

The Gulf Crisis and Narratives of Emotionality in Nepal’s English-Language Press

SUBIN PAUL
University of Iowa, USA

This study examines the media discourse on the Gulf diplomatic crisis and its effect on one of the most marginalized populations in Qatar: Nepali migrant workers. Although the diplomatic crisis made news headlines across the Middle East, Nepal-based newspapers were the only ones to cover the vulnerable migrant worker population in some detail. In writing about this population, three prominent English-language publications in Nepal, *The Kathmandu Post*, *Republica*, and *People’s Review*, employed emotional storytelling. Drawing on Wahl-Jorgensen’s notion of the “strategic ritual of emotionality,” this study specifically analyzes the use of emotion in the three publications’ news coverage. The study finds that the publications engaged in the ritual of emotionality not by assigning that function to external news sources, as is common in Western newspapers, but mainly through their own journalists and opinion writers who narrated their subjective viewpoints and concerns. This unreserved embrace of emotions and subjectivity in newswriting illuminates a unique, cultural mode of producing journalism.

Keywords: media and emotion, strategic ritual of emotionality, Gulf crisis, Qatar, Nepali media, Nepali migrants, Nepal

Nearly five months into the Qatar-Gulf crisis, a feature story in Nepal’s leading English-language newspaper, *The Kathmandu Post*, described life in the remote hilly village of Nalma, which was affected by the global forces of migration. Published October 28, 2017, and titled “What Migration Means on the Home Front,” the feature asserted that in the past decade, the young male workforce of Nalma, as in other villages around the country, has “looked outside Nepal’s borders for better economic opportunities than what local agriculture provides” (Lipton, Liu, & Basnet, 2017, para. 4). After describing the changing landscape and the traditional social hierarchy of Nalma, the story then focused on the plight of Tika, a 26-year-old local Dalit (“Untouchable”) man. Tika left for Qatar to find work and thereby defray his mounting debt. Quoting his wife, the feature concluded Tika’s story on a high note, with the hope that, although he is an uneducated migrant, Qatar will perhaps offer him a better future.

Tika is one of more than 400,000 Nepali migrant workers in Qatar, which is braving an air, sea, and land blockade imposed by neighboring countries belonging to the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC).¹ The Gulf

Subin Paul: subin-paul@uiowa.edu
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¹ GCC is a political and economic alliance of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the UAE, Qatar, Bahrain, and Oman.

crisis started on June 5, 2017, after Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Bahrain, and Egypt severed diplomatic ties with Qatar over allegations that the country was supporting “terrorism” (“Qatar-Gulf Crisis,” 2017, para. 10), maintaining “cordial relations” (para. 10) with Iran, and meddling in the internal affairs of their countries. Qatar has rejected these accusations, criticizing the blockade as an attempt to take control of the microstate.

As is common in times of blockades, wars, and natural calamities, the marginalized populations of society—in this case, migrant workers—suffer the most, often with mainstream media turning a blind eye. Although migrants constitute about 90% of Qatar’s population (Kamrava & Babar, 2012), middle-class natives and expatriates were those heard on social media, mainly to criticize the blockade and express their views. Migrant workers, being at the very bottom of the social hierarchy, remained unheard and invisible (Grugel & Piper, 2007). Unsurprisingly, the Arabic- and English-language press in Qatar focused on the prime movers (diplomats and private think-tanks) of what is the biggest news event in recent Qatari history and sidelined the effects of the blockade on migrants, particularly low-income migrant workers.² In contrast, newspapers based in countries that send workers to Qatar, such as *The Kathmandu Post*, provided more coverage, relatively, of migrant workers’ problems.

The aim of this study, therefore, is twofold. First, it qualitatively examines narratives about the Gulf crisis with a focus on Nepali migrants in three English-language publications: *The Kathmandu Post*, *Republica*, and *People’s Review*. These three privately owned publications are read mainly in print within Nepal and in digital format internationally. Second, and more theoretically, this study seeks to understand how emotions are deployed in newswriting in this part of the world. This examination is undertaken through the theoretical lens of what Wahl-Jorgensen (2013) termed as the “strategic ritual of emotionality,” a systematic practice of journalists infusing their reporting with emotion. In other words, this practice implies that “journalistic storytelling, despite its allegiance to the ideal of objectivity, is also profoundly emotional” (p. 2). The use of an emotional narrative, this study argues, humanizes the migrant experience, and in this way, newspapers advocate for peace and justice, especially in situations of war and turmoil. This article makes a contribution to journalism studies by demonstrating the strategies through which newswriters deploy emotions—which have been poorly understood because of the journalistic and scholarly emphasis on objectivity—in a non-Western cultural context such as Nepal, which has hitherto received negligible attention in the field of communication.

