

A case study of post-earthquake consequences for women within marginalized groups in Nepal

A qualitative case study with the aim to explore the consequences for women within
marginalized groups in a post-earthquake society

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Abstract

This report is the outcome of a case study conducted in Kathmandu, Nepal in April 2016. The purpose of the study is to investigate in the consequences of the 2015 earthquake in Nepal, from the perspective of women within socioeconomically vulnerable groups. The caste system is still practiced nearly all over Nepal and women are still facing multiple forms of discrimination. A woman belonging to the Dalits, which is the group considered to be at the bottom of the hierarchy and below the castes, have no right to control land, housing or money and are exposed to violence and forced sexual labour. The aim of the study is to shed light over how already existing discrimination leads to further examples of discrimination in the aftermath of a natural disaster and the “class-consciousness” of natural disasters. People within a society are living under different conditions and these conditions lead to different consequences when facing a natural disaster. The components of these conditions are often intertwined with each other and should therefore not be examined separately, which is why an intersectional perspective is used for this study. Furthermore, standpoint theory is used as well, to look at these issues from the viewpoint of the marginalized people of the society. Interviews were made with 6 different respondents, who are working for NGOs in and outside of Kathmandu and who through their work are coming on contact with the issues mentioned. My findings show several examples of post-earthquake consequences for women which can be linked to the strong patriarchy, the use of caste system and mistreatment from the government.

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Keywords: Caste, Dalit, gender equality, intersectionality, post-earthquake consequences

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Key concepts:

Caste, Dalit, gender equality, natural disaster, poverty, post-earthquake consequences

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

1.1 Introduction

Natural disasters are hitting all over our planet, at various levels. Looking back at disasters occurring in the world, there has been some previous attempts made to shed light on how natural disasters are affecting citizens differently depending on which social status and grouping they belong to. This happened for example after hurricane Katrina, a natural disaster which struck the Gulf Coast of the United States in 2005. David Alexander, a geomorphologist and professor of disaster management mainly focusing at the characterisation of vulnerability to major hazards, was referring to the hurricane Katrina as a “class-quake”, hitting harder on those with low social status and stated that the victims also were divided by ethnic origin (Alexander, 2006). Dr Susan Cutter, a professor in geography mainly focusing at disaster vulnerability and resilience science, was in the shadow of the hurricane arguing that it within the hazard and disaster literature is an ignorance regarding socially created vulnerabilities (Cutter, 2006). Social vulnerability is explained as an outcome of the combination of different social factors, such as access to basic health care, capital, the liveability of places, access to different services and political representation (ibid). Class, race and ethnicity are other factors mentioned by Cutter (2006). It is stated by Cutter that the hurricane occurred in the end of the month and thus the welfare checks were low, there were a lack of food and no help from the city or the state for the homeless and the poorest. Poor, black, single mothers, young and old, were pinpointed as being the most vulnerable groups (ibid). In planning for future catastrophes, Cutter suggested that one should not only look at the natural environment but also the social environment: “It is the interaction between nature and society that produces the vulnerability of places. [...] Disasters are income neutral and colour-blind. Their impacts, however, are not” (2006).

In April 2015, a major earthquake struck Nepal. A week after the earthquake, between 8000 – 9000 people were reported dead and more than 22 000 people were injured, according to Amnesty International (2015:6). The same numbers are found in the official incident report presented by the Nepalese government (2015). According to the governmental report, almost 600 000 homes were reported to be fully destroyed and 280 000 homes partially destroyed (Government of Nepal, 2015). The area’s which were most severely damaged were the areas where the poorest people live as the epicentre of the earthquake was close to places where households are deprived, built with mud and wood (McGranahan, 2015). Significant for these

areas are also that there is a lack of infrastructure and vehicular roads, which made it difficult for rescue teams to reach there (ibid). A Nepali journalist, Kanak Mani Dixit, stated that the natural disaster was “a very class-conscious earthquake, in town and country it targeted underprivileged households with mud-mortar construction” (McGranahan, 2015).

I travelled to Nepal one year after the earthquake, to study the earthquake aftermath in the context of disaster vulnerability. I wanted to look at the interaction between a natural disaster and social exposure in order to identify discriminatory consequences. My argument is that more focus must be set already in the prevention work when looking at how to work with disaster vulnerability in order for the consequences to not become extremely disproportionate big between groups with dissimilar socioeconomically strength. The purpose with this study is to show examples of different discriminatory actions and consequences found after the 2015 earthquake in Nepal. For this reason, I spent two weeks in Nepal conducting interviews and gathering observations.

1.2 Aim

The overall topic of my research is to look at how a natural disaster affects a society unequally and how already existing forms of discrimination become reshaped and re-enacted in the context of a natural disaster. I would argue that it is important to look at how a disaster, which is striking in blindness, still looks like it has been targeting the most vulnerable groups when looking at the consequences. It is therefore of importance to look at this from a feminist perspective, as it is a perspective emanating from the perspective of the inferior in a society. I would thus like to explore the impact of natural disasters on women in socioeconomic marginalized group such as the Dalit community, in the context of the 2015 earthquake in Nepal. The more specific aim would be to do an intersectional analysis of the multiple discrimination grounds cis- and transwomen are exposed to, as women, poor and untouchable, in the context of the 2015 earthquake.

- Which post-earthquake consequences do people working in areas where they come in contact with gender rights and vulnerable groups identify with regards to class, gender and caste?
- How were the Dalit women affected by the 2015 earthquake of Nepal, in context of the intersection of class, gender and caste?
- How were people belonging to the LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans-) group affected by the 2015 earthquake of Nepal?

- How do the interviewees experience that governmental aid was distributed after the earthquake, considering factors such as class, gender and caste?

1.3 Motivation of the study

On a macro level, one could connect this study to the fact that natural disasters without doubt will occur again, in Nepal and other places on earth. This, in combination with the statistics showing how the gap between poor and rich in the world is increasing, means that many people are in risk of being affected by “class-conscious” natural disasters.

On a micro level, it is important to look at how the Nepalese women of the Dalit community and other socioeconomically vulnerable or exposed groups were affected by the earthquake, as they are already in a vulnerable position. This structural vulnerability which individuals are exposed to after a natural disaster is not specific for Nepal but can be argued to be seen in any society hit by a natural disaster, as in USA after hurricane Katrina as mentioned earlier, where one can see examples of consequences on an individual level. There are many questions to be answered within the area of environmental justice. How come a natural disaster which is striking in blindness still seems to hit unequally on a society, as if it was targeting the already vulnerable? Anything which brings more light to this would be beneficial.

1.4 Situating myself

It is difficult to tell a story that is not mine. It begun with me, of course, otherwise I would not be here today writing about this topic. But that does not make me the main character of the story at all. I can picture the scene, I can hover over the scarce landscape and remote areas. I can see the Dalit women, the stigma they are facing and the intersectional web of discrimination they are captured in, but I cannot feel their pain. How could I? Only they could tell about it.

When situating myself, I will refer to Yuval-Davis and how she is explaining the concept of transversal politics. According to this concept, one should not consider oneself as a representative of a community, but rather as an advocate, aiming to promote their cause (1999:95). I am not the authentic voice of the communities I have met with, but I am trying to promote their cause. Yuval-Davis is furthermore explaining the concept of “rooting” and “shifting”, where I as a messenger should reflect on my own position and identity, which is the “rooting”, but at the same time also make an attempt to shift and put myself in the situation of those I am approaching or talking to (1999:96). I find this important.

I believe that we all belong to the same global community and that we share a mutual responsibility. Regardless if a catastrophe occurs in the neighbouring city or on the other side of the world, it is still everyone's concern as we all are interconnected to each other. Most of all, I travelled to Nepal to learn, as I highly value the notion of learning from each other.

This case study begun in Sweden, continued in Nepal and was finished in Sweden. I cannot say I am exactly the same person now as when the project started, as everything we experience and witness places another layer on top of us. I cannot say that that this research changed me, but it added something to me and it made me grow somehow. It made me more aware, and I did learn.

