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Who's in a labour camp? A socio-economic analysis of Nepalese migrants in Qatar.

Tristan Bruslé

Investigations into Nepalese international migration have mainly focused on the mechanisms of migration, remittances and the social aspects of migration in Nepal and in India. According to the Department of Foreign Employment, between 1.3 and 2.6 million Nepalese migrants work in the Gulf (khadi) countries whereas in 2008, 206,572 Nepalese migrant workers headed for this region out of a total of 266,666 people who ventured abroad (NIDS 2008). Although the Gulf countries have emerged as one of the major destinations (after India) since the year 2000, scientific studies about Nepalese migrants in the Middle East are non-existent. As Nepalese workers face a brand new reality compared to their familiar world in Nepal or in India, Gulf countries are no doubt a privileged arena for understanding new migration dynamics and new social phenomena back home. Anyone arriving in Qatar is struck by the large number of Nepalese men in the Doha streets and shops, all of which reflects the craving youngsters have to travel abroad, which is so palpable in Nepal. A rapid overview of the migrants' environment in Qatar raises the question of how migrants handle their lives abroad. The apparent diversity of migrants, compared to the official discourse which states that all migrants come from the same socio-economic background, needs to be evaluated. Yet acquiring detailed data about Nepalese migrants in the receiving regions is always difficult, whether because no official data exist as is the case in India or these exist but are not made public, as in the Gulf countries. As far as Nepal is concerned, no large-scale study of migrants has ever been undertaken. Therefore the only way of forming an idea of who is in Qatar is to go there in person and collect data directly where the migrants themselves live. With this in mind, I spent five weeks in Qatar, between 2006 and 2008. Fieldwork was done among Nepalese migrants in a labour camp which, from now on, I will call Al Mihinat camp. A set of data was collected for nearly all 203 workers living in the camp: name, district of origin, caste, age, date of arrival, marital status, standard of education, how they came to Qatar, kind of job, second job and earnings. Apart from quantitative data, a series of interviews was also held with migrants. Analysis of the data has enabled me to acquire an in-depth look into the socio-economic characteristics of migrants and to understand the way in which they are representative of Nepalese folk. I will therefore try to provide an answer to the question: what do we learn about Nepalese migration from the study of migrants in a *labour camp*?

The term *labour camp* stands for a labourer's dwelling-place in all the Gulf countries. As migrants are grouped together in such a closed area, where they spend most of their free time, the researcher has the opportunity of interacting with migrants as much as possible during his/her stay in the camp. Whether the particular *labour camp* where I spent some time is actually representative cannot be asserted, since no statistical data exist about *labour camps* in Qatar. To my knowledge, no article has been specifically written about these camps in the Middle East, except for Marsden (2008) and Gardner (2005:128-132). Both printed and electronic media, from the region and from elsewhere, regularly emphasize the horrendous conditions the migrants live in. Gulf countries are indeed notorious for the indecent treatment of foreign migrants or "temporary workers", as local authorities prefer to call them. The Human Rights Watch and other international agencies regularly attempt to raise public awareness about the conditions the migrants live in (HRW 2006), often evoking slavery-like conditions due to the sponsorship system (Longva 1999). Needless to say, migrants themselves are fully aware of their low status in the society, often depicting themselves as slaves (*gulam*).

Nepal and Qatar, a "migratory couple"

People from the Non Resident Nepali Association in Doha explain that the first Nepalese migrants to Qatar were Muslims from the Tarai, who could read and write in Arabic, and who found employment at the Ministry of Religious Affairs. Others at the Nepalese Embassy told me that in the 1980s a Muslim from the Tarai found employment in the Qatari police. Apart from these very sketchy stories, more research needs to be done to trace the history of Nepalese migration to Qatar. The Nepalese Embassy opened in Doha in 2000, since the number of Nepalese workers increased steadily from the mid-90s onwards. Embassy staff now only number nine.

