

**People Moving Matters:  
Theorizing Tourism and Migration  
on the Nepali 'Periphery'**  
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**Dedication...**

To the mammal that lives at a higher altitude than any other mammal.  
Marmot or pika, whatever you are, I love you.

(But I love you more if you're a marmot.)

**Acknowledgements...**

I would like to acknowledge the many people in Khumjung and Sauraha who spoke with me about my research, and especially those who also spoke with me about things other than my research. Particularly, I say thank you to the *didis* of Khunde and Khumjung and the *daais* of Sauraha. And to Christina Monson for advising all of this.

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## Introduction

Many papers and presentations pertaining to tourism have started something like the following:

The World Tourism Organization in its 1996/97 report states that 255 million people are employed in the tourism-related industries, which is one in every nine people employed in the world, making it the world's number one industry and larger than the oil, automobile or weapons industries. Tourism also contributed US\$653 billion to the international economy in the form of different tourism-related taxes. There is an annual growth rate of 4% in the world's tourism market. (Bajracharya & Shakya, 1998)

Now this one begins that way, too.

It is clear that tourism is an enormous industry, and it is inconceivable that an industry so wealthy and widespread would not have enormous impacts. And indeed, much research has been dedicated to understanding how tourism has helped and hindered, developed and destroyed, lifted and laughed at peoples and societies all over the world. Nepal itself has many good examples of such investigations (including Bhatt, 2006; East, Luger & Inmann, 1998; Kunwar, 2002 and 2006; Nepal, 2003; Rogers 2007). Yet it is curious that an industry that functions *as human movement* has been so little discussed as a factor *in* human movement, especially when one considers the capacity of human migration to define the places they come to and the places they leave. The most immediate objective of this paper is to give that conversation a basis.

Following explanations of research methodologies and key terms and frameworks, this paper will discuss the various ways local circumstances in the Himalayan town of Khumjung, and the Tarai jungle town of Sauraha, interact with their tourism industries to significantly alter local migration patterns. It will, at times, point to environmental, socio-cultural, and economic impacts resulting from these changes, but the focus is on illustrating the changes themselves in the hopes that an awareness of the

changes will stir the debate on the impacts and, eventually, how to mitigate the negative and propagate the positive ones. Application of a core-periphery model is used to illustrate how, in its various migrational impacts, tourism has changed receiving locations in fundamental ways by altering their relationship with other areas in the regional, national, and international arenas. The conclusion proposes a theoretical understanding of tourism impacts by looking at tourism itself as a form of migration, but it must be understood that this serves primarily as a basis for further investigations of the specifics.

## **Research Methodologies**

Research in Khumjung took place during two stays in the village, each lasting roughly one and a half weeks during peak trekking season in mid October and mid November, 2007. Research in Sauraha occurred following the second stay in Khumjung, for 11 days during peak tourist season in the region, late November and early December, 2007. These locations were chosen for possessing the necessary controlled variable of a tourism-dependent economy, while differing in nearly every other respect, including ethnic demographics, religion, climate and geography, dominant tourist activities, and land-use restrictions.

The primary method of research was informal interview or conversation, in Khumjung conducted almost exclusively in Nepali, and in Sauraha roughly equal amounts Nepali and English. Formal interviews proved unwarranted for several reasons. First, neither research location was so busy that it was impossible to speak with tourism workers or local people without pre-arrangement. Second, participation in tourism in both locations is predominantly undertaken by people without strict schedules, offices, or other features that would suggest comfort with a formal interview. Third, the objective of

the research was to understand the broad and unforeseen interactions between tourism and migration, and it would therefore have been counterproductive to limit the conversation to pre-determined questions.

Informal interview was assisted by participatory observation, small survey, and participatory network mapping. Small survey was undertaken to determine some measure of quantitative data on migration in the tourism industry, but time restraints and seasonal variations make the received data more anecdotal than confidently quantitative. Participatory network mapping was chosen for Khumjung as a means of increasing direct participation while determining migration trends according to employment and place of residence. It was not used in Sauraha because movement was more straight-forward and network mapping proved generally more confusing than it was worth. The participation inherent in the informal interview was actually undermined in network mapping because it took control and familiarity away from the interviewee, and placed definition of the process firmly on the side of the researcher. As a method it was therefore abandoned.

Participants were selected for their involvement in or knowledge of the local tourism industry, or for their status as long-term locals, which would grant them an understanding of the recent history of local migration tendencies. As a result, most participants were lodge, restaurant, or shop owners and employees, or trekking and safari guides.

Field research was informed and supported by textual research in Kathmandu before, between, and after field excursions. Time and language restraints are noted limitations, with the former being especially pertinent given the significance of seasonal variations and trends in migration patterns in both of the researched areas. These

limitations, however, were taken into consideration and their significance reduced by framing the scope and objectives of the research as highly demonstrative and analytical rather than exhaustive and proscriptive.

Informed oral consent was procured from all initiated interviewees prior to interview, and in all conversations prior or during. Because the objective of the research was primarily to identify trends, where statements are made regarding these trends they are based on prevalence in conversation and are not necessarily cited by name. All names of interviewees have been changed into two letters and defining features omitted where they may not have been publicly known already. Despite the seemingly “safe” nature of tourism-migration research, I am in no position to judge class identity in the researched areas in a sufficient manner to feel comfortable in exposing individual spending, earning and consumption patterns.

## **Theoretical Foundations and Key Definitions**

### ***Core-Periphery Model***

The core-periphery model is a theory which describes hierarchical relations between regions of the world, defined spatially but determined by many factors, and which has profound implications for understanding and engaging in processes of development. It is a well-established school of thought, and therefore an in-depth investigation of the model, its precepts and its implications is unnecessary. Instead, a brief explanation will here suffice. (For more thorough general discussions of world-systems, see Gunder Frank & Gills (1993) and Wallerstein (1999).)

It should be noted here that the core-periphery model is usually referred to as “world-systems”, a label reflecting the theory’s origins in explaining the development of

global capitalism in its modern form. I choose to use the more descriptive phrase “core-periphery model” because I believe it more accurately reflects my own multi-level application, addressing local, regional and national hierarchies as well as global ones.

