

Nitya Nanda Timsina

Discourse of Higher Education Reform in Nepal

– towards neo-liberalism

Ph.D. dissertation
Graduate School in Lifelong Learning
Department of Psychology and Educational Studies,
Roskilde University
2016

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A publication in the series: PhD dissertations from the Graduate School in Lifelong Learning, Roskilde University

1st Edition 2016

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Cover: Vibeke Lihn

Typeset: The author

Print: Kopicentralen, Roskilde University, Denmark

ISBN: 978-87-91387-94-4

Published by:

Graduate School in Lifelong Learning

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<http://www.ruc.dk/en/research/phd-programme/doctoral-schools-and-phd-programmes-at-ru/doctoral-school-of-lifelong-learning-and-social-psychology-of-every-day-life/graduate-school-in-lifelong-learning/>

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Foreword

This PhD dissertation is a result of a three year study in the Graduate School in Lifelong Learning at Roskilde University. The research perspective of lifelong learning comprises learning through the whole life course in formal education, everyday life, work life, family life, civil society, etc. Thus research in lifelong learning calls for an interdisciplinary approach to learning as a subjective activity in a social context.

The Graduate School in Lifelong Learning was established in 1999 with support from the Danish Research Academy. Since the PhD-programme was established more than hundred students have achieved the PhD degree and presently around 60 students are enrolled. The Graduate School has an annual enrolment of 10-15 new doctoral students. It is an international research training programme. Academic everyday life comprises frequent visits by international guest professors and visits by foreign PhD students. Both students and supervisors are engaged in international research networks. Also, the Graduate School is part of a national network developing and coordinating educational activities for PhD students.

The Graduate School draws upon theoretical and methodological inspiration from traditions within the arts and humanities as well as the social sciences. Graduate School training addresses issues traditionally ignored by discipline-oriented research and professional knowledge. It particularly focuses on learning as the subjective mediation of objective, societal and cultural processes. Research in Lifelong Learning encompasses a variety of subjects and is equally broad in the perspectives it takes. The topics of the PhD dissertations are often quite far from what is usually associated with pedagogy, but help to co-establish an emerging critical and historically located important area of research. This often demands theoretical and methodological innovation. At the same time the programme aims to establish connections between existing traditions in pedagogical research and associated disciplines. Methodologically the graduate school concentrates on qualitative methods and interpretive methodology. Within a wide scope each project may choose and adapt quite different methods to the specific research problem.

A PhD dissertation marks the end of an academic apprenticeship. It proves that the author has been “conducting an independent research project under supervision” as stated in the “Ministerial Order on the PhD Course of Study and on the PhD Degree”. It is the culmination of the process that is published here. PhD dissertations are however also part of the development and forming

of new areas of research. PhD dissertations are necessary in the continuous creation of new knowledge and reading this dissertation assures that this process is well taken care of.

This thesis – by Nitya Nanda Timsina – explores education in Nepal through discourse formation in the field of higher education. It is driven by a desire to analyze the contemporary desire of policy makers in Nepal, and their international development partners abroad, to transform the sector into a tool for economic growth and prosperity. Adopting a Foucauldian/discursive approach, the thesis explores both the origins and effects of the current discourse; locating it as the latest ‘regime of truth’ about progress and well-being in Nepal, and the role that education has played in realizing the imaginary of progress. The thesis comprises a number of conceptual chapters that explore social theory and discourse as method, as well literature on higher education reform and development in Nepal. These chapters serve as the foundation for a series of empirical chapters that explore the enactment of higher education discourse across different university contexts, actors and subject positions.

Ultimately, the thesis concludes that whilst neo-liberal reform in Nepal seeks to establish a totality or unitary form where all difference and diversity is reduced to singularity, the practice of reform leads to contested enactments that reflect different histories and contexts but also different visions of Nepal in relation to its unique social and political challenges but also in terms of its place as a nation in the so-called global knowledge economy. The thesis suggests that this local and context-specific diversity can be understood as being realized within a powerful meta-narrative that positions Nepal and its higher education policies, institutions and practitioners within an overall discourse of development that views Nepal as deficient and in need of radical change if progress is to follow.

The thesis is grounded in theoretical concepts from the fields of development anthropology, education policy and philosophy (or more accurately epistemology). Principle amongst these is Foucauldian governmentality theory which is well-explained and placed in dialogue with Marxist-inspired ‘critical’ alternatives. By exploring the Foucauldian critique of Marxism and its application in the field of educational studies, the theory work then elaborates upon different notions of discourse, leading to the operation of a loose form of Foucauldian genealogical method with which to describe and organize policy history in Nepal and identify a number of key policy moments. The aim here is to destabilize the dominant taken-for-grantedness of policy literature in Ne-

pal that assumes a logical continuity of themes and priorities for reform. The identification of shifting priorities for reform – from nation or state-building, decentralization and local autonomy and, finally, individualization – make clear that policy truths in Nepal are both ideological and fabricated. The notion of subjectivity emerges as quite central here: subjects must be understood as the historically-contingent products of these policy regimes.

Abstract

This PhD thesis examines how higher education has come to be understood and talked about in Nepal from the early 1950s to the present through the metanarrative of “development”. To be more precise, what is the discourse of higher education reform in Nepal? What is higher education? Who decides? How do actors in the field of practice enact it? These are some of the questions this PhD thesis attempts to answer. To answer these questions, the thesis deploys poststructuralism, mainly drawing on Michel Foucault’s discursive approach to social theory, as the lens with which to see the discourse and practice of higher education reform in Nepal. Accordingly, discourse is used as the overall conceptual frame for the study. It shows that the higher education reform doesn’t exist in itself as objective truth; it is tied to a form of power/knowledge which produces it and thus structures our sense of reality to think, talk and enact it.

Central to the thinking driving Nepalese higher education reform, with which this study is concerned, is international standards as the benchmark and the Western conception of economic “development” as its basic premise. The thesis questions this taken for granted assumptions about education as a tool for economic development. The thesis traces the emergence of this order of knowledge and thinking in Nepal to the adoption of modern education in the early 1950s sponsored by Nepal’s external development partners which began to intervene in Nepal in the name of “development” by presupposing that the Nepalese were in desperate need of external intervention. Since that time, education in Nepal has come to be understood increasingly in that imaginative international context and the country’s social realities as represented by a Western episteme and historicity. The thesis disturbs that dominant order of thinking higher education in Nepal to show how we have come to the present situation where “decentralized” and “autonomous” higher education is a political necessity.

This study is situated in a large Nepalese public higher education sector known as Tribhuvan University and its 60 constituent campuses undergoing a major restructuring sponsored by the World Bank. Accordingly, the study is situated in that national flagship of higher education in Nepal. But the thesis problematized not this institute, but the problems and practice of knowledge and power shaping this institute. It showed that this knowledge was so peculiar that its origin was not within Nepal, neither within the grasp of the ordinary Nepalese. Consequently, “development” as the dominant epistemological grid

to think about modern progress became the order of knowledge in Nepal colonizing our thoughts that education is self-evidently about economic prosperity. It is this scientific model which came to dominate the discourse and practice of education reform in Nepal that this thesis will set out to examine.

This thesis is organized into two parts. Part I analyses the discourse of “development” and the globalization of knowledge and power, namely the neo-liberal order of thinking, that is informing the policy and practice of higher education reform in Nepal. Neo-liberalism is approached via a review of international trends in higher education reform which reflected a globalization of knowledge. Here, neo-liberalism totalizes the world through the logic of a common time, space, history and culture. Neo-liberalism gets subsumed with the dominant category “development” which establishes its unquestioned relationship with education since 1951 to continue as the key enunciator of education policy. Thus, this study questions its legitimacy and the claims to knowledge and scientific reason which establish this field of relationship.

The thesis shows that “development” is the dominant order of knowledge and the rule governing the discourse of higher education reform. It structures our sense of reality to think that education is self-evidently about economic prosperity measured in terms of industrial progress in the West dictated by its social and cultural terms of living in the world. The most important institutional form sustaining this order of knowledge in Nepal is international “development” partners which establish themselves as a “laboratory of foreign aid”. They do so through their dominant position to produce and circulate the knowledge of “development”, thus making it impossible to imagine education in other terms. Other forces include the historical events of 1951 and 1960 which came to shape the perceived truth of centralization thinking in education; multiparty democracy, which erupted in 1990 establishing its relationship with education via “decentralization”; and the republican order of thinking after 2006 that redefined higher education as “autonomous” institutions. Here, the latest meaning of “autonomy” in higher education in Nepal is shaped by a neo-liberal order of thinking mediated by the rules of the republic, namely the political discourse of “autonomous state” in Nepal. The logic of the fall of the monarchy and abolition of the Hindu state via the April 2006 “revolution” was the strategic context for this reform thinking. Rather than locate the meaning of reform in its “self-enclosed truth” via “decentralization” and “autonomy” that appear so pretentious, legitimate, and unquestionable, the thesis examined these categories through their relationships with a number of events.

In sum, Part I argues for the emergence and disappearance of a succession

of regimes of representation that came to shape the policy and practices of higher education reform, first originating in the politics of Cold War, foreign aid and politics among nations for whom democratisation and modernisation in Nepal was more important, and then it showed the emergence of neo-liberal reform sponsored by the World Bank between 1990 and the present that places education in the scheme of economic prosperity. With these grounds cleared, Part II examines the deployment and enactment of this discourse via the subjectivity of actors, namely education policymakers, administrators, teachers and students that do not correspond to the grand trope of the dominant neo-liberal policy discourse.

Part II of the thesis, thus, shows neo-liberalism as a form taking the shape of the reform, mainly in terms of fee-setting, enrolment policies, and new programmes of study for the ever-growing numbers of middle class young wishing to find a way out of Nepal. The thesis shows that the neo-liberalism required the positive role of the state in Nepal in promoting privatization and markets in education. As a form of practice, “decentralized and autonomous higher education” emerged as the only way to address the alleged decline of higher education and its “weak” public provision in Nepal. The exodus of skilled graduates from Nepal emerged as one consequence of the reform. This was facilitated by the introduction of privately financed study programmes oriented to international certification and credits transfer. This discourse and practice of education has fostered a dominant imaginative geography of progress residing outside Nepal. These social differences and subjectivities have fostered the understanding of education as a social ladder, with its first step in Kathmandu and the last step in the Western capitals. These graduates competed with each other in their climb to experience that imaginative progress in the Western hemisphere. For some students who secured access to these high-profile courses via a nationwide competition and who found an exit from Nepal after graduation, this reform meant a victory; for others who didn’t secure it, tears. This reform also meant business and profits for some. For others, it gave easy access to jobs and foreign settlement. For still others, it amounted to nothing. For some teachers, the reform threatened their future job security. For others, it was so meaningful that it gave them more salary and high esteem. For still other, it amounted to nothing. This study shows that there are winners, losers, advocates, enemies and the confused and the disenchanted, as well as those for whom this reform meant absolutely nothing.