Conceptual Foundation

Emotion is sidelined in scholarly discussions of journalism because of the continual, yet contested, prominence of a commitment to “objectivity” (Schudson, 1978, 2001). Western journalists and scholars largely consider the use of emotion in journalistic writing as antithetical to “objective reporting,” which

² This assertion is made through a preliminary review of English-language newspapers published in Qatar and Nepal. Furthermore, based on interviews with journalists working in English-language newspapers in Qatar and with Nepali migrants who read English- and Nepali-language publications, it was learned that in general, Arabic- and English-language media devote less space to Nepali migrants as compared with Nepali media. The interviews were conducted in June–July 2016 and in August 2018 as part of a larger project on migrant media in the Middle East.

requires journalists to gather "facts" in a disinterested and impersonal manner. Tuchman (1972) saw this "strategic ritual of objectivity" as a survival mechanism, a response to the "risks imposed by deadlines, libel suits, and superiors' reprimands" (p. 662). Yet, despite claims to objectivity, journalists worldwide use emotions in newswriting strategically or willfully, indicating that an objective approach and emotional storytelling may not be mutually exclusive in practice (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2013). Josephi (2005) and others therefore suggested that a broader understanding of journalism is gleaned when we step away from the "inherently unstable categorical dualisms" (Peters, 2011, p. 299) that are often the basis of the normative model of objectivity.

Building on these debates, Wahl-Jorgensen (2013) suggested that the regimented use of emotions in newswriting should be seen as a strategic ritual because its correct deployment creates compelling narratives and stories that, for example, win awards and prizes. She further explained, based on her study of newspapers in the West, that this strategic ritual of emotionality does not call journalists to express their own emotions. Instead, such a practice is enacted through the "outsourcing of emotional labor" (p. 2) to news sources not only who are authorized to express emotions in public, but whose emotions journalists can "authoritatively describe without implicating themselves" (p. 2). Such a strategy is found to be consistent with journalistic objectivity because once "facts" are made available, journalists are authorized to describe the emotions of other individuals; as Tuchman (1972) noted, "The newsmen view quotations of other people's opinions as a form of supportive evidence. By interjecting someone else's opinion, they believe they are removing themselves from participation in the story, and they are letting the 'facts' speak" (p. 668). Similarly, White (1997) proposed that explicit judgments are "either avoided or confined to the quoted comments of external sources" (p. 107). Therefore, it is possible to understand emotionality as a complement to objectivity, as Loyn (2003) explained:

[An objective] approach is not dispassionate. It can be hugely passionate, requiring emotional engagement and human imagination. But it is not about my passion, how I feel. The viewer or listener does not want to know how I feel, but how people feel on the ground. (para. 38)

The use of emotional narratives has served important functions in journalism. A growing body of research (e.g., Huan, 2017; Kitch, 2003; Pantti, 2010; Telle & Pfister, 2016; Yell, 2012) has demonstrated how journalists in Europe, North America, China, and Australia deploy emotions in constructing social solidarity and inclusiveness and how emotions assist in reconstructing social values in face of events that disturb social order. The use of emotion is particularly justified in crisis reporting, which, as a part of hard news reporting, possesses "high legitimacy among journalistic genres" (Andén-Papadopoulos & Pantti, 2013, p. 961). Drawing on coverage of the 2004 South Asian tsunami in the Australian press, Cottle (2009) suggested that "media's performative use of resonate symbols, dramatic scenes, personalized narratives, and embedding of emotions and public performances can lend moral gravitas to the claims of victims" (p. 39).

Emotionality, according to Boltanski (1999), is essential for political action. Peters (2011) and Wahl-Jorgensen (2018) claimed that emotional storytelling calls attention to larger social problems by transferring emotional reactions to the audience and thereby securing its participation. Similarly, emotions in journalistic

discourse enable empathy, or the identification with and understanding of others' situations, feelings, and motives (Koehn, 1998). Although these may be reasons for the Nepali press to embrace the strategic ritual of emotionality in its coverage of Nepali migrants trapped in the Gulf crisis, this study will demonstrate that objectivity, as understood in Western contexts, is imported only selectively in the case of journalism in Nepal.