CHAPTER TWO

Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework that will be used for analysing the material in this case study is firstly feminist standpoint theory on environmental justice. Cutter is in her book "Hazards, vulnerability and Environmental justice" highlighting that the science field within that area has been criticised from the perspective of standpoint theory (2006:129). It is argued by Cutter that the acquisition of knowledge somewhat is determined by which views about the natural world that are adopted to be true. These different views are argued to be shaped by the perceptions of gender, race, social and cultural differences and these perceptions turn into privileged or unprivileged positions in society (ibid). Furthermore, Cutter is stating that not only the acquisition of knowledge and science but also the practice of science is socially constructed. This social construction can explain the phenomena of scientific results sprung from the same protocols but showing different results, depending on the social organizations perspective and agenda (Cutter, 2006:130). As an example, the under-representation of women are according to Cutter a recurrent issue affecting the practice of science within this field and are asking for diversity to challenge existing norms and research paradigm (ibid).

Stoetzler and Yuval-Davis are arguing that one core ideas within standpoint theory is that experiences, social practices and values and how knowledge production is socially organized is seen as a way to enable the transformation of situatedness into knowledge (2002:316).

According to Stoetzler and Yuval-Davis, it is impossible to discuss standpoint theory without relating to the interrelated moral, political, epistemological and ontological discourses (2002:317). The feminist standpoint theory is promoting the concept of situated knowledge

and how important it is that knowledge emerges from different standpoints, with the perception that the marginalized and oppressed of the society are able to produce a more objective and just picture of the world (Harding 1986:657).

Stoetzler and Yuval-Davis are stating that the concept of feminist standpoint developed with the aim to oppose against the view of social groups seeing the world in a particular way just because of their particular social location. Thus, it was a reaction against the notion of using terms such as “women’s viewpoint”, since a standpoint is something achieved and not something given (2002:317). Another debate have been regarding the difference between the group and the individual as units for analysis. The definition of the group is stated to be crucial within the standpoint theory, as a group can be defined as those commonly located in a specific positioning, those belonging to the same identity community, those sharing a social network, or support the same political grouping. Early formulations of standpoint theory was defining women as a group, but those groups started to split into fragmentations, embracing differences and intersectionality, as all women obviously not hold the same view on things or share the same goals, values and interests (ibid).

Secondly, intersectionality is used within the framework for this thesis. The intersectional concept came through as a response to the approach of studying socio-cultural mechanisms separately instead of looking at the interactions between the concepts (Einarsdottir, Thorvaldsdottir, 2007:21). Intersectionality aims to view the concepts as being built on top of each other instead of examining them one and one (ibid). Though, these concepts should be examined as being intertwined and not as resting individually on top of each other. It could be explained as instead of looking at only one key aspect, for example class or gender, one must look at other dimensions, like how the two factors affect each other when being entwined.

Lykke describes intersectionality as a method of analysing how constructed socio-cultural systems are creating injustice by their interaction with each other (Lykke, 2010:50).

Intersectionality can hence be used as a tool when looking at the interactions between different factors, axes of power, to identify discriminatory outcomes. It is argued by Crenshaw that one must emphasise more on intragroup alterations within the field of social justice (1991:1242). I therefore want to use intersectionality as an analytical tool to identify the underlying causes of injustice, as intersectionality can help detect discriminatory practices which are hard to identify. Intersectionality will be combined with standpoint theory as they

both aim to look closer at social structures, its different components and how the different components affect each other.

CHAPTER THREE

Previous research / Literature review

This chapter is divided in different sections, each explaining a concept which is central for this study. The purpose is to use this part as a context to the gathered primary material. One must though be aware of the fact that the text sources used in this chapter were produced for other purposes and that the organizations behind them have their own agendas and interests.

3.1 Natural hazards and vulnerability

A hazard is defined as a potential threat to people and things they value and ascends from an intersection of human systems, natural processes and technological systems, according to Cutter (2006:374). Examples are earthquakes, blizzards, floods, air pollution and drought (ibid). Hazard zones can have a risk estimator linked to them, estimating the probability of a hazard or event occurring. A disaster is the outcome of the risk and the hazard, but the magnitude of a disaster is difficult to estimate in beforehand (2006:374). The term social vulnerability is used by Cutter to define the exposure of social groups to potential losses from hazards (2006:91). Cutter is arguing that intersections of social, political and economic factors creates a web of risks that affect people and the places where they live (2006:92). Social vulnerability derives from everyday life events and circumstances and factors such as lack of access to resources and information, limited access to political representation, certain beliefs and customs, weak buildings, infrastructure and lifelines (2006:100).

According to Cutter, there are three tenets in vulnerability research. Firstly, the identification of conditions which make people or places vulnerable to natural hazards. Secondly, the supposition that vulnerability is a social condition, and lastly the integration of possible exposures and societal pliability focusing on particular places or regions (2006:111). Cutter argues that although there have been considerable research done regarding the vulnerability of the built environment, there is a lack of knowledge concerning the social aspects of vulnerability. Furthermore, it is stated by Cutter that social losses seems to be absent in after-disaster cost/loss estimation reports. Social vulnerability is commonly described with individual characteristics such as age, race, income and employment. Although social

vulnerability is a product of social inequalities and social factors such the ones mentioned above, it also includes place inequalities, the characteristics of built communities, as for example the level of urbanization and economic vitality, which contributes to the social vulnerability of places. Cutter argues that there is a lack of research comparing the social vulnerability of one place to another, which could give answer to the question of how different factors explain differences in economic losses from natural hazards (2006:112).

Amnesty International released a report in 2015 which focused at the earthquake aftermath from a human rights perspective. Amnesty International argues that the recovery after an earthquake should not only address the need for material and psychological support but must also address how to uphold the human rights (2015:5). The earthquake in Nepal is described as an ongoing emergency rather than a single disaster, with the necessity to guard against discrimination when distributing aid (ibid). In order to do so, attention must be brought to deeper structural injustices persisting in Nepal and its relation to the vulnerability of disadvantaged groups in the context of a disaster (Amnesty International, 2015:5).

It is argued that the people of the bottom of Nepal's socioeconomic and caste hierarchies were most severely impacted by the 2015 earthquake (Citrin, 2015). On the bottom of the Nepalese caste hierarchies the Dalits, also known as untouchables, are found. The next part will give a description of the ongoing caste discrimination in Nepal as well as of the life of Dalits.

3.2 Caste discrimination in Nepal:

According to a UN report, around 80 percent of the Nepalese population reported Hindu as their religion and hence located themselves within the caste system. However, it is argued that all Nepalese inhabitants historically have been socially defined by the caste system regardless of being Hindu or not (Bennett et. al, 2008:1). For most people living within the territory of the Nepali state the caste system is determining their identity, social status and life chances (ibid). The caste system is divided into several groupings, with all groups belonging to the caste system except one group which is considered as being impure, not belonging within the caste system. They are called Dalits, or untouchables (Bennett et al, 2008:2). It is estimated that between 3 – 4,5 million of the Nepalese population are Dalits (International Dalit Solidarity Network, 2016).

Human Rights Watch are referring to the treatment of Dalits in South Asia as hidden apartheid (2001). The structure of having Dalits in the bottom of the caste system and the caste system in itself can be found in countries such as India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Japan and

Pakistan (ibid). Dalits are facing multiple forms of discrimination, such as denial of access to land, physical abuse, they cannot visit the same churches and temples as the ones from higher casts go to. Regarding the Dalits situation in Nepal, Human Rights Watch are furthermore reporting about abuse against Dalits in areas such as access to education, access to land and other forms of oppression (2004). Cultural anthropologist Steven Folmar has conducted several studies on Dalits in Nepal. In his study from 2007 he is discussing the social equality for Dalits in Nepal, whether the small changes and improvements are a sign of an actual fundamental shift or not. He argues that even though Dalits might get access to once-forbidden spaces and get the possibility to have occupations which used to be forbidden, this can be a sign of positive social change but also of superficial changes overclouding the fact that things are changing very slightly (2007:45).

Within the Dalit community, women are reported to be particularly vulnerable since they are facing multiple discrimination, as women, poor and belonging to the lowest cast.

(International Dalit Solidarity Network, 2016). The girls and women are hence caught in intersections of gender, poverty and caste, in the context of imbalanced and unequal social and economic power equations. To put this in context to the earthquake in Nepal, I will firstly give a general view of the situation for women in Nepal.

3.3 Women's situation in Nepal:

Women in Nepal are stated to receive less opportunities for education and employment as men (Freedom House, 2015). Furthermore, women are also facing gender-based violence such as domestic violence, rape and dowry violence (ibid). The use of underage marriage of girls is common and widespread and most common within lower-status groups (Freedom House, 2015). Nepal's national index of empowerment and inclusion is showing that Dalit women are the most marginalized, having a much tougher situation than Dalit men (International Dalit Solidarity Network, 2016). The Dalit women have no control over land, housing, money and other resources. Moreover, they are often being forced into severely demeaning work (ibid).