What specific empirical result can be shown from a study that traces the arrival of reform in Nepal to unexpected historical rupture? The findings do

not seek to recommend that the efficient and well-resourced higher education can only exist in opposition to the state-owned system. There are areas for further research emerging from the thesis, especially by challenging the dominance of neo-liberal ideology in education in Nepal. This includes the possibility of conceptualizing alternative reform strategies by speaking against its hegemonic global rationale. The real challenge for future policy scholars and education planners in Nepal lies in being critical to the global one-size-fits-all policy dictate. And since it is guided by a development vision, namely modern economic practices, foreign aid diplomacy, power struggles and politics among nations, the Nepalese may continually fall into the trap of not being able to speak against a rationale that has made them suffer for more than sixty years. The real challenge therefore lies in unthinking education in terms of economic development ideals.

The method of observation and analysis moved away from the deterministic phenomenological position. In the treatment of the empirical data, the thesis challenges the modernist methods which rely heavily on observing (knowing) subject. To be more precise, the thesis hinged between epistemological knowledge (science) that demands results vs. archaeological knowledge that rejects scientific and conclusive results. The study left many field data open-ended leaving the readers to capture the depth of what is said from their own subject positions. This was a deliberate attempt and a consequence of the method deployed. In so doing, the thesis disrupted the “bureaucratic terrors” of science that demands systemicity, order, relevance, structure and morality from a study that came from a non-science context. Here was a PhD student who had no respect for time and space others would value so much in the West. On the other hand, the problem I was handling was so complex and enormous. Writing the thesis in a foreign language was in itself a challenge. The structure within which I was expected to present this work within a period of three years was another challenge. It took four years instead of three. Here was not just a thesis dealing with education alone but the entire problems of Nepal that surrounded education reform. Summing up, if it is true that the power of social sciences and their methods lies in being “vigilant” and “imaginative”, this study called for adopting new tools of research while acknowledging the complexities of reading the non-west.

List of Acronyms

ADB	Asian Development Bank
AMP	Aid Management Platform
BTech	Bachelor in Technology
BBA	Bachelor in Business Administration
BBS	Bachelor in Business Studies
BHFM	Bachelor in Horticulture and Floriculture Management
BIM	Bachelor in Information Management
CCT	Central Campus of Technology
CMAT	Common Management Aptitude Test
DV	Diversity Visa
EU	European Union
IDA	International Development Association
ILO	International Labour Organization
INGOs	International non-governmental organizations
IOE	Institute of Engineering
IOM	Institute of Medicine
KU	Kathmandu University
MA LLL	European Master in Lifelong Learning
MBA	Master in Business Administration
MBS	Master in Business Studies
NGO	Non-governmental organization
NNEPC	Nepal National Educational Planning Commission
NRB	Nepal Rastra Bank
NRN	Non- Resident Nepali
NESP	National Education System Plan
NPC	National Planning Commission
OCE	Office of the Controller of Examinations
QAA	Quality Assurance and Accreditation
SHEP	Second Higher Education Project
TU	Tribhuvan University
TUTA	Tribhuvan University Teachers' Association
UGC	University Grants Commission
UK	United Kingdom
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
US	United States
VC	Vice-Chancellor
VDC	Village Development Committee

Acknowledgements

This thesis became a reality under the rigorous supervision of Stephen Carney (D.Phil.). Despite strong warnings from his close friend Jeremy Rappleye from Kyoto University who I met in Nepal with my supervisor during a fieldtrip that his Oxford-educated buddy is very strict, and my early assessment of him as a hard man, he eventually led me to do a truly rewarding work. I am deeply indebted to Dr. Stephen for leading me into the scholarly world. Thanks are also due to Dr. Jeremy for his cautionary advice and assistance.

Despite some initial discontentment with the university administration, the PhD as a 'job' at Roskilde University was nonetheless a rewarding experience. Experiences may be personal, but I have absolutely no qualms about the quality of supervision I received. I am heavily indebted to Roskilde University (RUC), Denmark, its intellectual climate, that silent and super comfy environment to read, that modern library infrastructure, that huge online bookstores containing the whole world of information, that generous financial grant to attend seminars and conferences, one of which included a weeklong "theory lab" workshop at the University of Sterling, Scotland, and finally the critical approaches to research. I am also indebted to Professor Ulla Ambrosius Madsen for her continuous encouragement and support that included organizing research methodology workshops and seminars for international PhD students. I am no less indebted to individuals like Vibeke Lihn, Liselotte Gregart, Jan M. Larsen and Mikael Meldstad for their administrative support.

I will do a great injustice if I do not thank my teacher Jeannie Donald-McKim who lives in Oxford and is currently a tutor at Abingdon and Witney College who sponsored my schooling in one of India's top schools without which I would not have possibly become a scholar. That was the rare heart of a mother which bled equally to her own children and others. Thank you Jeannie! Then comes my mom, Uma, the life and soul of my house, who not only gave birth to me but also sent me to school. I vividly remember those mists of tears in her eyes when I told the news of my PhD proposal being accepted when she said, "Your dad wanted you to help him in the field but I sent you to school." Thank you mother! I also thank my son Hridayesh (10) who often grew wary of seeing me silent and engrossed in reading all the time at home and having had no spare moment with him in football. I hope he will forgive me for this. I dedicate this thesis to my wife, Indu. I am indebted to her beyond words. Without her support, encouragement, and love this dissertation would not have been possible.

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PART I

CHAPTER 1

Locating the problem

1.1 Introduction

This PhD thesis grew out of my interest in how higher education has come to be understood and talked about in Nepal through the metanarrative of “development”. The aim of this thesis is to examine this discourse in Nepal from the early 1950s to the present and to challenge that dominant order of thinking by exposing the play of historical forces and discursive practices that constitute this discourse.

What is higher education? Who decides? Central to the thinking driving Nepalese higher education reform, with which this study is concerned, is international standards as the benchmark for reforming Nepalese higher education and the Western conception of economic “development” as its basic premise. These normative and value-laden concerns serve to consolidate the notion of Nepal as “backward” and “poor” in social and cultural terms. Since the adoption of modern education in the early 1950s, the search began for education policy that was “more frequently found in the western hemisphere than elsewhere” (*Education in Nepal*, 1956, p. 136). Ever since then, education in Nepal has come to be understood increasingly in that constructed international context and in the country’s social realities as represented by a Western episteme and historicity. The present policy is to make higher education institutions in Nepal comparable internationally and to enable Nepal to participate in the “global knowledge economy” (see Tenth Plan, NPC, Govt. of Nepal, 2002; UGC, 2010a, 2012b). The key rationale for doing so starts with a brief statement: “A substantive number of students are going abroad for higher education seeking better quality and relevance. This phenomenon, although new to

Nepal, is already a core concern and focus of higher education development in many parts of the world” (UGC, 2012b, p. 34). A “decentralized” and “autonomous” higher education system is the form taking shape in policy and practice. Graduates are required to recognize or choose only those high-brow courses that meet the “international” category and that are “relevant” to the market’s needs.

In trying to locate the production site of this policy regime, I initially came upon a World Bank document entitled *Second Higher Education Project* (SHEP, 2007), which outlines a systemic solution to perceived problems focusing on the “weak public provision” of education in Nepal. The most decisive step the Bank took was to influence the national government to adopt “autonomous campus rules” in January 2006, with the assumption that the prevalent, freely accessible state-supported higher education system in Nepal was at the root of all the problems of higher education. With this teleological explanation forming a particular way of reasoning, the reform was targeted at Tribhuvan University (TU), which is emblematic of the country’s largest and oldest state-supported higher education system, enrolling 90 percent of the country’s students through an open-door admission policy with minimal fees.

The overall aim of the reform is to increase the “graduates’ productive efficiency” to support economic growth and social justice in Nepal. The Bank draws on international experiences to reform Nepalese higher education. It declares: “At present, other donors are not involved in higher education in any significant way, making the Bank’s involvement in the sector even more pertinent” (ibid, p. 4). In trying to figure out what that international experience was like, I looked at a number of countries where higher education reform was financed by the World Bank, reflecting a neo-liberal trend. At the outset, a geopolitical imagination was evident in the way the policy of higher education in Nepal appeared in the review of the SHEP document. This thesis mainly arose out of a sense of puzzlement: how is it that the constructed international context of higher education and its taken-for-granted notion of quality and relevance elsewhere have become so self-evidently necessary and central to higher education planning and policy in places like Nepal?

The immediate launch pad for the SHEP was provided by the April 2006 “revolution”, described in the report as an “open moment” and the time preceding that event as the “old order”. The Bank’s document refers these terms to political events in Nepal, assuming that the overthrow of the monarchy in 2006 created a sense of peace and freedom. This statement would have amounted to an act of treason against the HMG had it been released in 2005

or between 1960 and 1990. After a big historical event, it would start to seem normal. A smooth and certain future is predicted here from the presumed past failures. Ever since the introduction of the first modern Western system of education in the mid-1950s, this view of historical progress has been pervasive. Since then, the Nepalese higher education has been oriented to a seemingly endless journey in search of standards more commonly found in the Western hemisphere (see *Education in Nepal*, NNEPC, 1956). In view of this unquestioned appeal and search for Western models, the study first sets out to examine the invention of the discourse of higher education reform in Nepal, taking 1951 as the point of departure. In so doing, the thesis challenges the dominant order of thinking behind the reform in Nepal in terms of past failures and future possibilities.

The logic of the “open moment” manifested in the report takes for granted that the centralized system of higher education conceived by the monarchy is at the root of the decline of higher education. Here is an act of truth telling that assumes how the people of Nepal think and live their lives. Reading the text, it appears that this truth telling comes not from the people of Nepal but from their “development partners” external to them. They make us believe that a decentralised and autonomous higher education system arises from the free choices made by the people of Nepal. In view of this deterministic stance on reason, the study turns its attention to the external agency doing the reform. In other words, instead of pursuing how higher education has become “reformed”, more refined or better than the past, this research project studies how the apparatus conducting the reform creates a condition to think this way. The study is situated in that national flagship of higher education in Nepal. But the thesis problematizes not this institute, but the problems and practice of knowledge and power shaping this institute. It shows that this knowledge is so peculiar that its origin was not within Nepal, neither within the grasp of the ordinary Nepalese. Consequently, “development” as the dominant epistemological grid to think about modern progress becomes the order of knowledge in Nepal colonizing our thoughts that education is self-evidently about economic prosperity. It is this scientific model which dominates the discourse and practice of higher education reform in Nepal that this research project will set out to examine critically.

The theoretical frame for the study is grounded in Michel Foucault’s discursive turn to social theory. The study deploys Escobar’s (1995) Foucauldian discursive approach to the study of development, culture, power and history as the relevant framing for the study. Accordingly, the study theorizes higher

education reform as a discourse. This discourse is framed by three interrelated concepts – knowledge, power and subjectivity. The discourse structures our sense of reality to think, talk and act. The knowledge, which constitutes it, regulates our conduct; it works as a tool of power. Accordingly, the system of knowledge is couched in terms of “development” or developmentalism. The power is a strategic situation or relation whose effects are examined at the level of knowledge. The forms of power that regulates the discourse are couched in terms of development institutions doing the “reform” as they enjoy the access to knowledge and dominant position to tell the truth in Nepal but they are not the only ones. The others are global trends, mainly neo-liberalism, through which so many countries fashion their understanding of higher education and which are used as a justification for reforming the Nepalese higher education. Finally, the forms of subjectivities fostered by the discourse are understood as the effects of the reform. This will be approached via interviews of the actors situated in the field of practice and who are made the subjects and objects of the discourse. Accordingly, the thesis draws on interviews with policymakers, educational administrators, teachers and students to understand the institutionalization and consolidation of this apparatus of power and knowledge in Nepal. Interviews accompanied by field observations were conducted between November 2012 and March 2013 across three geographic locations of Nepal – Kathmandu, Dharan and Ilam – the three principal sites where the SHEP was deployed.