In essence, core-periphery characterizes locations as either “core” or “periphery” depending on one location's position of power in relation to another. This may be, and usually is, defined in economic terms, in which the core controls the means of production, and determines and drives modes of consumption. In classical core-periphery thinking, the core is extractive and consumptive, taking materials from the periphery for the advancement of the core. On an international scale this hierarchy has been used to explain “underdevelopment” in “peripheral” states while “core” states have prospered through the extraction of raw materials, exploitation of cheap or free labour, and manipulation of the market in such a way as to enforce peripheral dependency on the core for employment, value-added goods, and even daily needs like food and clean water. The same principles, however, may also be applied to the smaller spheres of nation-states and regions within nation-states, and to the political, cultural, and social spheres as well.

Looking at migration within the core-periphery model, human movement tends to flow towards the core, and has thus been used as an explanation of urbanization, especially in the global South. Yet in the case of Nepal, the model has most significantly been employed by Nanda R. Shrestha (2001) to explain frontier migration of landless peasants from the hills and mountains.

The application of the core-periphery model to this research provides a valuable scope through which to understand the significance of changes in human movement caused by tourism. Specifically, this research has focused on what may be called

“peripheral tourist-receiving locations” – that is, areas which are broadly situated in the periphery of the national relational hierarchy in Nepal, and in which tourism is the primary means of development, be it economic, social, or environmental. By differentiating between the various spheres of analysis – again, economic, social, or environmental – one may avoid some of the more universalizing tendencies of the model which characterize each location as definitively core or definitively periphery. More practically, it is also possible to point out specifically how and where tourism and migration can fundamentally alter a community's position in its broader society, though it is also important to recognize when the core-periphery model does not conveniently apply. In such situations it should not be assumed that the model is useless, but rather it should be recognized that there is significance to the complications which make it impossible to define a location as core or periphery. It should be stressed again here that this paper intends primarily to bring these alterations into the light where they may be more closely investigated in the future, not to exhaustively explore their various and far-reaching implications.

### ***Tourism as Migration***

Tourism has been a widely studied international and local phenomenon, and the practice has been contested for decades as an agent of both progress and destruction. Yet, tourism has not been investigated through the migration lens, a view which lends itself to a unique way of understanding the entire practice, from motivation to marketing to impacts. While the discursive potentials are seemingly endless, the present research is fundamentally concerned only with the impacts. Since this is a new theoretical

application, it demands a brief theoretical discussion before addressing the specifics of what this means for Khumjung and Sauraha.

If we understand migration simply as the movement of persons in pursuit of improvements in their quality of life, and tourism as the movement of persons, temporary within the area of their presence, for means of leisure, then it follows that tourism is a form of migration. Admittedly, both of these definitions are liberal and would be contested by academics looking more closely at tourist motivations, or specific subjects within migration, but I believe both suit the purposes here defined and accurately reflect the reality of tourism's presence in a given location. This will be further developed and illustrated through the case studies and conclusions to follow.

### **Case Study 1: Khumjung, Khumbu**

Khumbu is the northern region of the Solukhumbu District, located on Nepal's northern border in the east of the country. It is characterized by the world's highest alpine environments, including the world's highest mountain, Mt. Everest. The population is approximately 90% Sherpa (Rogers: 20), with small numbers of other caste and ethnic groups, including Rai, Tamang, Bahun, Chhetri and Newar (Nepal: 37). Within Khumbu, Khumjung is located in a high valley at 3,790 metres elevation, immediately north of the region's commercial center, Namche Bazaar, and immediately east of Khunde.

The Khumbu region of Nepal has always been an area in a significant way defined by human movement. As a high alpine environment with steep valleys and difficult seasonal climate conditions, residents of the Khumbu have never produced enough food to sustain their societies. This reality, along with the region's geographical position as a link between Tibet to the north and the hills and plains of Nepal and India to

the south, made the Khumbu Sherpas a significant player in Trans-Himalayan trade. This role required a great deal of mobility, specifically seasonal trade migration through high passes into Tibet, and down the narrow river valleys southward toward Solu and the rest of the Indian subcontinent (Rogers: 24).

When Trans-Himalayan trade was effectively halted by the Chinese takeover of Tibet in 1959, the Khumbu's strategic position was stripped, and for the region's residents, as for most of those living amongst Nepal's northern Himalaya, outward migration became an increasingly popular choice for improving one's standard of living (Nepal: 37). Building on the foundation of two generations of regional and ethnic predecessors (Rogers: 32), many Khumbu Sherpas relocated eastward to Darjeeling, India, where mountaineers since the 1920s had made Sherpas famous as good-natured, colourful and hardworking assistants in mountain expeditions (see Ortner for a thorough discussion of this process). Yet, unlike many other mountainous rural regions of Nepal, emigration from Khumbu slowed in the proceeding years. The reason for this shift is precisely what set Khumbu apart at the time, sustains its economy still, and in many ways defines its society today: the development of tourism (Rogers, 26).

Nepal opened its borders to international tourism in 1953, and proceeding governments were quick to recognize the country's comparative advantage in the field, promoting it as a key source of foreign exchange earnings. Originally limited to the Kathmandu valley and surrounding hills, tourism expanded outward as infrastructure and ordinance allowed, reaching the Everest region for earnest when it was officially opened to trekkers in 1964, the same year the Lukla airstrip was constructed (Rogers: 41). Then,

with major growth in international travel and the counterculture movement of the 1970s, tourism exploded into a regional phenomenon (Nepal: 38).

Since that time tourism has been central to life in Khumbu, having a varied and profound impact on local culture, environment, and economy. The presence of the world's highest terrestrial point, and the famously friendly and peaceable Buddhists at its base, have invited the curiosity of millions around the world, inspiring countless mountaineers, tourists, and researchers to venture beyond their usual spheres to experience the grandeur of a truly unique and awesome physical and cultural environment. Many have since visited to consider the impacts of their visitation, often coming away with conclusions of significant relevance to the future success and sustainability of the region for locals and tourists alike. Reports of deforestation to heat tourist lodges have led to some highly successful community-based reforestation campaigns (Nepal: 158). Reports of large amounts of garbage have led to clean-up campaigns based locally and abroad (Kathmandu Environmental Education Project (KEEP), 2005). Reports of cultural degradation have led to increased international funding for monasteries and other cultural sights, at least along the tourist routes (Ortner, 1999: 266).

