Introduction

In October 2004, when I was doing fieldwork in a village in Nepal's Palpa district, I came across a 34-year-old Bahun man who was about to leave for India with two of his nephews, who were between 18 and 20 years old. The two young men had never been abroad before. The uncle had already found a job for one nephew as a domestic worker in Friends Colony in Delhi, and, given the demand for domestic workers in Indian cities, he was hopeful that he would be able to find work for the other soon after their arrival. The two boys, in brand-new clothes, seemed both nervous and shy. Some members of their family and friends were giggling and teasing the two young men for going off to be *lahures*.[1] The departure took about fifteen or twenty minutes, and there was a small crowd of around fifteen family members and neighbors gathered in front of the house. Signifying good luck for travel, the travelers had red vermilion *tika* marks on their foreheads and carried guava fruits in their hands. The young men were carrying only two small bags each. Much of the focus was on the boys, who were leaving home for the first time. They were told to take care of themselves, not to become involved in *naramro kam* (immoral work or behavior), and to send *halkhabar* (news) regularly. The uncle assured his brothers and sisters-in-

law that he would take care of the boys and they need not worry about them. As they left, all the family members and neighbors gathered and watched them walking away until they disappeared along the trail that led to the main road. In response, the three men turned back frequently and waved. One of the mothers had tears in her eyes, but the grandmother said, in an authoritative voice, that she should not cry because it was an auspicious time for departure, or *sait*. As soon as the three men were out of sight, everyone returned to their usual routines.

Whether accompanied by elders or not, departure scenes like this are very common in the rural hills of western Nepal. Both historical and ethnographic evidence show that hardly any area in the hills of Nepal remains untouched by the practice of young men's out-migration to India or, increasingly in recent years, to various global destinations such as the Gulf States and Southeast Asian countries. Given the limited economic opportunities in rural Nepal, the desire of young men to migrate—regardless of their income and education level, caste, or ethnicity—has never been greater. In the villages and towns throughout the region, people often say that no one is left in the villages but the old people, women, and little children. While this certainly does not mean that *all* young men out-migrate from these villages, the historical practice of out-migration, combined with higher aspirations among the younger generation to leave rural villages in search of paid work and the associated opportunities to experience the world outside in cities and towns, often means that those who stay back are equally affected by this "culture of migration" (J. Cohen 2004). In his ethnography of migration in the central valleys of Oaxaca, Mexico, Jeffery Cohen (2004) uses this term to characterize (1) the pervasive practice and long history of out-migration, (2) how out-migration practices and the values associated with them are deeply ingrained into the everyday lives of people, and (3) how the decision to migrate is an accepted livelihood strategy for economic survival and well-being. This idea of a "culture of migration" captures well the pervasive nature of circular and temporary migration in the rural hills of Nepal that has long remained a practice among the village households.

Furthermore, the migration decision is a part of everyday life, and households consider migration one of the key strategies for managing their livelihoods. Without work opportunities outside Nepal, marginal households in the hills of Nepal would face serious hardship (Hitchcock 1961).

The first wave of migration began in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when state policies and agrarian changes forced peasants in the hills to move off their land and seek their livelihoods elsewhere, both within Nepal and across the border into India, mainly by working in agrarian sectors (Regmi 1978). Since the 1950s, pushed by difficult economic conditions at home, young men from poorer households in the hills have relied on the comparatively large economy of Indian cities, which they travel to regularly in search of various work opportunities so they can support and maintain their families. For these men, migration to Indian cities, with its prospects for jobs and greater economic security, opened up the potential, real or imagined, for asserting male identity. Migration to Indian cities is circular in nature and is facilitated and sustained by social networks. Many workers begin when they are young and continue to travel back and forth between their home country and the migrant destination until they are old, sick, or injured. Because of the open border between Nepal and India, it is difficult to know the exact number of Nepalis who migrate on a circular basis to work in Indian cities, but it is estimated at about 1 million.[2] Many of these migrants work in different service sectors and in the Indian police and army, and about 90 percent of all migrants are believed to be men. Although most Nepalis, especially those from the poorer sections of the population, continue to migrate to Indian cities, the proportion of Nepali migrant laborers traveling to India decreased from 80 percent in 2001 to 41 percent in 2009 (World Bank 2010), mainly because of the emergence of other migrant destinations, such as the Gulf States and Southeast Asian countries (Seddon, Adhikari, and Gurung 2001). This form of migration plays a major role in supporting subsistence agriculture and the livelihoods of marginal households in Nepal.