One striking image I brought with me from Nepal was when I was passing over a small bridge. On one side of the bridge I could see young men and boys playing in the water, splashing water at each other and laughing. When I looked in the other direction, I saw a group of young women and girls, strenuously washing clothes in the water. It was a hot day and they looked very sweaty and tired. I took a walk around the area and when I walked back

over the bridge 45 minutes later, the picture was still the same. The boys were still playing and laughing, the girls were still washing clothes. It is a picture I will remember well as it goes hand in hand with the stories I was told about growing up as a woman in Nepal.

Regarding disaster vulnerability in the context of gender, Elaine Enarson, founding member of the Gender and Disaster Network, argued that women and girls are facing the greatest challenges after natural disasters in general (2006). She states that even in situations of chaos, women carry the responsibility for the family, the duty to keep the household clean, to put the babies to sleep and to support their partner or husband caught in silent grief. Daughters are called upon to help their parents to a greater extent than sons (ibid). Teenage girls become more vulnerable to sexual assault and domestic violence against women increases. Women and girls are carrying a heavy burden of hidden emotional work, with babies, teens, parents, partners, neighbours, friends depending on them and turning to them for support (Enarson, 2006). Enarson is listing these factors as explanations to why more women than men are reporting post-traumatic stress following disasters (ibid). This is why Enarson is asking policy-makers to come up with tools for gender-sensitive emergency response and recovery and to make use of gender-specific data, to create gender-fair emergency relief (2006).

Furthermore, Dalit women are extremely exposed to sexual abuse and are often victims of trafficking and forced sexual labour (International Dalit Solidarity Network, 2016). The next part will therefore discuss the occurrence of trafficking in Nepal.

3.4 Trafficking in Nepal:

Brysk and Maskey (2012) are explaining that Asia has a long history of trafficking and unpaid labour, due to factors such as the caste system which is expecting low caste groups to perform such duties, not seldom over generations. According to a study by India's National Commission for Women, 62 per cent of the women within the sex market in India were from untouchable castes (ibid). Globalisation is according to Brysk and Maskey the explanation to why South Asia has become a centre for low cost work- and sex-trafficking (2012). Many people are moving from the countryside to bigger cities, due to factors such as poverty, landlessness, lack of education, caste and gender discrimination and natural disasters. Much of the trafficking is happening over borders, and Nepal are one of the major source countries while India is one of the main destination countries, according to Brysk and Maskey (2012). India and Nepal has an open border policy and the majority of the cross-border victims from Nepal hence end up in India. It is common for young women in Nepal to be trafficked to India

and there are estimations saying that 12.000 – 15.000 girls are trafficked between Nepal and India each year for prostitution (Freedom House, 2015). Within India, research has shown that girls from large and poor families who are living in areas who has been struck by drought or natural disasters are increasingly trafficked. Also, girls in South Asia are stated to face multiple forms of discrimination. When a female child is born, the parents immediately start to worry about the dowry. Girls have less access to nutrition and education and once they are married they are considered the property of the family of the husband (Brysk and Maskey, 2012).

Brysk and Maskey (2012) are arguing that one must shift focus from India as a destination country and look at the source countries, as there is little attention paid to the gap between policy and practice in the surrounding source countries. More emphasis should be on how to tackle the root causes, which by Brysk and Maskey are stated to be poverty and patriarchy (2012). They are asking democratic states and civil societies to put pressure on local governments in recourse countries to strengthen their work with issues such as caste and gender discrimination, sexual violence forced marriages and dowry oppression, and the tools for doing so are argued to be empowerment and education (ibid). The next part of this chapter will focus at the legislation in Nepal regarding discrimination and how it is implemented.

3.5 National legislation in Nepal

The Caste Based Discrimination and Untouchability Act 2068/2011 was authenticated and published in June 2011 (ILO, 2011). It has the goal of “creating an environment where no untouchability and discrimination prevails on the ground of caste, race, descent, community or occupation in the name of custom, tradition, religion, culture, ritual or any other name, to make punishable to the acts of untouchability, exclusion, restriction expulsion, contempt or any other discriminatory act that is against humanity, to provide restitution (compensation) to the victim of such acts” (ibid). In section 3.1 one can read that “No one shall commit or causes to commit caste-based discriminations and untouchability” and in section 4.3 it is stated that “No one shall, on the ground of caste, race, descent, community or occupation, deprive a person of using or enjoying public service.” A last example with relevance for this paper is section 4.8: “No one shall, on the ground of caste, race, descent, community or occupation, prevent or cause to prevent anyone from producing selling or distributing any goods, services or facilities” (ILO, 2011). Despite this act, which also increases punishment for public officials who are found responsible for discrimination, there is a continuously

discrimination of Dalits, still facing violence and social exclusion (Freedom house, 2015). In November 2015, several UN members did together with different NGOs criticise the Government for not implementing this act and also raised concerns over the continued practice of caste discrimination, especially against women and Dalits (IDSN, 2015). Particular concerns were raised regarding “reports on discrimination of Dalits in the relief and rehabilitation after the earthquake.”

Concerning representation, a civil service law from 2007 states that 45 percent of posts should be reserved for women, minorities and Dalits, but still their representation remains inadequate, especially at the government’s highest levels (Freedom house, 2015). Government and business are still dominated by the upper caste Hindus while low caste Hindus are facing discrimination in the civil services and courts (ibid).

According to a statement from the Dalit Civil Society Organizations in Nepal, the Dalit community is still facing the worst forms of discrimination, despite legal and constitutional provision (2013). They are stating that the practices in society has not changed significantly and that Dalits are exposed to abuse and attacks while trying to enjoy their rights (ibid). The reason to the continuous discrimination of Dalits is according to The Dalit Society Organization in Nepal the ineffective implementation of the legislation. Another cause is media’s inability to digging out the roots of structural discrimination (2013). One could argue that if the Nepalese government had actually implemented the Act practically, lives could have been saved and the natural disaster could have had a less class oriented impact.

Regarding domestic violence, there is a 2009 Domestic violence act which has the purpose of providing monetary compensation and to offer psychological treatment for victims of domestic violence, but according to Freedom House authorities seldom prosecute domestic violence cases (2015). Concerning the legislation for other vulnerable groups, The Supreme Court ordered in 2007 the government to eradicate all laws discriminating against lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people and gave its consent to same-sex marriage in 2008. Still, the government are not implementing these rules and LGBT people are reported to face harassment both by the authorities and by other citizens (Freedom House, 2015). The last part of this chapter is about the general situation for LGBT in Nepal.

3.6 LGBT discrimination in Nepal

According to a report made by Unicef, UNDP and UNAID, Nepal is a largely patriarchal society and people of diverse sexual orientation are not easily accepted. Caste, class and

gender are factors which are very important in how attitudes towards sexuality is shaped (2014:9). Family pressure and social expectations are forcing people into not coming out and to marry persons of the opposite sex against their desire (2014:10). Regarding work related issues, the report states that many LGBT people are exposed to harassment and discrimination at their work places. This is explained as one of the reasons to why most LGBT people choose to not be open about their sexual identity, as they are afraid of facing stigma and harassment (ibid).

However, the report is stressing that the Nepali society is as divided and diverse as the LGBT community. The Nepali society has different castes, ethnicities and social classes, and the society also looks different in terms of rural and urban locations. The LGBT community is diverse in terms of gender, sexual orientation, age, class and ethnicity for example, and one should not generalize the LGBT community as being one (Unicef, UNDP and UNAID, 2014:3).

CHAPTER FOUR

Methods and methodology

4.1 Methodology

The methodologies used for this research are discourse analysis and post-structuralism. Discourse analysis is according to Healy central to postmodern and post-structural theories (2005:199). The concept of discourse is used to look at how the practice of language constructs knowledge, truth and social relations (Healy, 2005:199). “Discourse refers to the language practices through which we understand reality and act upon it” (ibid).