With human movement playing so central a role to life in Khumbu, it follows that in order to understand the region, and to then work to improve it, one must understand how the tourism epoch has changed and continues to effect patterns of human movement in the area. It is important also to recognize that tourism affects migration patterns differently in different places, even within an area as small as Khumbu, because of different interaction with the industry. For example, Khumbu tourism has caused spatial

expansion of Namche Bazaar (Nepal: 73), made permanent towns out of “temporary herding villages” like Gokyo (72), and increased and changed the primary direction of labour migration away from villages in Solu and southern Khumbu (Rogers: 78).

Six main intersections, at times overlapping, have been identified within a local Khumjung context: seasonal guide work; labour immigration; winter emigration; low permanent emigration; changing spheres of movement; and the presence of tourists themselves. Descriptions of these impacts and discussions of their contexts are to follow.

### **1) *Seasonal Guide Work***

The title of trekking guide is an almost ubiquitous title for the men of Khumjung, taking them out of the town for between two and six months each year, especially during the peak trekking season of October-November and the secondary one of March-April. During these seasons guides frequently travel from regional destinations in the north to Kathmandu, and onward to other trekking regions in Nepal and the broader Himalayan region, including Annapurna, Mustang, Kanchenjunga, Langtang, and Tibet. During my time in Khumjung it was rare to find a guide in his home, and those who were present were always preparing to leave within a few days, even if just returned. When asked, local people asserted that all local guides were out working, and that none would return home until the season finished in December. Though not perfectly accurate, the hyperbole reflects the atmosphere of absence, in which there is important truth: guiding treks has produced a profound seasonal absence of men.

Although season migration is nothing new to Khumjung, there are characteristics of guiding migration that differ from more traditional forms. One such differentiating feature is the change in destination. As a trekking guide, migration destinations have

shifted to areas which once held little if any economic value. Instead of moving through a high Himalayan pass toward the Tibetan plateau to exchange for salt, barley, and religious articles, trekking takes guides to passes which provide only views, and to locations, like Everest Base Camp, where nothing grows, nothing is made, and no one permanently resides. In addition, guides travel to other regions in Nepal and Tibet which would have likewise held little historical economic value for them.

Another key difference is the objective of migration. Formerly and understandably, migration was a necessary means of reaching a location at which goods could be procured. Migration was a means. In trekking, while the destination may be the reason trekkers pay the guiding fees, the fees are paid for the movement itself. Translated into terms of a guide's trekking objective, it is simply to trek; that is what he is paid to do. Exactly what impact this change has had and will have on Khumbu deserves greater investigation than can be applied to it here, but one may easily envisage the expansion, differentiation, and stylization of trail systems as one important change.

Thirdly, guiding treks produces and promotes a new social structure, one which in practice has been highly defined along ethnic and regional lines. Traditional trade migration was undertaken collectively, and while hierarchies of decision-making certainly existed, those hierarchies existed within the group, which existed within the community. In the trekking industry, Khumjung Sherpas recognizably sit at the top of the regional pyramid. This may be illustrated by several factors. Along with the fact of so many local men working as guides, Khumjung is recognized by locals all along the trails of Khumbu as a place with lots of rich people, a wealth attributed almost exclusively to guiding. Along with these, the high number of Khumjung guides is in contrast to the

absence of Khumjung porters. Indeed, this researcher never once encountered a porter from Khumjung, and others as well have noted the near impossibility of hiring one once one is so far north. While not to deny the existence of hierarchies amongst guides in Khumjung, the definitive split is between guides and those labourers who work beneath them, especially porters (Ortner: 252). Significantly, these come almost exclusively from Solu and southern Khumbu.

All of the features just discussed will reoccur in discussions below, a testament to the guiding profession's central and foundational position in the tourism-migration dynamic in Khumjung.

## **2) Labour Immigration**

With most local men working as guides and others taking advantage of other tourism opportunities afforded by local land ownership (stores, internet café, bakery, etc.), Khumjung is marked by a shortage of manual labour and a surplus of demand for it (see also Rogers: 210). Local circumstances, however, work against permanent immigration. These include absolute restrictions on sprawl imposed by Sagarmatha National Park since its creation in 1976, and a strong sense of identity and control that has expressed itself (ambiguously but apparently quite effectively) in locals' efforts to retain all saleable land in local hands (TZ). The result is a large number of temporary and a small number of permanent labour immigrants, and a relatively small and static population and infrastructure, with an approximate 12 to 13 houses going up in the last six years (TZ).

Immigrant labourers are widely employed in agricultural harvesting, construction, carpentry, painting, and in the large, outsider-owned lodges in a variety of positions. Of

particular interest is the way many of these tasks are expressions of the disposable income which has been generated by heavy involvement in tourism, particularly in the well-documented expansion and elaboration of shrine rooms. While performing private work, the workers, again predominantly from Solu, generally stay in the home in which they are working, for the duration of their work, and then return to their own villages (Neema, Oct. 14). While this is the most evident pattern of immigrant labour, the existence of permanent labour immigration should also be noted. The foreman of a crew working on new privies for the school, for instance, moved to Khumjung ten years ago (CB).

The trend also extends into the civil service. Within Khumjung, none of the school teachers or police officers is from Khumjung or is even an ethnic Sherpa, a fact at least partially attributed to the high pay of the tourism industry (Ram; Rogers: 210).

### **3) *Winter Emigration***

During the coldest months of the year, particularly late December and January, many of Khumjung's residents migrate southward while tourism lags in Khumbu. While this is by no means universal, and only the wealthiest families go to Kathmandu each year (TZ), its presence is certainly marked and a significant characteristic that differentiates Khumjung from most of Nepal's rural areas. In discussions with local lodge owners, six of the seven spend their winters in Kathmandu, with the other going to visit family in Phortse. The families are away between one and three months during which their lodges are closed and they perform no paid work. Similar trends, though with lower percentages and less time spent in the capital, were noted with non-lodge owners whose husbands work as guides. One factor that reduces the amount of time spent in the city,

aside from raw economics, is dependence on animal husbandry, as animals require tending irrespective of the tourist season (NM, Nov. 20).