The unique "open border" between Nepal and India, formalized by the Nepal-India Peace and Friendship Treaty of 1950, allows the citizens of both countries to cross the border without having to produce official documents and also prescribes equal treatment of both Nepali and Indian citizens (Hausner and Sharma 2013). In practice, however, "open border" and "equal treatment" do not apply to poorer migrants, who are regularly subjected to interrogation, frisking, ill-treatment, and humiliation while traveling and crossing the border. It is very common for low-income migrants to get cheated or robbed on their way to India or while returning home with the little money that they carry with them. Except for those who work in the Indian Army or police, most work in informal sectors that offer low pay and little protection, and thus they cannot save sufficiently to send money back home regularly. Language, appearance, and cultural differences expose many to harassment and ill-treatment. In India, Nepalis have neither legal status similar to that of Indian citizens to enable them to access services or protection measures nor the right to protection or privileges offered to foreigners under international human rights acts, because of their liminal position.

In practice, however, low-income migrants from within India also have limited citizenship status (e.g., they may lack appropriate Aadhaar registration or ration cards linked to their new, often transient, residence). Consequently, there are obvious similarities between the internal and cross-border Nepali low-income migrants in regard to their entitlements and protection from violence. While several Nepali migrants I spoke to in Delhi and Mumbai have acquired documentation that is necessary to access basic services, the political and administrative climate is becoming more hostile to low-income migrants in Indian cities with the politicization and pathologization of migrants and the introduction of Aadhaar, a twelve-digit unique identification number issued by the central government of India to its citizens.[3] Despite their active participation in the growth of Indian cities, many Nepali migrants I worked with lacked documentation and registration for basic services such as health care and so are excluded

from the promise of Indian cities and the idea of belonging. Most Nepali migrants have to go to private health care providers to be treated when they fall ill. Such exclusion perpetuates structural inequalities that lie at the heart of their poverty and marginalization. The public health gaze views Nepali migrants in India within the pathologizing framework of HIV, where migrants are seen as the carriers of disease, particularly diseases associated with sexual promiscuity, and completely ignores the social determinants of their health status. In Mumbai, the only existing service for those Nepali migrants I worked with was an organization, Sathi Nepal, that overwhelmingly focused on HIV and sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and not on other health issues or the well-being of low-income migrants.

Traditional studies of migration focus on economic motivations that lead an individual to choose to migrate. Academic, policy, and popular accounts typically assume that limited economic opportunities for earning cash as well as a fragile agriculture and environment—characterized by vulnerability to irreversible damage to the physical land surface, vegetation, and economic systems due to overuse or rapid change—in the "sending community" and economic opportunities in the "receiving community," understood in the terms *push factor* and *pull factor*, respectively, result in this type of circular labor migration. While there is no reason to doubt that regional inequalities between Nepal and India, wage differentiation, increased work opportunities in Indian cities, and poverty in Nepal's hills explain the male labor migration across the border to Indian cities, such a perspective assumes a rationally acting self-interested economic migrant, who maximizes his self-interest and has control over his destiny through choice. This perspective not only minimizes the role of structural context, of poverty and inequalities, and of how they shape livelihood options and therefore people's decisions; it also disallows sociocultural and, more specifically, gendered or generational perspectives on migration. Nepali male migrants I worked with were anything but rationally acting self-interested economic migrants. Their motives are not simply rational economic ones.

Young migrants not only struggled to earn money and to save while working in India; most of them also experienced hardship, ill-treatment, and exploitation while living and working in India, while crossing the border, and while traveling. Despite this, they refused to see themselves as victims; rather, they were actors with their own motivations and goals for migration, making their own sociocultural worlds. The migrants I worked with were individuals who had experiences, skills, and aspirations. They had the support of and obligations to social networks rooted in kinship and friendship. They were persons with economic, political, and social lives, never entirely dehumanized, who retained an element of agency despite the forces working on them.