1.2 Background and the context

The study is situated in a large Nepalese public higher education organization, Tribhuvan University, one of the locations where the SHEP was implemented. This state-supported university is the national flagship of higher education in Nepal. It comprises 60 constituent campuses and caters to more than 90 percent of graduates’ enrolment. The SHEP is a US\$60 million higher education reform project signed between the World Bank and the Government of Nepal in 2007, targeting this university, whose principal aim is “deepen[ing] the degree of decentralization” (World Bank, 2007, p. 123). With the theme “education for the knowledge economy” and the April 2006 “revolution” that abolished the monarchy and the Hindu state in Nepal as the strategic context for the reform, the SHEP proposed a total restructuring of higher education in

Nepal. This document declared the bankruptcy of the public provision of education in Nepal and constructed Nepal as the “poorest country in South Asia” and the “12th poorest in the world” in terms of “weak contributions of the sector [higher education] in supporting economic growth and social harmony” (ibid, pp. 1–2). The report outlined the role of higher education in creating economic growth and ending the perceived state of poverty and alleged social disharmony in the country. Efficient governance of TU campuses, increased accessibility of “disadvantaged” students to higher education, increased employability of graduates and development of students’ “productive efficiency” to support economic growth and social justice in Nepal are the core aims of the reform. “Decentralization” and “autonomy” are the two broad strategies and names of the reform.

The Tribhuvan University, with its 60 constituent campuses, four research centres, 38 central departments, 405,341 students, 1,053 affiliated colleges and 15,196 employees (including 8,000 teaching staff), is the national flagship of higher education and the target of reform. Since its founding in 1959, it has pursued a centralized management of its 60 constituent campuses, relied on state financial support and pursued a liberal admission policy offering a high degree of access to students with negligible fees. The Bank-sponsored project reversed that trend; it required the Tribhuvan University to decentralize and give autonomy to all its institutes. The new policy framework (as reflected in the 132-page SHEP document of the World Bank) required the students to come through national open competition and their parents to take upon themselves the role of educational entrepreneurs.

Reading the SHEP document prepared by the Bank, which guided the reform and led to the introduction of autonomous campus rule, I grew increasingly suspicious of the highly authoritative knowledge claims contained in the document to reform Nepalese higher education based on the Bank’s international experience of higher education reform, which mainly is in low-income countries that have been reduced to clientele dependency on the Bank for loans and policy directives. I began to think that there must be more complex forces at work in dictating the policy and practice in education. The Bank was not the only agency involved in Nepal; it was part of a long list of multilateral and bilateral “development” partners, INGOs and NGOs engaged in the economic development of Nepal. All of these organizations are named “development” (see the underlined words in the list below). Higher education reform is part of this large scale international development intervention in Nepal.

The following are the development institutions and their ongoing projects

in Nepal listed by the Ministry of Finance (2013) under its International Economic Cooperation Coordination Division, whose vision is to mobilize foreign aid in accomplishing the development goal of poverty reduction: Of the total of 91 development partners, the major ones are: UNDP (runs 220 projects), ADB (87 projects), World Bank/IDA (42 projects), EU, World Health Organization (WHO), Save the Children, World Food Program, World Wildlife Fund, UN Population Fund, Population Services International, Int'l Fund for Agriculture Development, World Wildlife Fund, Inc., Nepal Program, UN Peace Fund, and Children Fund Japan. Of the total of 15 bilateral development partners, the major ones are: India, Japan International Development Cooperation Agency (JICA), Department for International Development (UK/DFID), US Agency for International Development (USAID), German Development Cooperation (GTZ), Denmark Development Cooperation Agency (DANIDA), Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, Australian Development Cooperation (AUSAID), Norwegian Development Cooperation Agency (NORAD), China, Finland, and Republic of Korea. In sum, there are 170 INGOs, 30, 284 NGOs and a total of 818 development projects. Of these development projects, the following are the top 13 listed by the government: School Sector Reform Project, health sector reform, power development, BP highway (Sindhuli Road), local governance and community development, Melamchi drinking water project, road improvement project, road sector development project, road connectivity sector, Hariyo Ban Program, human rights and good governance, the Second Higher Education Project (SHEP) [Focus of this study], and skills for employment. The SHEP was financed by the World Bank and the School Sector Reform was financed by 14 “development partners” that included IBRD/IDA’s “specific investment loan”. The volume of “development” aid had reached US\$1.112 billion in 2014 (Ministry of Finance, 2015). Education sector, followed by health and energy, received the highest share. Assuming that this massive international intervention was so essential in the development of government schools, they were increasingly being discredited (Madsen and Carney, 2011). If it was about the development of energy sector, Nepal became “land of the blackout” from the prolonged power outage on an average of two thirds of a day (BBC, 2009) forcing the people to collecting firewood, the ancient practice of gathering fuel. If this intervention was about economic growth, Nepal fell to the rank of the 12th poorest in the world by 2007 and the poorest in South Asia. If it was about consolidation of democratic institutions, Nepal has seen a succession of 20 “weak” governments since the introduction of democracy in 1990 none of which had lasted

for a full term. If it was about urbanization, the urban poverty increased by more than two-fold (Poudel, 2012). If it was about reducing Nepal's economic dependency on India and China, its trade deficit with these neighbours had more than doubled in one decade (NRB, 2009)¹. If it was about making Nepal similar to India and China in terms of economic growth, these countries were becoming the leading producers of emissions in the world. What then is this massive international intervention in Nepal for? What is "development"? On the one hand, these questions haunted me all along; on the other, the relationship between education and development was becoming all too familiar that it was virtually impossible to think about education in its own right. What caught my attention more was that such authoritative claims to knowledge had their sources in international development institutions.

Reading a long list of international development partners, their project documents and authoritative statements on the "weak" and "fragile" Nepali state, I began to doubt the very existence of a Nepali state and its national policy bureaucrats managing the affairs of Nepal autonomously. Reviewing the SHEP document, I came across a highly authoritative stance the World Bank had adopted in drawing up the present higher education reform strategy on Nepal. The Bank enjoyed the exclusive rights to produce and circulate what counted as knowledge of education reform in Nepal.

The Bank claimed its strategy for reform was based on its prior deep local knowledge of Nepal and international experience of conducting reform in other countries (see World Bank, 2007, p. 4). At the outset, an unequal power relation in terms of knowledge claims between those conducting the reform and those to be reformed was evident in the SHEP document. On the other hand, there was an unquestioned logic of economic development shaping education policy and practice in Nepal, making it impossible to conceptualize it in other terms. The SHEP was part of that larger institutional apparatus of economic development. This apparatus operated through the AMP created in Nepal under the Ministry of Finance. There was no separate national higher education reform project in action in Nepal other than this World Bank-assisted project. Beyond any doubt, an international regime was in charge of education policy in Nepal, with "development" as its basic foundation of knowledge. According to the Ministry of Finance, the World Bank and EU were engaged with 16 ministries, the ADB with 15 ministries, and UNDP with 25 ministries. The education sector received the highest amount, \$284 million (see

1 Nepal's trade imbalance with India exceeds by more than Rs 111,443 million (NRB, 2009).

MoF, 2011/12). It was not possible to imagine education independently of its “enabling framework” – international aid.

Not long ago, R. [redacted] Prime Minister Juddha Shamsher declined an offer of financial assistance from England and France during the earthquake disaster of January 1934 that killed more than 10,000 people (Bista, 1991, 2011, p. 134). When I embarked on this study, there were at least 40 Western donors, 30,284 NGOs and 818 foreign financed projects in Nepal. In Kathmandu alone, there were 8,981 NGOs, out of which more than 400 were engaged in education for “development” (Social Welfare Council, 2013). This means that for every 890 Nepali people out of the total estimated of 27 million, there was one NGO. Or, in terms of geographical coverage, there was one NGO for every five square kilometres. But despite such a heavy presence, international development was criticized for its failure to bring about desired social transformation in Nepal.

Before I embarked on this study, I worked for *The Kathmandu Post*, Nepal’s national English daily, where I had the opportunity to interview and talk to the officials at the Ministry of Education, UGC and the World Bank (see the report in Appendix 5: “Capable TU colleges may get autonomy”). I also attended press meetings, seminars and conferences covering exclusively educational issues. Often those events were held at exclusive hotels in Kathmandu accompanied by cocktail drink parties and luxurious dinners. I grew increasingly curious about how these development agencies had swamped Kathmandu and yet how Nepal continued to be branded as “poor” or “least developed” in the world. These development agencies occupy some of the most expensive brick-walled residential quarters, formerly the privilege of the Rana rulers and the Shah kings. Their iron gates are manned by a fleet of private militia, who always stood to salute them as they came and left while shoving off beggars and local passers-by. I got the feeling that the Ranas were still alive in Kathmandu. I always thought the central location in the national capital should belong to the national elites and government offices. There should have been a national university, a large public amusement park, a hospital, a college or a national museum. But these spaces were overwhelmed by the Western donors, their resident missions and their representatives, with their large foreign missionary schools and colleges serving the richer urban clienteles. In the ugly and chaotic suburbs uninhabitable to them live a majority of migrants from the mountains, hills and flatlands, who send their children to low-fee private schools that lack even minimum infrastructure. The entire foreign aid goes to funding public sector education, but it has become so impoverished that many parents send

their children to private schools, which receive no support from the donors or the government. I thought I would not understand Nepal and its education reform without understanding such a preponderance of donors that occupy that absolute space in the national capital, providing both finance and advice to the government of Nepal while further impoverishing Nepal's public education sector and drawing criticisms from those to be "reformed" as "dollar-kheti".²

Looking back to earlier times a little further, a comprehensive education system plan tied to the story of modern progress was launched in 1954 with money and advices sought from the United States. Funded and guided by the US, the education system was prepared by the NNEPC. As I will show, more important than the education itself was the underlying motive of stopping communist incursion in Nepal through Western style democratization and development. Then in 1971, one more higher education reform originating in a number of events and shaped by a different historical context altering the earlier understanding arrived and was known as the National Education System Plan (NESP). The political context for the emergence of the SHEP was the April 2006 "revolution" that presupposed that the increased efficiency of higher education institutions in Nepal could only come from displacing the past centralized management of higher education institutions by introducing decentralization and autonomy. In so doing, higher education was expected to contribute to the economic growth and social harmony in Nepal allegedly denied by centralization programmes in the past.

The immediate space for the adoption of the autonomous campus rules was provided by the political discourse of the "autonomous state" that was reflected in political speeches and republican slogans. On the last day of the April 2006 19-day-long street protests in Kathmandu that overthrew the monarchy, a senior Maoist leader declared from the Open Air Pavilion in Kathmandu: "Give us one last chance and we will make Nepal another Switzerland!" I was reporting the event for *The Kathmandu Post*. A youth leader of the Nepali Congress, who first led the republican parade in Kathmandu declared: "The Nepalese people's date with destiny has begun" (BBC, 2006). For the third time, the Nepalese politicians had made a similar pledge since they overthrew the Rana regime in 1951 with the backing of India. This time their principal enemy was the brother of the slain king: "King Gyanendra must leave the country!" The rest of the slogans were: "down with autocracy!" "Long live

2 A local Nepali word, whose literal translation in English is dollar field, used to critique foreign aid that has failed to fulfill modern dreams.

democracy!” Others shouted “republic!” We were made to believe that the king was the major obstacle in Nepal to catch-up with the modern progress, hence the revolt was necessary.