A labour agreement was signed between Qatar and Nepal in March 2005. Each year, there is a joint committee meeting but no decision is made as far as basic salaries are concerned. As there is no legal minimum wage in Qatar, the Nepalese embassy issues a ruling on this: in 2008 it was 600 Qatari Riyals, that is 108 euros. On the Nepalese embassy website the cheap labour is indeed a strong argument: "Nepalese workers are comparatively cost effective and their hiring cost is lower as compared to other labour exporting countries". That is precisely what workers criticize in their embassy's politics: "they do not protect us, they are weak compared to the Indian Embassy" said some workers I met in Doha. However the embassy has a minimum social policy: it inspects *labour camps* if called upon by workers and shelters a few of the thirty to forty

workers who come to complain every day about their work or housing conditions and who are in desperate need of food and a place to stay.

The majority of Nepalese workers arrived in Qatar from the year 2000 onwards, due in particular to the growing demand in the building sector. The number of Nepalese migrants was about 400 in 1994 , 30,000 in 1999 , 100,000 in 2005 , 157,000 in July 2006, 177,000 in October 2006, 266,000 in February 2008 and at least 300,000 in 2009. According to the Nepalese Department of Foreign Employment (DoFE), Qatar hired 34% of all Nepalese migrants in 2008 (NIDS 2008): 250 workers arrived daily at Doha airport! Among these, only 2-3% are women: the Nepalese authorities allow them to come and work in the “legal organised sector”, though many of them arrive illegally through India to work as housemaids and find themselves completely unprotected (*ibid.*). According to diplomatic sources, though more than 95% of the Nepalese manpower consists of unskilled and semi-skilled workers, there are also about one hundred engineers, a few entrepreneurs and an indeterminable number of men from the middle classes. Most of these migrants are “geographical bachelors”, whereas there were about 80 Nepalese families in Doha in 2008. According to the same sources, at least 15,000 Nepalese males stay in Qatar illegally: some have quit their jobs or were fired and have stayed in the country with no visa. In February 2008, about 800 illegal Nepalese migrants were being held at the Qatari deportation centre where they often wait for many long months before their family sends them money for a return ticket. Other problems faced by migrants are the non-payment, underpayment or delay in paying salaries, physical harassment, frightful living conditions and health hazards. Although every worker should benefit from free medical treatment by their company, it is seldom the case except for serious accidents. Just as the Nepalese population in Qatar has risen gradually, so has the number of dead: 139 men died in 2006, 151 in 2007 and 209 in 2008: “54 percent of them died due to heart attack, which Nepali migrant workers call ‘death in sleep’”.

Even if Nepalese cultural life is less developed than in other communities, there are some regular music and dance venues which draw thousands of workers. In 2008, there were at least five Nepalese restaurants in the centre of Doha and at least one in Al Khor and Doha Industrial Areas. Their names most definitely emphasize their nepaliness: Nepali Bhansa Ghar, Sagarmatha, Himalayan Restaurant, Samsara, Nepali Chowk. They are particularly frequented on Fridays when thousands of Nepalese migrants flock to the centre of Doha to a place which “is known up to the corners of Nepal” as the Nepali chowk. There, Qatari versions of Kantipur and Rajdhani are for sale, as well as the latest Nepalese films and songs. Finally, the 65 Nepalese associations headed by the Non Resident

Nepali Association, form a basis for acts of solidarity and to give migrants a sense of belonging.

The setting: a typical Qatari labour camp

I persist in using the term *labour camp* because it is the local term used in the Gulf region to talk about a worker's dwelling-place. A better way to describe them would be to talk about labourers' camps because the *labour camp* denotes an exclusively dwelling function. Due to the negative image it conveys, new terms have been coined: "luxury labour camps", "labour villages" or "operative villages". Nevertheless, for a migrant, a *labour camp*, usually shortened to *camp*, is a dwelling place where he spends most of his time outside work. Companies usually rent camps out to other companies who run them and deal with all aspects of workers' life outside work. Camps embody spatial segregation, a major characteristic of Qatar town planning, where people live in different places according to their nationality and qualification (Nagy 2006). As workers, a majority of Nepalese live in *labour camps* (although no precise figures are available) where the conditions greatly depend on the willingness of their employer to provide them with proper conditions. If the employer is not a large company, workers share rooms in some derelict buildings in the centre of the town.