Key Concepts

In this book, I attempt to provide an ethnography of male labor migration from the western hills of Nepal to Indian cities. In order to provide a conceptual framing for the ethnography, I here introduce some key concepts to help understand the young men's efforts to deal with economic uncertainties in the middle hills of Nepal and their decisions to engage in the practice of circular migration to India that, in the end, offers very little opportunity for social mobility. My approach is informed by my desire to narrate the perceptions, experiences, and aspirations of migrants in a way that makes the discussion accessible to nonspecialist readers while placing it within a broader conceptual framework. In the following paragraphs I introduce three key concepts: livelihoods, gender, and structural violence.

Livelihoods

I approach the practice of circular migration from the hills of Nepal to India within the broader framework of livelihoods. For the purpose of this book, I adopt a simple definition of livelihoods—"diverse ways in which people make a living and build their worlds" (Bebbington 1999: 2034). Instead of making the presumption that people prefer not to migrate, the concept of liveli-

hoods provides a framework to explore migration as one of the economic strategies available to households. In the context of economic uncertainties caused by the fragile agriculture of the mountain environments, as well as a history of extractive state policies in Nepal (Regmi 1978), circular migration across the border into India is one of the strategies available to marginal households to manage their livelihoods. Using the framework of livelihoods, this book approaches circular migration from the Nepali hills into India from the vantage point of the migrants and their communities, without disregarding the structural contexts that shape their decisions (De Haan 1999; Whitehead 2002).

At a broader level, economic approaches have looked at labor migration in a positive manner and have emphasized the rational choice of an individual migrant (Todaro 1976) or migrant household (Stark 1991), whereas structuralist theorists and neo-Marxists have looked at it from a pessimistic perspective, as resulting from an exploitative structure that breeds underdevelopment, poverty, population pressure, and environmental degradation (Breman 1985; Shrestha 1990). Both individualistic (and behavioral) models and migration analyses in the Marxist (or structuralist) tradition have taken a one-sided point of view (De Haan 1999). Economic and behavioral models tend to isolate economic decision making, and they do not analyze the cultural, political, and social contexts in which these decisions are made. On the other hand, Marxist analyses overemphasize the political-economic contexts that influence migration decisions, giving no consideration to the perceptions and experiences of migrants themselves. No doubt, economic compulsions seem crucial in determining migration decisions among the poorer households, but choices are more complex. Social, ethnic, gender, and religious factors also inform people's decisions to migrate (De Haan and Rogaly 2002; Shah 2006). Without considering the experiences and the perceptions of migrants and those from migrant communities, it would be difficult to understand sociocultural as well as gendered meanings attached to migration.

In contrast to the behavioral and structural theories of labor migration, I find that the concept of livelihoods offers a useful

framework to explore the meanings and experiences of migration in relation to the gendered, familial, social, and economic dynamics of those who migrate and their networks, from their own perspective. The major feature of the livelihoods approach is that it does not view migrants as vulnerable and helpless victims but as dynamic actors that use tactics to cope with risks imposed by external conditions (Whitehead 2002). It focuses on the premise that people are actors who seek to counter vulnerability, arising out of high risk and uncertainty, and ensure their immediate survival as well as their long-term well-being by deploying various strategies and using both tangible and intangible resources (Bebbington 1999). The decision to migrate is thus based on a household's perceptions of these contexts and an evaluation of the different possibilities and constraints (De Haan 1997).

The livelihoods approach departs from viewing migrants only as economic actors or only as workers, arguing that such a view fails to recognize livelihood strategies as social and cultural processes and their role in reproducing the social structure. The economic approach focuses narrowly on economic motivation and, by doing so, the whole universe of exchanges is reduced to mercantile exchange predicated on self-interested maximization of profit, whereas sociocultural meanings are conceived as noneconomic and therefore not significant. Drawing on actor-centered notions, the livelihoods approach argues that "we need a notion of resources that not only helps us to understand the way in which people deal with their poverty and well-being in a material sense, but also the ways in which their perception of poverty and well-being are related to their livelihood choices and strategies" (Bebbington 1999: 2022). The capacities that migrants possess both add to their quality of life and enhance their capabilities to confront the social conditions that perpetuate risks and vulnerability.