Among a bunch of journalists, I was standing by the road at Tinkune, close to Kantipur Publications where I worked, watching the advancing caucus of a mass breaking the curfew order I had seldom seen before. A sea of demonstrators led by the Seven Party Alliance broke the dawn-to-dusk curfew order. On the 19th day, Nepal Army personnel left their sentries waving their hands at the demonstrators and saying, “You have won!” There was a sense of jubilation everywhere as if lasting political freedom had been ushered into Nepal. That street demonstration had been held against the direct rule of Gyanendra, who became the new king of Nepal after the June 1, 2001, bloody royal palace massacre that had wiped out his reigning brother and his family members. The Seven Party Alliance, which included the Maoists, revolted against the monarch, which was seen as a historical symbol of oppression, the cause for development failure and a threat to individual freedom, in which the rules of knowing were not questioned.

Despite backing from the army, the beleaguered monarch surrendered finally on April 19, 2006. That event was understood by mainstream political parties as being like the French revolution. A great sense of euphoria filled the air in Kathmandu. Politicians hoped to carve a defined, coherent and concrete future for Nepal via the creation of an autonomous state. Describing that event as an “open moment” and an end to the social and political constraints in Nepal, the Bank outlined a framework for reforming higher education. The Bank’s document traces the alleged social constraints in Nepal to a 19th century historical document *Muluki Ain* and the political constraint to the monarchy. In so doing, it makes the commitment to represent the subjective experiences of the people who lived and perished in the past rather than uncover the truth about Nepal, the author of this document tells a fabricated story here. That political turmoil of 2006 provided an immediate space for this to happen from which follows the deployment of the SHEP and to think of “autonomy” in higher education. Prepared and financed by the World Bank and agreed by the new political elites of Nepal, the SHEP redefined higher education institutions in Nepal from one that was centralized to decentralized and as an autonomous system.

The Bank’s report declared the “weak public provision” of education in Nepal under the centralized programs. It shifted the sources of financing the public campuses from the national state to the local communities by giving

them “autonomy”. Among many other pledges made, realizing the dreams of the April 2006 “revolution” for economic prosperity and a peaceful and inclusive future, supposedly denied by the previous regime, figured high in the plan. The overall aim of the higher education reform was increasing “graduates’ productive efficiency” to create economic security by which a peaceful and inclusive future in Nepal would be achieved. But within six years, when this study was undertaken, the dreams of the politicians and Western donors had turned into a nightmare: the country was caught up in ethnic tensions and internal strife; the interim parliament ended in a brawl without a new constitution; political instability further deepened; economic growth dipped; inflation reached the double digits; the Maoists threatened to revolt once again; another splinter group was preparing to go underground once again; and others back to guerrilla wartime activities. The \$60 million higher education reform project was soon clouded by conflict. For a few campuses, which had succeeded in initiating the reform project, their campus chiefs were forced to resign. Teachers and students unions were divided into different ideological camps and protested rancorously, political parties pressed the campuses to appoint their own people, their sister organizations pressed for the money the campus received as grants, and the TU council interfered continuously.

The reform was launched amid huge jubilation and great expectations of a future full of certainties and free of obstacles. While launching the reform, the World Bank announced that the Nepalese had entered into a new era in history by mobilizing their “enormous popular energy against the old order” (see World Bank, 2007). The Bank assumed that the fall of the “old order” also “lifted many social and political constraints” and that “a peaceful, inclusive, and prosperous Nepal was within their grasp” (ibid, p. 1). Despite such a happy prediction of the future ushering in the peace and freedom supposedly denied by the previous regime, by 2012 when this study was undertaken, Nepal was referred to in development terminology as a “fragile state” (see Berry, 2010). In less than a decade after the April 2006 jubilation and the smooth progress envisioned by donors and politicians, Nepal became a place difficult to live and work in, where many graduates, unable to find the employment and economic security promised by the reform, began to leave Nepal.

I set out on this research journey in 2011. However, the SHEP was signed in 2007 after a momentous historical break in Nepal’s history. Working as a journalist exclusively covering education stories in Nepal for *The Kathmandu Post*, between 2000 and 2006, I was occasionally assigned to report on the World Bank-funded CSSP. I also managed to gain access to Tribhuvan University (the

key target of reform) and, as a graduate student, I saw how that large public university became embroiled with the country's complex political turmoil.

The period between 2000 and 2006 saw some of the major historical events in Nepal. As a reporter, I spent my time glued to those events, which included the Maoist armed insurgency, the palace massacre and the "April revolution" – all of which profoundly changed the course of history. After doing a master's degree in political science from TU, I was selected to receive a European Commission funded scholarship under the Erasmus Mundus program to pursue a joint-MA LLL in Denmark, Spain and England. TU was the focus of my master's thesis. The main title and the key theme of the thesis, later published in a book chapter, was the "Knowledge Economy and the Developing Countries: The case of Nepal" (see Timsina, in Korhonen, 2010).

With my main beat as education, I covered mainly educational stories in the national daily and attended numerous news conferences in Nepal. In course of reporting, I happened to build a strong network of social connections and personal relationships with leading figures in education sector.

Before embarking on this research journey, I interviewed the rector of Tribhuvan University and a few officials at the University Grants Commission to gain an understanding of the policy shift in higher education. In so doing, I found that the new policy was about orienting Nepal's education to an international reality. But this was not the only discourse of higher education reform circulating in Nepal; it was mainly about economic development of the country and social justice. It was also concerned with how to secure the political freedom of the Nepalese, create employment opportunities for graduates and expand the outreach of education in the country to ensure geographic and regional equality. Economic development figured prominently and was the exclusive enunciator of the policy with the international aid agencies as its referent. "Decentralized" and "autonomous higher education" were the new buzzwords in the higher education system with the World Bank as their referent, and the strategy was to attain the main objective of "development".

Trying to figure out who controls policymaking in Nepal, I stumbled on a brief statement: "When a country finds itself deeply divided, especially along geographic or ethnic lines, decentralization provides an institutional mechanism for bringing opposition groups into a formal, rule-bound bargaining process (World Bank, 1999). At the outset, I realized that it was futile to search for the meaning of reform that comes with the word "decentralization". Reading a statement like the one above, I began to doubt whether Nepalese national policy bureaucrats had any role in shaping the current higher education policy.

Is Nepal really independent? Consider another statement: “UGC and DOE shall implement, in a manner satisfactory to IDA...” (World Bank, 2007, p. 13). Who really wields power and knowledge in Nepal? Who has the power of knowing? This PhD thesis partly grew out of this sense of puzzlement. There is yet another puzzle: “Privatization can significantly improve the dynamism of the sector ...private sector can play a significant role in the delivery of higher education...and there is a considerable scope...” (ibid). How would the world’s 12th poorest country reform its higher education sector through privatization without the state taking upon itself the intervening role? I began to doubt the truth of these statements. Then there was another sense of puzzlement – a political rationality behind the reform, the search for the “open moment”, a very ambiguous reason, tied to reform. While launching the present policy moment, the SHEP declared an end of the “old order” in Nepal, presupposing that what it would usher in would be “new”. It was referring to the fall of the 240-year-old monarchy and the ushering in of the autonomous federal republic in Nepal. This interpretation of history haunted me all along. From where did the SHEP obtain the exclusive right to make proclamations like this? The most immediate one that shaped reform thinking was the infatuation with continuity, change or transformation the historical event of 2006 brought into existence. This event invented a “new Nepal” that implied there was an “old Nepal” prior to 2006. The present policy moment was premised on this logic. Having worked as a national reporter at the height of that political turmoil, attended the Tribhuvan University, done a master’s thesis in Denmark with higher education reform in Nepal as the focus, and reflected personally on my experiences of education reporting in Nepal, I set out on this research journey in 2011.

1.3 Research questions and key assumptions

This PhD thesis mainly grew out of my interest in how higher education has come to be understood in Nepal in terms of continuous development. Who decides in Nepal what counts as higher education reform? What is “reform”? What it is supposed to be? Who wields the power and knowledge in Nepal? These questions came to my mind while reading the SHEP document prepared by the World Bank. This document describes Nepal as the world’s 12th poorest country and the poorest in South Asia and outlines privatization, albeit in the

name of decentralization, as the only solution to the alleged decline of higher education in Nepal. In so doing, it makes us believe that socially-desirable change can come from non-state options and characteristics in the private sector. The Bank claims it has “the deep knowledge of local context including the political economy of reforms and a rich international experience”. In view of this authoritative claim to knowledge, I was led to ask from where did the Bank obtain the exclusive right to make proclamations like this? Must not the Nepalese themselves have the knowledge and power to decide how higher education is to be organized in their own construct? How do Nepalese educational historians and policymakers evaluate this? Could there be an authentic “Nepal” that would exist freely and independently? Who are the Nepalese who are projected as so incapable of self-defining and self-directing their own socioeconomic development? All these questions initially prompted me to finally come up with the following key research questions:

1. What is the discourse of higher education reform in Nepal?
 - i. How is it that the economic development and the international quality benchmarks have become so self-evidently necessary and central to higher education policy and planning in Nepal?
2. How do those ideas crystalize into present higher education policy and practice in Nepal, where they privilege “decentralization” and “autonomy” in higher education? Where do they come from and in what directions are they headed?

The most important puzzle to resolve was: who wields the power and knowledge of this education reform in Nepal? Another puzzle to resolve was how it is that a globalizing and homogenizing one-size-fits-all policy prescription can adapt to local social and cultural realities in Nepal? Early in the research journey, I happened to spot the unfolding of complex contradictions around the implementation of this apparatus. That led me to reformulate my concluding question as follows:

3. How do policymakers, educational administrators, teachers and students enact the discourse of higher education reform through their acts of submission and resistance?

1.4 Theoretical and methodological considerations

The study takes a discursive approach to understanding the reform of higher education in Nepal. In so doing, it doesn't seek to understand the emergence of decentralized and autonomous higher education system as a free choice made by the people of Nepal. Instead of studying the concepts of "decentralization" and "autonomy" that the policy presents as so self-evident and unproblematic, it takes the apparatus, namely the SHEP which introduces these concepts as the main focus of the study. The overall approach in this study is post-structuralism. The discursive view of higher education reform I take in this study is mainly inspired by Michel Foucault's philosophical thought, namely his archaeological and genealogical approach to the critique of modernity. I seek to understand the rhetoric of neo-liberalism within the overall space of developmental modernity that is shaping the thinking and practice of decentralized and autonomous higher education in Nepal.