Al Mihinat *labour camp* is situated in a vast area called the industrial area, where there are only *labour camps*, parking lots and factories. Compared to other *labour camps*, it is of average size and only shelters 203 labourers. It is 45 by 60 metres long and consists of several one floor buildings lying adjacent to each other. Two mobile homes were recently installed to lodge more workers. Between 8 and 12 workers live in one room, which is 20 square meters on average and contains double bunk beds. The supervisor, Hemant Thapa, and the two "camp bosses" live in a separate room. Two toilet and shower blocks are at the workers' disposal. A small dining room is also available but seldom used by the men who prefer to eat their dinner in their rooms. Another room is used by a group of men who gather from time to time to rehearse dance programmes. Outside, next to the parking lot where cars and buses park, there is a recreational area which is sometimes used for volleyball. By and large, conditions in the camp are reasonable and, in my opinion, are middle-of-the-range regarding camp standards.

Social characteristics of workers in the camp

Contrary to what I was used to in Northern India where I met Nepalese migrants (Bruslé 2007, Bruslé 2008), the geographical origin and caste-wise diversity of workers in the camps struck me. My first impression was

that the entire Nepalese male society was represented. Of course, this proved to be wrong. Their district of origin, caste and standard of education definitely distinguish migrants from their fellow countrymen in Nepal. The data analysed below are based on a few questions asked individually or indirectly to all camp-dwellers. For lack of time, no economic data other than wages have been collected.

Geographical origin of migrants

The 2001 Nepal Population Census showed that migrants' destinations are highly dependent on their district of origin. At that time almost all migrants from Mid-Western and Far-Western regions headed for India, whereas in the rest of the country (See Graner and Gurung 2003), the situation was more diverse. An unequal access to migration was also observed in Al Mihinat camp.

Table 1: Al Mihinat camp population per development and ecological zone of Nepal (in %) compared to the distribution of the Nepalese population.

	East.	Cent.	West.	Mid-West.	Far-West.	Hills and Mountains	Tarai
Camp	51,5	8,4	38,6	1,5	0	58	42
Nepal*	23,1	34,7	19,7	13	9,5	51,6	48,4

* Source: Population Census 2001.

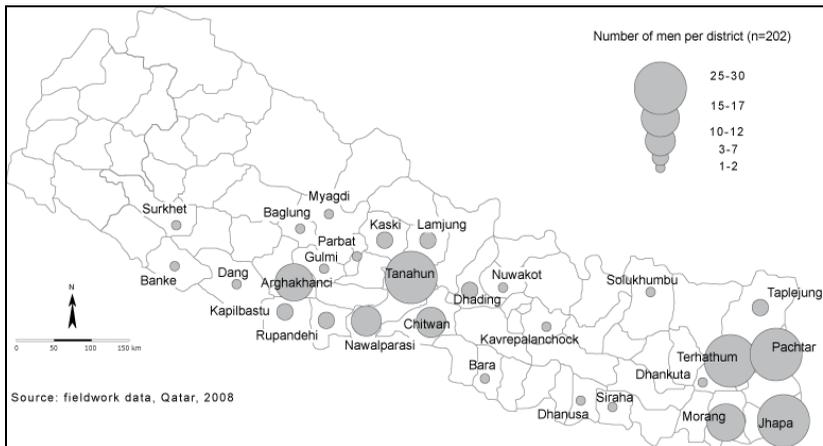


Figure 1: District of origin of migrants in Al Mihinat labour camp

Figure 1 and Table 1 clearly show the spatial dimension of migration. Proportionally more migrants come from the Nepalese hills and

mountains than from the Tarai; thus this does not reflect the actual distribution of the population. There are two broad sending regions in Nepal represented within Al Mihinat camp. The Far East (mainly the four districts of Terhathum, Pachtar, Morang and Jhapa) and the Middle West (Tanahun, Arghakhanci and Nawalparasi districts) are the two main “gulf pockets” in the camp. It is worthwhile noting that this broadly corresponds to the main sending regions towards the Gulf countries as shown by the 2001 Census. Yet, if we compare this map with the one produced by Graner (this issue), with records from the Department of Foreign Employment, one has to admit that the Al Mihinat camp is not strictly representative of the migration dynamics recorded from 2006 to April 2008. However, the propensity to go abroad for men from Eastern districts and for those from the Western ones, as seen in this Qatari *labour camp*, is particularly high. The concentration of migrants from particular areas is illustrated by the fact that 74% of all Al Mihinat migrants come from seven districts, four in the Eastern Development Region, and three from the Western one. On the contrary, the camp population reflects the weakness of migration to the Gulf from Mid- and Far Western Nepal, and to a lesser extent from Central Nepal. Wherever I went through the *labour camp* area or in Doha, whenever I looked for people from faraway western regions, I could never find any. The over-representation of some districts will be explained below by the strength of networks based on manpower agencies and individual relations.