Nepal's News Media

In 1990, Nepal lifted a three-decade-long ban on political parties and restored a multiparty democracy. A new constitution initiated a system of parliamentary democracy, which, although rife with political conflict, gave people hope that they would see an improvement in living standards built on the political freedom arising from the *Jana Andolan* ("People's Movement") for restoring democracy (Wilmore, 2008). The new constitution also guaranteed the freedom of the press, and in 1992, the National Communication Policy was implemented, which promoted the development of private print and broadcast media (D. Adhikari, 2005; Aditya, 1996). Consequently, eight privately owned daily newspapers, including *The Kathmandu Post*, were established in the early part of the decade. Progress in the development of news media was affected by the Maoist War from 1996 to 2006, during which several journalists made headlines for the atrocities they suffered at the hands of Maoist rebels and the royal government for their "defiance of repressive press directives" (D. Adhikari, 2008, p. 80). News organizations, however, were instrumental in brokering peace with Maoist rebels in 2006. Journalists working for privately owned newspapers, together with an expanding network of FM radio stations across the country, helped turn public opinion against the violence.

Apart from press histories and administrative surveys of media growth, scholarly work on Nepal's news media remains sparse to date. In a linguistic study of the Nepali-language press, Upadhyay (2001) found that a common journalistic convention before the turn of the 21st century was to omit bylines in news stories, demonstrating a cultural practice of suppressing individualism. In a 1999 survey of Nepali journalists, Ramaprasad and Kelly (2003) discovered that journalists perceived their role as practicing "development journalism" (positive coverage of leaders, country and events) and as "public advocate" (investigate leaders and give voice to the public). Writing in 2008, after the end of the Maoist War, D. Adhikari (2008) noted that "opinion journalism is incredibly diverse and vibrant, and it has fostered public debate and interpretation" (p. 81). The popularity of opinion-based journalism traces back to the times when Nepal was a monarchy and "reflected as much dissidence as was possible under the Panchayat system [nonparty system directly ruled by the King] of government that had been established by King Mahendra" (Dixit, 2006, p. 28).

In the past decade, the Nepali press has showed increasing interest in investigative reporting, although the safety and financial stability of journalists remained a concern (Neupane & Zeng, 2014). Independent organizations such as the Centre for Investigative Journalism in Nepal have promoted critical reporting on migration, domestic labor, and children's issues (Centre for Investigative Journalism, 2018). According to the latest Freedom House (2018) report, pressure on the media has eased somewhat in recent years, and investigative pieces on topics including government corruption are becoming more common. The report, however, also noted that arrests of and assaults on journalists continued in 2017, particularly during

periods close to elections. It is within this context that we examine the journalistic ritual of emotionality in the narratives of the Qatar diplomatic crisis and its consequences for Nepali migrants in Qatar.

Nepali migrants constitute about 17% of the total population in Qatar, and they are the second largest migrant group after Indians (Snoj, 2017). Qatar and Nepal are among the world's smallest countries in terms of geographical area, yet the former has one of the highest per capita income in the world, whereas Nepal is listed among the least developed countries by the United Nations (2017). The majority of Nepali migrants arrived in Qatar after the year 2000 because of a growing demand for labor in the construction sector of the economy. The Embassy of Nepal (2017) in Doha, Qatar, touts that Nepali workers are "cost effective" (para. 3) and "experienced in working in the extreme climatic conditions" (para. 3). More than 95% of the Nepali migrants are unskilled or semiskilled workers, and only 2%–3% of the migrants are women (Bruslé, 2009, 2010). Although Nepali cultural life in Qatar is less robust than in other migrant communities, there are regular music and dance venues that draw thousands of workers. On Fridays and other holidays, migrants flock to Nepali Chowk—the haunt of migrants at the center of Doha—where they can buy Nepali films and songs; they can also buy the weekly edition of *Kantipur*, the largest Nepali-language newspaper in Nepal and Qatar, which also has a daily edition. *Kantipur* is a sister publication of the English-language daily *The Kathmandu Post*. The former claims a daily circulation of 360,000, whereas *The Kathmandu Post* prints 82,000 copies (Acharya, 2018).

