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A Way of Reflecting on Identity:

The Five Stories of the Conflicting Relationships in Nepal

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Abstract

Conflict studies show that the components of identity are interrelated to sources and dynamics of conflict in intricate ways. This study self-reflectively explores a way of reflecting on identity from the links between conflict and identity through a qualitative study of the five stories of the conflicting relationships in Nepal. By analyzing the stories collected through in-depth interviews with Nepali peace workers, an element of power in group differences was noted. This illustrated the challenge of having the voices of those being marginalized heard amongst conflicting issues around them. Those that were interviewed also struggled with the challenge of having access to spaces to address conflicting issues. On the contrary, the analysis of the stories also indicated an element of power in courage and solidarity through the voices and mobility towards change. The study links the elements of power to the voices and mobility of people as a way of reflecting on identity.

Introduction

An Experience of Conflict and Identity in Sri Lanka

While I was interning at Sarvodaya, a local development organization in Sri Lanka, I closely studied communities where there was a violent incident between Muslims and Buddhists in the Dharga town, Aluthgama in 2014. According to BBC News (2014), there was a small clash between Muslim youths and a Buddhist monk's driver. After that, an anti-Muslim protest was inflamed by a Buddhist group, the BoduBalaSena (BBS) and the protest grew intensely. As a result, more than 78 people were seriously injured, and local properties and shops were looted and destroyed.

I visited the Dharga town in September 2016 to see the damaged properties and listened to those affected by the violent incident. I met with Muslims who shared stories of how religious differences between Islam and Buddhism were systematically used to justify the act of violence against them. They told me the fear they experienced when violence erupted in their neighborhoods and experience of physical and psychological pains after the incident. Some of them were continuing to experience economic hardships due to the loss of their resources from the incident.

The civil-war in Sri Lanka ended in 2009, when the Rajapaksa government's army defeated the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and killed its leader Velupillai Prabhakaran who aimed to create a separate state of the Tamil Eelam (homeland) in the North

and the East of the country. The United Nations estimated that the war killed between 80,000 and 100,000 people from 1983 to 2009 (Rawat, 2012). After the war, the Rajapaksa government was tasked with rebuilding the country. However, episodes of violence continued to take place between Muslims and Buddhists.

In one case, Buddhists protested Muslim traders who were allegedly selling T-shirts and pants carrying the image of the Buddha. The protest grew into a national campaign to boycott Muslim trading places and avoid selling land/property to Muslims (Rameez, 2014, p.168). In another case, the BBS inflamed fears of Sinhala-Buddhists by accusing the growing international Islamic presence in Sri Lanka as well as condemning the growing number of Muslims which was threatening the majority of Sinhalese in the country (Zuhair, 2016, p.21).

In Sri Lanka, there are four major religions, Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, and Islam and three major languages, English, Sinhalese, and Tamils (BBC News, 2015). While I was there, local people used Buddhists and Sinhala-Buddhists interchangeably, the former could be considered a religious identity and the latter could be considered an ethno-religious identity. Local people used Muslims which could be considered a religious identity. This is an important distinction between Muslims and Buddhists to explore the conflicting relationship between them in Sri Lanka.

Historically, the relationship between Sinhala-Buddhists and Muslims changed when the Portuguese, Dutch, and British colonized some parts or the entire area of the island, today

known as Sri Lanka. The Portuguese military defeated the Tamil kingdom in Jaffna and it controlled all the coastal lines of the island (Perera, 2001, p.7). After that, the Portuguese systematic coordination of violence against Muslims began. They destroyed all the mosques in Portuguese domains in the 1590s and they expelled all Muslims from the area of Colombo and its environs in 1626 because of economic and religious tensions between Portuguese and Muslims on the island (Zulkiple & Jazeel, 2013, p.183).

Muslims consequently moved into the inland areas such as Kandy where they became more integrated into Sinhala-Buddhist communities for their economic and other mutual benefits (Ali, 2014, p.7). The Kandyan kingdom, which lasted between 1512 and 1815, had a feudal system that diversified occupations of Muslims whose jobs had traditionally been related to merchandise. The kingdom also allowed Muslims to construct inconspicuous mosques for practicing Islam. Their mutually beneficial economic and strategic relationship helped their religious co-existence until Britain defeated the Kandyan kingdom and conquered the island, bringing the majoritarian status of Sinhala-Buddhists to an end and changing the relationship between Sinhala-Buddhists and Muslims by enforcing new social systems.

Muslims had notable economic activities in the British colonial era. Britain's loose religious restriction and open economic policy created momentum for them while Sinhala-Buddhists suffered from the British colonial administration (Ali, 2014). During this colonial time, a conflicting economic element in the Sinhala-Buddhist and Muslim relationship became

salient and a catalytic scenario of violence took place when a traditional Buddhist procession was prevented from passing a mosque in Gampola in 1915 (Ali, 2014, p.10). The tension soon escalated and Sinhala-Buddhists initiated the anti-Muslim riots of that year, resulting in violent attacks, and the loss of life and property of the Muslim community.