Post-structural feminists are challenging us to see ourselves as well as others as embodied beings (Healy, 2005:201). Furthermore, post-structural feminists aims to make us consider how bodily differences which are connected to age, ethnicity and gender complicate ones identifications (ibid). Power is a central concept for feminist poststructuralists, who are viewing power as an ever-present feature of social relations (2005:202). Post-structuralism is stating that power is a product of discourses rather than something attached to specific identities (Healy, 2005:202). This means that we must analyse how different discourses operate to construct concepts such as identity, knowledge and power in specific contexts, if we are to understand the phenomena of power in any context (Healy, 2005:203). When I

analysed the gathered data, I was focusing at central concepts such as vulnerability, class, caste, catastrophe, and I tried to see how they become visible from a gender perspective. I used the chosen methodologies to look at these concepts in relation to environmental justice, to show how a natural disaster becomes a question of class, caste and gender.

4.2 Research design:

This study is conducted as a case study with a qualitative research design. The characteristics of a case study is to focus at one or a few instances linked to a particular phenomenon that is to be investigated. In this case the study is in the framework of NGOs working within and outside Kathmandu, Nepal, and their experiences regarding gender and vulnerable groups in context of the 2015 earthquake. The NGOs were approached by me during 13 days in Kathmandu in April 2016, around a year after the 2015 earthquake. The goal was to gain insight from looking at a few individual instances instead of doing a mass study using a survey trying to cover a large number of instances (Denscombe, 2003:30). By studying the particular, it is possible to get a picture of the general (ibid). As explained by Denscombe, the aim for the case study is not just to find out certain outcomes, but to find an explanation to why those outcomes are happening (Denscombe, 2003:31). One of the common criticism against case studies is that general knowledge is more important than concrete, context-dependent knowledge (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2009:264). This is challenged by those stating that it is impossible to find universals when studying human affairs, as human actions are set in local contexts of practice (ibid). It is therefore argued that context-dependent knowledge instead has a higher value than a hopeless search for universal theory (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2009:264).

Moreover, when using a qualitative research design, one aims to answer the question “how?” instead of “how much?” which would be applicable for a quantitative study (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2009). As stated by Kvale, interviews are often applied in case studies, where one focuses at a specific situation or institution (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2009:117). In this study face-to-face interviews were conducted. One advantage with face-to-face interviews is that the data often is more detailed and rich, as well as that the direct contact can offer direct means of validating the data (Denscombe, 2003:8). The method for the interviews was to use a semi-structured interview guide with open-ended questions. Questions of “how” and “why” were used to make the interviewees further elaborate on their answers. Furthermore, direct

observation were used which increased the insight in the culture and everyday life in Kathmandu.

4.3 Data collection

4.3.1 How I met the people I interviewed

The aim for this case study was to focus at a few instances with offices in Kathmandu and to conduct interviews with people working for them, to gather information about their experiences and explanations of the consequences of the 2015 earthquake in Nepal. The choice of instances was done in relation to the target subject of the study, which have gender issues and socioeconomically weak and vulnerable groups as main focus. As some of the questions and subjects were to touch upon the actions of the government after the earthquake, it was most suitable to talk to non-governmental organizations. I was aiming to choose a few organizations covering different aspects of gender work and work with vulnerable groups, for example with target groups such as children, women's rights and LGBT. The goal was to find a couple of organization representing different groups, but with the common attachment to gender issues and vulnerability in connection to the 2015 earthquake. The goal was, due to the limited time span and limited extent of the research, to conduct between 4 and 7 interviews.

The procedure of finding suitable respondents began in Sweden about four months before going to Nepal. I searched online for suitable participants according to my target group and established contact with several NGOs working with issues related to the topic of the study. I did not have any specific target group regarding age, gender or so forth, but were hoping to have a diverse group of participants. When finding suitable partakers, contact was established through e-mail. I presented myself and explained the purpose of the study, as well as in a kind manner asked if they were willing to agree on being interviewed sometime during the dates I was going to be in Kathmandu. When receiving positive responses, interviews were scheduled with those who wanted to do so in beforehand, while other asked me to get back to them when being in Kathmandu. Two of the participants were contacted through recommendations by other people. One of them was contacted from Sweden and the other was contacted when already being in Kathmandu.

The outcome was five interviews with a total of six respondents, as one of the interviews was a group interview with two respondents. In four of the interviews the interviewees were talking mainly from the perspective of representing the NGO they are working for, while one of the interviews more were conducted from the perspective of the voluntary work made by

the interviewee just after and in connection to the aftermath of the earthquake. The wish of having a diverse group of participants were somewhat fulfilled as the participants differ in terms of sex, gender, caste, work orientation, age and years of experience. A majority of the interviewees are women though, only one interview was conducted with a man and one was conducted with a transgender person. All of the participants originate from Nepal.

Denscombe argues that interview can carry with them a high degree of credibility as the interviewees are chosen just because of their position and knowledge of the core subject of the research (2003:187). In this research, all the interviewees can be argued to carry with them first-hand knowledge and experiences, which makes the credibility higher.

4.3.2 Conducting interviews

The interviews are conducted in Kathmandu, Nepal during two weeks in April 2016. The interviewees were given the opportunity to suggest time and place. Most of the interviews took place in the facilities of the organizations, except one which was conducted at a restaurant. The interviews varied in length but were all between 20 – 60 minutes. All the interviews were conducted in English. Four of the interviews were conducted with a single respondent, while one interview was conducted with two respondents, as it was the wish of the participants. Every participant were before the interview started asked if it was ok to use a digital recorder and they all agreed. Furthermore, before each interview started, the confidentiality of the study was underlined. Each recording started with me as an interviewer reading statements regarding anonymity and asking the participant if she or he agrees to this. The method of semi-structured interviews was used. I had prepared a list of about fifteen open-ended questions, based on the aim of the study. When conducting the interviews, the interviewees was encouraged to speak as openly as possible. Interference was mainly done to ask for further elaboration or to present a new area of discussion or to make the discussion stay within the framework for the study. The interview guide was used to keep the interviewee from being too much side-tracked. Each interview ended with the question if the participant wanted to add anything or lift any other aspect. A concern regarding reliability is whether the interviewees would change their answers during the interviews or if a different answer would be given to another interviewer (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009:245). During the interviews, the key questions were therefore reworded and asked several times, to see if the answers from the participants changed or not . The interview guide which was used for each

interview, was modified for each participant, as a method of taking the environment and the hallmarks for each organization into account.

4.3.3 Direct observations

Interviews are the main source of information for this case study, but information was also gathered through direct field observations. I had a note book where I wrote down interesting things I observed, read or was told by people not directly connected to the report, which I could link to my research. By observing the daily life I could for example make conclusions regarding what is considered male and female occupations and behaviour in Nepal.

Denscombe argues that the core idea of direct observations is that it for certain purposes are better to observe what actually is happening (2003:192). Furthermore, observations from the field are occurring in situations which would have happened with or without the ongoing research, as the aim is to look at things as they normally happens (Denscombe, 2003:193). Though, the challenge of this approach is to avoid disrupting the naturalness of the setting and to minimize the effect of the researcher being present at the scene (ibid). One issue with field observations is the issue of perception, as the researchers perception of situations could be influenced by personal factors (Denscombe, 2003:193). When conducting direct observations, it is important that the researcher has a strategy for how to note down the observations made (Denscombe, 2003:204). I always carried pen and paper with me but my routine became to every day note down keywords after returning home in the end of the day and then develop the thoughts and key words in a longer text every other day.

Another aspect to mention regarding field observations is the ethical part, as direct observations might mean that those being studied will not be aware of it (Denscombe, 2003:204). They can hence hardly give any informed consent. This can though be justified according to Denscombe, by demonstrating that none of those studied suffered due to the observation and if the researcher can show that the identities of those observed are never disclosed (ibid). This can be applicable on one of the days when I, after being recommended so by one of the participants, took a bus to a city next to Kathmandu and spent the day walking around where people were still living in rescue tents and where buildings were still damaged. The core objective of the observation I did in the area did not come from particularly looking at the families at the tents, but to compare the landscape in this nearby city with central Kathmandu, which was much more restored. Hence, the identity of the

families was not interesting for me, but the observations from the area in itself which they were an important part of.

4.3.4 Data transcription

All interviews were recorded with a digital audio recorder. Furthermore, notes were taken during the interviews. When all the interviews were conducted, they were transcribed into text. I listened to the recordings and typed the interviews word by word. The interviews were transcribed without mentioning names of the participants or the names of the organizations. Hence, the privacy of the organization and the participants were protected. Also, names of other people mentioned by the participants were made anonymous as well. The interviews were transcribed into 32 pages of full text.

