

Bucknell University

## Bucknell Digital Commons

---

Faculty Journal Articles

Faculty Scholarship

---

2014

# Transnational Marriage: Modern Imaginings, Relational Realignments, and Persistent Inequalities

Coralynn V. Davis

*Bucknell University*, [cvdavis@bucknell.edu](mailto:cvdavis@bucknell.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: [https://digitalcommons.bucknell.edu/fac\\_journ](https://digitalcommons.bucknell.edu/fac_journ)



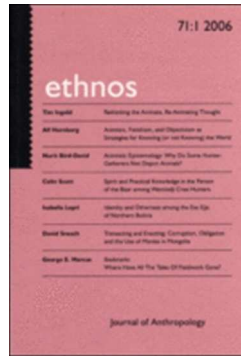
Part of the [Asian Studies Commons](#), [Gender and Sexuality Commons](#), [Human Geography Commons](#), [Inequality and Stratification Commons](#), [International Economics Commons](#), [International Relations Commons](#), [Other International and Area Studies Commons](#), [Political Economy Commons](#), [Race and Ethnicity Commons](#), [Social and Cultural Anthropology Commons](#), and the [Sociology of Culture Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Davis, Coralynn V.. "Transnational Marriage: Modern Imaginings, Relational Realignments, and Persistent Inequalities." *Ethnos: Journal of Anthropology* (2014) : 585-609.

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Faculty Scholarship at Bucknell Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faculty Journal Articles by an authorized administrator of Bucknell Digital Commons. For more information, please contact [dcadmin@bucknell.edu](mailto:dcadmin@bucknell.edu).



## Transnational Marriage: Modern Imaginings, Relational Realignments, and Persistent Inequalities

Journal:	<i>Ethnos: Journal of Anthropology</i>
Manuscript ID:	RETN-2012-0058.R1
Manuscript Type:	'Intimacies and Sexualities in Out-of-the-Way Places' Special Issue
Keywords:	transnational, marriage, gender , inequality, sexuality, immigration

SCHOLARONE™  
Manuscripts

**Transnational Marriage: Modern Imaginings, Relational Realignments, and Persistent Inequalities**

“I know I have big dreams, but I have come so far to understand what and how it could be possible.” – Gudiya, December 2011

I first met Gudiya in 2003 on the street in Janakpur, Nepal, a town in a region culturally and linguistically dominated by Maithil people of whom Gudiya is one.<sup>1</sup> At the time, Gudiya was 23 years of age. This essay examines Gudiya’s endeavor to live a fulfilling and worthwhile life, to undertake what Niko Besnier has characterised as “the never-ending project through which people search for meaning and dignity with the meager material and symbolic resources available to them” (Besnier 2007:10). Engaging Gudiya as a transnational subject, I offer reflection on the interface between global forces, powerful transcultural narratives, and state policies, on the one hand, and local, even individual, constructions and tactics in regard to sexuality, marriage, migration and work, on the other. Gudiya’s story highlights the ways in which she has engaged in a series of realignments aimed at bringing her closer to the life she imagines, even as she has negotiated shifting cultural anchors and encountered new and persistent forms of inequality both local and transnational in scale. Gudiya’s life trajectory provides a window into the scope of the imaginable and the materially possible for an ambitious young Hindu woman with little social capital and few economic resources who started out life in a dusty, “out-of-the-way” (Tsing 1993) corner of what was then still the kingdom of Nepal.

My initial encounter with Gudiya led to a working relationship and friendship that has lasted a decade. In January 2010, Gudiya and I began an intentional dialogue aimed at deepening and shifting our working relationship toward one in which she would contribute reflections on her own experiences to scholarship focused on transnational intimacies. Gudiya launched our dialogic exchange with the following statement: “I had dreamt of starting a school project since I was 13, and now every year of my life, year by year, I have been desperate to do something meaningful for other people apart from my family, friends, and relatives.” Raised in a culture where for generations girls have been socialised to expect a life of subordination and service to husband, children, and in-laws, Gudiya’s statement sounds at

once modern and radical **in terms of gender politics**. I draw here on Anthony Giddens's conceptualisation of modernity, whose features include the supra-local quality of social relationships and the concomitantly reflexive nature of identity formation. As Giddens has noted, in local contexts of modernity, the self (narrativised self-identity) becomes an everyday, reflexive project "accomplished amid a puzzling diversity of options and possibilities" derived from multiple and contested sources of authority, more and less mediated (Giddens 1991:4). Further politicising Giddens's conceptualisation of modern selves, Lisa Rofel contends that "if one relocates modernity by viewing it from the perspective of those marginalised or excluded from the universalising center, then it becomes a mutable project developed in unequal cross-cultural dialogues and contentions" (Rofel, 1999:12; Tsing 2005). Material constraint is as formative a factor as privilege in the construction of modern lifestyles, where projects of the body play a central role and are one modality in which gender politics come into play.

In the decade and a half since Gudiya first envisioned this alternative future of "doing something meaningful," she has fostered transnational and cross-cultural connections, engaged in multiple **bodily and relational** realignments, risked loss of face for herself and her family, and experienced opportunities and setbacks in turn; yet, she is still striving **to contribute** to her broader community. Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing (2005), **among others**, has challenged the assumption that globalised environments are characterised by unimpeded flow, arguing instead that in our globally connected world "coercion and frustration join freedom" (5). Employing a metaphor of "friction," Tsing theorises how marginalities are materially, discursively and subjectively played out in the varied eddies of our unevenly globalised world. For Gudiya herself, factors of cultural geography, transnational mobilisation, family structures and strategies – each of which is deeply inflected by norms for gender and sexuality -- have all provided fraught contexts, structuring the friction, for her evolving ambitions (Massey 1994; McDowell 1999; Mohanty and Russo 1991). Her efforts and their results demonstrate that "out-of-the-way" signifies not mere geo-political marginalisation but a complex discursive orientation or subjectivity, informed by and informing practices of intimacy that span the continents; individuals themselves sometimes transverse. As

we will see, construed this way. Sweden itself can be the locus for out-of-the-way sexualities entailing new forms of marginalisation and reconfigurations of privacy and surveillance.

*Contexts and Frictions*

Gudiya grew up in the town of Janakpur, a small commercial center and renowned Hindu pilgrimage site located in the heart of Mithila.<sup>2</sup> Janakpur is on the Nepal side of the international border with India that transects the region. Mithila is a primarily rural terrain characterised by village clusters surrounded by irrigated rice fields and dotted by fish ponds. Named for the ancient kingdom that is understood to have flourished in its place, Mithila boasts a great literary tradition and is renowned for its part in the Hindu epic Ramayana. According to this epic tale, Sita, daughter of King Janak (after whom the town is named) and eventual wife of Rama, was born in Janakpur. Sita and Rama are often considered to be *the* ideal couple in Hinduism – Sita as a model of chasteness and wifely devotion, and Rama as a model of personal integrity (*dhr̥ti*) and fidelity. Each has his/her own temple in Janakpur to which pilgrims flock, and there is a memorial, as well -- complete with larger-than-life mannequins -- depicting their wedding. This gendered narrative has an enormous influence on how people in the region think about womanhood, manhood and marriage.