This macro perspective of the conflict may sound distant however, when I interacted with local Muslims and Buddhists in Althugama and Beruwala in 2016, a number of Muslims spoke about the economic vibrancy of their communities in Sri Lanka. One Muslim woman from Aluthgama described that Muslims in Sri Lanka are a "business community". Although there could be numerous elements underlying the conflicting relationship between Muslims and Buddhists in Sri Lanka, the historical violent incident between these two religious groups in 1915 and the recent incident in 2014 could indicate an observable pattern in the act of violence of Sinhala-Buddhists against economic resources of Muslims in the country.

During my initial time in Sri Lanka, I felt that religion was a likely salient element of identity in the conflicting relationship between Muslims and Sinhala-Buddhists at the beginning. The more I listened to the local people's views on the conflict, however, the more I realized that there could be other human elements such as the unmet economic need of the Sinhala-Buddhists affecting their religious differences in the conflicting relationship. From my learning experience of this conflicting relationship, religion could be a salient element of

identity in a conflicting relationship while it is interrelated to other human elements such as an

unmet economic need.

The Theme of Study

After I returned to my home in Japan, I spent time reading the literature on conflict and

identity. The literature suggested that elements of conflict such as exploitive power imbalances

relate and impact components of identity (Woodhouse & Lederach, 2016). The literature also

suggested that components of identity such as transgenerational traumas relate and impact

elements of conflict (Volkan, 2004). It broadened my understanding of the links between

conflict and identity.

In September and October of 2017, I collected five stories from local peace workers in

Nepal that highlight the conflicting relationships of the community. While I was listening to

their stories on my recording device, I became interested in exploring a way of reflecting on

identity from the links between conflict and identity. I decided to conduct a qualitative study

of the five stories using the themes that emerged to explore the links and reflect on the topic at

hand. This became the theme of the study.

Please note that this study does not suggest any identities of the people in the five stories

of the conflicting relationships in Nepal. These stories were only cases of conflict which I

analyzed and identified themes to self-reflectively explore the links between conflict and identity to find a way of reflecting on identity.

The Outline of Study

This paper is constructed to address the theme of the study based on four major sections. First, a conceptual framework regarding the links between conflict and identity is presented to situate the study within it. Second, the choice of inquiry methodology, the setting of inquiry processes, and limitations of inquiry in the process of collecting and analyzing the data are explained. Third, the analysis of the data coming from the five stories is presented. Fourth, findings that emerged from the analysis of the data are used to address the theme of the study.

Key Terms of Study

It is important to clarify key terms used in this study. The first term is identity. Identity in this study refers to an abiding sense of the self and its relationship to the world (Northrup, 1989, p.55). Identity in this study also refers to a person's subjective experience of self and an inner solidarity with one's group (Volkan, 2004, p.32).

Second, a conflicting relationship in this study refers to a relationship between people having elements of incompatibility such as incompatible aspirations. This idea developed from how Curle defined conflict as incompatibility (as cited in Woodhouse & Lederach, 2016, p.44).

Lastly, violence in this study refers to the act of physical or psychological violence. When a person or group's body is hurt by another person or group's actions, it is considered physical violence. When a person or group's soul is hurt by another person or group's actions, it is considered psychological violence (Galtung, 1969, p.169). Please note that my understanding of these terms does not represent other people's use of these terms in this study.

A Conceptual Framework of Study

This section presents a conceptual framework regarding the links between conflict and identity. The study was situated within the conceptual framework to address the theme of the study.

Literature on Conflict and Identity

Various elements exist that link conflict and identity. First, Curle defined conflict as having elements of exploitive power imbalance in economics, politics, or military, affecting identity of parties (as cited in Woodhouse & Lederach, 2016). It is important to note that power imbalances between people do not necessary cause conflict however, when power imbalances create a situation in which individuals or groups dominate and exploit others, it can cause conflict. In Curle's account, conflict can involve an exploitative power imbalance by which powerful parties make decisions and withhold resources from weaker parties. Although the latter groups might have a power to address this kind of relationship in conflict, their power can be potential rather than actual. Curle noted that this kind of relationship in conflict stunts the development of normal maturity, and erodes the individual's sense of identity and self-respect (as cited in Woodhouse & Lederach, 2016). As a result, physical violence could outbreak in an attempt to change this kind of relationship in conflict.

Second, transgenerational traumas embedded in group identity-development can

impact a relationship between people in conflict. According to Volkan (2004), injured self-images of an identity group created by violence of their adversaries can transmit into the next generation's identity development in varying levels of intensity (pp.48-49). This could happen when those traumatized people assign their unfinished tasks of mourning the losses associated with the trauma to their identity group to reverse the sense of humiliation, helplessness, or aggression. As a result, the collective mental representation of the traumatic event is created and it can sustain their large group identity against their adversaries in conflict (Volkan, 2004).

Third, the escalation of violent interactions could create fears of people with each other in conflict. Mitchell (1981) notes that when conflicting parties have suffered because of the behavior of the opposing party, one of their goals can be to retaliate the opposing party (pp.53-54). This kind of goal can be different from their initial conflicting goals. In this process, conflicting parties might externalize their own fears, suspicions, and hostility onto the opposing parties who become greedy, ambitious, and implacably hostile in their perceptions. This is done to reassure oneself of fundamental safety and superiority.