The study begins by exploring neo-liberal trends in international higher education reform. It then explores the discursive turn in social science to understand higher education more critically, challenging the singular global order of thinking built into the SHEP document. Foucault's discursive approach privileges the rules of knowing. In short, I approach the study of higher education as a discursive field. The focus will be on the deployment of the SHEP in action. It shows how the actors (in this case, policymakers, educational administrators, teachers and students) enact the discourse of higher education reform. Accordingly, the study documents the responses to reform across three different sites – Kathmandu, Dharan and Ilam – where the SHEP is deployed through the interviews conducted with the above cited four actor sets – policymakers, administrators, teachers and students. Attention is paid to how these actors become the subject and object of the discourse.

The analytical framework for this study is drawn from Escobar's (1995) approach to "development" as discourse via a cultural critique of economics constitutive of the forms of knowledge, systems of power and forms of subjectivity through which higher education has come to be understood and talked about in Nepal. Following Escobar, my discursive approach is inspired by Foucauldian scholars who work across two themes – development (Ferguson, 1994; Pigg, 1999; Shrestha, 1995; Robinson-Pant, 2010; Tatsura, 2013) and education reform – mainly neo-liberal trends – (Olssen, 2005; 2010; Hursh, 2007; Popkewitz, 1999; 2000; Lather, 2004; Ball, 2012; Apple, 2001; Carney and Bista, 2009). As regards my discursive approach, instead of focusing on

the “reform” that figures in the Bank’s scheme of things as “decentralization”, my attention will be the systems of knowledge and forms of power that are behind the reform. As regards my field work, interviewing and observations are my main tools.

1.5. Thesis structure

This thesis is organized into two parts – Part I and Part II.

Part I is organized into three chapters as follows:

Chapter 1 outlined the whole study in a snapshot, covering its aim, research questions, context and the key assumptions built into the project.

Chapter 2 provides a review of a range of literature within which higher education reform is examined in contemporary times. It then questions some of the assumptions made in international higher education reform. The theoretical frame for the study is grounded in Michel Foucault’s discursive turn to social theory. Accordingly, the study theorizes higher education reform as a discourse. The discourse is framed by three interrelated concepts – knowledge, power and subjectivity. The system of knowledge is couched in terms of “development”; the forms of power that regulates this discourse and practice are couched in terms of development institutions doing the “reform”; and the forms of subjectivities fostered by the discourse are understood as the effects of the reform. This will be approached via interviews of the actors situated in the field of practice and who are made the subjects and objects of the discourse.

Chapter 3 presents a genealogy of higher education reform in Nepal via a survey of three key policy moments. Taking 1951 as the point of departure, this chapter exposes the discourse of higher education reform in Nepal in the historical context of its emergence. The aim is to rewrite a different history of higher education reform in Nepal to how others have understood it as emerging logically and scientifically.

PART II examines the deployment and enactment of the SHEP in the field of practice through the subjectivity of the actors who enact the discourse of

“decentralization” and “autonomy”. The main object and focus of analysis is SHEP but I wish to underline much more complex factors at play in the constitution and consolidation of this apparatus in this study. This part of the thesis is organized into one methodological and three data chapters. The three data chapters are organized into four thematic categories, namely education policymakers, administrators, teachers and students. The three chapters open up a contested understanding of higher education. Divided into chapters 5, 6 and 7, it tells how the actors situated in the field of practice enact the discourse of higher education reform through their acts of submission and resistance. The thematic chapters are organized as follow:

Chapter 4 outlines the fieldwork methods and technique for data collection.

Chapter 5 examines policy responses to the ongoing discourse of higher education reform in Nepal via interviews of senior government planning officials and officials at the Ministry of Education and University Grants Commission.

Chapter 6 documents administrators’ and teachers’ responses to the ongoing SHEP across multiple locations.

Chapter 7 analyses students’ responses to the ongoing reform as it applies to social justice, equity, access, overseas studies, employment and settlement.

Chapter 8: Concluding comments

Understanding Higher Education Reform: Theories and Practice

2.1 Introduction

What is higher education? What are the major theoretical frameworks within which higher education is examined in contemporary times? The aim of this chapter is to discuss a range of literature in higher education in order to inform an appropriate theoretical framework for this study. I shall begin this chapter with a review of recent trends in international higher education reform, following which I shall explore linguistic turns in social science before framing the study in a discursive turn in social theory to explore the ways in which higher education can be examined more critically, challenging the earlier assumptions in liberal, modernist and Marxist moments.

2.2 International trends in higher education reform

Dominant within the international trend in higher education reform is an idea that all the countries around the world fashion their higher education systems within a singular frame of reference and objectively measurable outcomes comparable across countries, cultures and contexts. Including countries like Senegal and Uganda, China and India, the Netherlands and Norway, the UK, the EU and the US, and Australia, New Zealand and Japan, and from Hong Kong to Chile, and Romania to Nepal, this view of historical progress is per-

vasive. This modern positivist understanding seeks to connect people via an illogical common experience of time and space. Popkewitz (2000) and Peters et al (2000) trace the roots of this system of reasoning to neo-liberalism in the American and French revolutions, originating in the ideology of liberalism and political philosophy, and the economic theory of modern states. As early as 1954, Nepal set up its first national education planning commission, which was deeply interested in following the road laid down by industrialized countries (see *Education in Nepal*, 1956). As I will show, this process, which has continued since then, has been more likely marked by violence, political and economic turmoil than to follow a certain and smooth trajectory.

As I will show, after 1990, the context shifted to neo-liberalism as a state policy seen as necessary in a globalized economy. Described as the “neo-liberal revolution” in the West, a process that has impacted on the industrialized countries over the past 30 years (Olssen, 2010, p. 199), it came to displace the earlier understanding of the public provision of education by reconstructing the individual as an “autonomous chooser” of education (paraphrasing Olssen, 2005, p. 367) or “entrepreneurs of themselves” (Hursh, 2007, p. 497). According to Olssen (2010), the neo-liberal policy agenda has been continuing in the West since 1970s. In the UK, neo-liberalism in higher education reform began in the early 1980s with the Thatcher government, in that the market-driven unregulated private sector model was picked as a model to increase the efficiency of public sector higher education (see Shore and Wright, 1999).

The efficiency and autonomy of higher education are central to the policy discourse of higher education reform in Nepal. Though stated in the context of the UK, according to Ball (2012), institutional autonomies are to be traced to the making of a “reluctant state” or the beginning of the end of state education. Similarly, Rhoads, Torres and Brewster (2005) have shown the impact of neo-liberal reform on Latin American universities, namely the national universities of Argentina and Mexico, in the context of the major economic restructuring of those countries. The above scholars describe the rise of neo-liberalism accompanied by the destruction and fall of old regimes. They show how the urge to participate in the “global market place” or “free-market entrepreneurialism” has led to decreased public support for higher education.

The global influence of neo-liberal policy discourse in higher education reform is pervasive. In many countries, higher education reform is driven by neo-liberal policy agendas, which appear through universally applicable tools and the language of globalization, a global, knowledge-based economy, effi-

ciency, comparability, competitiveness and effectiveness (see Maassen et al, 2011; Gornitzka et al, 2005; Tan, 2013; Wan, 2011; Maassen and Cloete, 2006). In China, this policy is manifested in higher education reform linked to “global competitiveness”, through which China aims to sustain its economic growth (see Tan, 2013). India set up its National Knowledge Commission in 2005 to reform its higher education, drawing heavily on the global neo-liberal policy discourse (see Rizvi and Gorur, 2011). Studies in higher education reforms in Norway and the Netherlands suggest all the countries in the EU aim to provide their citizens with a singular experience (Maassen et al, 2011). One of the underlying assumptions about reform in higher education in the Norwegian context in particular is that it is about “economic growth”, to be realized through the efficient organization of higher education institutions under what is known as “New Public Management” (ibid, p. 484).

Hursh (2007) examines the NCLB³ policy in the US in the changing historical context of neo-liberalism, which emphasizes “deregulation”, “liberalization”, and “the dismantling of public sector”, which includes education (ibid, p. 495). He traces this shift by going back to the Roosevelt era, showing how social democracy shifted in favour of neo-liberalist individualism that sought to construct the individual as an “autonomous entrepreneur” or “entrepreneurs of themselves” (ibid, p. 497). Similarly, Apple (2001) shows how the rise of neo-liberalism in education is concerned with “privatization”, “marketization”, “performativity”, and “enterprising individuals” (ibid, p. 421). Lather (2004) questions the “necessary”, “inevitable” or “unquestionable” assumptions about globalization, mainly neo-liberal policy, as objectively producing their intended results.

The operating language of neo-liberalism appears in its linguistic category “global knowledge economy”, which refers mainly to 30 OECD countries (see Olssen, 2010) and their experiences that must be replicated elsewhere in places like Nepal. Apart from Nepal, this is manifested in the national policy goals of many countries. For example, Hong Kong initiated higher education reform in 2001, with the goal of developing a “knowledge economy”. Accordingly, a higher education reform commission was set up in 2000 (Wan, 2011). However, as Wan notes, the reform was contested in many quarters for the poor quality of self-financing education programmes.

3 An abbreviation of the “No Child Left Behind” law passed in the US under the Bush Administration in 2002. Hursh (2007) situates this in “a larger shift from social democracy to neoliberal policies that has been occurring over the past several decades; a shift accompanied by both discursive and structural changes in education and society.”

The ongoing policy in Nepal is for the abolition of centralized and free higher education system in favour of “cost-sharing” and privatization, but the field of practice is both a resistance and submission to this policy discourse. This policy partly reflects the global trend in higher education reform, as demonstrated by Maassen and Cloete (2006), in that they show the policy goals of higher education reform of most countries are framed by the languages of “economy”, “globalization”, “efficiency”, “competitiveness” and “effectiveness”. As I show, these languages reappear in the policy documents examined in Nepal (see NPC, 2010), but they do not necessarily reflect the whole picture on the ground.

Particularly interesting are the cases of Chile, Argentina, Mexico and Romania, where higher education reform has been driven by the World Bank and IMF. However, these examples in no way reflect the actual practice in Nepal. Rhoads et al (2005) show there is a strong urge to end the prevalent free public higher education in Argentina and Mexico under the influence of the neo-liberal policy guided by the IMF. In Chile, higher education reform financed by the World Bank began in the 1980s under the Pinochet regime. It shifted higher education from state control to the “open market” (Espinoza, 2002). Through a critical discourse analysis, Espinoza reflects on how neo-liberal higher education reform in Chile was influenced by the SAP of the World Bank and the IMF. The emphasis was on “privatization” and “cost-recovery” (ibid, p. 2). In the case of Chile, the SAP promoted that country’s economic policy on reduction of government spending. The above cited two key terms reflect the SHEP document in Nepal, but they are not the only ones.

After Chile, a similar approach to higher education reform was adopted in Romania. Since 1991, after the end of the Communist rule, the World Bank has been actively influencing higher education reform in Romania, mainly through the abolition of free education and the promotion of privatization through the Second Private Sector Adjustment Loan (see Curaj et al, 2015). In the Chilean context, the idea behind privatizing state-owned enterprise was to promote business environment and cut costs.

The reform in Romania led to the abolition of free education. It also supported access to “talented” students to higher education. This is reflected partly in the Nepalese case through the “access” component of the reform. In the case of Romania, the \$84 million higher education reform (also known as “Marshall Plan” for higher education) was funded jointly by a grant of the EU (\$9.6 million), the World Bank (\$50 million loan) and the government (\$24.4 million). After signing the Bologna Declaration, Romania began to align its

higher education system with the EU's. This reflects partly how the new curriculum structure in Nepal is oriented to EU/US quality benchmarks but leaves many students out of the system. Thus, Nepal presents a complex situation for framing the understanding of reform in the global rhetoric of neo-liberalism.