The core of the Maithil kinship structure, common to much of the region (Jeffery and Jeffery 1996), is patrilineage, with alliances formed through arranged patrilocal marriages endogamous to caste, exogamous to village. The approach of adolescence brings increased gender segregation (Kumar 2002), as well as, for pre-marital females, virginity and the proscription against displays of sexual interest. Here, girls' narratives reflect "both the hope of the ideal [i.e., benign, romantic patriarchy] and the inevitability of subjugation" (Abraham 2004:230). In such a context, young women learn that by consenting exclusively to marital, heteronormative, reproductive sexual experiences, they stand to be legitimised as good wives and daughters-in-law, the only sanctioned identification available to them and vehicle by means of which they can strengthen their life situation (George 2002:218).

1  
2  
3 In the context of enormous differentials in wealth and power, contemporary orientations toward  
4 sexuality on the Indian subcontinent have been characterised by Rita Banerji as dualistic; the vast  
5 majority of people are ultraconservative and the relatively small but not culturally insignificant (because  
6 economically powerful) minority is characterised as “neo-liberal.”<sup>3</sup> This duality creates a particular  
7 conundrum for young (especially urban) people, who are more influenced than the older generations by  
8 global mediascapes, constructed through communication technologies and networks, and material realities  
9 of, for instance, education and transportation. Yet their lives, too, remain circumscribed by the traditional  
10 familial, caste, and community boundaries (Abraham 2004:213; cf. Aengst, this volume). Abraham points  
11 out, as well, that male and female urban youth engage with sexuality very differently from one another,  
12 with girls experiencing and expressing greater ignorance and passivity. Further, urban women are  
13 expected to demonstrate their respectability, appearing modern (for instance, in consumptive practices)  
14 but moral, sexy but also compliant and virtuous (Phadke 2005:68). What becomes evident is that modern  
15 South Asian sexualities are not necessarily radically more egalitarian or less bodily disciplined than so-  
16 called traditional ones (see also Liechty, 2003; cf. Hirsch 2007),<sup>4</sup> a truth illustrated by the secrecy and  
17 surveillance of youth sexualities in Ladakh (Aengst, this volume), and the Kathmandu Valley (Brunson,  
18 this volume), as well.

19  
20 Contemporary politics of gender and sexuality in South Asia intersect with growing tensions  
21 between the extended family and romantic hetero-couple, whether married or non-married. Susan  
22 Seymour has examined a number of longitudinal studies on family and gender systems in different parts  
23 of India, remarking that as a whole they indicate changes that include “the loosening of familial bonds of  
24 authority based upon age and gender hierarchies in favor of increased husband-wife intimacy and the  
25 relaxation of purdah restriction on women” (Seymour, 2002:115). Such loosening is by no means  
26 simple in their motivations, unidirectional in their results, or unresisted; and tensions between the nuclear  
27 and extended family continue to loom large discursively and in practice (Dickey 1995; Phadke 2005,  
28 Uberoi 2001). One aspect of this tension involves the ascendance of companionate or “love marriage.” By  
29 “love marriage,” I mean marriages chosen primarily by the two people who get married and socially  
30

acknowledged as such. Despite its discursive and actual ascendance in South Asian life elsewhere, I have come across no cases of acknowledged love marriage, let alone dating, between two Maithil people.<sup>5</sup> Arranged marriages across families remain pivotal to social organisation in Mithila. In such familial configurations, resources are shared (however unequally) fraternally and across generations, being passed down patrilineally. While modernity and class striving is changing much in the socio-cultural landscape in the region, a shift toward love marriage in this sense has not been a significant response to such pressures and possibilities among Maithil people in the Janakpur area. Just as in the case described by Aengst (this volume) for northwest India, for Maithils to marry “outsiders” is considered a threat to the social order. Gudiya is the only Maithil woman I have met or heard of in Janakpur who married someone who was not South Asian.

Political machinations and their social and economic fallout are also important factors in the lives of Gudiya and her people. Such circumstances have contributed to the ideological pairing of life success with physical departure from the locality. In the past half century, the longstanding monarchy of Nepal experienced significant political upheaval, culminating in the country’s formal structural transformation to a democratic republic. In the first decade of the millennium, the time of my most recent field research and Gudiya’s youth, Nepal was already embroiled in political turmoil involving a civil war of several years’ duration. Though Janakpur was not a hub of rebel organising, perhaps primarily by virtue of its identity as a district center, it did see some violent activity. This took the form of extortion of large landowners and detonation of small bombs in the commercial area, under vehicles, and at district government buildings, such as the school district headquarters and the communications tower. Such activity was matched by increased presence of police and army personnel. It left in its wake an environment of fear – lest one or one’s loved ones become collateral damage – and pessimism among the general public. This environment may have contributed to a kind of escapist attitude – already fostered through economic and political global inequities, as well as Western dominated global media -- that encouraged Janakpur residents and many located elsewhere in Nepal to look outside the country and particularly to the “stable” West for models of “the good life” (Liechty 2003 and 2010). This orientation

is a critical component of the context in which Gudiya came of age, one in which, as Karin Friederic (this volume) has noted in her work on brothels in Ecuador, transnational processes and policies contribute to the production of difference in deeply personal ways, including in the realm of the erotic.

By the time of Gudiya's childhood, access to nonagricultural income -- from office work, teaching, army or police service, or various sorts of entrepreneurship and employment abroad, for instance -- had increasingly become a key marker of difference among Maithil families that had historically farmed.<sup>6</sup> The largest single employer in Janakpur was the Janakpur Cigarette Factory, whose employees were overwhelmingly male. Some young men migrated to Kathmandu, India, the Gulf or elsewhere for work. Cash saved from this work helped underwrite many of the most important markers of the emerging rural middle class, including packaged food and cement or brick (as opposed to mud and thatch) houses, as well as many consumer items that often found their way into dowry negotiations, such as electronics and motorcycles. For those families who had started with some assets (in this case arable land), and who, in search of modern lives and class mobility, have become geographically mobile, combining village, town, and world economic and social strategy has become, in fact, typical. Yet, such mobility has been virtually gender-exclusive: opportunities for education and work abroad have been available primarily to males.

Correspondingly, arranged marriages are another means of enacting class aspirations, where families seek sons-in-law with formal education and a "good" non-farming job, or who at least have good job prospects. And they seek daughters-in-law who come from families that have at least some male members engaged in such education and employment. Thus, despite pressures in the direction of individualism that are attendant to the shift from family farming to individual money-making, class status and class mobility are generally still a *familial* project in the Janakpur context, enacted through family level decisions about individual family members regarding education, labor, consumption, loans, marriage, housing, etc. (cf. Dickey 2002). In this sense, as Rhine (this volume) highlights for the case of Nigeria, the economic and the intimate remain intricately related phenomena, requiring careful management of bodies and desires and particular strategies of consumption and display.



As Arjun Appadurai (1996) has pointed out, “[w]omen in particular bear the brunt” of the frictions and traumas of deterritorialisation as they hit the family, “for they become pawns in the heritage politics of the household [whose men] are themselves torn about the relation between heritage and opportunity in shifting spatial and political formations” (44). Women in Maithil society have long been household “pawns” (though not agentless ones), in the sense that the honor of the family weighs heavily on their shoulders and other body parts. Now, with the intensification of migration and the mediation of life possibilities, there are all sorts of “heritage vs. opportunity” tensions. For instance, families must decide which brothers will stay on in the village to live agrarian lives, and which brothers will be sent or venture out in search of employment in towns, cities or abroad. A related tension involves the question of whether those family members working abroad will continue to visit, financially support and participate in important events with other family members, or whether they will break traditions and obligations of various sorts. The ideology that the path to success is a path leading away from the local area has, in turn, helped construct a geographically outward-facing erotic, whereby erotic desire has become infused to an extent with exotic desire. In this dynamic, women and girls generally have fewer opportunities, and their bodies become the site of pressures to maintain heritage in the midst of perceived threat to patriarchal, communal life. Such were the waters in which Gudiya initiated her search for a meaningful and materially possible life.