Over-representation of higher castes

In terms of diversity, seventeen castes and ethnic groups live together, which is remarkable (Table 2). Yet this diversity is hampered by the over-representation of high castes (Bahun, Chetri, and Thakuri) that represent 66.5% of the camp population but only 31.2% of the population of the ten major sending districts and 30% of Nepal’s population. Their proportion is therefore more than double what we might expect. It reflects the dominant position of higher castes in Nepal’s economic and social spheres, a domination which translates as access to foreign employment. Although Newars traditionally enjoy a high status in the economic sector, their proportion is far lower than the one in the districts of origin. This could be attributed to their higher standard of education and their business skills. It is frequent in Doha to meet Newars at hotel receptions or stores.

Table 2: **Comparison of caste and ethnic composition of Al Mihinat camp and Nepalese society (in raw numbers and % of the total population)***

	Bahun	Chettri	Thakuri	Magar	Tamang	Kami	Limbu	Gurung	Newar
Camp (number)	71	57	7	21	11	8	7	4	4
Camp (%)	35	28,1	3,4	10,3	5,4	3,9	3,4	2	2
Major districts (%)**	19,4	11,1	0,7	7,4	2,5	3,7	4,7	4,3	3,6
Nepal***	12,7	15,8	1,5	7,1	5,6	3,9	1,6	2,4	5,5

* Only caste and ethnic groups of more than three people have been taken into account. Other groups representing one to three people are: Muslims, Rai, Majhi, Damai, Tharu, Sarki, Sherpa and Sunar.

** Here statistics are for the 10 districts from which there are 5 men or more in the camp.

*** Source: Population Census 2001.

Apart from Magars, who are proportionally in greater numbers than in Nepal, so-called martial races are scarce in this *labour camp*. This might simply point to a particular bias in this camp, since they are in fact present in large numbers throughout Qatar, according to Amrit Gurung, president of the Qatar branch of Nepal Adivasi Janajati Mahasangh. This could also be explained by the fact that working as a labourer in a Gulf country is less valued than more qualified jobs, not to mention being a Gurkha. With the exception of Kamis, lower Hindu castes, Muslims, Yadav (only two members) and Tharus are also under-represented. Despite the fact that the latter account for 12.7% and 16.5% of the total population of Chitwan and Nawalparasi districts respectively, only one member of this tribe, from Kapilbastu, is present in the camp.

Given the over-representation of high castes and since money spent to go abroad represents a substantial sum of money, from 800 to 1,500 euros, the hypothesis may be put forward that there is a correlation between caste, wealth and migration to Gulf countries. However, as the economic background of each migrant is not known, this cannot be asserted. However, if we consider that the amount of capital necessary to come to Qatar is more than what is needed for India, an explanation in economic terms must be taken into account to understand why some caste/ethnic

groups migrate and others do not. As one migrant explained to me: “the poor in our village do not travel abroad. In order to take out a loan, the money-lender asks for land as a mortgage. If you do not have any land, then it is difficult to go abroad”. Access to migration is definitely hampered by limited access to money, and to the informal source of money the money-lender (*sahu*) represents, to the detriment of migrants who pay high interest rates (up to 3% per month).

At national level as well as in Al Mihinat camp, regions of origin as well as caste membership show us how migration is neither a ubiquitous phenomenon nor a phenomenon equally accessible to all kinds of people.

Age, age upon arrival and wedding age

It comes as no surprise to note that the proportion of young males is high in the camp. Sixty per cent of them are aged 20 to 29, whereas this proportion is 15.5% in Nepal. Seventy per cent of the men are aged between 18 and 30, whereas only 7.8% are above 40, the maximum age being 44. Migration and household livelihood strategies depend on the younger generation. The mean arrival age in Qatar is 25 and the median 22, though 57% of the camp population arrived between the ages of 17 and 23. Even though since 1995, when the first men arrived, the mean arrival age has been different every year (24 in 2000 and 2001; 27 in 2005 and 2006), there is no visible trend.