Both *The Kathmandu Post* and *Kantipur* were founded in 1993 by Shyam Goenka and are published by Kantipur Publications. *Republica* was established in 2009 and has a Nepali-language sister publication called *Nagarik*. *People's Review* is a weekly founded in 1991 and is the oldest of the three English-language publications. Although all three English-language publications are based in Kathmandu and privately owned, none has a Qatar print edition. However, because *Kantipur* and *Kathmandu Post* are sister publications, news stories are occasionally shared between the two. Thus, in practice, the three English-language publications are accessible in print or online format to the upper-middle classes located in Nepal and internationally, including skilled migrants in Qatar. As Rajagopal (2011) argued in the case of newspapers from the Indian subcontinent, the English-language press has greater power to shape public and political agendas than its vernacular equivalent; although the latter usually has a higher circulation and readership, the former is more likely to be read by people with influence, such as diplomats and policy makers in Kathmandu and Doha, who tend to be proficient in English.³

Methodology

The news stories for analysis published in these three English-language publications were taken from the Access World News Research Collection database. Because this study examines coverage of the Gulf crisis in relation to Nepali migrants, the articles were retrieved using different combinations of the keywords *Qatar*, *migrant*, *blockade*, and *crisis*. The time period for analysis was six months starting on June 5, 2017, when the blockade officially commenced. This search produced a total of 68 relevant news items.

³ In addition to these three publications, *The Himalayan Times* and *The Rising Nepal* are other prominent English-language newspapers. There is also private television broadcasting in Nepal, and the government too operates television and radio services ("Nepal Profile," 2017).

Of these, 34 came from *The Kathmandu Post*, 30 from *Republica*, and four from *People's Review*. In all, there were 39 news stories, 10 editorials, and 19 opinion pieces. To ensure that no item was missed, the search results from the database were compared with the publications' websites.

Although opinion pieces are not written by regular staff, and publications claim to distance themselves from the viewpoint expressed in those pieces, it is reasonable to assume that the viewpoint is partly, if not completely, in line with the publications' position on an issue. Under normal circumstances, no newspaper will publish an opinion piece that deviates significantly from the newspaper's editorial line. An analysis of opinion pieces and editorials, then, helps us understand the position of a publication on a matter—in this case, the Gulf crisis—and is therefore useful for data analysis. Some stories in the sample used the Gulf crisis as a way to discuss the issue of labor migration, and such stories were also part of the analysis. All the retrieved news items were saved to a Word document for analysis. A qualitative data analysis (Johanssen & Garrisi, 2017) of the news items was then conducted based on the emotional narratives they constructed about migrants trapped in the Gulf crisis. It is important to note that opinion pieces and editorials are not expected to adhere to the ideal of objectivity, and the strategic ritual of emotionality that Wahl-Jorgensen (2013) mentions is applicable only to news stories.

Because emotional expressions and intentions are deeply rooted in language and culture, the interpretation of data must entail a macro-level analysis of the narrative, including the history of the region and the larger context in which it is situated, and a micro-level analysis of particular word choices (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2013). According to Edwards (1999), emotions operate at multiple levels of discourse. Most directly, they are at work in the use of language—from the use of individual words such as *angry*, *jealous*, and *worried* to the use of detailed descriptions, judgments, appraisals of conditions, objects, and individuals (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2013). Emotions are also embedded in the narrative. Even in stories that do not use emotional language, "dramatic tension is created through a variety of narrative strategies, including detailed description, juxtaposition, and personalized storytelling" (p. 7). The creation of dramatic tension can be hard to detect because it draws on shared cultural assumptions that are taken for granted and implicit, such as the idea that children are innocent, that farmers are tied to the earth and need protection from the larger world, and that loving and caring are morally right.

Informed by these perspectives, each news item was read closely with the following guiding questions adopted from Wahl-Jorgensen's (2013) study: How is emotion built into journalistic stories? Who expresses emotion? What is expressed, and how is it expressed? On whose behalf is it expressed? What role does the emotional expression play in the narrative? Furthermore, it was considered whether expressions of emotion are supported by evidence in the form of quotations, which enables us to relate the storytelling techniques observed here to those associated with the strategic ritual of objectivity (Tuchman, 1972; Wahl-Jorgensen, 2013). It was discovered that most news stories in the three publications did not contain source quotations.