*(Not) Speaking of Desire* *Shifting Ethnographic Relations*

With nowhere to stay and no one to help me forge the connections that would be crucial to my projects’ success, I arrived in Janakpur on an October day in 2003 to begin a research project on Maithil women’s storytelling.<sup>7</sup> Before I knew it, Gudiya had recruited me to be her house-guest/tenant and had also secured a position as my research assistant. Being in the street as Gudiya was when I met her, talking to strangers and foreigners, proposing further social and work engagements was very bad behavior for an unmarried post-pubescent Maithil girl, the kind of risky behavior that could and did bring shame upon her family (cf. Aengst, this volume).<sup>8</sup>

Over the next five months of fieldwork, Gudiya and I spent most of every day and night together, working, eating, and sleeping in the same rooms, during which period she was an enormous and invaluable help in my work and to my well-being. We got to know each other's moods and personal habits and shared some life tales, but we also respected key taboos of intimacy, in particular navigating around conversations about relational desires and experiences. I have myself become implicated in the trans-communal linkages in the midst of which Gudiya has led her life. Erstwhile ethnographer/field assistant cum friends, Gudiya and I have become part of each other's lives and narratives. Were it not for my own personal strivings (though they be differently configured) around sexuality, relationships, international travel and work, Gudiya's life, and her story, would be different. (And vice versa.)<sup>9</sup>

As we were to discover many years later in our exchanges on the **topic**, my own unwillingness at the time of our initial acquaintance to reveal that I was five years into an increasingly unsatisfying relationship with the female "friend" who called me from the U.S. every week reinforced Gudiya's own silence. Gudiya and I were both negotiating strong sexual taboos, each from our own cultural locations. However, our relationship -- fraught as it was with inequalities of nationality **and age, as well as** her economic dependency on me as an employer (and tenant) in a context of significantly limited family income -- made for a complex nexus of forces in regard to such taboos **that surpassed** mere cross-cultural difference. For instance, my silence about my own intimate if temporarily long-distance relationship was enforced by my knowledge of Gudiya's own cultural context, where unmarried women are not to speak of matters of eros.

For Gudiya, knowledge about Western norms for sexuality (however distorted by popular media) created certain possibilities. She might **have, for instance, sought** to speak with me about her own relational desires and the possibilities that could result from her having gained entrée into international communities to which I **was** connected in Nepal and Janakpur in particular (in which a very small community of foreign development workers circulated). Gudiya knew that for Westerners like me, non-marital heterosexuality was not, in fact, taboo. She would seek a certain kind of proximity, accompanying me as her quasi-legitimate chaperone to social occasions with Peace Corps acquaintances and to such

scintillating cosmopolitan(ish) spaces as the local “internet café.”<sup>10</sup> Whereas in the case of girls in the Kathmandu Valley described by Brunson (this volume) scooters were utilised as the means to get away from the watchful eye of family, in Gudiya’s case, I became her “vehicle” for such escape.

It was not until several years later, bolstered by the prospect of contributing a presentation to the conference session that was the inspiration for this special issue, that I proposed to Gudiya that we tell each other more about the sexual and romantic aspects of our lives. Gudiya was thrilled by the idea, both for the opportunity it would provide for us to get to know each other more deeply, and for the opportunity to share her story with scholars examining issues of gender and sexuality in global context. Our conversation, taking place over email and Skype, has been made possible by a confluence of shifts in our ages, geographical locations, and access to technologies of communication. Gudiya’s unfolding story, I believe, helps us to understand the manifold forces affecting intimacy and sexuality in contexts inflected at once with marginality and movement, including the opportunities and constraints under which real people make relational and sexual choices as they seek to lead materially and emotionally satisfying lives.

*Desiring female subjectivity and marital ambivalence*

Gudiya describes her earliest romantic and erotic subjectivity in this way:

I was in love with one guy when I was in class 9 and 10 in girls school. He lived just the other side of the school wall, so when we were having assembly every morning, rather than praying, I liked to watch him bathing at his family hand pump. The thing is, it’s so strange that we never talked. We just looked at each other and smiled. Sometimes we passed each other on the street, and all this was romantic enough for me. I don’t even know what his name is. Every day when I could see by virtue of the fact that he hung his towel over the wall that it was his time to bathe, I told my teacher that I had to go to the bathroom. I could see him from the toilet window. All my friends knew that I was in love with him, so whenever they saw him outside they came to tell me, “Hey Gudiya, look, your sweetheart is out there.”

Contrary to the one-sided attention given in popular Western media to arranged marriage (deemed emblematic of women’s oppression) in South Asia, the cultural region is steeped in romantic and erotic narrative going back many hundreds of years (Ahearn 2001; Ram 1998; Srivastava 2009). Erotic capers involving, for instance, Lord Krishna and his “flute,” are now fully imbricated with narratives and imagery from globalised popular culture. In conservative Hindu regions such as the one in which Gudiya

grew up, however, girls can speak of their desires only to their girl confidantes and only in coded language; and what covert moves they make in the direction of boys must never, ever be perceived by male peers or anyone their senior (cf. Aengst, this volume; Rhine, this volume). Indeed, any such breach can negatively impact not only the marriageability of the girl but also the reputation and the social capital of the girl's entire family. As Gudiya **was**, so far as I was able to determine, the first woman in the region to marry a Western foreigner, she has forged new ground in her marital pursuits requiring her to negotiate complex and sometimes contradictory pressures with few guideposts.

In point of fact, Gudiya never wanted to get married, since she dreamed instead of doing "something meaningful for other people apart from my family, friends, and relatives." She believed that her dreams were incompatible with traditional Maithil marriage, **for** such marriage would mean serving her family and relatives exclusively, and put a halt to her study and paid work. Gudiya was allowed to go further in her schooling than the vast majority of girls in Janakpur; for this reason, she knew enough English to try it out on those occasional non-South Asian foreigners -- mostly development agency personnel and tourists -- who would sojourn more or less briefly in her town. Breaking with cultural norms for her gender, Gudiya would approach any foreigners she could encounter:

I met them randomly on the street and started talking to them speaking English all the time. I enjoyed that freedom of all the local people not being able to understand anything. So, I came to like Westerners more and more, also slowly realising that I was learning a lot about their way of living and seeing things differently than I was supposed to see in Janakpur -- from religion to culture and traditions. [By the time I was 20] I knew some [foreign] people, not that they were my good friends but just that I was happy to hang out with them and they were happy to hang out with a Nepalese person who is a girl. If they wanted to buy something, to get a cab, or they need me to talk to someone who didn't speak English, etc. They contacted me for all kinds of help. Sometimes I felt it was too much to ask. But, then I felt if I were to say no, what if they no longer let me hang out with them?