Drawing on the work of anthropologist Pierre Bourdieu, this book approaches the culture of migration and Nepali migrants' daily lives as a result of the dialectical relationship between social fields and habitus (Bourdieu 1977). "Habitus" is the socially and culturally conditioned set of durable dispositions for social actions,

and it is reflected in the perceptions and strategies of migrants. Habitus is a product of history and a tradition of out-migration, but it is dynamic. It is always in the making. Considering both the history and culture of migration, and the everyday lives of migrants, I explore how habitus can change and that migrants are not at the mercy of history and tradition but are actors who construct history and meanings associated with migration. Such a perspective offers a useful framework through which to bring to the foreground the sociocultural and gendered meanings of migration beyond the dominant yet narrow economic approach. With its emphasis on sociocultural aspects, the livelihoods framework allows for viewing migrants not just as workers or producers but also as consumers. Therefore this book considers how Nepali migrants mobilize ideas of progress, development, modernity, and consumption in their favor.

Gender and Masculinities

Given that circular migration from the hills of Nepal is a male-dominated practice and that many start at a young age and continue to travel back and forth until they are old, sick, or injured, gender and generation are two key concerns of this book. Until recently, focus on gender has been on women, and the possibility of gendering male labor migration has been largely neglected (Bretell 2000; Jackson 2001). This is reflected in the overwhelming focus on women's trafficking from Nepal to India (Joshi 2001). "Originally concentrated upon women of the industrialized West, gender scholarship gradually expanded to recognize and include the contributions of women of the global South" (Jones 2006: xii). Despite the shift from a women in development to a gender and development paradigm in the 1990s, where the latter theoretically provides a greater space for inclusion of men and masculinities, social scientists have largely preferred to treat men as ungendered beings.

Recent years have seen considerable growth in the body of literature on gender with the theme of masculinity. The work of Raewyn Connell has become influential in debates and discus-

sion on masculinities since the publication of *Gender and Power* (Connell 1987) and *Masculinities* (Connell 1995). In the first book, Connell demonstrates how gender is a concept of power and shows how men have gained from the overall subordination of women. He argues that being a man gives power. His second book develops a theory of masculinities, which shows that not all men share the power and not all are exploitative. He argues that there is no such thing as a universal masculinity, but rather that different masculinities are organized hierarchically. The key here is what he calls "hegemonic" masculinity, which dominates other masculinities (namely subordinate, complicit, and marginalized) as well as women and creates a model for what it means to be a real man. "Hegemonic masculinities define successful ways of 'being a man'; in so doing, they define other masculine styles as inadequate or inferior" (Cornwall and Lindisfarne 1994: 3). The work on multiple masculinities has contributed to challenging the naturalized assumptions of what it means to "be a man." Instead of viewing gender as a predetermined role through which men (and women) act out their prescribed social roles, the focus is on the making and remaking of gendered practices. This framework allows for an analysis of low-income Nepali male migrants as enacting a process of being and becoming men. In his book *The End of Masculinity,* John MacInnes (1998) argues that a growing concern with masculinity is misplaced and that the study of new and more acceptable models of masculinity is not worthwhile. His argument is that gender difference is a social construct and therefore there is no logical basis from which to associate masculinity with biological males. Drawing on European social history, he regards the problem as being rooted in the uncompleted project of modernity and the idea of the social contract on which modernity rests. "Modernity produces societies that are transitional, in the sense that they combine the material and ideological legacy of a sexual division of labour produced by the patriarchal era which preceded this, with material and ideological forces which undermine that legacy and create the conditions for a sexually egalitarian order" (MacInnes 1998: 3). MacInnes's work helps us to look at

the importance of masculinity as an ideology rather than associate it with the biological male.