Tahirsyzaj (2010) discusses a similar higher education reform strategy in Kosovo to Romania after the end of the conflict in that country in 1999. The reform was influenced by developments in the European Union, mainly the Bologna Declaration. The study discusses the case of University of Prishtina, which took a major step in that country towards restructuring and adjusting the country's education with the eurozone. The most important step taken in this respect was the implementation of a European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) to catch up with the European Union higher education system. International competitiveness in higher education, student mobility and common European higher education qualification frameworks were other attractions.

Following the developments in the EU, several eastern European countries began to fashion their national higher education systems similarly to the EU's. As I will show, the awareness about the need for quality in higher education in Nepal came from the Bologna process in the European Union. According to the new higher education policy, academic institutions in Nepal must be comparable internationally (UGC, 2010a, 2012b). Students must be able to recognize or choose which academic institutions meet international standards. The key rationale for quality in higher education starts with a statement: "A substantive number of students are going abroad for higher education seeking better quality and relevance...This phenomenon, although new to Nepal, is already a core concern and focus of higher education development in many parts of the world" (ibid, p. 34). In view of this constructed and homogenizing global thinking that calls for replicating a one-size-fits-all remedy to problems that are specific and diverse in nature, I felt the need for a critical sociological lens to be used to view higher education reform in Nepal.

2.3 Exploring social theory: Towards difference, diversities and complexities of knowing

If it is true according to Levinson (2011) that the word "theory" is the way scholars come to know and understand the empirical world via an "unbiased account", then I thought I must do so only after a careful consideration. This

led me to a long journey in search of a theory to frame my understanding of higher education reform in Nepal. A social theory is a lens through which to see the social world. There are two major theoretical frameworks within which social institutions are examined: structural-functionalism or macro perspectives and social action (micro) perspective (Haralambos, 2000, ed.). Social action and interpretive sociological perspectives reject the idea that society has a structure that directs individuals to action. Following the functionalist tradition, social stratification theory advances a teleological explanation as a particular way of reasoning.

Structuralism and poststructuralism differ in the way they approach the analysis of education. According to Ball (1981), structural-functionalism remained a dominant theoretical paradigm to examine educational institutions in the West until the 1960s, after which modernization and dependency theories in the sociology of education in the so-called “Third World” emerged. “Modernization” is not only about how the physical landscape can be altered or nature can be adapted to man’s needs but also about developing discrete attributes and behaviours in individuals (Popkewitz and Brennan, 1997). Liberal and Marxist theorists were inspired by 19th century modernization, democratization, the rise of social organizations and bureaucracies, the development of human rights, collective governance and the Darwinian laws of nature (Fendler, 1990, p. 172). Thus, the earlier moments of educational theories were influenced by “modernization”, which referred to modern life in late 19th and early 20th century Europe, and, to a lesser extent, North America, concerned with “big ideas” and the grand narratives of the Enlightenment. Post-structuralism rejects big ideas and the narratives of the Enlightenment project. By positioning myself in post-structuralism, I am not constructing one knowledge, actual or potential, of higher education, or one methodology to understand it. Post-structuralism abandons the ontological proof of knowing the world in objective light of science and universal morality.

Structuralists argue that the notion of progress so central to Marxism in regular resulted in the extremes of Stalinism and the Gulag, among other excesses. They argue that Western European liberalism and social democracy, despite the depth of its society’s civilization, the long centuries of high culture and its maturity ended up producing Hitler and the Holocaust (see Eisenstadt, 2000). Despite their violent ideologies these societies, nevertheless, became the foundation of the modern state (ibid). Eisenstadt insists on locating the present moment in a much more remote process, starting with French Revolution and the rise of European nihilism, or what he describes as the “horrible

manifestation of European modernity”. Poststructuralists point to the catastrophic failures of the grand narratives in their social and political application in the real world (Taylor et al, 2002, p. 8). Writing in the context of Scottish notion of the “educated public” and the contested lifelong learning policy, Taylor et al discuss how higher education has shifted in the last 40 years from some sort of a project understood in earlier times to be oriented towards the construction of “educated public” to a “fragmented”, “pluralist”, individual-centred programme.

Poststructuralism as a movement began to gather more steam at the end of the 1950s. Most importantly, Lyotard sees these developments or changes as organized around “language games”. According to him, “languages” are games that serve to legitimize people’s behaviour in society. Foucault first developed discourse theory to critique language games used in positivist knowledge traditions. Later, he developed a genealogy which emphasized the emergence and disappearance of language and the need for this to be traced historically (see Geuss, 2002, and Owen, 2002). As I show, the poststructuralists following Foucault rendered big stories of science and metanarratives of progress circulated through language and narratives as untenable. This is how poststructuralism as a movement grew, calling for wholesale scrutiny of the existing foundation of knowledge.

Reading the literatures inspired by the post-structural turn, I found that it offers a more complex framework through which to understand the discourse of higher education in Nepal at a time of profound change. Recognizing the contradictions that are inherent in an increasingly uncertain world, this movement calls the celebration of difference and diversities. No longer is it possible to theorize higher education through the grand narrative or the large schemes of social renewal. Most importantly, post-structuralist epistemology has challenged the previous premises of social sciences that kept faith in reason. Proponents of this theory take the view that the search for truth is [not] over. Following Foucault, the statements, texts and talks that construct contemporary knowledge of the world are to be judged not by whether they are true, but by the historical context they represent.

The key words “open moment” and “old order” that I located in the review of the SHEP document could be related to ideas in Western philosophy. The two following quotes illustrate this:

An old institution needs to be replaced by the new because it doesn’t function well. The new is not an evil [neither good nor better]... Rather, it must be compared with

the old according to its effectiveness; it is through comparison, measuring, numbering, and calculating that superiority is granted (Heller, 1999, p. 45).

The period of clarity: one understands that the old and the new are basically opposite, the old values born of declining and the new ones of ascending life—that all the old ideals are hostile to life (born of decadence and agents of decadence, even if in the magnificent Sunday clothes of morality (Nietzsche, *Periods of European Nihilism*, Nov. 1887–March 1888).

The first text is a critique of modernity which suggests that higher education like any reform is founded on a collapsing “old order” and the ushering in of a “new” order. The second text is from Nietzsche’s book *Will to Power*: the present understanding of higher education in Nepal draws its force from collapsing/vanishing history. Following Marshall (1995; 1999), Nietzsche offered a more radical approach than even that of Foucault. Uttered in different historical contexts, the above ideas provided me with the initial trigger to think and reflect critically on the reform whose meaning was unapproachable in objective light. Following Foucault, a critical approach to social science does not seek to know why “things [appear] as they are” (see Mahon, 1993, p. 135). The present reform is framed by an understanding of how things become better or progressively refined after a “revolution”. In sum, an ambiguous theory of knowledge is used to ground the present thinking on reforming higher education. It is premised on “past failures” and future possibilities that call for a critical lens to understand it. The following text was one way to reflect on this.

Unless we speak critically and specifically to their construction of these problems and to the solutions they propose internationally, I fear that comparative education will slide into irrelevancy—as one more arcane academic specialisation that can be ignored as not speaking to the reconstructions we are witnessing all around us. As Pierre Bourdieu reminds us, one of the most important activities scholars can engage in during this time of economic rationalism and imperial neo-conservatism is to analyse critically the production and circulation of these discourses and their effects on the lives of so many people in so many nations. (Apple, 2010, p. 421)

While reviewing the scholarly works in education, a more radical style of critique was apparent in Foucault (see Apple, 2010, Marshall, 1999; Popkewitz and Brennan, 1998; Peters, Marshall and Fitzsimons, 2000; Peters and Besley, 2007; Fendler, 2004; Olssen, 2005; Usher and Edwards, 2007). These scholars have widely applied Foucaultian methods and theories in educational studies. Development studies are approached through Foucault’s philosophical ideas (see Escobar, 1995; Ferguson, 1994). More recent studies in education reform,

literacy and development in Nepal are approached through Foucauldian post-structuralist perspectives (see Shrestha, 1995; Carney and Bista, 2009; Robinson-Pant, 2010). Olssen (1995) writes that since 1993, the influence of Foucault and post-structuralism on education research has been steadily growing, affecting every area of study.

Following Marshall and Olssen, Popkewitz (1999) and Peters (2000) are widely known names in the Foucauldian poststructuralist approach to education research. Popkewitz argues that the dispute with earlier critical theory relates to the nature of truth embedded in knowledge. Olssen takes the view that Foucault's discursive approach permits us to understand education as historically constituted forms of knowledge and regimes of truth. Following Olssen, the Foucauldian discursive approach to study education is to treat knowledge and forms of pedagogy as "contingent", "specific", "local" and "historical" (ibid, p. 366). In a nutshell, there is no higher education reform that can be discovered in a "form" as such, or, to paraphrase Usher and Edwards (2007, p. 1), there is neither an "original" or "final meaning". The approach to be taken in this study is therefore what I prefer to call post-structuralism.

Following this brief outline of the theoretical departures, I set out to present a range of concepts and theoretical tools applied in the Foucauldian post-structuralist epistemological tradition to frame this research study in a way that goes beyond the critical theory of the Frankfurt School. Popkewitz and Fendler (1999, eds.) trace the roots of critical theory to the Frankfurt School, with its intellectual roots in Marx and Freud (1920–1950). It lays the blame on capitalism as the cause of modern domination. It shows the "relations among schooling, education, culture, society, economy and governance" (ibid, xiii). However, its approach to understanding "power", history and pedagogy has stirred a real hornets' nest in the contemporary sociological debate. The Foucauldian poststructuralist tradition is mainly focused around the nature of truth or knowledge beyond the language. This led me to explore first the linguistic turn in social science.

2.4 The linguistic approach to discourse in social science

I have already pointed out that my problem in this study was largely concerned with understanding the World Bank-financed SHEP that appears couched in

the bombastic language of “development”, the “decentralization” or the managerial and technocratic term of “cost-sharing”. The aim of this section is to explore whether the linguistic approach to discourse in qualitative research traditions offers a way to frame the study. “Language as a means of understanding” or a “vehicle of knowledge” originated in the German tradition, mainly in Humboldt, and extended its influence on contemporary social thinkers who include Habermas (Lafont 1999).

There are many ways of conducting discourse analysis. Broadly, I show a linguistic approach to discourse and then a discursive approach. The former draws on linguistic analysis. The latter questions the positivist knowledge traditions used to understand the nature of reality constructed through language games. The aim of this section is to identify which one (or both) is appropriate to frame the study.

First, I start with a review of a range of scholarly works that apply linguistically-oriented discourse analytic approaches. In so doing, I found that some of the widely acclaimed analysts who apply linguistic and textually-oriented critical analytical approaches to discourse theory are Fairclough (2004, 2005, 2001) and Chouliaraki and Fairclough (1999), who use the term “discourse” to refer to language (“written and spoken and in combination with other semiotics, for example, with music in singing”), “nonverbal communication (facial expressions, body movements, gestures, etc.) and visual images (for example, photographs, film)”. The most widely acclaimed name in this approach is no doubt Fairclough. His following ideas struck a chord with me at the outset.