Fourth, conflict can have varying elements of insecurity related to identity for those being affected by external violence. J. Lederach & A. Lederach, (2010) talk about the significance of internal insecurity for people living in contexts of deep-rooted conflict from feeling lost to attempting to relocate a sense of place and purpose (p.13). The authors used the phrase, 'internal displacement' to suggest a challenge of those living in such contexts of

insecurity to feel and relocate a sense of self, belonging, and connection. Furthermore, the phrase of internal displacement also illuminates a challenge of those violent conflict-affected populations to attach meaning and purpose to their lives and identities (J. Lederach & A. Lederach, 2010, p. 60).

Lastly, conflict can have elements of mourning tasks for those whose identities are affected by violence. Volkan (2006) tells his account of studying mourning processes of displaced populations by violence. In Volkan's study, there is an ethnic Georgian family who was displaced from their home by the violent ethnic conflict between Georgians and Abkhazians. The family's attachment to their original home illustrates its members' hopes, a sense of belonging, and identity. In this story, the losses of their home, dog, and the plan for returning to their original home by the prolonged violent conflict indicate serious impacts of these losses on the family. The family was supported to mourn these loses over a decade.

These insights into the links between conflict and identity derived from the literature will be utilized conceptually to address the theme of the study through findings that emerged from the analysis of the data in the discussion section.

Inquiry Design

This section presents the choice of inquiry methodology, the setting of inquiry processes, and limitations of inquiry to illustrate the process of collecting and analyzing the data.

Choice of Inquiry Methodology

The inquiry methodology was inductive and interpretive to collect and analyze the data to address the theme of the study. According to Hesse-Biber (2017), inductive techniques allow guiding research questions to be open-ended and multiple findings to emerge (p.12). The inductive nature of the study was important to formulate open-ended research questions and interview questions to draw findings from the information of participants. According to Hesse-Biber (2017), interpretive approaches value experience and perspective as important sources of knowledge to understand social reality from the perspective of those within it (p.23). The interpretive nature of the study values meaning-making of participants as important sources of knowledge to address the theme of the study. With these considerations in mind, an in-depth interview method was used.

Setting of Inquiry Process

In-depth interviews with five Nepali peace workers were conducted in and around Kathmandu, the capital city of Nepal. I chose these areas because, I had the great possibility of

finding potential participants within the limited amount of time for the study. Participants came from different locations in the country and worked in and around Kathmandu. The selection of participants was based on a 'convenience sample' including individuals who were available, who had some specialized knowledge of the setting, and who were willing to serve in that role (Hesse-Biber, 2017. p.56). Interviews required participants, who knew issues of conflict in Nepal, spoke English, and were available and willing to participate in the study voluntarily. Their general profiles were illustrated to explain the convenience sample:

Interviewee A: he was considered suitable as he had been a UN peace-keeper and was working as a peacebuilding practitioner. He had a great command of the English language.

Interviewee B: she was considered suitable as she was a researcher in a local peacebuilding non-profit making organization. She had a great command of the English language.

Interviewee C: he was considered suitable as he was working in the field of women rights, peace, and governance. He had a great command of the English language.

Interviewee D: he was considered suitable as he had worked in an international peacebuilding organization for several years. He had a great command of the English language.

Interviewee E: she was considered suitable as she worked in fighting for rights for internally displaced persons (IDPs), local indigenous people, and women dealing with domestic violence. She had a great command of the English language.

Interview questions below were asked to collect information from participants for the study. Please note that these questions were often modified to communicate with participants in an easy and accessible manner:

• What is your understanding of conflict?

• Do you know any conflict in your community?

• Do you know how has the conflict mobilized your community members that are involved?

• Do you have your own narrative to describe the conflict of your community?

• Do you think that your own narrative of the conflict reflects on relationships of your community members? If so, in what ways?

• Do you know if your community members from different social backgrounds meet and interact? If so, do you know where they meet and how they interact with each other?

• Do you have your own narrative to describe their gatherings and interactions?

• Do you know if your community members from different social backgrounds participate in communal activities together within your community?

• What are those activities? Do you think that those activities play a role in their relationship-building? In what ways? Do you have your own narrative to describe their times together in those activities?

Limitations of Inquiry

First, interviews needed to account for the safety of participants as it asked them sensitive topics that had the potential of surfacing their painful memories. The interview guide was sent to them prior to interviews to check if some questions needed to be omitted for their well-being. They were asked to only answer questions that they would be comfortable with. They were also asked not to provide their personal and community members' identifiable information and painful factors to protect their safety. Furthermore, the voluntary nature of their participation and their right to withdraw from the study were emphasized during and after interviews. These considerations were implemented to create a safe environment for participants. However, it could have made them feel safer if the researcher and participants had known each other well. The researcher met with most of participants a first time.

Second, I was foreign to the research site, Nepal, although I had previously visited there for three months. I could not speak any local languages and knew little about local cultures. I might not have noticed significant verbal and non-verbal messages of participants for the study.

Third, the study incorporated different subjective views of participants on issues of conflict in Nepal for the study. Findings that emerged from these views of participants on issues may not reflect perspectives of other Nepali people on same issues as the number of interviews was very small.