In Nepal, 47.8% of the male population aged between 20 and 24 are married (Population Census 2001), whereas the proportion in the camp is only of 26%. At an older age, the proportion of married men from the camp tends to be the same as in Nepal, even though it remains a little lower. It may therefore be said that long-distance migration postpones marriage for men. This concurs with what young men say about their plans to get married only once they have settled down. There are many cases of young migrants getting married in the few weeks they are on holiday, between two contracts. The newly married woman will get to see her husband a few years later, while fathers are forever complaining about not seeing their children grow up.

A higher standard of education than the average Nepalese

Contrary to widespread allegations about Nepalese workers, migrants in Al Mihinat camp have a higher standard of education than the male Nepalese population. Fifty one per cent of men in the camp reached class 10, whereas the proportion of people who passed the School Leaving Certificate (SLC) is almost triple the national rate (Table 3).

Table 3: **Standard of education (in % of total male population above six years old)**

	No schooling	Primary (1-5)	Secondary (6-10)	SLC and above
Camp	7	16	48	29
Nepal*	5,5	25,7	20,1	13,3

*Population Census 2001.

The high standard of education can be linked to the large number of Bahuns and Chetris, who are usually more educated than others. Sixty per cent of Bahun men reach class 10, whereas the percentage is as much as 80% for Chetri men. Eighty-five per cent of men who pass the SLC exam belong to higher castes (Bahun, Chetri, Thakuri). There is no doubt therefore that the caste characteristics of Al Mihinat *labour camp* greatly influence the standard of education of the men living in the camp. Should statistics exist regarding the standard of education among Nepalese migrants in India, I believe that they would show that migrants are less educated in India than in Qatar.

Access to migration is dependent on caste, education, region of origin: these factors constitute economic and social barriers which prevent the lower sections of society from going abroad. It is nothing new in migration literature to say that the poor and uneducated do not move. Social and economic capital is needed to migrate to the Gulf. This statement is even more accurate if we compare migration to the Gulf and migration to India, which is much less demanding in terms of money, but often no less in terms of networks. The official view of the Nepalese authorities (newspapers, embassy staff, members of associations) whereby the Nepalese who come to Qatar are poor and uneducated, is questionable. However, we shall see that the standard of education in Nepal does not translate into skilled jobs in Qatar, due in particular to the fact that the Nepalese, compared to other nationalities, are perceived as workers and as such fill the labourer niches. Just as for Nepalese nurses in England (Adhikari, this issue), for a large number of men, migration to Qatar also is a degrading experience.

“We’re here to work”: Recruitment, Job and Income

I will not go into detail about the actual reasons migrants come to Qatar. In short, one can say that migration is definitely a livelihood strategy, just as it is for temporary migration to India (See Thieme 2006). Yet a large number of young men also admit that they are here not because their father told them to go and earn money for the whole family, but out of personal choice to live a life of their own. A desire to lead a different life

from their parents' drives them to a land where they hope to be able to attain higher goals. Without further elaborating, I would say that the longing to go abroad, to earn what can be viewed in Nepal as "easy money" in a modern world and to imitate one's neighbour also prompts young Nepalese people to come to Qatar. The "culture of migration" (Massey *et al.* 1993), in which migration is a "rite of passage" needs to be investigated further in order to better understand what is at stake in migration processes and in order to go beyond the classic "push and pull" factors. Household strategies, like the choice of destination among brothers, should also be studied. Nonetheless, the basic aim that migrants are forever stressing is that "they are here to work" because they cannot earn any money in Nepal.

Date of arrival and duration of stay

It was not possible to collect data about all the flows of people who came to Al Mihinat camp and returned to Nepal. I can only give a general picture of the camp at a given period. In February 2008, the mean duration of stay in the camp was four years, which corresponds to two two-year contracts. Fifty-eight per cent of the men arrived between 2004 and 2008, while the ones who had arrived before 2000 only represented 5%. This broadly corresponds to the waves of recruitment of Nepalese migrants in Qatar, which surged from the years 2003-2004 onwards. The arrival of a group of workers in the camp depends on the recruitment policy implemented by the firm employing the migrants and the country, and less so on the supply of Nepalese manpower, which seems to be endless.