The journey to and from Kathmandu is usually done by plane from Lukla, with at least one case of chartered helicopter from Khunde, though this is an elaborate exception. The expense of the journey, renting or owning a second home in Kathmandu, and one to three months without income each year cannot be divorced from local dependence on the tourism economy. There is a strong correlation between tourism involvement and season migration to Kathmandu that cannot be ignored.

The frequently cited reasons for winter migration include cold weather and snow in Khumjung, the lack of tourists, and family members, especially schoolchildren, living in Kathmandu. None of these motivations can be seen as divorced from the tourist economy, though all of them have a contradictory relationship with it. This helps explain why, among other reasons and despite such frequent seasonal migration, permanent migration to Kathmandu is not more pronounced than it is.

#### **4) *Low Permanent Emigration***

Compared to other areas of rural Nepal, Khumjung sends low numbers of permanent emigrants. Considering the high numbers of season migrants and the relational familiarity with Kathmandu which could make permanent emigration easier, this fact is even more impressive. Partly this is due to the contradictory nature of the motivating factors for seasonal migration.

While cold weather and snow encourage migration, tourism has also provided the base for local amenities which make such a climate easier to live in. This has been the case through personal investment in housing infrastructure as well as through the

National Park Buffer Zone Committee, which receives 50% of the National Park entrance fees and uses those funds for local community development. The local Buffer Zone Committee has been focusing particularly on increasing electrical capacity to combat deforestation (TZ), a feature which reduces incentive to migrate during the winter months.

Even though tourist numbers are low, the industry still provides some incentive to stay in Khumjung in the off-season, to cater to the few tourists who do come or to take care of rentable carrier animals. As for family members living in Kathmandu, it is precisely because of, and/or for, tourism employment that many Khumjung natives migrate to the big city. Many have used tourism money to send their children to school in Kathmandu, are familiar with the city because of frequent work-related travel there, or have moved permanently to own or work at trekking agencies (Rogers: 88). In any case, the Khumbu tourism industry remains the basis of their migration, and continues to provide incentive to return to Khumjung while simultaneously providing the capacity to leave.

Yet, tourism has provided other reasons to stay in Khumjung, and these likely explain the relative absence of emigration from there. The first, and most significant, is pure economics. The profitability of land, livestock, and labour in Khumjung are each difficult to replicate in Kathmandu or elsewhere in Nepal. While Khumjung's position off the main trekking routes has helped keep land prices down (countering upward pressures from the National Park) and reduced immigration pressures to the village (TZ), for those who have lodges or stores, rent their land for camping, raise pack animals, or perform physical labour, the money that can be made from working in Khumjung is noteworthy

and not easily replicated where tourism is absent or interacts differently with the community. While this is more true for wealthy residents than for poorer ones (Rogers: 95), tourism has provided some social mobility for the traditionally poor through wage labour, pack-animal hiring, or guiding (Ortner: 255).

The second is really only a half reason, and is probably most accurately considered half tourist-based; that is, the presence of a mid-level school and nearby mid-level hospital in Khunde. Both were originally built in the 1960s by the region's most famous tourist, Sir Edmund Hillary, and have been expanded and funded largely by the donations of wealthy visitors. The attribution of health and education services to tourism is irregular, but in this case largely accurate. After all, while the national government provides teacher's salaries, it does not provide funds for infrastructure development (Tenzing), a lack which has been visibly taken up by mountain travel groups from abroad, including Korea, Japan, and the USA – groups whose plaques adorn each of the school's various buildings.

The fact that these services are mid-level, however, means that students migrate to Khumjung (either every day or staying in on-site dorms) until they finish 10<sup>th</sup> Class, at which point all students must go to Kathmandu for further education (SP). Most do not return (TZ). Similarly, people with minor ailments do not need to travel or move to Kathmandu to receive services, but serious conditions and injuries cannot be dealt with locally. In this way, health and education services as they are today serve more to delay emigration than to counter it.

## **5) *Changing Spheres of Movement***

A sphere of movement is simply the places a person goes. It includes paths one travels often and paths which have been significant to travel. Tourism has in many ways altered the spheres of movement of the residents of Khumjung, some of which have already come up. For example, the reorientation of work-migration northward and to traditionally economically non-productive areas, and increasing linkages to Kathmandu for seasonal migration, higher education, and trekking agency work. Yet there have been other changes as well.

One pronounced change has been an increase in Khumjung residents traveling abroad, and their reasons for doing so. Interview and observation revealed that in many cases, guides or their children had gone abroad either for leisure travel or for educational purposes – university or mountain training. These individuals had usually visited Japan, Australia, Austria or the United States. While certainly not a majority of locals, or even a majority of guides, this trend is in marked contrast with the pre-tourism, post-Trans-Himalayan trade trend of Darjeeling migration from the Khumbu, and stands even more starkly against the contemporary reality of thousands of thousands of Nepalese labour migrants in India, East Asia, and the Middle East working in construction, security, and as domestic labourers. While there remains some such emigration from Khumbu (Luger, 56), it is far from the defining feature in Khumjung that it once was, or that it is in many other areas of Nepal.

Aside from the obvious connection between tourism earnings and the ability to travel internationally, many of the Khumjung residents who travel do so at the invitation, and often with the financial support, of former trekking clients. Engagement in tourism

has developed important international connections which have opened to door for both leisure and education migration away from Khumjung (Rogers: 81).

Another noteworthy alteration under this heading has been the means by which people do their traveling. The Lukla airstrip was famously constructed by Hillary's school-building mission in order to more effectively transport building materials, but has since been used by tourists and locals as an easier and faster link between Khumbu and the rest of the world via Kathmandu. What was once a two-week walk to Darjeeling is now a two-day walk and one hour flight to Kathmandu. Since Nepal started allowing private aviation companies in the early 1990s, flight frequency and competitiveness have increased and prices have declined, making such trips increasingly viable for the local population (Rogers: 48).

