Sexual trafficking, poverty, marginalization and citizenship in Nepal

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Who are returned trafficked women?

- Most women trafficked from Nepal (maybe 12,000 a year?) go as girls, taken by deception, false marriage or coercion, most to brothels in Mumbai, India.

- Hundreds (at least) return to Nepal after escape, ‘rescue’ or just losing their value, after 5 -10 years.
We focus on returnee trafficked women - Why?

- Lack of research to date that focuses on returnees
- Family stigma makes citizenship difficult – we’ll see how later
- In turn livelihoods are difficult
Why Nepali women?

- Returnee trafficked women, while one of the most stigmatised, vulnerable groups in Nepal, are beginning to organise around rights to sustainable livelihoods. Our partner organisation ‘Shakti Samuha’ was set up and is run by trafficked women, a rare such organisation and the only one in Nepal.

- Shakti Samuha’s demands challenge discourses of victimisation and assert citizenship claims, focused on a right to livelihoods, which need to be analysed in relation to current democratic processes.
Two groups of policies on sexual trafficking:

• GAATW, including Shakti promote Citizenship and livelihoods. Self-determination. GAATW includes sex workers organisations.

• CATW, US govt (determines aid through TIP Reports), Nepali Govt, most NGOs, promote: Three Rs: Rescue, Repatriation and Rehabilitation (in centres).
Context: Women’s citizenship in Nepal

- In Nepal citizenship is awarded on blood rights.
- *Fathers* pass citizenship to their sons and daughters.
- The mother is not considered on a par with her husband in terms of being able to confer citizenship on her child.
- Under the Constitution (1990), only a person over 16 years of age whose father is a citizen of Nepal at the birth of the child shall be a citizen of Nepal. According to the Citizenship Act of 1963, after the age of 16 both men and women shall apply for a certificate of citizenship to ensure that their citizenship rights are protected.
- Citizenship is a relatively simple process for a young man, however for a woman an application must be supported either by her father or her husband.
Methods

- Analysis of discourse, policies of trafficking and models of citizenship
- Semi structured interviews with activists and key informants in NGOs and government
- In depth interviews with returnee women (20-25 in urban areas – mainly Kathmandu -- and 20-25 from rural districts). Leading topics are escaping stigma, livelihoods and citizenship. Trafficked women are very sensitive, so this is Meena Poudel in Nepal’s languages.
Preliminary findings: institutional strategies

- Increased competition and success in obtaining international funding is forcing processes of professionalisation within local, Nepali anti-trafficking NGOs.

Outcome: Non members and increasingly men come to occupy staff positions, even in Shakti Samuha.
Who speaks for whom?

Shakti’s strategic location within competing discourses

Shakti Samuha establishing an identity and legitimacy as the only anti-trafficking NGO run by “returnee women”

That is, by promotion of 1996 ‘rescue’ founding narrative

They are also seeking training in research methods
Who am I and who speaks for whom?

Individual strategies in dealing with stigma examples

• Concealment
• Marriage, maybe not telling the husband
• Creating a career biography: from trafficked women to activist to professional (Staff Worker)
2000 – 2010 - 2020

• 2010: Many returnee trafficked women in Nepal suffer chronic poverty through stigma, lack of citizenship, lack of livelihood.

• It is time in development studies for more research into intersections between development and sexuality. Locally unacceptable sexualities often lead to chronic poverty, regardless of capabilities.
Where to find out more

ESRC project ‘Post Trafficking Livelihoods in Nepal: Women, Sexuality and Citizenship’
www.posttraffickingnepal.co.uk


PhD Meena Poudel Dealing with Hidden Issues: Social Rejection Experienced by Trafficked Women in Nepal (Newcastle 09)