Fourth, the analysis of the data was conducted inductively for the study. The

information of participants was transcribed and edited by listening to the recorded information

iteratively from which identified themes or concepts emerged. Despite these considerations, it

is important to acknowledge that my subjective biases might have intervened the analysis of

the data.

Lastly, participants were only asked to describe their community members' conflicting

relationships. They were not asked to describe their individual identities nor the identities of

their community members. This is because interview questions were only designed to collect

the information of participants regarding conflict. Thus, this study was only an author's thought

experiment to explore the links between conflict and identity to find a way of reflecting on

identity through findings that emerged from the analysis of the data.

Nepal: A Glossary of Key Terms

This section presents a glossary of key terms adapted from Post-War Development and Peacebuilding: A Study Guide (Arai, 2016). This section is useful to understand specific terms that appear in the following presentation and analysis of the data.

Ethnic and Religious Groups: estimates of the number of ethnic groups in Nepal range from 67 to over 100.

Hindus: the Hindus are dominant, making up well over 50% of the population. They are divided into four major caste groups: Brahmin or Bahun (priests), Kshastriya or Chetri (ruler/warrior), Vaishya (merchants), and Sudras (manual laborers and peasants) including Dalits (untouchables). Non-Hindus are seen as casteless or untouchable.

Brahmin: the highest caste in Nepal Hinduism, the priestly caste which is one of the two dominant castes.

Chetri: the ruling and warrior Hindu caste of Nepal. The second dominant caste of Nepal, technically lower than Brahmin but in some cases functioning as higher than Brahmin.

Dalits: people of the untouchable castes in Hinduism. There are sub-castes with varying levels of status within the Dalit groups.

Magar: one of fifty-nine officially listed indigenous groups in Nepal. Those indigenous people are known as the Janajaatis.

Nepali Christians: a legal ban on conversion efforts has historically kept numbers of

Nepali Christians low, but the proportion of Christians has increased in recent years as contact with Christian individuals and organizations increases.

1996-2006 Maoist/Government War: an estimated 13,300 Nepalis were killed in the 1996-2006 'People's War' with 930 "disappeared". 100,000 to 200,000 people were displaced at the peak of the war in 2006.

Presentation of Data

This section presents the data collected from interviews with five Nepali peace workers, illustrating their community members' conflicting relationships. The data is presented in the form of a story transcribed and edited. Many pieces of information from participants were included in the following stories however, because of the limited space of the paper, information from participants was selected. This section is useful to understand the following analysis of the data derived from the stories. Please note that the content of each story is based on the narrator's information and the accuracy of the content is not probed in this study as the inquiry methodology had an interpretive component.

Story No.1

This story is about the potential conflicting relationship between local Christians and Hindus over different beliefs.

The narrator said that there were a few Christians, three or four, when he was young. They had been Hindus, but changed their religion and became Christians. After that, they also motivated other local people to be Christians. After some local Hindus became Christians, the rest of the community members, Hindus started separating and keeping local Christians from participating in social activities in their community.

One day, a local Christian died in the community. Despite his death, his body was left there by local Hindus. For that, Christians living in other areas had to come to cremate the body and perform rituals. The narrator explained that Christians were not allowed to enter the houses of Hindus and they did not eat the food when Christians touched it. Later he explained that local Christians in his community were treated like the lowest caste, untouchables. The narrator said that beliefs mobilized his community members' behaviors and attitudes.

When I asked the narrator how his Christian and Hindu community members address the issue of separation and discrimination that arise from their religious difference, he said:

> "I do not think there is discrimination, there is misunderstanding between the people because, my community is still not ready to accept Christianity. A few people who changed their beliefs. They are not only minority, but helpless."

"My community is a very compact community that is homogeneous community first

and it is not a new community, so any ideology and change is very difficult in a

homogeneous and very old community."

The narrator talked about the quality of his community, the character of homogeneity

and tradition. According to him, his community members were connected by their ancestors,

marriage relationships, and nature. Many of their names were after surroundings of nature. He

mentioned that there was no big conflict in his community and if it emerged, it was settled

because these connections.

Additionally, the narrator said that when disputes emerged between his community

members, the local village chiefs, elected members of the local community or social workers

talked with them separately and brought them in the open space where they expressed their

intense emotions such as anger and sadness, and then they resolved the problem. Then, I asked

him how the conflict over Christian and Hindu beliefs was addressed in his community. He

said that there was no visible conflict between Christians and Hindus in his community because,

there was a very small number of Christians around three or four households in his community

and they were not competent to trigger and address the conflict with local Hindus. Thus,

according to his knowledge, the conflict over Christian and Hindu beliefs was not addressed

by the local village chiefs or other local mediators.

This story was about the potential conflicting relationship between local Hindus and

Christians over different beliefs. The narrator said that the conflicting relationship did not escalate as the number of Christians was too small and they were helpless. Although there was the potential issue of social separation between Christians and Hindus, the narrator said that it was not about the practice of discrimination, but misunderstanding because Christianity was a new belief to local Hindus in his community and it was difficult for Hindus to accept Christianity as their community was homogeneous and very old.

Story No.2

This story is about the conflicting relationship between women and men over safe public space.