Until recently, the study of masculinity in the South Asian context has been somewhat neglected. Exploring the ethnographies of South Asia with the intention of locating men, Filippo and Caroline Osella write that while men are certainly present, they are not the explicit object of study. They find that not much attention is paid to understanding men's behavior and their relationship with others (Osella and Osella 2006: 4). For a long time South Asian men have been treated as universally similar, ungendered objects, rarely examined as gendered beings. Recent ethnographies have highlighted the anxieties and strategies of educated unemployed men in India in the face of widespread unemployment (Cross 2009; Jeffrey, Jeffery, and Jeffery 2007; Jeffrey 2010). How boys become men and the role that work and mobility play in the construction of masculinity remain important questions (McDowell 2003).

An emerging body of work looks at masculinity and migration and addresses the impact of mobility on men's identity in different ways. Migration both enables and challenges the masculinity of migrant men, as men are expected to migrate and provide for their families, but they leave behind their family and their role as farmers to work in low-paid jobs as migrant workers (Boehm 2008: 20). Similarly, Deborah Cohen (2006) argues that because of working conditions, discrimination, and the complexity of interaction with local residents, migrants experience a dramatic assault on their subjectivities even as the migration experience simultaneously provides the mechanisms to secure gender and class subjectivities and claims in a crucial way.

Osella and Osella show that migration of young men from Kerala to the Gulf was motivated not only by the need to escape unemployment and earn money, an important source of masculine potency, but also by a desire to move away from "payyanhood" (young immature status) toward full adult status as a householder, defined by the combination of marriage, fatherhood, and ability as a provider. Here migration functions as a means of

bridging a gap between payyanhood and manhood (Osella and Osella 2000: 120–122). Their work shows how the migration of young men from Kerala to the Gulf has become incorporated into the local styles of masculinity (Osella and Osella 2000). On one hand this presents young males with opportunities to gain status as wise and economically secure men, but on the other hand threatens male identity if economic resources are not managed well; these men must decide how much money to spend on individual consumption and how much to remit or spend on family and friends.

Drawing on the case of Hazara men who migrate between the mountainous region of central Afghanistan and the cities of Iran, Alessandro Monsutti (2007) argues that their migration can be seen as a rite of passage to adulthood, a step toward manhood. Using the concept of rites of passage, he shows that the journey of these young Hazara men represents "separation" from home and family; the difficult life in Iran, where they need to find and save money, is the "liminal phase"; and the migrants' eventual return to Afghanistan is "incorporation," when they get married and establish a household (Monsutti 2007).

Describing the case of a marriage-led migration of Pakistani men to Britain, where migrants moved into the houses of their wives' families and become "house sons-in-law" (*ghar damad*), Katharine Charsley shows that such migration had an adverse impact on migrants' male identity (Charsley 2005: 91). She demonstrates that "house sons-in-law" are faced with the somewhat unusual proximity of the wife's family in a new place. In addition, these men lack a local kin support to assert their male identity. Combined together, such a context can result in a restructuring of gender identity. Similarly, a study on Nepali nurse migrants and their husbands in the United Kingdom shows that while the migration had an empowering effect on the migrant nurses, their husbands became frustrated with their compromised gendered position as dependents (R. Adhikari 2013).

What emerges from the studies of migration in situations of economic hardship is the central importance of gendered ideas in shaping young people's migration. Migration not only is informed

by classed, gendered, and generational considerations but also disrupts gender and class subjectivities. Accordingly, this work approaches masculinity as an ideological space through which men see their life. The case of the large number of Nepali men who travel to work in Indian cities like Mumbai offers an interesting opportunity to bring circular migration and masculinity together in order to explain the context, reasons, and effects of men's migration from their perspective.

Structural Violence

This book is about marginal young men who come from poorer households in the hills of Nepal, eventually end up working in an India that pays too little to enable them to improve their households' situations back in Nepal, and must go through the difficult process of border crossing and the humiliation and ill-treatment that comes with it. Thus, in this book I aim to uncover the linkages between social inequalities related to structural violence and the normalization of symbolic violence. I draw on the concept of structural violence to analyze the configuration of social inequalities, discrimination, and ill-treatment that has effects on the bodies of migrants as well as on their notions of masculinities.