4.3.5 Data analysis

The transcribed text was analysed through dividing the text into different groups. I gathered quotations and pieces of text from the transcriptions according to the grouping which I thought they belonged to. Once I had divided the text material into different grouping, I looked for similarities, contradictions as well as examples which were suitable for the chosen methodologies.

4.4 Ethical considerations

From a feminist perspective, Brewster states that feminist theories are promoting the notion of ethics being corporeally enacted, arguing that we feel the effects of moral practices through our bodies (2014:64). She states that the idea of moral agency only being achieved through cognition is being criticized and she is explaining that embodied ethics can be achieved through being mindful of the relationship between bodies, others and the world, by using our reading and writing functions to connect us to others (2014:76). Brinkmann & Kvale argues that qualitative research is brimming with moral and ethical issues (2005:157). One issue brought up by them regarding interview situations is the asymmetrical power relation between the interviewer and the interviewee, where the interviewer might have more scientific competence (2005:164). The interviewer poses the questions and follows up the answers, answers which later are interpreted by the interviewer (ibid). As stated by Brinkmann & Kvale: "The research interview is not a dominance-free dialogue between equal partners; the interviewer's research project and knowledge interest set the agenda and rule the conversation. The interview is a one-way dialogue. [...] Unlike a good conversation, the

research interview is no longer a goal in itself or a joint search for truth, but a means serving the researcher's ends." (2005:164). Brinkmann and Kvale warns that even though the interviewer has good intentions, a qualitative research might still fail to be ethically and scientifically objective if one fails to situate the knowledge production in the power relations (2005:165).

The Swedish research council is presenting guidelines for how to conduct research in an ethical way. It is argued by them that research ethics are not static, but shifting as the scientific landscape changes (2011). Our quest for knowledge must be dealt with in a balanced way and weighted against the risk of harm and individual privacy interests. It is though argued that it sometimes is impossible to gain new knowledge without exposing research participants for a certain degree of risk (ibid). Different kinds of research have different kinds of harm and risks involved and hence need different kind of considerations (2011).

Before starting to ask my interview questions but after the recording machine was switched on, I was explaining to the participants that they would be anonymous throughout the paper, that they had the right to withdraw from the interview at any time, that they could contact me at any time should they feel that they do not want to participate and that the material from the interview only would be used for this paper and in no other purpose. After each interview, a card with my contact details was handed over to the participants so they knew how to contact me should there be anything.

4.5 Limitations

This study is focusing on certain aspects which hence leaves other perspectives unexamined. That is a natural outcome of a study as a research must have its limitations, both due to time and space but also as it is impossible and rather pointless to try to cover all aspects. However, it could have been fruitful to look more in to religion in order to study the relationship between religion and the caste system. Another aspect commonly mentioned when discussing the actions of the government was the relatively recent shift from being an absolute monarchy to becoming a democratic government which by many described as somehow having reshaped the society.

I would also like to mention the time span. The information for this case study was collected during two weeks in Kathmandu. Two weeks is a limited time span which should be taken into consideration. It is though argued by Yin that a case study does not need to be conducted

under a long time to be valid (2009:15), but still, as a reader one can keep in mind that the field observations are made under a short period of time and it was hence not possible to identify a longer pattern.

Another possible limitation is the language, as the participants and I do not share the same mother tongue which might have created misunderstandings. However, the participants and my own level of English was according to me at a level which made the use of an interpreter unnecessary and whenever a linguistic misunderstanding arose the question was rephrased.

CHAPTER FIVE

Analysis and findings

The analysis for this research will be conducted as a discussion where I am discussing themes that came up during the interviews. When analysing the interviews, the participant's general description of forms of discrimination commonly seen within the Nepalese society will be presented as well as those stated as post-earthquake consequences. This is because I would argue that in order to look at how the interviewees experienced that the consequences affected certain vulnerable groups, it is important to also know what their situation was stated to look like before the earthquake occurred. The findings of the study is divided into the different themes, and discussed accordingly.

The general occurrence of caste discrimination in Nepal

I asked the participants to describe the general situation for Dalits in Nepal. When the interviewees described the life of the Dalits, they were all using very harsh words regardless if the interviewees were Dalit themselves or not. The lives of Dalit are described as a living hell, as the hardest possible life in Nepal and as being surrounded by hate from other citizens. Some of the interviewees appeared as if they were in pain when talking about these matters, looking into the distance while talking. The general description shows a picture of Dalits being discriminated in their daily life in several ways, because of their class and caste. The participants are describing that most Dalits are living on an extreme poverty level, they are not allowed to touch water, a non-Dalit cannot touch them and they cannot touch a non-Dalit. However, one of the participants who is from a Dalit community explained that she was not so concerned about Dalit issues until she started to engage in human rights organizations and organizations promoting Dalit rights. She is very engaged in these issues today. From the

perspective of the standpoint theory, which is looking at how situatedness is transformed into knowledge (Stoertzler and Yuval-Davis, 2002:316) I would say that this shows how strong the caste system is implemented as a social practice and reality, since a person who is Dalit herself does not reflect upon the inequities until approaching them through an organization. Stoertzler and Yuval-Davis talks about experiences, social values and perceptions turning situatedness into knowledge, which seems to have happened in this example (2002:316). Another participant, who today works with vulnerable youth, explained that the fact that her best friend growing up was a Dalit has had an impact on her adult life. She stated:

“I used to have a best friend and she was Dalit. Every time we sat for food or tea my mom said: No she has to sit outside. She cannot eat together with you. That was also always very painful for me.”

The story shared above shows an important example of oppositions between the treatment of a best friend and the customs of the family, how she had to follow the customs even though it was painful for her. It can be compared to a social created reality which, in the eyes of a child, becomes the truth. She continued the interview by explaining how she witnessed the discrimination against Dalits in the village where she grew up, but that she thought it would be different in the city of Kathmandu. It was no difference she learned when she got there. She told me that the discrimination against Dalits was still present.

The overall situation for women in Nepal

As for the situation for women, several of the interviewees are stating that Dalit women are facing multiple forms of discrimination based on class, caste and gender. One of the interviewees describes a society where Dalit women are regarded as second class citizens and that they have not been given the same priority as the first class citizens. The opposition of first class citizen/second class citizen appears but with no deeper definition of the two. Dalit women regularly have to face psychical violence, psychological violence, and torture according to the participants. Torture is mentioned by several interviewees, and torture can be argued to be a method of showing one's dominance in the most brutal way, which makes one make the conclusion that it is a lot about power-relations, to show power over another human being. According to the participants the main issue is domestic violence within the marriage, and several participants stated that men's violence against women is common within all caste. However, the interviewees argued that it seems to be the most severe within inter-caste marriages, when a non-Dalit man marries a Dalit woman. As I understood it, that is the

circumstances with maximum chance of domestic violence, and the violence will come from the husband himself as well as from in-laws. This seems to be an opposition of central importance within the Nepalese society. From an intersectional perspective, one can see how the different grounds of discrimination interact with each other. A woman is being exposed to violence within all castes, but the worst situations are stated to happen in relation to the combination of being woman and being Dalit married to someone from another caste. I would hence make the conclusion that it therefore is of great importance that those who are working to combat violence against women keep in consideration that the vulnerability for women look different depending on which caste you belong to and who you are married to.

Several of the interviewees are witnessing of a society where boys are prioritized before girls, regardless of caste or class. Most of the participants stated that women in almost all castes are inferior to men. Regardless of being Dalit or non-Dalit, rich or poor, educated or non-educated, there is still a strong patriarchy and male domination. A woman I interviewed summarized the situation for Nepalese women like this:

“In Nepal, all boys or men have high priority. They can do anything they want. Educated or not educated, a much better life they can have, but a woman or girl, even if they are from good family or bad family, educated or not, it’s a really hard life for them.”

An example she gave me is that if parents has a son and a daughter, it is prioritized to send the boy to school while the girl have to work, for the family to be able to pay for the son’s school fee. Another participant told me that the drop-out rate in school is bigger for girls than boys, which according to the participants of the study is explained by the fact that many families have many children and when the parents go to work, the daughters must stay home taking care of the younger siblings. I would argue that these statements by the participants shows yet another socially constructed reality where a girl or woman’s value seems to be measured in how well she can support the success of the boys and men of the family.