> "As a woman, I think I would say that there is no direct physical violent conflict, but between men and women, the way we use the public space, there is hierarchy between men and women. When you walk in Kathmandu, you see that conflict. Men try to dominate the space and women try to integrate into the space."

> "If I am walking in the street as a woman, like men stare at you. For me, that is two groups not being able express the feelings in the same ways. That is the daily conflict that I face."

The narrator pointed out an element of social class in the issue of sexual harassment in her community:

> "You have to remember that I do come from a certain social class. My friends I know would never do these things. It is men are not aware or not taught that you cannot touch women or you cannot stare at them. Within my community, I am in a very close circle of friends, they understand me."

The narrator explained the challenge of women feeling safety with men in the public space of her community because of the unresolved issue of sexual harassment:

> "Now for us, you are so vigilant while walking, when you see men, you do not want

to be anywhere close to men."

The narrator expressed her emotions and actions on the issue of sexual harassment in public:

"For me, my attitude changes whenever there are two men walking around me. I am very protective. I am always angry when I walk in the streets in certain parts. When I try to speak with them, they get angry with me. Because, they do not expect me shouting at them. Most of the women face this issue, but I am not sure if all of them resolve the issue by actually scowling men or calling the police. It takes the courage to do that."

The narrator also noted actions taken to address the issue of sexual harassment in her community:

"The women are serious about what happens to them. It is more of the awareness that letting the police know this is something a really big issue that they do have to address. We have done so many rallies and campaigns against these things in front of the police and the parliament."

"You have got some newspapers who are actually along with the Nepali police. They are actually undercover, trying to find men harassing women. Awareness is there. Now men know that I can take the man to the police. There are now ways to actually resolve this issue through the system."

The narrator talked about the changes in the issue of sexual harassment between men and women in the public space of her community:

"Men do not dare to sit in the seats, reservation seats. Men try to respect women more. They know that ok, this is a real issue for women. We cannot just ignore the issue. Women said ok, this is my seat. They were empowered in that sense. They tell men, who are sitting in the seats. Men actually actively try to respect women by saying so. I think that is constructive."

This story was about the conflicting relationship between women and men over safe public space. The conflict was not openly violent, but the domination of men and the integration of women in the public space was noted, a sense of hierarchical gender difference. There was the challenge of women not being able to express their feelings when they experienced the men's act of sexual harassment. The narrator said that it takes courage for women to scowl at the men or call the police to address the act. The issue created different understandings of the safety between men and women in public.

A factor underpinning the issue of sexual harassment was a social class, affecting some men being unaware of the issue of sexual harassment against women. Rallies and campaigns played an important role in letting the public such as the police become aware of the serious issue of sexual harassment. The narrator said that there were now more men trying to respect women in the public bus and women were empowered when they spoke to men and ensured

the reserved seats for them in the public bus. This was constructive between men and women

in public.

Story No.3

This story is about the conflicting relationship between Dalits, Magars, and Brahmins over power.

The narrator said that Brahmins were more economically sustained whereas Dalits and Magars were very poor. He mentioned that Dalits and Magars built up the concept that Brahmins were exploiting them from the ancient time through the caste system. They were hired in the labor work for Brahmins. On the contrary, Brahmins thought that the classification of castes continued from the ancient time. According the narrator, the Maoist rebel groups rewarded Dalits and Magars to fight to address this issue of exploitation.

The narrator described that during the war, youth, elders, and even children were mobilized to fight. According to him, almost 60% of people from his community joined the Maoist rebels and 53 people were killed in the war between the Maoists and the state army. In his community, youth members joined the Maoist forces because, it was partly the issue of youth unemployment in his view. When the war was intense, combatants were carrying guns and killing others. In his community, Dalits, Magars, and Brahmins engaged in underground fighting in the evening, kidnapping, torturing, and killing.

In this intense period of time, wives of those Maoist combatants had fears that their husbands would be killed by the state army one day. The narrator described an important role of family members in disarming their husbands, combatants:

"The family turns to be another weapon, not a type of machine gun. Weapon means they listen to their family members. They are fighting for their families, otherwise for what, for whom?"

The narrator described that women were organized to talk with their husbands or to provide that third parties have access to contact their husbands and convince them to stop fighting. These women were at risk of their lives being pressured, tortured or killed by the state army in search of the Maoist combatants, their husbands. The interviewee firmly stated the importance of privacy and neutrality to continue the work. Despite these efforts, he said that because of the Maoist party's decision, their husbands, combatants could not give up the weapons.

The narrator emphasized the importance of the psychology of those being involved in the conflict:

"Every man is emotional, some negative and some positive parts, both are there in each person. You have to just stimulate positive aspects of your body."

"You have to engage community people, those people who have been involved in the conflict, otherwise nothing will work. You can convince them separately or jointly."

After the end of the war, wives of the Maoist combatants continued to play an important role in his community. Those combatants, husbands, who survived the war, came back and joined their families in community development activities. The narrator mentioned that the

government, civil society organizations, and community members supported each other to rebuild his community.