I use the concept of structural violence to characterize conditions of structural inequalities in Nepali society that result in the poverty, exclusion, and marginalization of populations and also to frame the discrimination and exploitative working conditions of Nepali migrants in India. According to Paul Farmer (2004), structural violence refers to systematic ways in which social structures disadvantage individuals. Johan Galtung, another scholar who frequently uses the term "structural violence" in relation to conflict studies, defines it as "the indirect violence built into repressive social orders [that] creates enormous differences between potential and actual human self-realization" (1975: 173). Structural violence is subtle and often has no one specific person who can (or will) be held responsible. Farmer defines it as "violence exerted systematically—that is indirectly—

by everyone who belongs to a certain social order" (2004: 307). The system of social and institutional oppression functions as long as each side, oppressor and oppressed, plays its role according to the rules implanting social suffering and subordination of one to the other.

Within the labor migration debate, Michael Burawoy (1976) has argued that the system of labor migration is characterized by a separation between labor's production and the reproduction of the labor force. In other words, Nepali migrants survive on low wages in India and contribute to economic production in that context while the family, community, and state in Nepal provide education, health care, and other services to the reproduction of labor. Nepali migrants come to work in India and return to their home in Nepal when they are no longer physically strong. These low-income Nepali migrants do not settle in India. Therefore, although the host society benefits from the contribution of migrant labor, it does not bear the cost of migrants' or their families' welfare. They are welcomed to Indian cities as cheap circular labor, but they are not accepted as citizens with rights. As liminal beings, these migrants are neither here nor there; they are neither citizens nor aliens—and they are open to exploitation in this context. The in-between status of migrants in general, and Nepali migrants in particular, as a result of the "open border," means that they fall outside the protection regime.

Here, the role of a national border that maintains the separation between the maintenance of labor and the maintenance of its reproduction is useful to illustrate the migrants' experience of suffering. I illustrate this through the experience of migrants from the western hills who negotiate the border apparatus—bureaucratic law enforcement, political, market, and sociocultural—that formally and informally shapes the migration experience and its outcomes. "For some, crossing the border is an option, while for others it is an existential issue. It is often the latter, those that must find a way across the border if they are to survive, who find it the hardest to cross, if only because they are deemed undesirable by the border gatekeepers who maintain control over entry and exit" (Newman 2006: 178). This allows us

not only to look at the border from the perspective of marginal migrants who cross over it, and who thereby directly experience and confront its authority, but also to recognize that it serves to maintain a steady flow of cheap, docile, and exploited labor in migrant destinations. Michael Kearney (2004b) suggests that borders have a "classificatory" mission that categorizes the identities of both persons on either side of the border and those who cross it and filters forms of economic value that flow across it. As a consequence, "open border" and "equal treatment" do not, in practice, apply to poorer Nepali migrants, who are regularly subjected to humiliating treatment while crossing the border.

I draw on the notion of "symbolic violence" from Pierre Bourdieu (2001) to illustrate various modes of sociocultural violence that shape the experience and the position of Nepali migrants. Bourdieu uses symbolic violence to designate symbolic power exercised by the dominant over the other (2001). Symbolic violence is the unnoticed or naturalized domination that everyday social practice maintains over the conscious subject. One of the key features of the concept is that those who are subjected to symbolic violence are not passive recipients, but they are actually complicit in their own subjugation. For this reason, the dominated internalize and naturalize domination and neither question nor resist it. Unlike refugees or other international migrants, the suffering of Nepali migrants who travel to work in India is not the subject of public or policy debate. In other words, their suffering is normalized.

Bourdieu's concept of symbolic violence helps us understand how the nature of inequalities and the suffering and ill-health of migrants come to be unquestioned not only by policy makers and civil society but also by the migrants themselves: they come to see their ill-treatment, inability to earn and save money, and poor working conditions as natural. Migrants blame themselves for not being able to save, for not being able to avoid extortion, and for ill-treatment while crossing the border. Public health officials view migrants' health issues, particularly the high prevalence of HIV and STIs, as resulting from their aberrant sexual behavior, without looking at the structural context, including the very nature of

this form of migration and the poor living and working conditions that make them vulnerable in the first place. Their marginal position entails poorer access to health care provisions and other determinants of health than general populations, thereby enhancing their vulnerability to ill health while simultaneously compromising their ability to improve their well-being.