Gudiya articulates here how her actions were calculated to advance her interest in expanded knowledge and connection, while requiring her, at **the same** time, to enact **a deferential role potentially** resonant with long-standing Western fantasies of the subservient, feminine, third world Other. Gudiya was well into this pattern of simultaneously servile and self-serving interaction when I arrived in town in 2003. While for

1  
2  
3 my own interests I wanted to speak Maithili and Nepali rather than English, I did provide her with greater  
4  
5 access to other English-speaking foreigners. This was possible because of my gender and my  
6  
7 incorporation into her household as something between a mother's sister and an elder daughter, as well as  
8  
9 my propensity to pay contractually for her assistance, room and board. Due to these factors, Gudiya and  
10  
11 her family could construct a narrative of respectability and prestige for Gudiya's extra-household  
12  
13 circulations with me.  
14

15  
16 By educating their daughter through the bachelor's degree level, Gudiya's parents had taken  
17  
18 another cultivated risk with Gudiya regarding respectability and prestige. Formal education is a key  
19  
20 marker of modernity in South Asian discourse and also a prime location of the contradictions this  
21  
22 discourse creates in girls' and women's lives.<sup>11</sup> To the extent that formal education for girls requires  
23  
24 freedom of movement (minimally to and from school) and freedom of speech (communication with male  
25  
26 peers and teachers), this central feature of modernity puts female honor – and therefore family honor – at  
27  
28 great risk (cf. Aengst, this volume). The costs to families of educating daughters go beyond school and  
29  
30 tutoring fees and the loss of daughters' domestic and agricultural labor hours. Additional costs may  
31  
32 include problems of marriageability due to questions of family honor and due to the advanced age of  
33  
34 daughters by the time they have finished schooling. Potential in-laws may worry that older, more  
35  
36 educated brides lack sufficient deference to familial elders as a result of their exposure to new ideas,  
37  
38 people and career options (Dickey 2002; Seymour 2002). These prospective losses must be weighed  
39  
40 against new forms of social capital that can attach to formal education – including, contradictorily, *better*  
41  
42 marriage prospects and the potential of a higher standard of living for married (and employed) daughters,  
43  
44 which may ultimately also mean greater security for her natal family (Dickey 2002). The uneven rise in  
45  
46 educational levels of achievement for girls is thus related in a complex manner to personal and family  
47  
48 class status and mobility, intrafamilial relations of seniority and gender, and values associated with  
49  
50 modernity and development.<sup>12</sup> That Gudiya's parents have educated their daughter is a signal of their self-  
51  
52 positioning vis-à-vis local notions of modernity and class. They may have regretted this decision when  
53  
54 Gudiya, still unmarried, began cavorting in local public places, seeking employment and social  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

1  
2  
3 opportunity. On the other hand, the skills she learned and delay of marriage entailed in her extended  
4  
5 education were part of what enabled her, ultimately, to support her natal family in a way that neither her  
6  
7 father nor her brothers proved capable of doing.  
8  
9

10         Around the time that I arrived in Gudiya's household, her elders had begun looking for possible  
11  
12 husbands for her, whereas she intensified her efforts to find fruitful connections with other foreigners.  
13  
14 Gudiya was quite excited when I asked her to join me on an extended trip to Kathmandu, where we would  
15  
16 stay in a flat with a another foreign researcher, an acquaintance of mine, and where Gudiya would  
17  
18 continue to transcribe the stories we were working on. I was called away from Nepal for part of that  
19  
20 period, and Gudiya took the opportunity to explore the city, network and socialise, tagging along at first  
21  
22 with my friends and then eventually making her own connections. I became quite worried for Gudiya's  
23  
24 well being and reputation, as well, to a certain degree, for how her behavior might affect my reputation.  
25  
26  
27 Gudiya later described her explorations in the big city:  
28

29         I went to all kinds of places where it was exciting for me and where for girls at my age it was not  
30  
31 possible in many ways. I was interested in hanging out sometimes late at night, so I realised  
32  
33 mostly foreigners were doing that, not many Nepalese. Most of all you could talk with foreigners  
34  
35 about all kinds of things without feeling uncomfortable, or a kind of pain in your stomach. I also  
36  
37 met lots of Nepali men whom I was attracted to. There were few that I liked to have long term  
38  
39 contacts with as a friend. But, mostly they were interested in having sex in the first meeting, and I  
40  
41 tried to explain them that I don't want to have contact with you for physical reasons but to know  
42  
43 you. I met all these men in trainings and seminars, through friends or in public transportation,  
44  
45 etc.... There are two or three men that I am still in touch with since ten years, but even now they  
46  
47 are still waiting for me to sleep with them, you can feel it, although they are married and have  
48  
49 kids and so on.  
50

51         Although Gudiya said she was not looking for sex, she was interested in "attraction," and she made the  
52  
53 most of her connections with men. It was at the party of a Sri Lankan artist that Gudiya met her future  
54  
55 husband, Lukas, then a student of Buddhist Studies at Kathmandu University.  
56  
57

58         That was an extreme [i.e., stressful] time when my parents were really worried about me that no  
59  
60 one will marry me because I am old. I was 24. That was also the time I was into doing something  
[worthwhile with my life] and not really focusing on getting married. When I met Lukas, I liked  
him, although I wasn't so sure what to do. I knew that Lukas was different in many ways  
compared to most Westerners I met. He was practicing Buddhism, had lived in Nepal for five  
years. He was poor and not telling me anything [i.e., bragging] about how great his family and he

was. Not telling me how beautiful his country and people there are. He was open for what I was. I was thinking about all these things. Many other people I met spoke of how much land and property they had, how great their parents are, doctor this and that. When I told Lukas that my parents wanted to marry me off with someone, he told me I should [escape this fate by going] to Bodhgaya, where his friend had an orphanage.

This part of Gudiya's narrative speaks to the immense pressures to marry placed on post-adolescent Maithil females, as well as to Gudiya's continued desire to do something positively impactful with her life. Her initial connection with Lukas was directed at avoiding marriage altogether, not in seeking to marry him. Indeed, he helped her to avoid returning to her natal home by finding her employment elsewhere. While Gudiya was interested in foreigners for the worlds they could open up for her, this connecting was about capacity building rather than wealth or status building. She used her connections at this stage largely for geographic mobility.

*Transnational marriage and relational realignments*

After being in Bodhgaya for half a year I was invited to Germany, and Lukas was in Sweden, so he invited me to visit him there. I went there, and he proposed to marry me in Stockholm.... I wasn't still sure that I should marry him. Mostly because I didn't wanted to marry [at all]. Secondly, he was the only person I had sex with for the first time. So, I felt I should marry and [could] still do the things that I wanted to do.

Gudiya's narrative portrays her marriage to Lukas as something about which she had ambivalence, not because of any concerns about Lukas himself, whom she found embodied special qualities of humility and serious engagement with Nepali society and culture, but because she was unsure how well marriage itself lined up with her more primary aims of mobility and productivity. Yet, having transgressed Maithil sexual norms by having sex with Lukas prior to marriage, she also showed allegiance to these very same norms insofar as they sanction for Maithil women a single lifetime sex partner, one's husband. She suggests that her decision to marry Lukas was influenced by the fact that she had been sexual with him and him alone. She thereby sought to realign her body as normative vis-à-vis her home culture by marrying, albeit with a non-Maithil.

While Gudiya's thinking about her sexuality at this time aligned somewhat awkwardly with the Maithil notion that one should only have sex with one's husband (or in this case, at least one's husband-



to-be), she was clearly also looking for a mate with a certain kind of manner and personality, and one who would appreciate her for who she was, including her aspirations. She was attracted to the novel idea that she could be married *and also* do “what I wanted to do,” meaning, among other things, to “do something meaningful for other people” beyond her natal and affinal family circles.