This story was about the conflicting relationship between Dalits, Magars, and Brahmins over power. Their conflicting relationship was built into caste differences by which Dalits and Magars made the concept of exploitation against Brahmins while Brahmins perceived their caste relationship continued from the ancient time. The conflict escalated into the violent confrontations for which youth, elders, and even children joined the Maoist groups to fight to address the issue of exploitation. The narrator said that youth members joined the Maoist groups because of the issue of unemployment. While the fight was unfolding between the Maoist groups and the state army, wives of the Maoist groups had fears of losing their husbands. They played an important role in communicating with their husbands to give up weapons or providing third parties to have access to work on the disarmament of their husbands. This work put their safety at risk as the state army was in search of the combatants thus, the privacy and neutrality of the work was critical. Those women also played a significant role of helping their husbands in community development activities after the war.

Story No.4

This story is about the conflicting relationship between Dalits and non-Dalits over dignity.

The narrator shared his own experience of caste-based discrimination by non-Dalits in his community:

"I was born in one of the caste groups, untouchables, Dalits. When I was born in that village, there was a lot of discrimination. My mother and grandmother used to go and take water from the tap. Then, there was a lot of conflict between the upper caste and lower caste. Our voice is not heard, our voice is very low. Everyone knows there is a problem, but no one talking about it."

"Twenty years back, caste discrimination is so high. People cannot go in the tap, the school, and the restaurant. Even myself, I could not enter my best friend's house. You cannot imagine that. Four years back, I enter into my friend house. It took 32 years. My friend maybe more than thousand times, he came to my house. I never get a chance to enter into his house, even though our relationships were good, because we were not ready to revolve the problems or our voice is not heard anywhere."

The narrator emphasized that:

"Each human-beings wanna live a life with dignity, but the Dalits, they could not live their life with dignity. That is why, a relationship when people see it good, but a real

relationship is not good."

The narrator repeated his view on many Dalits joining the Maoist movement because of the issue of caste-based discrimination and the dignity-less life. According to him, Dalits perceived the movement as a good opportunity for change. When they had guns, they felt power. They came to the village to threat upper caste people to stop the practice of caste-based discrimination. The narrator said that higher caste people were not happy to accept the change but, they were forced to do it because, there was no government or police presence to prevent that threat during the civil-war. He mentioned that everyone was doubtful of each other during that time, nobody knew who to trust.

According to the narrator, after the Maoist movement, there were a lot of changes. Unheard voices of people were heard. They started talking and realizing their rights. Many Dalits secured their seats in the first Constituent Assembly after the civil-war. It was one of the historical Dalit movements and democracy movements for the participation of all caste groups in Nepal. He contemplated the Nepali history:

> "If there was not the Maoist War, this kind of problem maybe not coming out like this way. It is now vocal, everyone can talk about their rights, everyone claims I have rights, before that was no."

The narrator reflected on his own emotions with non-Dalits from the past and the present to the future:

"This is like, no one care about our emotion, our anger, frustration. They treat us bad than dogs. Dogs can go inside the houses, but we cannot go to their houses. I had a teacher. One day, it was like a heavy rain fall, but I could not go to his house. All my friends, they went to inside, but I could not. On that day, I decide not to go to his house anymore. No one listened my feelings, I had no any place to go and tell. Look, I had this kind of feeling."

"After the civil-war, people are moving here and there, the migration is high. People learn from different places. Now some of the people realized that what we are doing is not correct, even though they have deep-rooted, but they have some guilty in their mind or heart. From the Dalit perspective, it is a lot of changes, thing is moving. That gives me a lot of hope. I hope my next generation will not face all the problems what I faced, so I am working for that, that is my main motto."

This story was about the conflicting relationship between Dalits and non-Dalits over dignity. The issue of caste-based discrimination in the relationship created the situation in which Dalits could not enter the houses of non-Dalits and were not allowed to touch the tap and other facilities. These examples denied the dignity of Dalits in the conflicting relationship. The conflict escalated into violent interactions. During the Maoist War, Dalits and non-Dalits became doubtful of each other as Dalits used guns to threaten upper caste people who practiced caste-based discrimination. The narrator said that Dalits, who used the guns, felt power and

perceived the Maoist movement as an opportunity for change. After the war, there was significant change as the voices of Dalits were heard and they started claiming their rights with non-Dalits. Although the relationship between Dalits and non-Dalits was still not good, it was changing slowly and there was hope for betterment.

Story No.5

This story is about the conflicting relationship between local indigenous people and the Nepali government over the implementation of the hydro project.

According to the narrator, the hydro project started a long time ago and she was involved in supporting local people to ensure their rights in the implementation of the project from a year ago. The Nepali government informed them that the dam was going to be built in their community for the project. According to the narrator, the government only informed local people that they would receive compensation and benefit from the project by accessing new infrastructures and new business opportunities. In order to do so, however, they needed to leave their ancestral land on which they were living for a long time.

According to the narrator, the government needed to compensate local people and provide the same kind of house to their previous house in a new place when they were compelled to move by the project. Those affected community members would also have compensation for the loss of their land regardless of their land registration however, the government only informed those who registered their land about the compensation which was not enough for impacts of the loss of their land by the project. According to the narrator, the government did not inform local people about their rights ensured by the policy of the project accurately.