### **6) *Tourist Presence in Khumjung***

A high percentage of Khumjung's overnight visitors are either acclimatizing slowly on their way up to higher destinations or trying to avoid Namche Bazaar's crowds and noise on their way down. During my time in the town, only one group aside from my own stayed for more than one night, and this was for a rest and recovery day due to sickness. A majority of visitors, however, do not spend the night in Khumjung, as Namche Bazaar is near enough to attract most trekkers, especially those with a pre-arranged schedule, and the major trekking routes actually circumvent the town-site, thus missing many of those without a set agenda.

As could be predicted, tourists in Khumjung, when they do buy, tend towards tourist-oriented consumer goods and services. Lodges are obvious, whether for the night or just for a meal in their omnipresent, wood-stove heated kitchens. Khumjung does have

a few shops, selling the usual fare of imported beverages and snack food, as well as a standard souvenir shop selling t-shirts, badges, prayer beads, and new and used books. There is a bakery and an internet café, as mentioned, and a women's knitting group which sells locally made toques, socks, belts, and other goods knitted from sheep and yak wool. Spacially, each of these (excepting a small proportion of the lodges) is situated directly along the main trekking trail through town, and are the spaces most frequented by visitors, with the exception of the Khumjung monastery and its famous yeti scalp display. The bakery in particular is a busy site, crowding every day between noon and sundown.

In any case, compared to other prominent Khumbu villages Khumjung is not the site of a great deal of tourist spending, or a great many days of tourist visitation. The result is that Khumjung has relatively few lodges and shops compared to other places, even those with significantly smaller populations. Again, the commercialization of space has not been substantial, a fact which has contributed to the commercialization of mobility and had great ramifications for human movement to and from Khumjung as described above. This relatively low commercial property value has reduced the incentive for permanent upper class immigration to Khumjung, the type of immigration with the greatest implications for land-use, land pressure, and socio-economic community dynamics because of the immigrants' considerable economic capacities.

Aside from this, climate and geography are frequently cited by porters and guides from the outside as reasons for preferring their home villages, and by locals as reason to seasonally migrate to lower elevations. It cannot be ignored as a factor working against immigration to Khumjung. In addition, the cultural homogeneity of Khumbu, the region's strong cultural association with the Sherpa people, and the community's own initiatives to

maintain control of local properties all contribute to keeping permanent immigration low (TZ).

### ***Core-Periphery Analysis for Khumjung***

Tourism in Khumjung has had a varied and conflicted relationship with migration trends, creating new incentives to stay and to leave while doing away with old incentives to leave and to stay. Trends like seasonal guide work requiring so many men to be away from home for extended periods of time each year are uncommon, and are contradictory from a core-periphery perspective; the fact that work is made available to them in their hometown is emblematic of the core, while the fact that the work itself takes place away from home represents peripheral dependence.

Similarly, the widespread practice of winter emigration to Kathmandu, and the relative lack of permanent emigration, present some analytical difficulty. The disposable time and income required for non-productive seasonal movement can be seen as indicative of a productive core economy which grants its members the capacity to consume leisure away from home. That so few people leave permanently suggests the capacity to compete on fairly equal footing with outside destinations. Conversely, the motivation to leave, even temporarily, can be understood to represent the lack of comforts and amenities in Khumjung relative to Kathmandu, as well as being a product of the seasonal absence of work in Khumbu, placing it certainly on the periphery of that relationship.

The trend of sending students to Kathmandu for secondary and/or abroad for post-secondary education is certainly indicative of Khumjung's peripheral position on a national level, as well as Nepal's peripheral position on an international one, at least as

far as education is concerned. That said, the Khumjung school – tourist-built and tourist-funded – is an example of tourism reducing the need to emigrate and thus pushing the town towards the centre.

Labour immigration to Khumjung is one way in which the town has become a regional core, since the vast majority of the labourers come from nearby Solu. The presence of disposable income in excess of available manual labour and extractable resources is one of the foundational characteristics of a core economy. Khumjung continues to send small numbers of workers to Kathmandu and abroad, which is a trend of the national and international periphery, though significant numbers of guides and porters, who perform at least some of their work in Khumjung, come from other regions of the country – characteristic of a national core.

Khumjung residents' changing spheres of movement again are contradictory for analysis. The ability to travel for leisure, especially internationally, represents a movement towards a core location, no matter the spatial scale. This is not a tremendously widespread practice, however, and is countered as well by the new routes and destinations determined by and taking place within the trekking industry. As long as these changes are defined and determined by tourist demands and the planning of outside agencies, definitional control remains in outside hands. As local people gain greater control of the planning and organizing of treks, however, they regain that definitional capacity and assert their position as a core.

Taken together, the striking characteristic of all of these migrational changes in Khumjung is that they are all highly contradictory, making them each impossible to define definitively as core or periphery characteristics. In this way it may be said that the

tourism-migration dynamic in Khumjung has had a neutralizing effect on its relationship with national and international centres of control. While its position relative to certain other areas of Nepal, especially Solu, has increasingly become one of a core location, tourism has served in other ways to mitigate peripheral status in relation to Kathmandu on a national scale, and foreign countries on an international one.

This can be attributed to local circumstances which mirror the aforementioned contradictions. The income opportunities of the tourism industry act as an immigration attractant and an emigration deterrent, while the narrow valley, National Park, and the determination of locals to maintain and gain control of the industry all deter immigration.

## **Case Study 2: Sauraha, Chitwan**

Chitwan District runs along the southern border in central Nepal. It is within the Tarai belt, characterized traditionally by thick jungle, fertile and level soil, and high numbers of wildlife. Today the region, including most of Chitwan, is used for agriculture, manufacturing, and transportation. It is a monsoon climate with maximum rains during the hottest season, in September and October (Kunwar, 2002: 81). Sauraha itself sits on the northern edge of the center of Chitwan National Park.