Following Wahl-Jorgensen (2013), this study also analyzes appreciation, or the evaluation of objects and events (e.g., devastating earthquake) and the judgments of individuals (e.g., President's foolhardy official visit) as analogous forms of appraisal, which contributes toward building dramatic tension through storytelling while challenging the idea of the journalist as an objective and detached observer (Bird

& Dardenne, 1988). For the analysis, news items were coded thematically using an inductive approach, which focused on identifying and describing both explicit and implicit ideas within the data (Mayring, 2000; Saldana, 2009). Common ideas or themes that ran across the publications were then linked to raw data as summary markers (Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2012). Not all news items contained all themes, which provided an analytical scheme to study and organize the results and thereby shed light on the coverage of the Gulf crisis with regard to Nepali migrants. The analysis elicited three themes, which are presented next, along with their exemplary narratives and analyses.

Bridging the Us Versus Them Divide

As the four countries imposed the blockade on Qatar, news items published at the beginning of the crisis attempted to make connections between Qatar and Nepal by recounting Nepal's own recent history and experience of blockades. In September 2015, India allegedly imposed an undeclared blockade against Nepal, which was still recovering from its April 2015 earthquake that killed 9,000 people. The two-month-long blockade for Nepal, a landlocked country with India bordering it on three sides (the Himalayas separate Nepal from its neighbor China), prevented the imports of, among other things, petroleum, medicines, and earthquake relief materials (Arora, 2015). On the ground, the blockade was enacted by Madhesi—Nepalese who are ethnically, linguistically, and culturally close to people of the Indian states of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh—who demanded greater representation in Nepal's new constitution, which was instituted September 19, 2015 (Pokharel, 2015).

An opinion piece in *The Kathmandu Post* deployed the collective memory of this 2015 blockade to juxtapose and forge a connection to Qatar's ongoing crisis. With an image of the flags of Nepal and Qatar crisscrossed in a symbol of unity and solidarity, the author wrote, "For those of us who lived in a country that reeled under a blockade when it was just recovering from a devastating earthquake, news of a nation being obstructed by another takes us down the memory lane" (Shakya, 2017, para. 1). Similarly, another opinion piece in *Republica* titled "The Other Blockade" used the word *blockade* to bridge the two countries:

This [blockade] is a loaded word for Nepalis after their harrowing experience with sudden cessation in import of vital food and fuel from India. India kept denying that it had imposed any kind of blockade, attributing any obstruction in supplies solely to the protesting Madhesi parties. Yet it was India's blockade, imposed with the sole intent of bringing the establishment in Kathmandu to its knees for daring to have an "anti-India" constitution. (Baral, 2017, para. 3)

Because the leaders in Kathmandu did not permit India to intervene in Nepal's political affairs, and the new constitution failed to sufficiently address the Madhesi demands, the constitution was considered anti-India (Kumar, 2015; Ojha, 2015). The opinion piece then described India, the largest country in South Asia, and Saudi Arabia, the largest GCC country, in the same negative light as the "big bully" (Baral, 2017, para. 4) of their regions because, similar to India, but more overtly, Saudi Arabia exerted its political clout to impose a blockade. "Just like India is the big bully in South Asia, in the Persian Gulf, it is Saudi Arabia that likes to throw around its weight" (Baral, 2017, para. 4), wrote the author of the opinion piece, adding, "The rulers of Saudi Arabia—which has 10 times more people and 200 times more land area than Qatar—

are, frankly, jealous, jealous that the tiny Qatar has far surpassed the regional hegemon in terms of soft power" (para. 4). Through this shared experience of having been browbeaten by a larger nation, the opinion piece thus sought to generate sympathy among Nepali readers.

The publications also presented the blockade as "illegal" or against international law. For example, an opinion piece in *People's Review* claimed that the Gulf crisis "is now no longer a major 'diplomatic' crisis, but an illegal trade blockade contrary to international law" (Nepali, 2017a, para. 4). Another commentary described the blockade on Qatar as against the "tenets of international law and the multilateral pact known as the Gulf Corporation Council (GCC)" (Nepali, 2017b, para. 2), of which Qatar and "all the blockading countries" (2017b, para. 2) except Egypt are members. The reference to words *illegal* and *law* arguably functioned as a way to present Qatar as a victim of a crime perpetrated by larger countries.

In some news items, the emotion expressed about the Gulf crisis was anger and exasperation. Referring to the situation of those directly affected by the crisis (including Nepali migrants), an opinion piece in *The Kathmandu Post* written by Nepal's former ambassador to Qatar asserted that the "blockade is against international law and norms of humanity. No country has the right to play with the lives of their neighbouring countries' inhabitants and the livelihood of their dependents" (Mishra, 2017, para. 6). The former ambassador further made a call to "powerful" (para. 7) countries to push for a solution to the crisis through diplomatic means; he wrote, "As such, all the countries of the world should condemn the actions taken against Qatar. In particular, powerful countries should exert diplomatic pressure on Qatar's neighbours to lift the blockade and settle disputes through meaningful dialogue" (para. 7).