Nevertheless, when I was discussing this matter with the participants, it became clear that even if a family can afford to send both sons and daughters to school, it is not worth doing so. Sending daughters to school is seen as waste of money, which is stated to be the case regardless of caste or class. A huge amount of girls are married off and since the daughter is being married away, there is no need for her to have an education. The explanation to this is according to the participants that when a daughter is married away she will belong to her husband’s family, so her own parents do not find it worth investing in her. One participant is

stating, though, that in some higher families there are a bit more awareness, where family members are witnessing their sisters and daughters suffering, and their mother being very intelligent but still denied any education. A woman working with vulnerable children gave me this statement:

“They can see their mum, how she is brilliant but she never got the chance to go to college or get the education. Why? Because I am a woman and I had to get married”

But on the other hand, another participant stated that it can be worse in high status families, as daughters in richer families are being told that the brother has to go to school as he will run the family eventually. He will keep the family name while she will become part of another family and some high status families are very afraid to damage their reputation and therefore women has to adjust to whatever is expected of them. I understood this as there hence is a contradiction, as some high class families are more aware while others are explained to be the most conservative. What I see here is a very strong opposition between the family and the individual. It is not worth investing in the education of a woman as it might not give the family anything back. Whatever the girl herself would gain from an education is not important or interesting, instead the girl’s future is all about what the family can win from it. It seems as the daughter is considered to be a component of her family, until she becomes married and then becomes a component of the husband’s family. My impression is that a girl does not seem to be thought of as an individual.

The post-earthquake consequences from a gender perspective

In many of the interviews I was told that if parents has a son and a daughter, it is prioritized to send the boy to school while the girl have to work, for the family to be able to pay for the son’s school fee. This is stated to be even more visible after the earthquake, especially within poorer families. Also, a woman I interviewed explained to me that there is a perception in rural areas that the younger the girl is the less dowry the family have to pay. She continued by explaining that the earthquake destroyed homes and houses, so in order to be able to rebuild the houses and still have enough money to marry away their daughters, poor families choose to marry away their daughters down in the age of ten and even younger. One can hence see a very concrete example of what the intersection of gender, age and poverty can lead to in the context of a natural disaster. I asked her whether the government is aware of this or not, or if they choose to look away, and the woman I was interviewing told med the following:

“They are aware, but to be honest, the government was overwhelmed at that time. They were not ready at all, not with the infrastructure, they didn’t have a plan. They didn’t know what to do. They didn’t have enough resources. Although, they did try, it’s just that, to keep it straight, they were not ready for this situation and they were incompetent. They could not support as much as they should have.”

The story of how families choose to marry away their daughters before they even are 10 years old once again shows how deeply rooted the expectations on gender roles are. It is though not only a girl problem but a bigger problem for girls within poor settings, where lack of money places them in an especially vulnerable situation.

When looking at the direct consequences of the earthquake, the duty which lies on the shoulder of women is commonly mentioned by the participants when we talked about consequences from a gender perspective. One participant told me that this is the explanation to why more women than men died in the earthquake. She explained that it is a woman’s responsibility to cook and serve food in the Nepalese society. The earthquake occurred on a Saturday around lunch time and at that time of the day, women were mostly inside the houses preparing lunch while the men were waiting outside, as explained by one of the interviewees. Hence more women than men were trapped in the falling buildings. It is also the women’s responsibility to take care of the sick and the elderly and they are usually inside, which further explains why more women were inside the buildings than men. One interviewee shared this story about a certain family:

“It was in the noon and it was time for lunch, so given the responsibility of the women that it is usually their responsibility to cook food and serve food, the women of the family, three or four of them, they went inside the house to get food and make everything prepared while the men were outside. So, because of that, the women were inside the house when the earthquake happened, and then the house came down.”

The duty of a woman was also mentioned when discussing further circumstances after the earthquake. It was argued by one of the participants that it was the woman’s responsibility to arrange everything for the family, just as before the earthquake. When social workers came to hand out food, tents and medicine or any kind of support, it was only women waiting in line as the responsibility of a woman did not change even in a moment of crisis.

“I would really think that men would arrange something, like where to get food, where to get money, where to get tent, medical... but it was all women, no matter of it was a rich family or a poor family. Women have to run everything.”

It is at the same time stated by the participants that the reconstruction and rehabilitation-efforts were not equal and that women received a disproportionate amount from the support funds. One reason, according to one participant, is that the government providing relief services wanted to see ID-cards and many women do not have ID-cards and hence had to rely on their husbands and them having an ID-card. This tells something about women's position in society compared to men, where women are trapped in legal incompetency due to lack of an ID-card. Also, there were many mothers with children who were unable to go to the places where the services were provided. Furthermore, the interviewees also brought up how women became traumatized after the earthquake and how they must carry an extreme psychological burden which is not being dealt with as they at the same time must deal with all the responsibility for the family. The participants suggest that focus should not only be on reconstruction of concrete things, such as buildings and bodily matters, but on the reconstruction of the mental health after a natural disaster. It is argued by one of the participants that counselling is a must in order to work with preparedness for future disasters. Something all participants brought up was the lack of safety in the camp areas. A woman who works at an orphanage explained like this:

“There have been many rape cases. Kidnapping too. In two months I never sleep. I have 14 girls. Somebody might pull my daughter or do something to my staff, so whole night I was just awake worried. Daytime also, because lots of men are running around the tent places, keep going, it was horrible for the women. It was really, really scary.”

She continued by concluding that she never felt safe during this time and that rape, robbery, theft and kidnapping was happening everywhere inside the tents around her. The building which the orphanage used to be in was damaged by the earthquake and she told me that she and the children had to stay in the tents for two months, before moving in to a new building, which is where our interview is taking place.

Trafficking as a post-earthquake consequence

Another aspect commonly discussed by the participants is the occurrence of work- and sex-trafficking, and it is argued that it increased in all castes after the earthquake but mostly among the Dalits. The explanation is stated to be interlinked with poor economic conditions.

The Dalits do generally have a low degree of education and many had no good housing, according to several of the participants. The earthquake knocked down whatever housing they had; it was already a big challenge to support the family even before the earthquake and suddenly everything was gone. Several participants were concluding that when there is no support at all some people become criminals to survive. Many were not aware of any other solution than to turn to traffickers. Families must have their children working to get another income source in order to survive and they therefore choose to send their children to a brick factory instead of school. A woman I spoke to told me that men took the choice to sell their daughters or sisters. Traffickers took advantage of this as families could not afford to keep all family members, as stated by one participant:

“People who have daughters or sisters, those people are easier to buy from. Because now I don’t have anything, how can I keep them? What shall I feed them?”

The interviewees are telling that many women and girls were being trafficked to India. Families were being manipulated to leave their girls to the traffickers and the girls then became indulged in the sex industry in India. When I asked if the parents were aware of what would happen to their children, the interviewees replied that some parents were aware of what they were doing while others believed their daughters to get a proper job according to the respondents. A participant described that the traffickers were trying to be friendly:

“I can see your trouble so I really want to help: take your kids and give them a good job so they can send you money.”

As an interviewer, I get the impression that the actions of parents sending their children away are not defended by the interviewees, but it seems to be about the oppositions of life and death, and that anything will be done by anyone to avoid death.

While many women were sold or tricked into being trafficked after the earthquake, the interviewees are also explaining that Dalit men were compelled to go to other countries to look for work, as all their work had been destroyed and there was no reason to stay. This led to further consequences for the women who were left behind: When the husband migrated the women and children were left in a vulnerable situation, where they have been facing rape, violence, sexual assault and torture according to the interviewees. What I can read from this is that a woman’s safety always seems to be at risk, as women are stated to be exposed to rape and sexual assault from strangers when being left without the husband, which at the same time is contradictory, as it previously is stated that the most common violence is domestic

violence within the marriage. It somehow seems that women have no safe haven whatsoever. My impression from the observations and in the interviews is that violence seems to be inseparable from women.

Some of the participants in this study had special knowledge about these issues in relation to the LGBT-community. When they spoke to me about these issues, they used the abbreviation LGBTI instead of LGBT. When discussing trafficking and prostitution one participant explained that LGBTI-people often move from the countryside to the cities, uneducated and not trained in any profession, which makes them vulnerable for the sex industry. When talking about sex work and LGBTI in context of the earthquake, the response was that the earthquake affected the LGBTI sex workers in a negative way as many of their clients, the sex buyers, were too scared to go out and buy sex during a period after the earthquake. Those who used to get their livelihood from sex work were therefore affected dramatically, as there became a lack of customers and therefore income. It is hence a big difference between those talking about the LGBTI-community and the other participants, as they are the only ones mentioning that the earthquake made a decrease of sex work instead of an increase.