The strength of networks explains the destination

As most Nepalese newspaper articles about foreign employment emphasise the fact that recruitment agencies represent the "dark side" of the migration system, with the agent (dalal) being its "dark angel", data from Al Mihinat Camp reveal that only 25% of the migrants come via manpower agencies, whereas 75% relied on their personal relations. This was already the case among Indian migrants in Kuwait at the end of the 1990s (Shah and Menon 1999).

The hiring process in Al Mihinat camp has been a two-stage one: at the beginning, pioneer migrants called upon manpower agencies to get into the country, then other workers came over thanks to these men who had already laid the foundations. Personal networks have become a major factor in the perpetuation of migration. One recruitment company, Efficient Manpower, is for instance responsible for having brought to Qatar all the very first newcomers from 1995 to 2001. Today they still account for the arrival of 18% of migrants. Among these, a man named Man Bahadur Chetri, whom I have never met, became supervisor. The supervisor is in charge of all the workers and deals with them within the

company; he dispatches them to different posts, replaces them when they fall sick, makes decisions regarding their holidays, etc. Thanks to his position as an intermediary, he has access both to company management and to the workers. If he is trustworthy, the company entrusts him with the task of hiring (and sometimes firing) new employees. This grants him a certain power since he can send visas, i.e. working permit, job contract and residence permit, to anyone in Nepal who is interested. Twenty-one per cent of the men in Al Mihinat camp are there thanks to Man Bahadur Chetri. He is now ironically known as Man Bahadur Overseas or Chetrimanpower. It is a way for him to turn his position in the company to his economic advantage since he takes commission when acting as an intermediary. His successor, Hemant Thapa, in his post since 2005, also takes advantage of this privileged position: 10% of the migrants in the camp have come through him. Where a two-year working visa, to which a residence permit is associated, costs around 1,500 Qatari Riyals (€275), Hemant Thapa “sells” it for at least 3,500-4,000 Riyals (€640-730). For the migrant, acting through a supervisor has various advantages. The cost is at least half of what he would have paid to a recruitment company, the uncertainty factor is low and the risk factor practically zero. Buying a visa, directly or indirectly, from the camp supervisor, is a much safer way of going abroad, given that thanks to these network ties, the conditions in the receiving region can be known in advance.

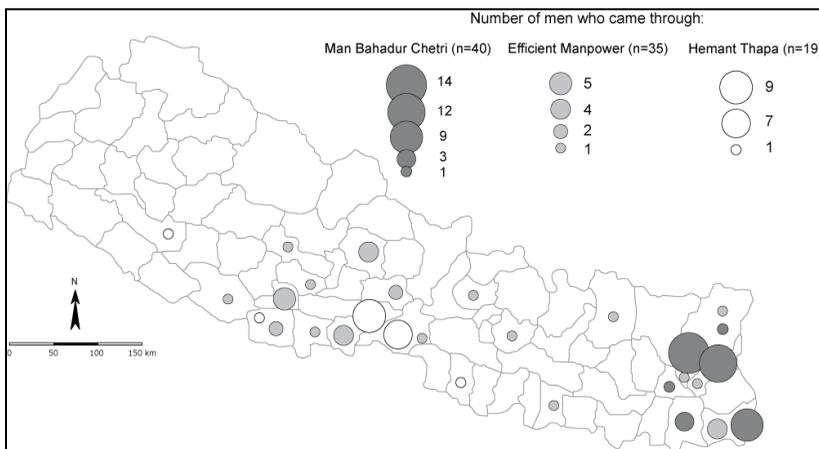


Figure 2: Spatial dimensions of recruiting networks

The recruitment process partly explains the caste and geographical origins of the migrants. As Efficient Manpower was located in Sundhara,

