOs offer training or awareness programs for civil society – the police, the

press, and perhaps bar owners too – in order to mitigate the negative reputation and reduce the exploitation and harassment of girls and women working in the sector. Many women hoped that the impressions of women who worked as dancers, waitresses, and/or sex workers could be changed in part so that they might marry or remarry. In order to counter negative social experiences, women also requested rehabilitation centers, for those that have become reliant on alcohol, and perhaps most importantly, counseling facilities, especially for those women who have suffered exploitation and abuse.

In a region of transience, we see how those who might otherwise slip through the cracks can sometimes find unexpected stability, in domains not usually considered socially acceptable. As we advocate for equal consideration of the disparate regions of Nepal, let us not allow gender disparities to go unnoticed, or impose puritanical social assumptions on women who have defied them. Indeed, only by changing predominant views about women's roles in society can we hope for a just and equitable Nepal.

ENDNOTES

1. This paper was presented at the Social Science Baha Conference "Tarai: Contexts and Possibilities" in Kathmandu in March 2005. It is printed here with their kind permission. A Nepali language volume of the conference presentations, including this paper, was published by Social Science Baha in 2006 (V.S. 2063).
2. Men migrating to the Gulf often fly directly from Kathmandu, rather than crossing by land to India first. Because of strict laws regulating women's migration to the Gulf (now finally being contested in 2006), women who intend to move to the Gulf states almost always migrate to India first, often through land borders.
3. See Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict (2005) for an account of forced recruitment by Maoist cadres.
4. The research for this paper was conducted under the auspices of the Save the Children-USA Himalayan Field Office, Kathmandu, by a team of eight for a project on the Safe Migration of Women and Girls, in partnership with Maiti Nepal.
5. We were also told that a sizeable wave of settlers came into Kakarbhitta from Burma in the 60s, under King Mahendra's rule.

6. Those from Dailekh and Jumla (followed by Salyan) most often cited conflict as the reason for migration. Many families from these districts had migrated to resettle in Nepalganj proper, rather than cross the border to India; this usually implies more capital with which to start a business and reestablish a home (see below).
7. A Surkhet man and his sister-in-law had also moved to Nepalganj because the Maoists had increased their 5% donation requests upon learning that the man's brother had migrated to the Gulf.
8. Some Nepalganj residents told us that they had to fight the police when they wanted to close down Badi institutions of prostitution. Police action against prostitutes, then, seems very arbitrary, and more closely related to individual desire or inclination – in more ways than one – than to an execution of duty.
9. My thanks to Carole Joffe for demonstrating this link.
10. This programming suggestion was first recommended by advocates of the issue in Bangladesh. The beauty of the model is that it bypasses questions of which country bears responsibility for which migrant: the Centers could be internationally funded, and would benefit migrants to a particular city from any country.

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