The three publications also engaged in critical commentary after Nepal's President Bidya Devi Bhandari accepted an invite from the UAE's crown prince to visit Abu Dhabi amid the Gulf crisis in mid-November. The news items termed Bhandari's decision to visit the UAE as "foolhardy" (Nepali, 2017b) and warned that it could create a wedge between Nepal and Qatar. A story in *People's Review* titled "President's UAE Visit Annoys Qatar: Nepal's Foreign Policy in Doldrums" anonymously cited foreign affairs experts and government officials who "termed the visit ill-timed as Qatar and the UAE, which is a part of the Saudi Arabia-led alliance, are engaged in diplomatic standoff over the past few months" ("President's UAE Visit," 2017, para. 1). Another news story in *Republica* claimed that the president's visit was tantamount to Nepal taking a side against Qatar in the ongoing Gulf crisis, as it explained:

Nepal does not have a full-fledged ambassador in the UAE. Nor does Nepal have a full-fledged foreign minister at home. "In the first place, the visit is taking place at a time when the country is heading for two crucial elections in a few weeks. As it seems to me, there is no agenda that deserves the visit by the head of the state. Instead, the visit is likely to send a message that we are siding with one of the two blocs. This is something we cannot afford to do," said a former Nepali ambassador, preferring anonymity. ("President's 'Ill-Timed' Visit," 2017, para. 6)

Pointing to the negative ramifications that the visit might have on the migrant population, the report presented statistics on the number of Nepali migrants in Qatar. Similarly, a commentary in *People's Review* argued that the president should have declined the invite and that the visit would strain relations

with Qatar, stating, "the Emirate of Qatar with which Nepal had very cordial relations is bound to interpret the visit to Abu Dhabi with consternation" (Nepali, 2017b, para. 4). By juxtaposing *very cordial* with *consternation*, the author indicated, through subtle use of language, that the president's visit to Abu Dhabi would have negative implications regarding the plight of Nepali migrant workers in Qatar.

For the Sons and Daughters of Farmers

All three publications employed narratives of emotionality to highlight the condition of migrants marooned amid the Gulf crisis. However, as opposed to Wahl-Jorgensen's (2013) finding that such emotionality is engendered indirectly through the words of news sources in the Western media, the contributors themselves constructed the majority of narratives in these three English-language Nepali publications. The newspapers explained that migrant workers in Qatar were at the bottom of Qatari society and therefore were the first to be affected because they faced loss of jobs and rising food prices. A news story in *The Kathmandu Post* titled "Caught in the Deadlock" used the Gulf crisis as a hook to highlight the chronic problem of migrant workers unable to leave the country. The story explained that several Nepali workers "found themselves unable to change jobs or leave the country despite facing job losses or late salary payments" (Lam, 2017, para. 7). The story connected the condition of migrant workers to the effects on their families back in Nepal: "98 percent of migrant workers are men and the sole breadwinners of their families. When their salaries are delayed, things come to a complete standstill for their entire family" (para. 7). Another news story echoed the migrant workers' marginal status in the society when the author wrote that "the real pawns in this geopolitical game stand to be ordinary citizens, especially foreign workers including more than 400,000 Nepalis based in the tiny Gulf nation" (Aryal, 2017, para. 11). Contributors, moreover, situated the condition of migrant workers in the larger social and international context, as one feature author commented:

One group facing the state's [Nepal's] utter neglect is migrant workers, the absent population numbering in millions, most of them sons and daughters of farmers. The emigres are exposed to all kinds of danger: terrorist assaults in Afghanistan, low wages in Malaysia, merciless homeowners in the Gulf, scorching heat of the desert, closure of industries in recession-hit countries, and, lately, a blockaded Qatar. And how does the government respond? With silence, and a lack of plan and action. (Guragain, 2017, para. 19)

Using different narrative strategies, such as referring to the number of migrants in millions (description), their background as children of farmers (dramatic tension), and the indifference of the Nepali government (proclaiming a judgment), the passage appealed to an ethics of kindness and care to morally influence the reader. Similarly, portraying the wide range of issues plaguing migrant workers in different parts of the world helped demonstrate the global nature of the problem. The contributor also criticized Nepal's government for its lack of action in extending support to migrant workers, and thus, in a small way, he engaged in adversarial commentary. Another author of an opinion piece in *The Kathmandu Post* raised a series of pointed questions, expressing frustration and anger on behalf of migrant workers at the lack of action on the part of Nepal's leaders.