Though in considerably different fashion from Khumbu, human movement has played a significant role in the Chitwan region as well. Originally inhabited by malaria-resistant Tharu people, the Tarai was long made uninhabitable to anyone else by thick jungle and epidemic malaria. As many in Sauraha point out with pride, the region has been “malaria-free” since 1960, following an intensive spraying campaign conducted by USAID (Rogers, 38). Combined with land availability problems caused by divided-inheritance and overpopulation in the hills and mountains, the opening up of the Tarai

resulted in a massive influx of agricultural migrants to the fertile frontier farmlands of the plains (Shrestha: 93). According to Shrestha the most commonly cited reason for migration from the hills or mountains to the Tarai is “agriculture”, though in the case of those from the mountains “trade and commerce” is a close second (27).

For the town of Sauraha this meant a major demographic shift to the point that today locals estimate a 50/50 ratio between Tharu and other ethnic groups (DK). In an agricultural region with high interaction between villages, it is also significant that Sauraha is surrounded by villages identified as Tamang and Rai-Limbu (PM), and Sauraha itself is home to “9 exogamous sub-groups” (Kunwar, 2002: 81), since there were essentially none of these ethnic groups in the Chitwan region until 50 years ago.

In this investigation, it is important to keep in mind, then, that the most significant regional interaction with migration has been non-tourist related, but rather the product of land availability circumstances – an economic “survival strategy” for hill people (Shrestha: 93). Therefore, despite the easy temptation to make assumptions of migration along ethnic lines, it is presumptuous and inaccurate to do so since so many non-Tharu locals are in fact second or third generation – not what could contemporarily be considered immigrants. And while there are certainly important caste and ethnic hierarchies at play in Sauraha's interaction with tourism (Guneratne), and which cross-over frequently with local migration patterns, it is with migration that this research is primarily concerned.

With all of this in mind, five main migrational alterations have been isolated as having occurred in Sauraha as a result of tourism: immigration of a capital class; labour

immigration; outward movement of locals; reduced and higher-status emigration; and the presence of tourists as migrants themselves.

### **1) Immigration of a Capital Class**

As has been pointed out by many authors in regards to tourist destinations around the world (Namibia in Weaver and Elliot (1996); Mexico in Clancy (2001); Thailand in Cohen (2004)), the big money to be made in tourism is usually made by the already rich. While in Khumjung this means many people save up their guiding, portering, or labour wages to invest in a lodge, Sauraha is more open to the immigration of individuals who have earned their money elsewhere and already possess the financial capacity to take best advantage of the tourism industry. While complaints of heat during the summer are common, especially among immigrant workers, the climate and geography of Chitwan is much more conducive to immigrants than are those of Khumbu. Perhaps more importantly, there is no shortage of available land around Sauraha, which only has the National Park to the south and a small buffer zone to the west on which there are land-use restrictions. Further, there exist no restrictions on hotel building outside the park (Bookbinder *et al*, 1998: 1404), and land away from the downtown strip remains relatively inexpensive (RB). This is likely due in large part to the lack of definitive boundaries and the saturation of the market (Kunwar, 2002: 83).

Nonetheless, interviews with local restaurant, resort, and store managers and employees revealed that almost every property in the downtown area is owned by an outsider, usually from Pokhara or Kathmandu, the use of which requires, of course, the payment of rent. A 1994 survey of tourism workers in Sauraha supports this observation, reporting that 61% of Sauraha's hotels were owned by “non-locals, either Nepalese from

outside the Chitwan District or expatriates” (Bookbinder *et al.*: 1402). This is both recognized and resented locally, and there is a perception that “big bosses” are making “big money”, without working, and using that money to send their sons to educational institutions abroad rather than investing it locally (RB). Indeed, salaries have been found to be higher for those who come from outside than for locals (Kunwar, 2002: 98), and many, if not most, arrangements for tours and excursions happen in Kathmandu (RB). A particularly egregious example of economic leakages because of outside ownership is an inclusive and expansive resort on the outskirts of Sauraha where the staff is unaware of the cost of a room because all arrangements are made through Kathmandu. The owner of the resort is American (RS).

Many of the renters, those who own the shops and their merchandise, are also from other parts of Nepal, having moved to Sauraha to start their businesses. Most come from areas near Pokhara and Kathmandu (eg. Bhaktapur, Pharping, Jomosom), where they were able to earn the capital to invest in Sauraha. A common reason for coming to Sauraha is that both Pokhara and Kathmandu are too busy, too competitive, and too expensive (NL; RK).

The majority of this growth occurred during the 1980s when tourism was a big new business opportunity; there were three private hotels before 1980, while 31 were built between that year and 1989 (Bookbinder *et al.*: 1401). Locals recall that 15 or 20 years ago the town was totally different for not having big buildings housing resorts, shops and restaurants (JM), and in some cases bemoan the impact this commercialization has had on interpersonal relationships and the environment (RB; JM).

According to the theorization of R. Noronha, the tourism industry, as it expands in a given location, will be increasingly dominated by outsiders with the capital and technical capacity to meet mass tourist demands (Cohen, 1984: 383). While circumstances in Khumjung refute this as a universal theory, it is played out quite clearly in Sauraha where immigration and investment is essentially unrestricted. From a core-periphery perspective, this is one way in which Sauraha is definitively peripheral since control of local resources is concentrated so heavily in the hands of economic higher ups in the capital and other major urban centres.

## **2) Labour Immigration**

Sauraha's tourism industry is a seasonal one, characterized by fairly minor increases and decreases in visitation numbers during the dry season, and a near total absence of tourists during the monsoon, when temperatures and floodwaters both reach their peaks (SV, Dec.1). Unlike Khumbu, however, Sauraha's off-season is generally between two or three months, and because it is very much a domestic destination, occasional variations from the expected weather patterns can see a brief deviation in predicted visitation – a dry week during the monsoon, for example, could bring a short rush of Nepali visitors (SV, Dec. 1).

Because of this seasonal ebb and flow, there is a dramatic difference in demands on staff during the different seasons. Therefore, during the peak season, restaurant and lodge establishments are likely to have two or three times as many staff as during the monsoon. Others may shut down altogether during the rainy season, especially those with properties along the river banks, where floods occasionally rise to their roofs (SV, Dec. 5). In any case, a great number of Sauraha's tourism employees get “holidays” for three

months each year, during which time most of them return to their home villages and perform domestic work.