I asked Gudiya how her family responded to the news of her marriage plans. Gudiya had been keeping in touch by phone from Sweden with her parents in Janakpur. They broached the topic of marriage before she had a chance to:

When they told me on the phone that [they had arranged for a prospective groom] to come and see me, I told them straight away that I would not marry him and that I wanted to marry Lukas. “And if you want to marry me off, do you have lots of dowry to pay? If so I will marry whomever you want!”

She knew her family didn’t have the money for a decent dowry, which affected their ability to find her a husband of quality, a man with financial prospects and a family of honorable reputation. Ironically, she appealed to her own family’s lack of resources as a way to bolster her capacity for independent decision making about marriage and therefore about her future. When she told them she wanted to marry Lukas, however, her family was “shocked:”

They talked to my grandfather, and he said, “If Gudiya wants to marry a foreigner she will never again be allowed to have contact with any of her relatives, not even with her family.” Everybody was against my marriage to Lukas. My relatives thought, “This girl is crazy! Why doesn’t she understand that it’s not going to last long?” Some of them thought, “It’s wonderful that you married and you will go to West and make lots of money and will be able to help your family.” Some of them said, “You should just take all the pains and sorrow from your husband and don’t make him feel like leaving you,” etc.

This array of responses displays the complex and contradictory place self-chosen and transnational marriage has among non-elite South Asians. For some, the practice is akin to cultural and familial treason punishable by banishment. Some believe that in contrast to their own arranged, patrilineal marriages, “love marriages” are less likely to last due to their lack of consideration of and support for kin networks. Some, in contrast, see such marriages as a means of upward mobility for the extended natal family of the girl, so long, perhaps, as she proves willing to play well her subordinate gender role in the marriage.



1  
2  
3  
4  
5  
6  
7  
8  
9  
10  
11  
12  
13  
14  
15  
16  
17  
18  
19  
20  
21  
22  
23  
24  
25  
26  
27  
28  
29  
30  
31  
32  
33  
34  
35  
36  
37  
38  
39  
40  
41  
42  
43  
44  
45  
46  
47  
48  
49  
50  
51  
52  
53  
54  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

Eventually, Gudiya's mother's relatives decided to throw a full-blown Maithil wedding for the couple, and Lukas agreed to participate in the traditional role of the groom. This was no doubt a way for the family to save face by culturally legitimating the marriage match, essentially bringing Gudiya back into the cultural, familial and communal fold, while incorporating Lukas into it, as well. With a portion of the funding for the wedding coming from Lukas's family, Gudiya's family was able to throw a rather lavish wedding, inviting and impressing many people with a grand affair lasting several days. Lukas's family was, according to Gudiya, very excited about the wedding but sad they could not be there. They did later get to see the proceedings on videotape. After the wedding, the couple left for Sweden, where they moved in with the groom's parents, a move mimicking Maithil expectations of patrilocality.

*Persistent Inequalities*

In 2006, Gudiya wrote to me of her frustration at not being able to work in Sweden, where marriage to a citizen does not automatically bestow working rights. She would first have to demonstrate language proficiency (which she did not have) and also apply for a residential permit at the Swedish embassy in India, both of which were lengthy and arduous processes. Meanwhile, Gudiya's marriage had become increasingly rocky. In February of 2009, almost four years into her marriage, Gudiya wrote to me, "I am not happy with my marriage life and am thinking about what to do." Part of the problem was Lukas's relationship with his ex-girlfriend, a relationship Gudiya found to be too close. This was tricky inter-cultural territory, for while in the West the platonic nature of an ex-girlfriend relationship is imaginable if not fully or easily accepted, in traditional Maithil culture it is doubly inconceivable. In the latter context, there is no such thing as a girlfriend, let alone an ex-girlfriend, and there is also no such thing as a platonic (direct) social relationship between unrelated men and women. In July of 2009, Gudiya wrote,

I am sad to say that my relationship with Lukas has not been so good. We are fighting all the time. I feel so stuck, as if I am taking care of small child who has lost his mother. Many times I have felt like divorcing, but then I have come to understand that it is going to be really hard with my living and permit situations. If I would have already gotten a permanent permit to live in Sweden, it would have been easier for me to go somewhere else to work or to study for myself and for my family [of origin]. When I try to express what I feel, he gets so angry at me and starts

1  
2  
3 throwing things at home. We have tried a couple of times to stay apart to have control on our  
4 anger, but it is Lukas who decides when to stay apart and when together.  
5  
6

7 Lukas actually hit her once, after which, Gudiya told me, his own family chastised him severely. In  
8 Gudiya's description of their troubled exchanges, one can glean the contours of the multiple forces at play  
9 in this situation: cultural norms for marriage relations and their privatisation vis-à-vis the state; the  
10 gendered politics of domestic violence; and the power that can be held over immigrant spouses whose  
11 partners hold the key to their legal status (Crenshaw 1991).<sup>13</sup> Indeed the role of the state in domestic  
12 violence involving immigrants without citizen status shares interesting features with the state's role in  
13 adjudicating intimate partner violence in the context of internally subjugated populations, as evidenced in  
14 McCollough's (this volume) examination of Aboriginal responses to Australian state legal interventions.  
15 In both cases, the state assumes prerogative to protect victims of violence, while it also shores up  
16 hierarchies of cultural value, as well as the power to intervene in a private sphere the state itself has  
17 defined.  
18  
19  
20  
21  
22  
23  
24  
25  
26  
27  
28  
29  
30

31 In January of 2010, Gudiya made the decision to return to Nepal, reporting, "About Lukas and  
32 me. We are having a break, which I need. I can't focus on my relationship right now because I need that  
33 energy and strength for myself and others through me." This remarkable statement reminded me that  
34 Gudiya had always wanted to "do something meaningful" with her life and hadn't really counted  
35 marriage among her life goals. Further, upon her return to Nepal, Gudiya learned of her family's plans to  
36 marry off her younger female cousin, Priti, who had grown up in Gudiya's own household. Contrary to  
37 her parents' wishes, Priti wanted to study further and to work before getting married. She was distraught  
38 to the point of threatening suicide at the prospect of her impending marriage. I had, up until that point,  
39 been financing Priti's education and continued to do so, as Gudiya enrolled Priti in a "10 plus 2" college  
40 in Kathmandu. Subsequently, Gudiya's unemployed younger brother travelled from Janakpur to  
41 Kathmandu to live as a male chaperone with them while simultaneously continuing his seemingly never-  
42 ending search for gainful employment.<sup>14</sup> These educational, employment and residential negotiations are  
43  
44  
45  
46  
47  
48  
49  
50  
51  
52  
53  
54  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

a reminder of the high economic, social and moral stakes hanging on the mobility and control of female bodies in South Asia.

In addition to her marriage woes, Gudiya told me,

I decided to go back to Nepal, because it was really hard for me to be in Sweden. It's not a country for me, unfortunately. I can't survive without doing anything [productive, fulfilling work]. ... It's so nice to be back, to feel like life. I was frustrated in Sweden not getting work or anything to do. On other hand, I am also sad that I left many of my good friends. I would like to go back, but not for a while. I learned language, and if I don't have any use of it, what can I do? You know, I heard and know many people who want to go abroad; every day there are a few hundred of them flying to other countries to work and study; but it's really hard, and they don't understand this. On one level, I can understand that the situation of Nepal is quite disturbed [politically and economically] but at least people here [in Nepal] can try to do something rather than running away from problems. I am thinking to start doing something that is meaningful, and that is to start a school for Maithili children.