Post-earthquake discrimination against the LGBTI-community

Regarding the LGBTI community, several examples of acts of discrimination in relation to the post-earthquake situation was mentioned by the participants. Generally, they described that the situation and the attitude against LGBTI-people in Nepal is slowly changing to the better but that the unawareness still is striking and that the traditional patriarchal view is still dominating. A transperson describes the situation like this:

“They often look at us as we have committed some crime or as we are not human beings”

Another participant is explaining how the attitude is worse among the uneducated.

“The major is the people who are still uneducated and have a traditional view of patriarchy, that we are only male and female, they still have a problem with us.”

Some of the consequences for the transgender community was explained to be a combination of fear of showing up at the governments rescue centres, and that those who did so were denied help. Transgender people who went to get tents were denied tents, according to one interviewee. They were also questioned, asked to show ID cards and accused of faking that they are transgender. I was told that many members of the LGBTI community lost their homes and in order to be able to rent new rooms, they had to pay double rent compared to

heterosexuals. The person who told me this continued by explaining that these form of discrimination was present even before the earthquake, but was increased after the earthquake. The participants are pointing at the walls while talking, where I can see the damage which was made to their office building where we are having the interview. Another post-earthquake consequence was linked to public restrooms, with only lines for male and female which made trans-people unsecure and many chose to not use the toilets at all because of their sexual identity and the vulnerability linked to it. This aspect can be argued to have harsh consequences, as the avoidance of public restrooms made people look for other places to do the toileting, leaving them in a very vulnerable situation. Also, after the earthquake one interviewee explains how everyone had to sit in the open space on the ground, where people from the LGBTI-community were attacked by people not accepting them. It was even difficult to find a place to sit as no one wanted to sit next to them. When trying to get food, transgender people were asked for a higher price. People did neither get water or food because of their belonging to the LGBTI community, according to the participants working with LGBTI-rights. When the participants spoke generally about the situation for LGBTI-people, it was stated that the part of the population respecting the LGBTI-community is very small while those enacting discrimination on them are high, due to the conservative society. They explained that being Dalit and belonging to the LGBTI-community means that one is facing double discrimination due to belonging to two vulnerable groups, exposed to discrimination from other citizens and from the government.

Governmental legislation and implementation

The opinions and experiences of the governmental standpoints regarding vulnerable groups shows a consistent picture by the interviewees. It is stated to be a huge paradox between laws and practice. The laws to support sexual minorities and Dalits are there but they are not implemented. The attitude from the government regarding these matters have changed and more attention is brought to the issues, which are being recognized according to the participants, though, the accountability has not been increased which is a problem. As one participant states regarding the protection of Dalits:

“They have changed the mind set regarding the caste based discrimination, but in practice there is nothing at all.”

The same is stated regarding rights for sexual minorities, the legislation is there but the implementation is not. Law and practice is constantly mentioned in opposition to each other.

When the participants are discussing the lack of implementation of the acts who are strengthening the rights for caste and gender discrimination, one can also see how a strong pair of oppositions within the interview is between the centralised government and what actually is happening on the grass-root level and out in the rural areas. The implementation with the aim to penalise those discriminating Dalits has not reached out, it is explained to be stuck in the centralised state mechanism. Nothing has happened in the grass-root level or community level, a huge discrimination against Dalit children, men and women are still happening by the non-Dalit community. This is explained by the lack of information flow. For the law to be enacted, the information needs to reach out in the rural areas, in each district level, to increase the awareness. According to several participants of the study, most people do not know about the act. The government is not taking any action to spread this information and this is explained with the bureaucratic system. However, one of the participants is placing more responsibility on the individual level.

“If you raise your voice you will get it but if you don’t you will not.”

Though, it seems as most of the interviewees find it hard to raise your voice about rights you are not even aware of.

Governmental post-earthquake action and distribution

When focusing at the governmental actions after the earthquake, all of the participants are arguing that the governmental aid was not being distributed fairly. The governmental representatives are stated to care more about the statistics, approaching those who were relatively fine after the earthquake but ignoring those who were left in despair. Also, people who were not in desperate need of goods still took the advantage of receiving everything they could, on the cost of those having nothing. Political leaders were pointed out as taking goods such as tents, even though they were not in need of it. This is supported by Amnesty International’s report, where it says that when the tents were handed out, the ones with familial and political connections and loyalties were favoured, and parliamentarians took tents which were intended for earthquake victims (2015:12). The politicians are several times positioned in opposition to the poorest people, which shows that there is no trust for the politicians representing the population as a whole and especially not the poorest part of the population. One participant stated that pictures were posted on Facebook by political leaders showing the tents they had received, but instead of handing them over to those in need, the politicians kept the goods. A team from the non-governmental organization Empower Dalit

Women of Nepal did a quantitative research on how the aid was distributed after the earthquake, and it shows that the already existing caste- and gender-based discrimination was enacted again within the aid distribution system which favoured the already privileged and those with access to information, while the poor, women and Dalits were left behind (Kasell, 2016). According to this study, many of the people from the marginalized groups did not have proof of citizenship or could show that they own land, which was required in order to get aid from the government (ibid).

Furthermore, the interviewees witnessed how a massive amount of money came to Nepal in the earthquake aftermath, but according to them, there is no way of tracking how the money was distributed and disposed. There is no transparency showing where the money ended up and according to the participants it is obvious to see that a lot of people still suffers. The aid should have been enough to make a much bigger difference as stated by the participants, but people are still living in tents, which now a year later need to be reconstructed and replaced, but no such thing is happening. This result is also seen in a report made by the Dalit Civil Society Massive Earthquake Victim Support and Coordination Committee, ASIA DALIT RIGHTS FORUM (ADRF) and National Dalit Watch (2015). They made a research where they looked at how the post-quake relief reached those living in 37 villages in the ten worst affected districts. The report shows that when asking whether the inhabitants were able to access the rescue services on time, 65 percent answered “no”. The report furthermore shows that when the participants were asked if they had experienced discrimination in relief and rescue services, compared to those from the dominant castes, 60 per cent said yes (2015:3).

The discussions about the actions of the government was many times held in context to the opposition of rural and urban parts of Nepal. The material consequences of the earthquake are reported to happen both in Kathmandu and outside. However, in regards of reconstruction, it is reported to be very uneven between Kathmandu and outside Kathmandu. In Kathmandu most tents are gone and people are back in their homes, but outside Kathmandu people are still living in tents, without the support reaching there. The differences within the Dalit community is also brought up in context to this, as some Dalits have a rather good standard while many are in extreme poverty. Once again the opposition of rural and urban is mentioned, as the Dalits living in rural areas are stated to have the worst and poorest conditions. Lots of districts and households has still not received any relief, according to several of the interviewees. The failure of fairly distribution is stated to be the geographic location of the Dalits. The governmental relief for the communities did not reach the Dalit

communities due to bad infrastructure and lack of roads. The Dalit communities are mostly based far from governmental headquarters and the relief was only provided to headquarters which meant Dalits living in the most rural areas did not get any chance to take part of it.

“They had already been victimized by that and after the earthquake they have been double victimized, double marginalized.”

Furthermore, some of them lived in temporary shelter even before the earthquake. The problem then became that the government would not provide any restoration of housing for them as they had no proper house to begin with. Many do not own any land or have a land certificate. The landlessness for Dalits is therefore a huge problem according to the interviewees, as the government are reaching out to help with reconstruction and rebuilding houses and to provide loans, but only to those who have a land certificate or owns land. As stated by one interviewee:

“The major problem is the Dalit have the problem of landlessness, they don’t have the land certificate, Most of the communities they live in scattered lands. They don’t have the certificate. So, what is the alternatives for that problem? They [the government] have not thought of it.”

Moreover, as the Dalit communities are stated to be based in disaster-prone areas vulnerable to landslides, natural calamities, monsoons and flooding, the communities has after the earthquake been afflicted with diarrheal and other kind of diseases. Since they have no money to cure the sick and no health services is available, one participant stated that many people died of this as a post-disaster consequence, among other causes:

“Some died after not getting relief, some died because they have been infected, some died prone to the sexual violence when there is an unsafe shelter, and those are the consequences that was led by the earthquake.”