Kathmandu, the 35 people who came through it belong to different districts scattered over Nepal (See Figure 2). Different spatial characteristics emerge in the case of those recruited by Man Bahadur Chetri, who is from Terhathum. The 40 men he brought over, and who were in the camp in February 2008, hail from Terhathum (14), Pachtar (12), Jhapa (9), Morang (3), Taplejung (1) and Dhankuta (1). The same goes for the people brought over by Hemant Thapa, who lives in Nawalparasi near the Chitwan border: 85% of the 19 people he brought over are from his own and neighbouring district. These two cases stress the importance of word-of-mouth communication in spreading information about the possibility of migrating. The intermediaries' notoriety contributes to creating networks that fan out along village and castes lines. As far as the relationship between caste and networks is concerned, one could speak of caste networks. Among the 40 people Man Bahadur Chetri brought over, only three are from Sarki and Majhi groups; the others belong to Bahun and Chetri groups. It is worth noting that other Far Eastern Nepal workers from different communities (Limbu, Tamang, Rai, Sherpa) did not come through him. Apart from caste, location is an important factor explaining why migrants from the same districts are concentrated in the camp: a large majority of the workers stated that they came thanks to a villager. The nature of networks, depending on strong kinship or village ties, helps understand the origin of the workers.

However, networks built thanks to supervisors or recruitment companies do not explain everything: the case of Tanahun district, which groups together 13% of men from the camp, cannot be explained by the strength of one particular network. Indeed, men from Tanahun came either through a recruitment company, or with the help of a villager or relative. Apart from established networks, it also happens that a migrant who is on good terms with his manager and who can speak to him in English can also recruit workers from time to time. On the whole, 45% of migrants in the camp came through personal contacts who only sent a few men, contrary to the case of the supervisors mentioned above.

Salary, second job and income

Workers from Al Mihinat camp are mainly employed as cleaners, "tea boys", "offices boys" or waiters in offices and in gated communities. Most of them work in offices and thus do not correspond to the typical worker in the Persian Gulf toiling under the hot sun on a building site. Most of them readily admit that the work itself is not difficult. The legal working hours in Qatar are eight hours a day, six days a week. Workers from Al Mihinat camp also have the possibility of working overtime ("OT") and some even manage to get a second job pending the acceptance of their sponsor. However, wages are not high and it is usually only after the first

or second year that migrants can save money for themselves after having reimbursed the loan they took out to come over in the first place. This also explains why migrants renew their contract at least once.

Basic salary

When they reach Qatar, many workers realise that the salary due is not the one on their contract that was signed in Nepal. They nonetheless have little or no power to bargain and have to take what they get. In actual fact, both the gross and net salary must be taken into account. Even if the salary is 600 QR, accordingly to Nepalese Embassy rulings, 150 QR is deducted for food and lodging. That is why the basic net salary at Al Mihinat camp is 450 QR (€78 in February 2008) (See Table 4).

Table 4: Distribution of monthly wage in euros in Al Mihinat Camp (February 2008).

Monthly wage in euros	Average wage in this category (€)	Number of workers	% of workers in this category	Cumulated %
78	78	128	64,7	64,7
79 to 156	130	29	14,7	79,4
157 to 260	217	26	13,1	92,5
261 to 416	320	9	4,5	97
417 to 607	580	5	2,5	99,5
1,386	1,386	1	0,5	100

Table 4 shows the very high concentration of wages at the bottom of the wage hierarchy. Whereas the average wage is 137 euros, 65% of the workforce in the camp, cleaners and tea-boys, earn a basic salary of 78 euros a month. There is little chance of securing a higher salary in the company and this seems to be related to the time spent in Qatar. The forty-four migrants who arrived between 1995 and 2000 earn an average wage of 272 euros, whereas migrants who arrived over the following period (2001-2008) only earn 107 euros. In fact, it seems that the most senior workers stay in Qatar because they manage to get better paid jobs. Poorly qualified at the outset, rare are the men who manage to learn a few skills (typing, speaking English, using a computer) to move up the ladder. They usually arrive as cleaners and stay as such. They have no prospect of getting a more qualified job, contrary to others who, with better credentials, can start straightaway as “photocopy boy”, clerk or driver. However, some men do manage to change jobs to earn better money. This

is the case of a young boy who arrived as a cleaner. He saved some money to take his driving licence (more than six months' salary) and now, as a driver, he is earning more than twice what other cleaners earn.

Finally, getting a better job depends on the willingness of the supervisor, who, according to many workers, privileges his own people (*aphno manche*), that is the ones who came through him or are related to him. Yet overall, there is a correlation between a migrant's level of responsibility, rank in the company hierarchy and salary. Being capable of speaking a little English and demonstrating a few basic intellectual capacities is definitely vital to ensuring a better paid job.