The narrator was concerned about impacts of the project on next generations of local

indigenous people. The interviewee reflected on her own experience of the impact of the voluntary migration of her family:

"I was not brought up in my community. I cannot speak my own language, my ethnic language. Till the collage time, I was not aware about my community, my ritual thing, my ethnicity, and my cultural things. Still I am in a learning process, but it affects me. I can say I am Magar, but I do not know in detail about Magar things."

The narrator illustrated the lives of local people that they were dependent on the jungle to collect herbs and fodders for cattle. They also had facilities for their seasonal jobs nearby. The narrator said that they would not earn properly without these resources. However, the area would be under water by the project and they had to abandon these resources with little compensation from the government.

The narrator shared the work that she did on raising awareness for local people's rights ensured by the policy of the project. She said that it was important because, local people had not previously been aware of their ensured rights in the implementation of the project. The information about the project had been published in the national newspaper, but it had not been written in their ethnic language and a limited number of them had had access to read the newspaper.

The project impacted local community members in different ways. The narrator said that some community members were optimistic about the project while others were depressed

about it. Some local people became even suspicious about outsiders who were coming to their local community. The narrator illuminated that local people were scared and tired as if they had lost their land or house and not received compensation from the government.

The narrator also said a unique aspect of their unified response to these challenges after they were informed about their rights ensured by the policy of the project. More than a hundred people came to the meeting to understand their rights in the implementation of the project. Men and women of all ages came together and talked. They also collected money, despite their economic hardships. Then they went from house to house and from village to village. They also went to the district office on the project, although the district officer first did not listen to them. Subsequently, they went to Kathmandu, the capital city and submitted a memorandum to the Energy Ministry. According to the narrator, their voices were listened to by the Energy Ministry. She said that to have the time and attention from the Energy Ministry was a big achievement for her community members. Furthermore, they submitted a paper to the hydro project office and an application to the national human rights commission.

This story was about the conflicting relationship between local indigenous people and the Nepali government over the implementation of the hydro project. The story illuminated that the government was taking benefits from the project while not fully informing the rights of local people ensured by the policy of the project. The narrator said that local people had to leave their ancestral land and abandon their livelihood by the project without ensuring their

right to have enough compensation from the government. The narrator also said that impacts of the project could be cultural losses as future generations of local indigenous people might not remember their customs. Affected local people unified to protect their rights by going to different locations together after they were informed about their ensured rights in the project. They went to the capital city and submitted a memorandum to the Energy Ministry, a paper to the hydro project office, and an application to the human rights commission. The narrator said they were not listened to by the district officer, but the voices of those local people were listened to by the Energy Ministry and it was a big achievement for them.

Analysis of Data

This section presents two identified themes or concepts in the analysis of the data. First, the concept of voice was identified from the challenge and opportunity of having the voices of people heard amongst conflicting issues around them in the stories. Second, the concept of mobility was identified from the challenge and opportunity of people having access to spaces needed to address conflicting issues in the stories.

Voice

From the stories of the conflicting relationships, the theme or concept of voice was noted. Story No.2 illustrates the challenge of women expressing their feelings affected by men's act of sexual harassment for their safety in public. Story No.4 illuminates the challenge of Dalits having their voices heard by non-Dalits for their dignity in the narrator's community. Story No.5 describes the challenge of local indigenous people having their voices listened to by the government for the protection of their rights in the implementation of the hydro project.

Underpinning the challenge of having a voice in the stories, an element of power in group differences was noted. Story No 2 illustrates that men tried to dominate the space and women tried to integrate into the space in their hierarchical gender differences. A gender group difference prompted women to be vigilant when they were walking close to men in public. Story No.4 illustrates that Dalits were restricted for what they were and were not allowed to do because of their caste difference from non-Dalits. A caste group difference silenced the voices of Dalits on the issue of caste-based discrimination in the narrator's community. Story No.5 illustrates that the government was benefitting from the hydro project while not fully informing local indigenous people's rights ensured by the policy of the project. A government-citizen group difference affected local people's livelihood and cultural connections while purposely withholding information that they deserved to know in the project.

An element of power in group differences was noted in the challenge of having a voice

in the stories. At the same time, another element of power was heard through the voices of those being marginalized towards change. Story No.2 illustrates the narrator's view on the courage required for women to scowl at men's act of sexual harassment or call the police to address the act when they experienced it in public. The narrator expressed her commitment to speak to address the issue of sexual harassment, when she experienced it in public. The narrator said that women were empowered when they were able to tell men and ensure the reserved seats for them on the public bus.

Mobility

From the stories of the conflicting relationships, the theme or concept of mobility was noted. Story No. 4 suggests the challenge of Dalits having access to the non-Dalit houses and other facilities because of their caste differences. The narrator said: "You cannot imagine that". This phrase implied that Dalits were unimaginatively offended by their experience of caste-based discrimination in the narrator's community. The narrator also said: "No one care about our emotion, our anger, frustration" and "No one listened my feelings, I had no any place to go and tell". These phrases implied that Dalits did not have access to spaces to share their experience of caste-based discrimination or be listened to by non-Dalits with care in the narrator's community.