A crisis emerges when existing structural forms and their ways of containing contradictions no longer work as expected, and a crisis becomes acute when crisis tendencies accumulate across structures. Such moments create the space for strategic interventions to significantly redirect the course of events... But strategies “are always elaborated in and through discourses”, different “narratives that seeks to give meaning to current problems by constructing them in terms of past failures and future possibilities. (Fairclough, 2005, p. 7)

In seeking to interpret Fairclough, at first I thought his critical discourse analytical approach (CDA) to qualitative research afforded the possibility of a critical understanding of education by moving beyond “past failures” and “future possibilities” that are implicit in the ideas of reform. However, I was not convinced fully by the linguistically-oriented discourse analytical approach alone to frame my understanding of the reform that arrived in Nepal through historical

ruptures in which only some statements and not others counted as knowledge. I wanted to explore more.

There is a growing trend towards the use of qualitative research as a field of inquiry, with the tradition being associated with post-structuralism and post-modernism. In her approach to the discourse method, Lakshmanan (2011) makes problematic the nature of literature written by a North American about a 13-year-old girl of Nepal (Laxmi) sold into prostitution in Kolkata, India. Lakshmanan argues that in critical analysis "...readers need to delve below the surface *content* of a text, and discern how the form of language, narration, and visuals construct knowledge..." She draws on Fairclough in this regard.

After Fairclough, I came upon Gee (2005), who distinguishes between "Discourse with a capital 'D' and a small 'd'". The former refers to "big Discourses" and the latter to "language in use or stretches of oral or written language in use "texts" (see Rogers, 2004b, p. 36). Gee's [d]iscourses focus on storylines, narratives and explanatory frameworks that circulate in a society as tools of inquiry. For Gee, there is always more to language in discourse; it also involves "acting". Gee has shown that discourse(s) are situated in three main domains: "mind", "world of texts" and "social practices". However, before taking a point of departure, I will explore more Foucault's discursive approach to social theory which moves beyond the textual analysis. This was required, as, according to Denzin and Lincoln (1998, 2000), the qualitative research paradigm grounded in a linguistic analysis faces a "crisis of representation" or "a double crisis of representation" (ibid, p. 10). Known as the "linguistic turn", the ethnographers or qualitative researchers attempted to capture the lived experience of others through the social text they wrote. Here, I am dealing with a problem that erupted in a decisive historical rupture in 1951 to shape that lived experience in the present. It requires a historical method of inquiry. I was thoroughly disappointed with the linguistic and structural approach to understand this reform. In the next section, I will show how Foucault's discursive approach can offer a more critical understanding of reform. I found Mill's (1995) interpretation of Foucault's discourse theory useful to begin with. In that regard, according to Mills, Foucault's discourse can be useful for grounding the thought on how at a particular moment of time "some statements – and not others – will count as knowledge" (ibid, p. 56). This was the most insightful commentary I found on Foucault's method of inquiry to frame my understanding of the discourse of higher education reform in Nepal. Based on this initial reflection, in the next section I open a space for a discursive approach to social theory as a point of theoretical departure for this study.

2.5 The discursive turn in social science

Foucault and the archaeological approach to discourse

The question posed by language analysis of some discursive fact or other is always: according to what rules has a particular statement been made, and consequently according to what rules could other similar statements be made? The description of the events of discourse poses a quite different question: how is it that one particular statement appeared rather than another. (Foucault, 1969, p. 30)⁴

In this section, I situate Foucault as a social theorist despite some scholars criticizing his approach as unsystematic and non-traditional (see Habermas). A large number of scholarly works that apply Foucault's discursive approach to educational research were criticized for misinterpretation or misrepresentation (Scheurich and McKenzie, in Denzin and Lincoln, eds., 2005). This led me to read Foucault directly, mainly his two books, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* and *Discipline and Punish*, from which I derived key concepts and tools for framing this study.

Foucault departs from the grand theorizing of thinkers such as of Karl Marx on the class structure of capitalism and Habermas' "public sphere". Foucault calls himself an "experimenter" rather than a theorist (Taylor, 2011, ed.). I understand Foucault's work as more of an analytical technique than a theory. This is made clear by Smart in *Foucault as a Social Theorist* (1971).⁵ He writes: "it is not a theory, but rather a way of theorizing practice" (ibid, p. 208). This approach calls for reflexivity in the sense that there is no knowledge pre-given or absolute or permanent. Rather, it is as an ongoing practice.

Foucault's works are found in his critical reflections in *The Archeology of Knowledge* (1969, 2002), *Discipline and Punish* (1977, 1978, 1979; 1991, 2001), and *Power/Knowledge* (1980). In *The Archeology of Knowledge*, he questions positivity, continuity, change, transformation and modern progress. Archaeology is a historical method of inquiry that decenters the human subject (Gutting 1989, p. 228). In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault discusses our ways of existence and

4 Michel Foucault's *L'Archeologie du savoir* was first published by Editions Gallimard in 1969. The English edition was first published in the United Kingdom in 1972 by Tavistock Publications Limited. It was first published by Routledge in 1989. This edition was published by Routledge Classics in 2002.

5 Foucault (in *Orders of Discourse*, 1971, p. 14), in Barry Smart (p. 207), "Foucault as a Social Theorist."

knowing ourselves as individuals. He challenges modern versions of enlightenment. The general theme of his inquiry is the question of the subject. In other words, how at a particular moment of time, some statements and not others will count as knowledge. He argues that since things have been made, they can be unmade as long as we know how they were made. This is the most insightful approach I found in Foucault's archaeological method of inquiry.

Why is Foucault important in the specific context of my study here? The greatest puzzle to resolve was the reason for higher education reform: The "old order" had fallen in Nepal, ushering in a "new" one, in which all the Nepalese people's hopes of a "peaceful", "inclusive" and "prosperous" future (World Bank, in SHEP, 2007, p. 1). This required a critical stance to analyse the reform. Reading other literature inspired by the liberal and Marxist traditions was to validate the "open moment" as following from the dissolution of the "old order". The biggest puzzle to resolve was the "open moment" and "old order" used to frame the present understanding of higher education reform through a god-like stance taken by the World Bank to interpret Nepal's history as moving from a dark period to a bright future. Following Foucault, I understand the language of "open moment" as "not a condition of validity for judgments, but a condition of reality for statements" (see Foucault, 2002, p. 143). In this sense, higher education is constructed via the rules of language used to describe the event "republic", a temporal phenomenon, which establishes its relations to education reform remotely. According to Foucault, this is the law of *a priori* and is not truth (ibid).

Before I discuss how Foucault can be applied in educational research of this sort, I briefly discuss why Foucault is important. Habermas has said: "within the circle of the philosophers of my generation who diagnose our times, Foucault has most lastingly influenced the zeitgeist" (Mark Olssen...). The first thing to be made clear about Foucault's discursive approach to social theory is that the sovereignty of the subject and uninterrupted continuity or the work of a sovereign human consciousness must be rejected (Foucault, in Smart, 2002). The second is to scrutinize the rules and practices that construct the meaning. In sum, my task was to locate the production of knowledge or meanings through discursive practice, not through language. In particular, I was concerned about how those discourses produce objects of knowledge (higher education). While reading the policy texts, at the back of my mind was a globally circulating neo-liberal discourse negotiating education reform and shaping the object of higher education. But in practice, higher education is constituted in

multiple relations with other forces and events that do not necessarily reflect neo-liberalism as the complete picture.

The key challenge that I faced while reading the official documents was that there was no “higher education reform” that could be understood in its own self-enclosed truth. Putting it in Foucault’s term, it appeared through a “confused murmur of discourses” that included but were not limited to the “development”, “decentralization”, “autonomy”, and “cost-sharing”. These significations were used to duplicate higher education. According to Foucault, this happens because “the relation of the sign [“development”, “decentralization”, “autonomy”] to its contents [or signified] [higher education] is not guaranteed by the order of things” (Foucault, 1970, p. 63). Following this, my stance is to understand these bombastic signs/language used to mirror higher education reform as “duplicated representation” (ibid). Following these initial reflections, I found that the major problem in my study was concerned with the problems and practice of knowledge. This took me closer to Foucault’s *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, which is about *savoir* and *connaissance* (body of knowledge) [cf. Scheurich and McKenzie, 2005, p. 846]. Archaeology in this sense allows the possibility of looking at higher education reform through a body of knowledge that constitutes it.

In the specific historical context of Nepal, “development” is the main body of knowledge that objectifies higher education reform. Instead of studying what is higher education, I thought I had to begin through using a remote process, looking at what is development. In a Foucauldian sense, what is proper to the knowledge of higher education is then “not seeing or demonstrating” what higher education is actually about but “interpreting” it through this bombastic language of “development” (ibid, p. 40, emphasis added). Interpreting higher education through what is already interpreted is not what Foucault professes in his discursive approach. His requires a different approach to reading the documents by moving beyond how it seemingly appears on the surface of the document. In taking this view, I disturb the dominant order of thinking around the reform in Nepal by problematizing the discursive interplay of rules that construct the object of knowledge “decentralization in higher education” as reform. In so doing, I treat the notion of “decentralization” as a representative value of higher education, brought into existence by the discursive practice and play of historical forces. In taking this stance, what I discover is not one global or ideal or everlasting discourse of higher education in a “form”, but a set of rules contingent and specific to time and immanent in practice.

Foucault’s discursive approach offers the possibilities of studying the rules

and practices that construct the meaning of higher education reform. To learn the rules, I scrutinized the SHEP document since it contains the detailed rules and rational plans, the aims and the objectives of reform. One way to do this was then to scrutinize all spoken and the written texts or documents that relate to higher education. The technique to do this in Foucault's terms is to examine the "modes of organization of thoughts", or excavate the rules of formation of particular thought through these spoken or written documents. Foucault's discourse is not about extracting information from the documents, the organization of ideas or the telling of the truth about "what men have done and said". Rather, it is about rules and practices producing meaningful (acceptable) statements that structure our sense of reality.

Foucault describes what meaning is in his discourse theory: "primary and ultimate meaning springs up through the manifest formulations, it hides beneath what appears, and secretly duplicates it ..." (p. 134). In taking this stance, I do not seek to understand "decentralization" and "autonomy" as reform based on what appears from reading the SHEP documents but to look for the rules through which they are constructed. In this sense, what appears to us as reality while reading texts or documents must be suspended and how it appears, with what rules, norms, motivations, among other factors, must be scrutinized.

2.6 The Marxist critique of Foucault

The starting point [in Marx's theorizing of capital] is money, armed with which the capitalist goes into the marketplace and buys two kinds of commodities, labor-power (variable capital) and means of production (constant capital). The capitalist simultaneously selects an organizational form and a technology and proceeds to combine the labor-power and the means of production in a labor process that produces a commodity, which is then sold in the market for the original money plus a profit (surplus-value). Impelled onward by the coercive laws of competition, capitalists appear (and I use that word in Marx's sense) to be forced to use part of the surplus-value to create even more surplus-value (Harvey, 2010, p. 316).