Upon her return to Nepal, Gudiya went village to village in the Janakpur area, speaking with women and children about their experiences and needs. She curtailed this activity only when her family convinced her that it was getting too dangerous, given the political instability in the area. Then, after intense self-lobbying, Gudiya managed to get a seat in a "peace building" training in Kathmandu, though, she reported, it is nearly impossible to get in if you do not have an official affiliation with an NGO. During this period in Nepal, Gudiya also completed her IELTS course and exam<sup>15</sup>, which would allow her to continue her education and then get a legal job in Sweden. Ultimately, with a Swedish passport, she would be able to work legally in other European countries, as well. Gudiya kept searching for work in Nepal, expressing an interest in getting an advanced degree in International Peace Development Studies. In these ways, she continued to use her ever evolving mobilities and networks to pursue her modern dreams and fulfill what she understood to be her financial responsibilities toward her family of origin.

Eventually Gudiya decided to return to Sweden, concerned that if she were out of the country too long her visa status would expire. She had had a brief reconciliation with her husband prior to her return, but once she was back in Sweden he expressed a firm desire to divorce her. For a while, concerned about the implications for her legal status and therefore employability, Gudiya managed to put off such proceedings. She and her husband no longer lived together, however, and Gudiya was able to find a job in

Sweden assisting elderly people living in a nursing home. In late 2011, after three years as a Swedish resident, Gudiya qualified for and acquired citizenship status. At virtually the same time, her divorce was finalised. Reflecting on her life trajectory, Gudiya wrote,

It has been quite tough for many years, but I can say it took me only a year [after separation from my husband] to become independent by finding work, living on my own in Europe, paying my own bills, economically helping to support my family in Nepal, etc. I am glad that I can stand head to head and toe to toe with Swedes and internationally.... Yes, I am also feeling “Oh my God! The Janakpuri girl just became EU citizen hahahah! I can hardly believe it myself.”

Subsequent to this exchange, Gudiya sent me a letter in which she asked for my support in helping her to fulfill her dream to provide educational and other opportunities for girls, particularly disenfranchised, low caste children, in her home community. She was simultaneously considering the financial feasibility of beginning medical school in Sweden, as well as bringing her youngest brother, still living in Nepal, to stay with her in Sweden. He, like many under-educated, under-employed, and (therefore) unmarried young men, has had run-ins with the “wrong crowd” as well as the law, and could himself use a fresh start. He has so far refused to join her.

### ***Reflections on Gender, Marriage and Transnational Mobilisations***

It is not accidental, I believe, that the dissolution of Gudiya’s transnational marriage eventuated in her employment in a nursing home. In her examination of the ideological rise of companionate marriage in the Mexican context, Jennifer Hirsch (2007) makes a particularly prescient observation about the ideological and material link between the cultural ascendance of “love” (romance and pleasure) and the denigration of “caring” work. Writes Hirsch,

The rise of love has coincided with the outsourcing of caring, at least in the developed world, so that now the changing of diapers of both the very young and the very old—as well as the cleaning of the toilets of those who are, however, temporarily, between Huggies and Depends—is done largely by darker-skinned hands. The idea that love is about pleasure rather than commitment is a social problem insofar as it relates to the persistent devaluation of the work of caring. (103)

Without the “love” of her companionate, transnational marriage, Gudiya found herself for some time in a social-economic-legal quagmire. She was not Swedish enough to continue her education and get a good job in Sweden; she was not Maithil enough to return home honorably (without a husband), where in any

case she would have no one to support her financially. She was (and is) still carrying the expectations of her less mobile, less cosmopolitan family members that she send home riches from the Western world. And she remains committed to her own imagined world of possibilities for returning to do uplift work in her home community. Having stayed married long enough to gain independent Swedish (EU) citizenship with its attendant educational and economic rights, Gudiya bided her time, filling a destiny others might expect of her as a dark-skinned woman immigrant, thankful for her low-wage job caring for the elderly in her in-law's social democratic northern European land.

Globalised contexts with their attendant mobilisations and uneven regulability are ripe for the development of alternative subjectivities that in turn produce novel configurations of desire and intimacy, even as they may also entail new and sometimes brutal forms of restriction. In this potent context, Gudiya has improvised, indeed *written*, literally as well as figuratively, her own story. Reflecting on the life experiences she has had, she explains,

I like our culture in some ways and in some ways I don't agree, but I don't think there is anything wrong with that. Sometimes I find it difficult in our society especially around my relatives [who] don't like to see people different than them. They think as long as your family is economically strong you as a child don't need to do anything in the sense you don't have to study or share what you feel. I am glad that my family has been always weak economically [because it has resulted in the fact] that today I am different in the same society.

As a transnational subject, Gudiya is indeed "different in the same society." She weighs the things she likes about her birth culture, such as "that marriages [may have] lots of problems... but [couples] live together laughing and crying" (that is, they stick it out), with the things she likes of Western cultures, such as the freedom of women to meet and learn from others. Borrowing from the Eastern religion her Western (ex)husband introduced to her, she reflects, "Buddha said if you want to get rid of your fear and worries, try to help someone. I think I want to keep on going through that direction."

In their introduction to *Love and Globalization*, Mark Padilla *et al* (2007) observe that examinations of political economy often ignore the personal and emotional spheres of life, focusing instead on large-scale structures and systems (xi-xii). In contrast to the myopically macro approaches criticised by Padilla *et al*, anthropologists have contended that "apprehending larger world issues requires

1  
2  
3 a focus on experiences through the lens of intimacy, while keeping in the immediate background a  
4 concern for comparison” (Besnier 2007:5). My focus has been on the life course and life narratives of an  
5 individual who has set herself into global circulation, effectively mobilising herself by navigating across  
6 multiple and intersecting cultural, social, economic and legal systems – each impacting and impacted by  
7 her marital status. I have sought to shed light on, rather than lose sight of, the relationship between  
8 “systems” and “subjects,” who prove themselves again and again to be the makers of history as well as  
9 made by history, at once limited by and creating global friction.  
10  
11  
12  
13  
14  
15  
16  
17

18 Roads, Tsing (2005) explains, “are a good image for conceptualising how friction works: Roads  
19 create pathways that make motion easier and more efficient, but in doing so they limit where we go. The  
20 ease of travel they facilitate is also a structure of confinement” (5). The factors I have delineated above  
21 regarding cultural geography, transnational mobilisation, and family structure and strategy, and their  
22 imbrications with multiple and conflicting cultural norms for gender and sexuality, are all part of the  
23 “frictional” circumstance of Gudiya’s calculated movements, the “roads” she travels across time and  
24 space.  
25  
26  
27  
28  
29  
30  
31  
32

33 At the crux of Gudiya’s story we find embodied desire, of which sexuality is but one part.  
34 Cymene Howe and Jakob Rigi (2009) observe:  
35  
36

37 Precisely because sex, sexuality, sexual ‘deviation,’ and the reproductive mandates of much of  
38 nation building have often benefited from sequestering sexuality as a proximate, controllable,  
39 intimate and personal terrain, the transnational dimensions of conceiving ‘desire’ and sexuality  
40 allow us to envision new forms of intimacy, politics and ways of understanding sexuality. (298)  
41  
42  
43

44 In such contexts, Howe and Rigi emphasise, women’s choices and marital strategies show that “they are  
45 not sycophants to western materialism, but interlocutors who negotiate desire, status and marital norms”  
46 (304). In Gudiya’s story, we find a woman whose individualised aspirations drew her away from home,  
47 both geographically and maritally, and toward an imagined Western world of gender freedom and human  
48 agency. Gudiya hoped these moves would result not in vast wealth but in the facility to engage  
49 meaningfully at work serving those in need, personified, ultimately, in the uneducated, low caste, girls of  
50 her home community. By choosing marriage to a European man she viewed as different from most in his  
51  
52  
53  
54  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60



interest in the real (unexoticised) her and in his less material pursuits, she also effects an uneasy reconciliation of sorts with her natal family and community in regard to her wayward relational and bodily practices. Her Maithil wedding ceremony strengthened this reading of her family's and her own legitimisation, even as it nudged forward slightly the possibility of a transnational sexual propriety.