Story No.1 suggests the potential challenge of local Christians having access to participate in social activities and other occasions with local Hindus because of their religious differences in the caste tradition in the narrator's community. The narrator explained that there was no case of dispute between local Christians and Hindus handled by the local mediators. Other cases of dispute between his community members were handled by the local mediators in the open space where disputants expressed their intense emotions (such as anger and sadness) to resolve the problem. The narrator said: "They (Christians) were not only minority, but helpless". This phrase implied that the small number of Christians did not have access to spaces to address the potential conflict with local Hindus in the narrator's community.

The challenge of having access to spaces was noted in the stories. At the same time, an element of power was seen through the mobility of those being marginalized towards change. Story No.2 illustrates an element of power in solidarity through the mobility of women rallying and campaigning to address the issue of sexual harassment for their safety. Women were dominated by men in the public space because of their hierarchical gender relationship. However, women used spaces in front of the police station and parliament to take actions towards change. These rallies and campaigns brought awareness to the public of this burning issue and also brought media investigation on the topic.

Story No.3 illustrates an element of power in solidarity through the mobility of Dalits and Magars joining the Maoist groups to address the issue of exploitation for their families. Joining the Maoist groups enabled them to take actions towards change, despite the violent actions between the Maoist groups and the state army that caused a great number of deaths, namely 53 people in the narrator's community.

Story No.4 suggests an element of power in solidarity through the mobility of Dalits joining the Maoist movement to address the issue of caste-based discrimination for their dignity. Dalits perceived the Maoist movement as a good opportunity for change. Joining the Maoist movement enabled them to take actions towards change, although the use of weapons by Dalits resulted in Dalits and non-Dalits to be doubtful of each other during the Maoist War. The changes on the issue of caste-based discrimination after the Maoist War enabled the voices of

Dalits to be heard and they started claiming their rights with non-Dalits.

Story No.5 illustrates an element of power in solidarity through the mobility of local indigenous people uniting to protect their rights in the implementation of the hydro project. They came to the meeting with more than a hundred people, men and women of all ages to learn their rights ensured by the policy of the hydro project. They went to different villages, the district office, and eventually the capital city to ensure their rights in the project. Their voices were listened to by the Energy Ministry of Nepal which was a significant achievement for them.

From the five stories of the conflicting relationships, one of the notable factors was the different elements of power through the voices and mobility of people. The stories illustrated an element of power in group differences underpinning the challenge of having a voice and access to spaces. In these relationships, the issues were built into the parties' ability to speak and have access to spaces for their aspirations. The element of power in group differences was noted. At the same time, an element of power such as courage and solidarity was also heard and seen through the voices and mobility of people towards change in the stories.

Discussion

This section presents the concept of voice and mobility that emerged from the analysis of the data to explore the links between conflict and identity in order to find a way of reflecting on identity. Please note that the exploration of the links between conflict and identity is illustrative only. It does not suggest identity of the people in the five stories of the conflicting relationships in Nepal. It is only an author's thought experiment to address the theme of the study.

First, the concept of voice and mobility could be useful to unpack affected emotions of people that arise from their unheard voices and denied mobility in contexts of conflict. This is important because people experience conflicting issues and they might aspire to address such issues. Marginalized people, however, might not be free to speak their experience of conflicting issues or be listened to with care. They might even be denied access to spaces to address such issues. It is possible that the neglect of voices and the denial of mobility of those being marginalized from the conversations and spaces could damage their identities beyond imagination in contexts of conflict.

Second, the concept of voice and mobility could be useful to unpack elements of power in group differences in contexts of conflict. This is important because conflict could affect the safety, dignity, and rights of people and they might aspire to address these harms of conflict. When conflicting issues are built into the power of group differences, however meeting these

aspirations of marginalized people could be silenced and denied from the conversations and spaces. It is possible that elements of power in group differences could affect such people to be helpless, when they cannot address actual or potential conflict.

Third, the concept of voice and mobility could be useful to unpack elements of power through the voices and mobility of people towards change in contexts of conflict. This is important because people might have different elements of power to take actions for their aspirations. For instance, those who are impacted by violence might have an element of power in courage through their voices for their safety in contexts of conflict. Those who are denied access to spaces might have an element of power in solidarity through their mobility for their families and rights in contexts of conflict, although these actions could have the potential to be violent or nonviolent in the form of weapons or dialogues.

The concept of voice and mobility could be useful to find a way of reflecting on identity by linking different elements of power to the voices and mobility of people. An element of power in group differences might suggest the voices of dominant individuals and groups in the conversations. This kind of power might also visualize the mobility of dominant individuals and groups in spaces. An element of power in courage might describe the voices of the marginalized in the conversation. An element of power in solidarity might illustrate the mobility of the marginalized in spaces. Unpacking different elements of power heard and seen through the voices and mobility of people could be useful as a way of reflecting on identity.

Conclusion

This paper presents the links between conflict and identity as a conceptual framework to find a way of reflecting on identity through the five stories of the conflicting relationships in Nepal. The concept of voice and mobility that emerged from the stories illustrated the challenge and opportunity of the voices and mobility of those being affected by the conflicts to address issues for their aspirations. The concept of voice and mobility took account of elements of power such as group differences, courage, and solidarity in the conflicting relationships. This study linked the elements of power to the voices and mobility of people as a way of reflecting on identity. It is important to remember that the multidimensional identity of individuals in conflict deserves necessary attention and reflection.

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