Bookbinder *et al* report that as of 1994, “72% of employees in the hotel industry were locals,” and that 74% of jungle guides “were permanent residents of the Chitwan District and 26% were recent migrants who had moved to the area within the past 5 years from other districts in Nepal and India” (1402). While it is important that such a high percentage of employees and guides come from Chitwan, being from Chitwan district is not the same as being from Sauraha, and the reality is that the great majority of tourism employees, with the possible exception of elephant drivers, immigrate to Sauraha from outside villages for the tourist season.

Most of this migration is not long distance, and in a predominantly rural society “local” is difficult to define by town names. Nonetheless, it must be recognized that the presence of tourism in Sauraha is the reason these people, almost all young men, have migrated to the town to work.

### **3) *Outward Movement of Locals***

With the immigration of a capital class primarily to the main Sauraha town-site, many traditional landowners and settlers were given little choice but to move as land prices went up and the feasibility of agriculture declined in an increasingly urban space (JM; Kunwar, 2002: 104). Since the land surrounding Sauraha remained and remains relatively inexpensive, and conservationist or geographical barriers have yet to be reached, what may otherwise have been widespread emigration expressed itself as a slow outward sprawl – precisely the kind of village expansion impossible in Khumjung – as people, mostly Tharus, moved their homesteads outward into rural spaces where they

could continue to grow crops and raise livestock (JM). This is graphically evident today, as there is a strong correlation with the size of Tharu landholdings, evidence of livestock rearing and crop production, and their distance from the downtown center (see also Kunwar, 2002: 104; and Guneratne).

#### **4) *Reduced and Higher Status Emigration***

Many older men in Sauraha, now working in the tourism industry as guides or restaurateurs, have experiences working abroad in India or Malaysia. For some it was a strategy in their young years to earn more money in one year than they would likely make in five at home in Nepal. For example, one small restaurant owner worked as a watchman in Bombay 15 years ago (RB), a waterfront cook worked in a restaurant for three years in Malaysia to help support the old man who took him in as an orphan (PM), and a shopkeeper spent three years working in computer hardware maintenance in India earning the money to start his business (NL). For others, international labour migration was a security strategy during the worst of the Maoist conflict in the early 2000's. One lodge safari guide with 16 years experience in Chitwan National Park worked in Kuala Lumpur as a potter for one year three years ago (TC), and another private guide spent “a few years” working in a factory near Delhi to avoid having to make the decision between army and Maoists (RJ). Still others speak of a desire to go abroad, and of the desires of others to do so (SV, Dec. 1).

Yet, it is a common perception that relatively few young men from Sauraha do go abroad. In his research on tourism in Sauraha, Ramesh Raj Kunwar (2002) found that, after graduation, “most [local] students leave their studies and try to get employment in tourism business [...] as it is an easy way of earning for them” (98). It also seems true

that the majority of those who travel cross-boarder skip over the Indian or Malaysian destinations visited by the older generation (the cheapest and least rewarding of international labour migration), and instead opt for the middle road option of the Middle East (the middle option, above India and Malaysia, but below Western Europe and North America) (NL). They are able to do so because of tourism earnings. Qatar and Saudi Arabia are the most commonly cited destinations, and it is always stressed that labour migrants return from these destinations, buy homes, and live more easily than others.

Significantly, however, I never spoke with anyone who had actually gone to the Middle East, and no one told me of a close friend or relative who had done so. This is not to doubt that people do practice such labour migration, only to suggest that, given the prominence of the practice in other areas of Nepal, it cannot be as significant to Sauraha as to many other locations.

There are other reasons to conclude this as well. For instance, one man approximated there to be 800 working men in Sauraha, and he listed how many worked in each of the resorts (RB). Another predicted that there are nearly 200 safari guides in Sauraha alone (JM). As noted by Kunwar (2002), while these jobs may not pay as well as those in other countries, such steady employment numbers in a town of Sauraha's size must be working against the trend of international labour migration, not only in Sauraha, but in the greater Chitwan District (103).

##### **5) *Tourist Presence in Sauraha***

The most commented on feature of Sauraha's tourism during interviews was that it has been struggling since the Maoist conflict reached crisis level, and despite a considerably better year in 2007, the industry has yet to fully recover. This has been

particularly true of international travelers who have become increasingly concentrated in the mountains, a fact with particular significance because it is the international tourists who spend the most time and money in Sauraha when they do visit.

Instead, assisted by the presence of good roads between the town and Nepal's major centres, Sauraha is characterized by a steady and heavy flow of domestic visitors, most of whom come for the day, some of whom may spend one night, but very few of whom stay any longer than that. Indeed, every day during my stay in Sauraha there were bus loads of Nepali students and small families in buses, cars, and on motorbikes. Nearly all of these were spending the day by the river or at the picnic area near the Elephant Breeding Centre. These visitors are unlikely to buy many goods or pay for many services, and thus are not the type most desired by local businesses.

As mentioned previously, but baring mention again, this access to the domestic tourism market makes Sauraha flexible to seasonal weather variations in a way that international-dependent destinations are not because of their need for pre-arrangement.

Nonetheless, even with this access to the domestic market, it is clear that the big money in Sauraha tourism remains with the foreign visitors. Resorts, restaurants and shops understandably cater to foreign tastes (again, the usual shop fare of American packaged foods and souvenirs), and business people complain about the shortage of foreign visitors even as they complain about the presence of screaming teenagers entering the town on the roofs of buses.

Foreign tourism in Sauraha is characterized by a resort and safari mentality. This involves an emphasis on the hotel, where visitors spend a great deal of their time and consume much of what they will in the town, as well as pre-arranged tour packages like

elephant rides, elephant bathing, jungle walks, cultural dance programs, and canoe rides. There are very few foreign tourists walking the streets of Sauraha without agenda in relation to those sitting on elephants or riding down the river in a Tharu canoe. The effect of this is an emphasis on inclusiveness within the industry, the capacity of a resort to provide anything and everything a visitor desires.

There is a commercialization of space because of the demand for resorts, though this is countered by the wide availability of land relative to the demand everywhere excepting the downtown strip. There is also the commercialization of mobility for safari guides, though most jungle walks are only for the day, and very few run more than a few days. Jungle safaris are certainly not competing with mountain trekking in respect to commercialization of mobility.