What Gudiya has discovered, however, is that such transnational freedoms are circumscribed by Western gender orders rife with their own domestic violences and imperial reaches. These include state renderings regarding immigrant dependents, as well as gendered racialisations and devaluations of care work. At the present moment, Gudiya finds herself in a new kind of transnational eddy, oceans away from the seemingly out-of-the-way place into which she was born. Armed now with deeper transnational knowledges and networks -- if also burdened with the pain of lost imaginaries and a continued sense of responsibility toward her natal family and community -- Gudiya continues to align her body and mind toward the pursuit of her evolving dreams.<sup>16</sup>

**Acknowledgements**

The field research on which this article is based was funded by a Fulbright Senior Research Grant. I am also appreciative of financial support provided by the Center for the Studies of Race, Ethnicity and Gender and the Provost's Office at Bucknell University. I wish to thank Gudiya for her trust and friendship, and for her engagement on this project. I also thank her parents and siblings for providing me with shelter, sustenance, human connection, as well as the twin offerings of protection and freedom.

**References**

Abraham, Leena. 2004. Redrawing the *Lakshman Rekha*: Gender differences and cultural constructions in youth sexuality in urban India. In Sanjay Srivastava, Ed. *Sexual Sites, Seminal Attitudes: Sexualities, Masculinities and Culture in South Asia*. New Delhi: Sage Publications. Pp. 209-240.

Abraham, Taisha. & Malashri Lal. 1995. *Female Empowerment: Impact of Literacy in Jaipur District, Rajasthan*. New Delhi: Har-Anand Publications.

Ahearn, Laura M. 2001. *Invitations to Love: Literacy, Love Letters, and Social Change in Nepal*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Appadurai, Arjun. 1996. *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

- Banerji, Rita. 2008. *Sex and Power: Defining History, Shaping Societies*. New Delhi: Penguin Books.
- Besnier, Niko. 2007. Negotiating Local Subjectivities on the Edge of the Global. Inaugural lecture delivered on the appointment to the chair of Cultural Anthropology at the Faculty of Social and Behavioural Sciences at the University of Amsterdam on 4 Friday May 2007.
- Burghart, Richard. 1988. Cultural Knowledge of Hygiene and Sanitation as a Basis for Health Development in Nepal. *CNAS Journal*, 15(2):185-99.
- Burghart, Richard. 1993. A Quarrel in the Language Family: Agency and Representations of Speech in Mithila. *Modern Asian Studies*, 27(4):761-804.
- Crenshaw, Kimberlé. 1991. Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color. *Stanford Law Review*, 43(6):1241-99.
- Dickey, Sara. 1995. Consuming Utopia: Film Watching in Tamil Nadu. *Consuming Modernity: Public Culture in a South Asian World*, edited by Carol A. Breckenridge. pp. 131-56. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Dickey, Sara. 2002. Anjali's Prospects: Class Mobility in Urban India. In *Everyday life in South Asia*, edited by Diane P. Mines and Sara Lamb. pp. 214-26. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- George, Annie. 2002. Embodying Identity through Heterosexual Sexuality – Newly Married Adolescent Women in India. *Culture, Health & Sexuality* 4(2):207-22.
- Giddens, Anthony. 1991. *Modernity and Self-identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Gold, Ann Grodzins. 2002. New Light in the House: Schooling Girls in Rural North India. In *Everyday Life in South Asia*, edited by Diane P. Mines & Sara Lamb. pp. 86-99. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Grierson, George A. 1881. *An Introduction to the Maithili Language of North Bihar*. Calcutta: Asiatic Society.
- Hancock, Mary. 1999. *Womanhood in the Making: Domestic Ritual and Public Culture in Urban South India*. Boulder: Westview Press.
- Henry, Edward O. 1998. Maithil Women's Song: Distinctive and Endangered Species. *Ethnomusicology*, 42(3):414-34.
- Hirsch, Jennifer S. 2007. "Love Makes a Family:" Globalization, Companionate Marriage, and the Modernization of Gender Inequality. In *Love and Globalization: Transformations of Intimacy in the*



*Contemporary World*, edited by Mark B. Padilla, Jennifer S. Hirsch, Miguel Muñoz-Laboy, Robert E. Sember & Richard G. Parker. pp. 93-106. Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press.

Howe, Cymene & Jakob Rigi. 2009. Transnationalizing Desire: Sexualizing Culture and Commodifying Sexualities. *Ethnos*, 74(3):297-306.

Jain, Jyotindra. 1995. The Bridge of Vermilion: Narrative Rhythm in the Dusadh Legends of Mithila. In *Indian Painting: Essays in Honor of Karl J. Khandalavala*, edited by B.N. Goswamy and Usha Bhatia. pp. 207-22. Lalit Kala Akademi, New Delhi.

Jeffery, Patricia & Roger Jeffery. 1996. *Don't Marry Me to a Plowman! Women's Everyday Lives in Rural North India*. Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press.

Kannabiran, Kalpana. 2010. Feminist Deliberative Politics in India. 2010. *Women's Movements in the Global Era: The Power of Local Feminisms*, edited by Amrita Basu. pp. 119-56. Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press.

Kulick, Don & Margaret Willson, eds. 1995. *Taboo: Sex, Identity, and Erotic Subjectivity in Anthropological Fieldwork*. New York: Routledge.

Kumar, Nita. 2000. *Lessons from Schools: The History of Education in Banaras*. New Delhi and Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

Kumar, Anuradha. 2002. Adolescence and Sexuality in the Rajasthani Context. In *Coming of Age in South and Southeast Asia: Youth, Courtship and Sexuality*, edited by Lenore Manderson & Pranee Liamputtong. pp. 58-74. Richmond, Surrey, England: Curzon Press.

Liechty, Mark. 2003. *Suitably Modern: Making Middle-class Culture in a New Consumer Society*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Liechty, Mark. 2010. *Out Here in Kathmandu: Modernity on the Global Periphery*. Martin Chautari Press.

Markowitz, Fran & Michael Ashkenazi, eds. 1999. *Sex, Sexuality, and the Anthropologist*. Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press.

Massey, Doreen B. 1994. *Space, Place, and Gender*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994

McDowell, Linda. 1999. *Gender, Identity and Place: Understanding Feminist Geographies* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Minturn, L. 1993. *Sita's Daughters: Coming Out of Purdah: The Rajput Women of Khalapur Revisited*. New York: Oxford University Press.