This statement shows how the combination of different inequitable factors creates an untenable situation after a natural disaster. According to Amnesty International, the district that were worst affected are districts which were already under marginalized and hard conditions, with lack of roads and lack of access to basic health services (2015:6). After the earthquake, it became even more difficult to get access to supplies, assistance and services (ibid). The participants are stating that the non-Dalit community receive relief 2-3 times in the same time as the Dalits did not receive any. A survey and research made after the earthquake

in the 13 most affected district shows that a majority of the Dalit community did not receive any relief support. Furthermore, the unfair treatment of Dalits in the earthquake aftermath goes deep into people's perception of the caste system. An example of how strong the caste system is, was given by one participant. She shared a story from when she was doing voluntary work after the earthquake. There were only a few available tents to distribute in the camp they went to, and the tents had to be shared between several families. Still, when the high quality tents had been distributed they could see how some families were inside the spacious good tents with room for more than one family while other were outside in very bad low-quality tents. When asking why the good tents were not shared, it was explained that the lower caste members were not allowed inside the good tents together with the higher caste members. This was despite the fact that some women from the lower castes were pregnant and in an especially vulnerable situation. Even in the happening of a natural disaster, the cast system overpowers. Despite the situation they were compelled to find a difference based on caste.

It is a common statement that all caste suffered from the earthquake but that the higher caste already had the money to get back on their feet. I understood from the interview persons that Dalits did not know where the help centres were to be found, they were not aware of that it even existed help to get and people did not really care about helping them find it, they rather wanted to be on the higher castes side than the poorest side. When politicians came to give support, they approached the rich people and the higher caste according to the participants. It is explained that the higher caste and richer families show a lot of gratitude towards the government, politicians and other givers for their help and are good at showing it publically, while the Dalits don't even know where to go to get this help. If Dalits go there, they do not know how to say thank you in English even though they are just as grateful. Many people were stated to only do good to get something in return like a public thank you and a photo published somewhere, with an interview in English with those who got the relief. One participant summed it up with this sentence:

“Everything ends up in the political things”

The Dalit people were not useful enough in these situations while the higher castes knew how to publically describe the givers as very good and generous. This created huge differences in how the aid was distributed. It seems as the returning favour for giving, as a public thank you or a good interview, has more value than what is given to begin with. An ulterior motive lurks

behind the decision to help, controlling who will get the aid. This is explained to be one of the many reasons to why a year later after the earthquake a lot of people still have not received any aid or help, according to the interviewees. As stated by one of the participants:

“People should already have received all their aid, it should have been in a very systematic way. But that is not the case. People are still living in tents and the monsoon is right in the corner.”

As I understood the participants, the disaster was not only something happening during the days of the earthquake, but something which is still present and ongoing in Nepal. It seems as the earthquake was only the beginning of a disaster.

CHAPTER SIX

Discussion and conclusion

6.1 Summary in terms of the aim

The overall theme for this paper was to look at how a natural disaster such as an earthquake affects a society unequally. I wanted to look at examples of how forms of discrimination deeply grounded in a society becomes re-enacted when a natural disaster hits the society. For this research I choose to focus at women in socioeconomic groups such as the Dalit community, as well as people belonging to the LGBT-group, in the context of the earthquake hitting Nepal in April 2015. My aim was to do an intersectional analysis of the multiple grounds of discrimination women and LGBT-groups are exposed to.

It is clear that the different grounds of discrimination, such as caste, gender and class are intertwined with each other and hard to separate, regardless if one is looking at the general situation in Nepal or focus at the post-earthquake consequences which is the main focus in this research. The participants could identify several consequences in the context of those matters. Rape and violence towards women due to lack of safety in the tent camps was commonly mentioned, but also forms of abuse from the own family, such as daughters being sold to traffickers and young girls being married away at the age of ten or younger.

Trafficking was a commonly mentioned consequence and Dalit women were reported to be the ones most victimized by trafficking as they were already in a very vulnerable situation. Also, when the camps were set up after the earthquake, Dalit people were not allowed in the

good tents together with the ones belonging to the other castes, which left the pregnant Dalit women in a specifically vulnerable situation. It seems as there must always be a difference upheld between the Dalits and those belonging to the other caste groups, regardless of outer circumstances.

People belonging to the LGBT-groups had to face different forms of discriminatory practices as well. According to the interviewees, they were denied tents, people did not want to sit next to them and they were charged double amounts for housing.

The governmental aid was not distributed fairly according to the interviewees. This was something they all agreed upon. Governmental aid was instead somehow directed to those who were not the worst off but who could show their gratitude. The rescue centres set up in the more remote areas did not reach those who were living very far off and it did not seem as much effort was made to reach them. Furthermore, if they did reach them, many from the poor and vulnerable Dalit communities were not entitled to any help as they could not show any proof of owning land. For women the problem was also connected to the fact that many women do not own an ID-card, and that women are not having ID-cards is telling something about how women are positioned in the Nepalese society.

The questions I was aiming to find answers to have been answered in different ways. It seems to be a question about the inseparability of violence and systems of power. There is of course a lot of more answers out there, but in context of the time- and space-limit for this research, I am satisfied with the outcome.

6.2 Comparison with earlier research

Elaine Enarson are describing post-disaster consequences, for example after hurricane Katrina, as a situation where women have to step in and carry a huge responsibility, for themselves, for the children, their partner and parents (2006). The constant responsibility of women is mentioned by the participants in this study as well. Enarson is furthermore stating that post-disaster settings are increasing women's vulnerability to domestic violence. In this study it was however shown that violence from strangers increased more than domestic violence, as many men chose to leave their families to go and look for work in other countries. Domestic violence was reported to be a general problem, but not necessarily increasing after the earthquake.

6.3 Alternative interpretations

When conducting the analysis of the interview material, the background of the interviewees are only mentioned briefly and there is no emphasis placed on their difference in age, gender, work experience or other characteristics. It could have been of interest to compare the different answers in relation to the respondents who gave the answers and that could hence been an alternative way of interpreting the answers.

6.4 Critical discussion of theory and methodology

Feminist standpoint theory is stressing the importance of situated knowledge and arguing that the voices of the marginalized and oppressed can give a more objective and fair picture of the world. The aim for this study is to meet with marginalized groups and shed a light over post-earthquake discriminatory practices oppressed groups have had to face. One can though be critical against the fact that the majority of the interviewees are not originating from the most vulnerable groups, at least not in terms of caste.

I tried to identify oppositions within the gathered material, and I have mentioned several pairs of oppositions in the analysis. However, I believe that it is important to remember that the oppositions I have identified and interpreted somehow are fledged from my own values and understandings.

6.5 Suggestion for future research

The interviewees were encouraging the choice of topic for this research and they were stating that they wish more attention was brought to the post-earthquake scenarios. The participants are stating several times that the legislation regarding discrimination is there but that the laws are not being used. As many participants were criticising the difference between law and practice in the Nepalese society, it would be interesting to study cases where discrimination have been reported in context of the earthquake and to look at how the government handled the cases, if the laws were implemented in any case and what the outcome of the case was.

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Appendix 1

Interview guide

The aim of the interviews was to get an answer of the following:

- Has factors such as gender, poverty and caste been affected by the earthquake in any specific way?
- Is it any difference in how girls or boys were affected by the earthquake, in the context of poverty and caste?
- What does the consequences of the earthquake look like on a socio-economic level? For those belonging to higher castes compared to those belonging to the Dalits?
- How do people working with issues regarding Dalits experience that the consequences of the earthquake affected their work and their clients?
- Is there any difference in consequences for men and women belonging to the Dalits?
- How do people experience that governmental aid was distributed after the earthquake, considering factors such as gender and caste?
- How does material factors, such as depleted housing, affect the vulnerability of women and men?

Examples of question asked are the following:

- How was the organization affected by the earthquake?
- Where your organization prepared for an eventual earthquake?
- Do you believe that the government had prepared you as citizens how to act in case of an earthquake or other natural disaster?
- Where the organizations buildings affected? How?
- Where your home affected? How? Where is your house located?
- Which caste groups are you mainly coming in contact with? Why?
- How do you experience the attitude against people belonging to the Dalits? Why?
- Which gender are you mostly working with?
- Do you believe that the consequences of the earthquake has affected people differently depending on their gender? Caste? How? Why?
- Can you give examples of concrete consequences people had to face after the earthquake, in the context of their caste and gender? For Dalits?
- How do you experience that the governmental aid was distributed after the earthquake? Was it any difference in the distribution of aid considering factors as caste? Gender?