### ***Core-Periphery Analysis for Sauraha***

Without Khumjung's geographical, political, and cultural barriers to immigration, Sauraha has been considerably more open to, and affected by, the incoming movement of people. Of particular significance is the immigration of the capitalist class, which has dominated Sauraha's tourist economy. Outside ownership of tourist properties is a classic example of core extraction of peripheral resources for the benefit of the core.

This is directly related to the outward movement of locals and the spatial increase in Sauraha's size. It has been decisively immigrant populations, especially from Kathmandu and Pokhara, who have defined the characteristics of the Sauraha town-site, building, managing, and renting out resorts, restaurants, and shop buildings. Local populations did not decide these changes and their outward movement was a reaction to externally-constructed circumstances. Both of these strongly reflect on a national scale

where control lies, and it is decidedly in the urban centres of the hills to where much of the income returns and where many of the definitive decisions regarding the industry – and thus many of the defining characteristics of the location – are made.

Conversely, tourism has turned Sauraha into a regional core. The phenomenon of seasonal workers coming to Sauraha from nearby villages to work in the tourism industry is perhaps most indicative of this. It reflects a demand for labour that cannot be met by the local population, a demand which is met by offering higher wages than other potential work options. That many from Chitwan District continue to seek work abroad is indicative of its position in the international periphery, but its ability to reduce that migration or to improve the status of its practitioners in a way that other locations have been unable represents a move towards the middle.

Taken together, Sauraha's experience with tourism and migration has been one of polarization. The town's position in the national periphery has been strongly reinforced through the emergence of a resource (tourism) worth the attention of a distant capital class, but the resultant creation of labour and status-improvement opportunities has established Sauraha as a regional core.

## **Conclusions**

### ***For Khumjung and Sauraha***

While tourism has altered migration in both Khumjung and Sauraha in dramatic and important ways, its expressions have altered significantly because of its interactions with local circumstances, including land availability, climate and geography, land-use restrictions, access, and ethno-cultural make-up. The accumulative effect in Khumjung has been one of neutralization along the core-periphery spectrum, with conflicting

tendencies in most of the categories of change. In Sauraha tourism and migration have established and emphasized the town's status as a regional core and a national and international periphery.

### ***For a Theory of Tourism and Migration***

In broader terms, there is one commonality which can be pulled from the data in order to be generally theorized, and that is the way the presence of tourists has immigration-like effects. This requires a longer discussion.

There is an assumption that tourism is defined largely by its temporariness, but this is true only on an individual level. It is true that tourists come and go quickly, spending little time in any single location and participating little in the life of the community therein. In Khumbu, for instance, the average trekker's stay in the region may be close to two weeks, but in Khumjung itself it is rare for a visitor to stay more than one night, if any. This is even more pronounced in Sauraha, where tourists are often domestic day-trippers and school groups, with a majority of visitors not spending a single night. With this knowledge it is easy to view tourism definitively in terms of its temporariness and, indeed, this temporariness has important cultural, economic, and environmental implications which have been, and ought to be, thoroughly investigated. However, it is important also to recognize that while the individual stays only a short time, the tourist class is constantly regenerating itself in a single location, creating in certain ways the impression of a permanent immigrant class, though one with unique interactions with local land and community that set tourism apart as a migrational form.

Tourism requires a location to supply goods according to a non-existent population demographic – one of the temporary presence of a locally defined upper class.

Upper class within the context because tourists are almost always wealthier than locals and, even when this is not the case, they create the economic impression of such by assuming a purely consumptive role – one with the upper class flavour of the heavy consumption of services (eg. food preparation, guiding, lodging) and disposable consumer goods (eg. batteries, snack foods, souvenirs) rather than livelihood consumption of such things as raw foods and productive land.

The fact that people individually come and go means they individually contribute little to local life, but the constant (albeit seasonal) turnover serves to provide the location with a permanent (if socio-culturally removed) upper class in the absence of permanent individuals. In this way, tourism constructs or embellishes an economy of service provision, leisure production, and the requisite increases in available goods. This increase in demand for locally available goods increases pressures on local production capacities while simultaneously drawing both land and labour away from production and towards service provision. Combined with common tourist demand (or, more importantly, the local *perception* of common tourist demand) for familiar products (the omnipresent Coke and Snickers), the common result is a great increase in imported goods relative to local production.

This shift is especially pronounced in rural areas where even a small number of tourists can have a large and widespread economic impact, and where export is the rural location's more traditional function within a core-periphery model. In this way, it may be said that tourism, by functioning as the permanent immigration of a uniquely consumptive upper class, urbanizes the rural space by shifting (transforming) land, labour

and trade relations into an urban frame, therefore serving to make core what was previously periphery.

This capacity can, of course, be overstated, and it should be emphasized here that tourism also acts counteractive to this trend in ways that a true permanent immigrant upper class would not, and in thus maintains certain of the receiving location's peripheral characteristics. The most significant is that tourists, while increasing productive pressures on land, have relatively little impact on the demand *for* land. Whereas permanent upper class immigration is marked by that class' demand for homes and business properties, tourists themselves do not make land unavailable to local people through purchase. While tourism's presence can certainly encourage the type of permanent upper class immigration that would do so, the practice thereof is circumstantial, as has been described in the case studies above, and thus cannot be universally theorized.

Therefore, as far as a tourism-migration dynamic *can* be theorized, it may be said that, with the presence of tourists as an immigrant group taken as the controlled variable, certain changes in the receiving area are ensured because of their increased demand for goods and especially services, *without* the corresponding direct increases in pressure on land availability created by other immigrants. This is true in all receiving areas. The differences in the tourism-migration dynamic and its impacts result from that phenomenon interacting with local circumstances which encourage or inhibit immigration from outside, from which local emigration patterns largely emerge. This much can safely be theorized, which leaves us to investigate these local circumstances, as has been done here, in order to understand this tourism-migration interaction and how it can play itself out in different locations. From a fuller understanding of the interactions

between tourism and tourism-receiving locations may be developed more holistic, and hopefully therefore more effective, tourism strategies for “peripheral” areas.

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