What if the situation deteriorates? What does this mean for the 400,000 Nepali workers in Qatar? Who is responsible for their lives? How capable is the Embassy of Nepal in Doha to deal with possible complications? How will the Ministry of Foreign Affairs handle the queries of these people? Where will the Embassy keep them? Who will feed them? Who will provide healthcare and counselling services? (Shakya, 2017, para. 3)

While the three publications directed their criticisms to Nepal's government, they largely lauded the Qatari government and its efforts to provide a better working environment for migrants as compared with other GCC countries. For example, an editorial in *The Kathmandu Post* praised Qatar for ending the controversial Kafala system—a regulation that gives unconditional power to employers, which can be used to police and exploit migrant workers—even as all the other GCC countries retained it (“Stuck in Limbo,” 2017). One news story in *People's Review* detailed the “landmark reforms” (Nepali, 2017b, para. 5) that Qatar initiated for its foreign workforce, including setting up “a temporary minimum wage for migrant workers worth some US Dollar 200 a month following criticism of its preparations for the 2022 FIFA Football World Cup” (para. 5). Such “employee friendly work conditions,” asserted the story, “are still long away in other Gulf countries where Nepalese migrant workers are currently seeking a livelihood” (para. 6). Value judgments, eyewitness accounts, and emotional narratives, in rare cases, were also attributed to news sources. As an example, one news story expressed support for migrating to Qatar by quoting a Nepali government spokesperson who said, “Qatar remains one of the most preferred countries among Nepalis because it is [more] friendly to migrant workers than other Gulf-nations” (“More Nepalis Going Abroad,” 2017, para. 5). This official quotation containing an appreciation of place was an attempt to maintain a positive image of Qatar amid the crisis for prospective Nepali migrant workers.

For the Hills and Plains

The third theme in the coverage of the crisis was the concern for Nepal's economy; remittances from migrants could decrease because of the Gulf crisis. The stories presented Qatar as the most preferred job destination among Nepali migrant workers, but there was a drop in the number of labor permit applications for Qatar after the blockade started. By explaining Nepal's economic situation with statistical data, the articles concluded that Nepal cannot afford to lose remittance from its migrant population in Qatar. The stories highlighted the instability of the region and Nepal's own vulnerability, as the author of one story commented: “The recent crisis in the Middle East—triggered after seven [*sic*]⁴ Gulf countries declared that they were cutting off diplomatic ties with Qatar—is indicative of the volatility of the region on which Nepal is so reliant for its income” (“Figure That,” 2017, para. 2).

The news items compared the Gulf situation to historic crises around the world that afflicted migrants. One opinion piece reminded readers,

⁴ Instead of seven Gulf countries, it is three Gulf countries and Egypt.

Just as the 2009 recession in the U.S. affected Latin American migrants, and just as the Russian ruble crisis affected Tajikistani migrants in 2014, Nepal could also face great economic crisis that would see thousands of Nepali workers abroad fired from their jobs. (A. Adhikari, 2017, para. 7)

News items also raised the concern that if Nepal repatriated its thousands of migrant workers in Qatar, the cost incurred would cause inflation and economic slowdown. One opinion piece in *The Kathmandu Post* advanced the possibility of air-lifting migrant workers, but that ended with more questions than answers.

If Nepal even manages to lease Airbus 330s or Boeing 777s, evacuation of all Nepalis in Qatar would require about more than a 1,000 flights. How long will this evacuation procedure last given the limited number of flights that the Tribhuvan International Airport can handle? Will they be flown into Delhi and Mumbai instead? The cost of these flights will run into millions. Who will bear this cost? (Shakya, 2017, para. 6)

This passage reflects the tension between competing moral and economic predicaments for one of the poorest countries in the world. Given the uncertainty of the Gulf crisis and Nepal's overwhelming dependence on remittance, most articles shared a naïve optimism that Qatar will successfully brave the crisis and will provide economic rewards for migrants. In this way, the news items concluded that there was little that Nepal could do and thereby maintained the status quo, as an opinion piece in *Republica* noted more generally:

The parasitic Nepali state thus has no incentive to discourage labor migration, even if decent work conditions cannot be guaranteed for Nepali workers abroad, even if millions of acres of our fields lie fallow as there is no one to till them, even if most of this "cheap" money that is flowing in is leaving as quick, most of it sunk in Italian designer bags, American smartphones and Chinese toys. (Baral, 2017, para. 9)

The word *parasitic* indicated the exploitation of the migrant workers by Nepal, highlighting the marginalized status of that population. Furthermore, juxtaposing "millions of acres" of uncultivated fields in the homeland with the importation and consumption of foreign-made goods implied a growing contrast between rural and urban, as well as historic and modern, in contemporary Nepali society.