Fieldwork

This book is based on fieldwork I conducted in Palpa and other villages in the western region of Nepal and while following Nepali migrants in several Indian cities, including Mumbai and Delhi, between 2004 and 2013. I began with ethnographic fieldwork between June 2004 and June 2005 in Palpa and Mumbai as a part of my doctoral research on Nepali male migrants who traveled to find work in India. I carried out subsequent fieldwork in Palpa and other parts of western Nepal in 2008, 2009, 2010, 2012, and 2013.[4]

In addition to fieldwork in western Nepal and in Indian cities, my approach included traveling with migrants to capture their actual experiences of crossing the border. Accordingly, in 2005 I traveled with a group of three men from Palpa going to work in Mumbai. Given that most studies of migration are based on either the sending or receiving context, with very little consideration as to what goes on in between, the focus of my fieldwork was to take into account a more holistic perspective on migration. I argue that understanding the experience of migration requires study of not only the beginning and end of migrants' movements but also their journeys, the border crossing in particular, as a crucial part of migration. I address this gap in the literature by describing the travel experience of these men, based on my own travel with a group of three men on their way to Mumbai. Characterized by ambiguity, insecurity, humiliation, and also excitement, the travel experience shows that the border is a liminal site in which the migrants stand on the threshold of renegotiating their identities.

By using qualitative methods—in-depth interviews, informal interactions, and participant observation—I studied the local meanings of migration and its sociocultural significance in people's lives in Palpa district. I interacted with several households about their experience and recorded their stories related to migration. The focus of my fieldwork in Palpa was on generating the grounded meanings of migration as experienced and categorized by the people themselves. The experience of traveling to Mumbai with a group of three men and conducting fieldwork for seven weeks in Mumbai provided me with in-depth insights into the meanings and experiences of this movement for the men who moved and for those who stayed back. Apart from informal interactions and participant observation with many Nepali migrants, I carried out interviews with eighteen Nepali migrant men in Mumbai in their accommodations, work places, and in public places. I also gathered information about Sathi Nepal, an HIV project funded by United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and implemented by Family Health International (FHI), which had a specific gaze on Nepali male migrants in Mumbai. To better understand how the project attempted to help Nepali migrants, I visited the project, participated in their day-to-day activities, and interacted with different staff members. In addition to formal and informal interviews with young men about their migration decisions and experiences, I carried out participant observation in their workplaces and accommodations and during their leisure activities. Spending time in India with migrants allowed me to understand their life in Mumbai, including, but not limited to, their identities as migrant workers.

My long-term fieldwork in Palpa and other villages in the western region of Nepal offered me deeper insights into the diversification of rural livelihoods from land- and agriculture-based to nonland and nonagricultural sources of income and how the mobility of labor has become much more widespread in other parts of the middle hills in Nepal. It provided insights on the changing political economy of rural livelihoods and the gradual weakening of traditional forms of caste-based division of labor.

The fieldwork also allowed me to better understand the perceptions, experiences, and aspirations of young men left behind in the village. In February–March 2010, I traveled with a group of Nepali migrants from villages of midwestern and far western regions of Nepal, who worked mainly as porters in the Indian town of Nainital and as domestic workers in Delhi. This fieldwork gave further insight into the significance of the "open border" between Nepal and India and how migrants experience border crossing. It also allowed me to understand the experiences of marginal migrants, such as those who worked as porters in the town of Nainital. In April 2012, I carried out fieldwork in Delhi and Mumbai, interviewing male migrants, mainly those who worked as *caukidars,* or "security guards," and those who worked as domestic help, and the representatives of various migrant associations and organizations. The fieldwork helped me understand not only the everyday lives of Nepali migrants, including but not limited to their work in various sectors of the economy, but also the work of Nepali migrant associations in India.