- Mishra, Pramod. 1997. Broken Egg or Live Wire?: Manu's Lies against Hindu Women's Lives. *Studies in Nepali History and Society*, 2(2):345-8.
- Mohanty, Chandra Talpade, Ann Russo and Lourdes Torres. 1991. *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Padilla, Mark B., Jennifer S. Hirsch, Miguel Muñoz-Laboy, Robert E. Sember, & Richard G. Parker. 2007. *Love and Globalization: Transformations of Intimacy in the Contemporary World*. Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press.
- Phadke, Shilpa. 2005. Some Notes Toward Understanding the Construction of Middle-class Urban Women's Sexuality in India. In *Sexuality, Gender and Rights: Exploring Theory and Practice in South and Southeast Asia*, edited by Geetanjali Misra & Radhika Chandiramani. pp. 67-81. New Delhi: SAGE Publications.
- Phnuyal, Bimal. 1997. Exploring Alternatives to Patriarchal Pedagogy: An Immediate Challenge for Mahila Mukti Andolan. *Studies in Nepali History and Society*, 2(2):306-11.
- Ram, Kalpana. 1998. Uneven Modernities and Ambivalent Sexualities: Women's Construction of Puberty in Coastal Kanyakumari, Tamilnadu. In Mary E. John and Janaki Nair, Eds. *A Question of Silence? The Sexual Economies of Modern India*. New Delhi: Kali for Women, pp. 269-303.
- Rofel, Lisa. 1999. *Other Modernities: Gendered Yearnings in China after Socialism*. Berkeley: California University Press.
- Seizer, Susan. 1996. Playing the Field: The Sexual Life of Anthropologists. (Review essay.) *Transition*. 71:100-13
- Seymour, Susan. 2002. Family and Gender Systems in Transition: A Thirty-five-year Perspective. In *Everyday life in South Asia*, edited by Diane P. Mine & Sara Lamb. pp. 100-15. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Srivastava, Sanjay. 2007 *Passionate Modernity. Sexuality, Gender, Consumption, and Class in India*. Delhi: Routledge,
- Tsing, Anna Lowenhaupt. 2005. *Friction: An Ethnography of Global Connection*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- Uberoi, Patricia. 2001. A Suitable Romance? Trajectories of Courtship in Indian Popular Fiction. In *Images of the 'Modern Woman' in Asia: Global Media, Local Meanings*, edited by Shoma Munshi. pp. 169-87. Richmond: Curzon Press.
- Wadley, Susan.S. 1994. *Struggling with Destiny in Karimpur, 1925-1984*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Notes

<sup>1</sup> All names appearing in this article are pseudonyms. Gudiya has read the article, and the author has incorporated her feedback.

<sup>2</sup> The Mithila region is generally understood by historians and linguists to extend to the Himalaya foothills to the north, Ganges river to the south, the Gandaki and Kosi rivers to the west and east, respectively (Burghart, 1993; Grierson, 1881). Historically, Mithila has more accurately designated a cultural and linguistic region blending into neighboring regions than a definite political or geographical unit (Henry, 1998, p. 415-417; Jain, 1995, 207). According to Richard Burghart, Maithil people have occupied the area for more than one thousand years, and the majority of the population is Maithili-speaking. Since state efforts in the 1950s to eradicate malaria, the district has been increasingly settled by Nepali speakers from the hills, who come to take advantage of the greater supply of fertile land (Burghart, 1988).

<sup>3</sup> Rita Banerji (2008) has outlined a several millennial story of periodic shifts in discourses on sexuality and morality on the Indian subcontinent. Over a 5000 year history, argues Banerji, sex went from celebrated, masculine duty to barrier to spiritual liberation to reclamation to a shameful activity in need of veiling, to the current period in which “it is puzzling how the nation reconciles its projected conservative personal with the sexual statistics of its social reality” (21). Pointing to the “mind-boggling discrepancy between the earlier periods of Hindu life (when figures in the act of intercourse were sculpted on to temple walls) and modern India (where a kiss on the lips on the movie screen causes the censor board to emerge scowling with hammer and axe) indicates a society that has evidently undergone significant changes in its moral outlook on life” (17), she shows that contemporary Indian attitudes on sexuality are very much influenced by this historical accumulation but also reflect the interests of the new dominating or master class, bringing us to what she sees as a malfunctioning present in which burning issues such as AIDS and female genocide are fostered rather than effectively addressed.

<sup>4</sup> With this complex and convoluted history and contemporary orientation toward sexuality, it is no wonder that many of the most salient issues addressed by the Indian feminist movement in recent years have sexual politics at their core (Kannabiran 2010).

<sup>5</sup> This is not to say that young people never have a hand in selecting their marriage partners, but that even where this is the case, families and the couples in question present such liaisons as arranged by elders.

<sup>6</sup> Landholding in the Janakpur area is mixed. In many instances, large estates owned by absentee landlords are cultivated by landless tenants. In other instances, smaller, present landowners enjoy multi-generational labor relations with those who work their land; in yet other cases they work their own land.

<sup>7</sup> I had done my doctoral work in this same area a number of years prior but had visited only once in the intervening period.

<sup>8</sup> In retrospect I find a certain gendered logic in Gudiya’s effort to bring me into the feminine interior of her household, while also using me as a foreign woman (for whom space was differently gendered) as a source of income and access to the extra-domestic world.

<sup>9</sup> Silence around issues sexuality in the context of anthropological fieldwork, as well as anthropological writing, is deeply entrenched in the discipline (Kulick and Willson 1995; Markowitz and Ashkenazi 1999; Seizer 1996). My acknowledgment to Gudiya of myself as a desiring subject in general opened the possibility of a dialogue resulting not only in a deepening of our personal connection but in the possibility of enriched ethnographic knowledge.

<sup>10</sup> Gudiya also occasionally wore articles of my clothing, as I did hers. In so doing, we embodied in an interesting exchange of fantasies, playing with the notion of shifting our inter-cultural positioning and gendered identities through markers of dress. Only much later did Gudiya suggest to me that by dressing in my clothing she was also expressing a sort of erotic attraction to me personally, as well.

<sup>11</sup> For discussions of such contradictions in a variety of settings, see Ahearn, 2001; Dickey, 2002; Gold, 2002; Liechty, 1996 and 2003; Seymour, 2002.

<sup>12</sup> Just *what* young people learn in school is another question beyond the scope of but not irrelevant to the present discussion, although few scholars have systematically examined this question (Ahearn, 2001 p. 152-171; Phnuyal, 1997, p. 311). For additional studies of family, gender, education and change in South Asia, see Abraham & Lal, 1995; Hancock, 1999; Kumar, 2000; Minturn, 1993; Wadley, 1994.

<sup>13</sup> Domestic violence in Gudiya's childhood household also occurred; I had observed Gudiya to be on both the receiving and perpetrating end of such behaviors.

<sup>14</sup> After just a few weeks, they had decided to pull Priti out of the college girls' hostel in which she was living because other students living there were reportedly prostituting themselves as "call girls." Such fears and consequent housing strategies speak to the depth of Maithil worries about the sexuality of girls not duly under patriarchal authority and surveillance, as well as the prevalence of sex-related economies in Kathmandu. Gudiya's family's work and educational dynamics in regard to gender also speak to the acute levels of male unemployment and disaffection in the context of global proletarianization.

<sup>15</sup> The "International English Language Testing System" (IELTS) is an international standardized test of English language proficiency.

<sup>16</sup> In the time during which this article was under review, Gudiya met and married another Swedish man with whom she has had a baby. Supported by the Swedish welfare state, Gudiya has been able to stay home with her baby. She has also recently visited her family in Janakpur with her daughter, whom they have welcomed with delight.