Conclusion

Scholars have largely overlooked the use of emotional strategies in journalism because of its historical allegiance to the ideal of objectivity (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2016). This study examined narratives of emotionality used by Nepal's three English-language publications in covering the Gulf crisis. The analysis revealed three overlapping themes: First, the coverage attempted to construct a shared history between Nepal and Qatar by highlighting similar episodes of blockades that the two small countries faced at the hands of their bigger neighbor. Political decisions such as Nepal's presidential visit to the UAE amid the Gulf crisis, which could possibly strain the relationship between Nepal and Qatar, were criticized. Second, the news items portrayed migrant workers as the group that suffered the most from the blockade. In

constructing this emotional narrative, the news items included specific instances of migrant hardship and compared migrants' plight to the condition of migrant workers across the world. Third, coverage showed a concern about Nepal's economic growth amid the Gulf crisis, especially about the decline in migration to Qatar and the possible expenses in evacuating the migrant workers.

This study revealed that *The Kathmandu Post*, *Republica*, and *People's Review* engaged in the strategic ritual of emotionality not by assigning emotions to external news sources or "protagonists" in the form of quotations, as Wahl-Jorgensen (2013) suggested, but mainly through their own newswriters who narrated their subjective viewpoints and concerns. The majority of news items, including news stories, did not even have an attribution to a news source. The publications' embrace of emotion in news stories in such a manner demonstrates that notions of objectivity have only been partially accepted in Nepali journalism. The focus of the coverage of the Gulf crisis was aimed at advocating for the rights of migrant workers and making public institutions—such as the Nepali government and its embassy in Qatar—more responsive to migrant needs. However, to what extent this advocacy and emotion-laden journalism have been instrumental in improving the plight of Nepali migrant workers in Qatar would be difficult to measure, even when the Gulf crisis concludes.

This article shed light on some of the unique ways in which the English-language press in the Global South follows the strategic ritual of emotionality. The use of emotion in newswriting here constitutes a ritual because it is through this shared cultural practice that Nepali newswriters create and disseminate meanings and expressions of commonality, as Carey (2009) would have it, among members of their community. For journalists and readers alike, these meanings help cement their sense of belonging in the Nepali community. Additionally, as Andén-Papadopoulos and Pantti (2013) argued, the use of emotion tends to be justified and more common in crisis reporting, and it is then that the newswriters enact the ritual of emotionality more scrupulously. According to Cottle (2009), global crisis reporting gives vent variously to the range of views and contention that surround, shape, and inform crises and constitutes an important, though often overlooked, dimension of media's role in reporting crises. We need, then, to attend much more closely to the communicative forms and differentiated nature of news reporting and how these provide different opportunities for the public elaboration, deliberation, and visualization of crises (Cottle & Rai, 2006).

Future studies should examine whether vernacular publications are different from their English-language counterparts in adopting emotions in newswriting and, if so, how they differ. Exploration of structural and newsroom conditions that influence news gatherers to perform the ritual of emotionality is also needed. For example, with regard to coverage of the Gulf crisis by Nepal's English-language publications, it is possible that a lack of regular news staff in Qatar played a role in the decision of journalists to insert their own voices into the story and thereby produce emotional narratives. Given that opinion-based journalism has traditionally been important in contributing to public discourse in Nepali society (D. Adhikari, 2008; Dixit, 2006), emotions may be acceptable as a matter of journalistic judgment and culture; therefore, the journalists may not be beholden to notions of objectivity and detachment to the same extent as in the West. In a transnational setting, the relationship between countries also potentially shapes the news narratives and the level to which journalists use charged language for advocacy, especially when one country has close financial ties with another. These are only some of the factors that may affect the ritual of emotionality, and research should describe more such parameters through newsroom observations and

interviews. Last, scholars should further explore the use of emotion in different press systems to enhance our understanding of the cultural production of journalism and how it deviates from the predominant Western assumptions about journalism.

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