Table 5: **A better education means a better salary (n=187)**

Standard of education	Number	Mean salary (in euros)
Class 0	14	103
Class 1 to 5	28	126
Class 6 to 10	92	121
School Leaving Certificate	37	155
Class 12 to BA	16	326

As opportunities to climb the career ladder are rare, difficult to achieve, and reserved for the more educated, another way of earning a better salary is to have a second job.

Holding down a "part-time" job

Among 198 men for whom I have information, 45% have a second job. Among the other 55%, most of them cannot find a "part-time" job anyway, others already earn a good salary or they are simply not interested in working more hours. Having a second job definitely makes a change to the pyramid of earnings, as Table 6 proves.

The "part-time" job consists in doing housework in private houses and in cleaning cars. This is done in a gated community located not far from the Al Mihinat *labour camp* where some of the Nepalese work. Contrary to most Nepalese construction workers, men from this camp have the opportunity to do extra work because in the course of their "official" work, they come into contact with some high-level managers who live not far from them. These managers, who know the Nepalese workers, call on them to do additional work, usually paid on a monthly basis. These second jobs are highly sought after. It was thought that research would show that due to their large numbers and traditional solidarity, Bahun and Chetri would benefit more than average from a second job. On the contrary, only 41% of all Brahman men have a second job, whereas this is the case for

53% of all Chetris. On the whole, there is no apparent connection between caste and a second job. Investigations should be more oriented towards links between a second job and the length of service. But here, once again, the expected higher rate of second jobs among men who have been in Qatar for a long time compared to newcomers does not prove to be the case. Even 40% of the forty men who arrived in 2007 found a second job. However, there is definitely a link between the length of service in part-time jobs and the money earned through this second job. Those who have held down a second job for a few years enjoy incomes of up to 150 euros a month, whereas those who just starting out in a job earn between 50 to 80 euros. The 91 men with a second job have a lower average salary than the others, but thanks to this extra work they manage overall to bring in a higher level of income compared to the others (See table 6). For many of the men with an extra job, this work becomes their prime concern and the main attraction of their stay.

Table 6: **Average income in euros according to the number of jobs workers hold down in Al Mihinat Camp (February 2008).**

Workers with two jobs (n=91)			Workers with only the company job (n=107)	All workers (n=198)	
Average company wage	Average part-time income	Average total income	Average total income	Average company wage	Average total income
106	104	210	154	137	180

Finally, one should note that some workers find other ways of earning money, by burning CDs and DVDs and selling them to co-workers in other camps in the Industrial Areas or on Fridays at Nepali Chowk. For two men in the camp, this has become real second job which occupies almost all of their free time.

On the whole, thanks to the informal job, the longer people stay in the camp, the more overall income they have.

Al Mihinat labour camp epitomizes Nepalese inequalities and hopes

This paper has shown that the *labour camp*, as a vernacular category in Qatar, is a valuable place to study migration. As a closed space, the camp can be seen as a small world where a social world is built under

institutional and economical constraints. Even though Al Mihinat camp does not represent the whole of Nepalese male society, we can still draw some conclusions about Nepalese migrants in Qatar. The over-representation of high castes and the concentration of men from particular districts mean that migration, in this case, does not contribute to equally distributing income among different population groups and throughout every region of Nepal. Moreover, it is striking that even for so-called unskilled migrants, education is a major factor in boosting one's income. International migration is definitely a highly selective, non-egalitarian and inequality-making social phenomenon.

This article should be considered as a preliminary report on a Qatari *labour camp* occupied by Nepalese labourers. As a particular case study, Al Mihinat camp cannot be taken as representative of all Nepalese *labour camps*. Though it gives some insight into a new phenomenon, other *labour camp* studies should be undertaken in order to provide a comparative view. Even if quantitative data are vital in accounting for who actually lives in the *labour camp*, studies should also be completed by qualitative research. Observing migrants in a camp is an extremely valuable experience and themes such as the pain (*dukh*) of exile, separation from the family, ways of handling this trauma, remittances, relationships among migrants and with fellow workers and transnational lives should be highlighted.

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