In this section, I discuss the contradictions between Marx and Foucault in critical social theory. This was needed in view of the many research traditions in Nepal and elsewhere that have attempted to theorize the relation between education and class reproductions or education and inequality in the Marxist

tradition that differs sharply from the Foucauldian tradition. I begin with Marx first for whom capitalism is the key problem of the world and communism its only solution. According to Harvey (2010), who defends Marxism, the starting point in Marx's theorizing of capital is money, which creates surplus value. As Harvey notes, "more and more of the money invested today comes from yesterday's surplus" (ibid, p. 317). In this sense, capital accumulation or money expands over time in the hands of capitalists and increases their power or domination. Money power is then concentrated in the hands of a few who control businesses or, to put it in the words of Harvey, "large enterprises" like supermarket chains, agribusinesses, buildings, railroads, airlines and steel mills, from which follows is the so-called "oppression" of the dispossessed. What is power? How is it exercised? Is it possible to conceptualize power outside the limits of capitalism? How about knowledge? Is power independent of knowledge or prior to it? These questions came to my mind while reading the Marxist literatures. My concern in this study is who has the power of knowing what counts as education reform in Nepal? Whose knowledge prevails in Nepal? In Marx's sense, this is a privilege only of the people who can own and control the means of production.

Marx critiques the modern capitalist system as the source of power and structural domination. He argues that this happens because the means of production and control fall in the hands of the few, who fix wages for labour, alienating the productive workers from being a part of the system of production. In Marx's sense, capitalism is the locus of power. He criticized its deformities in the form of inequality and exploitation it brought to society (Ritzer, 2011, p. 548). Marx wrote his theories when the industrial revolution was sweeping Europe in the nineteenth century. He critiques the industrial revolution and the rise of capitalism as a class-based domination. Central to Marx's critique of capitalism was that only a limited number of people in a capitalist system can own and control the means of production. In this way, Marx describes how the modern state arose in the interests of the governing class, the capitalists.

Contemporary Marxist scholars in Nepal emphasize that different social groups are in competition (conflict) with one another for power and that education is a part of that process. Skinner and Holland (1999), for example, examine educational institutions as sites of cultural production or identity formation. In so doing, they read history as a teleological progress, and man moving from his murkier beginnings to future perfection. This positivist critical approach to social science, advocated by the Frankfurt School and known as "critical theory", which was influenced largely by Marx, Weber, Lukacs and

Freud, currently dominates the scholarly interest in Nepal. Proponents of this theory keep faith in a process of change or transformation. A swarming mass of PhD students and scholars share this perspective to emphasize the idea that education is a part of that process. I will do a great injustice if I don't mention a few ones applied in Nepal that rested on the assumption that the humans can freely make a choice or that they were themselves responsible for their action. My aim here is to go beyond the modernist methodologies that have come to dominate the policy and define the social life in Nepal. In so doing, my aim is to frame a better understanding of the history of Nepal and its people by freeing myself from the modernist methodologies that rest upon assumptions that the individuals have the autonomous agency and consequently the ability to judge the moral content of their actions (Best 2014). Consider this example:

High-caste Hindus from the Hill region, including the Hindu monarchy, constitute the politically dominant group in Nepali society. They have dominated state power since the emergence of the modern state in the late 18th century. Ethnic inequality began when indigenous nationalities were incorporated in the state-building process on unequal terms. They were burdened by taxes and labor obligations, and often lost land to high-caste Hindus (Hangen 2007).

Here is an example of a scholarly work inspired by a Marxian utopian hope of a free and equal world. Scholarly works like these, which so easily give meanings to physical and social realities, fuel ethnic violence than tell the truth of Nepal. Works like these attempt to reorder the thoughts of all the individuals in Nepal who lived and perished in the late 18th century into a totality of caste. Consider another example:

We choose Nepal as our example for several reasons. First, Nepal is highly stratified along gender lines, a situation that similarly applies to the populous Hindu states of North India. Second, throughout Nepal, as in major regions of India, caste constitutes an enduring form of social inequality despite national legislation that outlaws caste discrimination...Historical patterns favoring high caste groups socially, economically, and politically favor their acquisition of "modern" schooling credentials...For this reason, we hypothesize that access to schooling reinforces caste hierarchies (Stash and Hannum, 2001, p. 354).

Drawing on a particular educational anthropology from Levinson and Holland (1996), Valentin (2011, 2015) presents the prospect of modern schooling in restructuring identities and power relations in Nepal. She does so by offering a teleological view of history as if the caste system arose in Nepal via "the intel-

lectual activities of human subjects” (Gutting, 1989, p. 229). Consider this argument she puts forth: “Until 2006, Nepal was officially a Hindu kingdom and access to formal education has historically been restricted by privileges linked to the caste system and by concomitant ideas of ritual purity and impurity” (Valentin 2015, p. 219). Implicit in this theorizing is a singularity of domination resting upon an assumption that the abolition of the Hindu state and the introduction of the modern secular education will usher in a permanent freedom in Nepal. Here is an example of a structural analysis that seeks to understand a particular social arrangement in Nepal through a Northern European enlightenment tradition.

Petersen (2012) takes a similar approach to educational development in Nepal to show how it simply reproduced “dominance and exclusion”. Petersen selected a far western hill district as a case study to validate this. She concluded that there was a severe form of caste and gender discriminations in Nepal (ibid, p. 49). Using a similar lens, Gellner (2007) evaluates the education reform in Nepal under the Panchayat regime in following words:

With no reservations as in India, nor even any development initiatives specifically targeting “backward” groups, the lion’s share of the fruits of development and rapidly expanding educational opportunities and rewards went to those groups who were already well connected and had long established traditions of literacy and academic study, namely, bahuns, some chetris, and some (principally high-caste) newars (BCNs) [ibid, p. 1824].

Situating the discourse of higher education reform in Nepal via a human agency approach would then be to argue that the people of Nepal are in control of their own destiny or are capable of forecasting their futures. The above cited approach takes for granted that the humans have agency through which they reason, make free choices, or freely exercise their thoughts. In other words, the modernist method takes for granted that the caste system arises through a state of automatic consciousness and hence the cause for the alleged social injustice in Nepal. I found this theoretical orientation as strange as the theory of *karma* people in Nepal advance for their troubles and anxieties (Shrestha 1995). Application of their structural approach would then have implications in which one or more individuals and groups in Nepal will no longer blame on their *karma* but to themselves for troubles and anxieties. Their approach would then run the risk of inciting communal violence and radicalization than bring about social harmony in Nepal.

Foucault, when asked to comment on whether he would distinguish him-

self from the Marxists and other critical thinkers, replied: “I think I would distinguish myself from both the Marxist and the para-Marxist perspectives. As regards Marxism, I’m not one of those who try to elicit the effects of power at the level of ideology” (Foucault, in Gordon, 1980, p. 58). In Marxist terms, the focus of power is on ideological class or castes. Foucault distinguishes his theory from the ideology of class and structure.

In taking the above stance, it is not possible to theorize higher education through the caste structure or class theory of power in Nepal. In Foucault’s terms, power is invested in the “body” and it produces effects at the level of knowledge and desire (ibid, p. 56). Far from preventing knowledge, power produces it (ibid, p. 59). It is knowledge which works as a tool of power (Kaufmann and Hollingdale, 1967, p. 266). Thus, Foucault’s ideas led me to link power with knowledge and desire as more important theoretical tools to frame the present understanding of reform that traces the goal of education reform to economic prosperity in Nepal. Thus, the ideology of culture, identity, caste, or class advanced by the Marxists as the site of power and domination, and Foucault’s use of power in terms of the problems and practice of knowledge and power are two different approaches to social science research. What Foucault suggests here is that knowledge is a truth which exists with power. Power is concerned with individuals rather than institutions or structures of society. “We are never dealing with mass, with a group...we are only ever dealing with individuals” (Faubion, 1994, p. 28). To deal with the structure or mass would then be to limit the understanding of power and knowledge in terms of who became the ruling block and who became the ruled in Nepal and to assume that this ruling block makes the history and ensures its continuity in Nepal. This eventually led me to explore the alternative ways of contributing to the academic knowledge to policy problems in Nepal and Foucault became important motivator.

In the next section, I introduce the approaches taken by Marxists and critical theorists (mainly inspired by the Frankfurt School) who dispute Foucault’s ideas. The aim is to draw a more clear distinction between the Foucauldian and Marxian approaches to social theory in general and their implications to educational research in particular.

2.7 Cultural production theory

The materials I gathered in this section are perspectives to education reform in Nepal shared by liberal and Marxist theoreticians inspired by “universals of justice and reason” (Rabinow, 1984). Liberal and Marxists inspired studies take humanistic approach and secular view of life. They view the social and cultural life in Nepal from “the high watermarks of western culture” (see Madsen and Carney, 2011, p. 131) or to put in Popkewitz’s term “cosmopolitanism” – a Northern European enlightenment tradition (Popkewitz 2008). As an example, I introduce the construction of the *educated person* in Nepal inspired by the Marxist critical social theory (mainly from those of Frankfurt School) and known as “cultural production theory” that seeks to understand schooling in Nepal as the site for overcoming “repressive” and “oppressive” power. Here, these new Marxian scholars construct a violent past history of Nepal via agency and structure informed by that modern European enlightenment thought. The notion of the “educated person” is framed within that logic as a liberated subject.

The educated person

The National Education System Plan of 1971 introduced a curriculum to be used throughout Nepal. This curriculum served to promote hegemony of the Hindu nation state, and its rule by members of elite Bahun and Chetri families. All books were written in Nepali ... taught ... All people in Nepal are one (‘All people’s blood is red’). (Skinner and Holland, 1996, p. 279)

I will start this section with the above stance taken by Skinner and Holland to understand the construction of the “educated person” in Nepal as a new identity formation or a form of “cultural capital”. They draw the reason for the emergence of the *educated person* in Nepal as a form of liberation. This set of scholars saw the people of Nepal living in chains under the Hindu nation state in the past without a modern education and what follows after the abolition of the Hindu state and the introduction of the modern secular education as a permanent freedom. The above set of scholars apply critical ethnographies of schooling to read history and culture as the site of knowledge.

To paraphrase Denzin and Lincoln (2000), Skinner and Holland (1996) presents the reality of Nepal through a “god’s-eye view” (ibid, p. 1051). Their main objection was that, “All school books were written in Nepali, the official national language”, assuming that this led to the oppression of the non-Hindus

or non-Nepali speaking subjects in Nepal. I interpret this as an “objectivist account of knowledge – a view that knowledge is independent of any individual” (Mathews, 1981).

For Skinner and Holland, their theory of “cultural production” presupposes that the people of Nepal lived in oppression during the Panchayat era. As I show in Chapter 3, the National Education System Plan (NESP) that introduced all school books in Nepali and imposed the dominant Nepali language on the population arose out of many different factors than this taken-for-granted presumption of hierarchies and privileges. For example, they do not show King Mahendra’s perilous move to foreign policy (see Mihaly, 2009, p. 216). In so doing, Skinner and Holland imply that the king was the sole author of the discourse of NESP, or that his decision to impose the dominant Nepali language and culture of the ruling block through the unified system of education on the heterogeneous masses emerged freely out of his self-capacity to reason. These scholars therefore problematized human agency or actors as an ideal of free humanity, or what Kant called the “free-thinking terrestrial being” not guided or constrained by external conditions. In short, these scholars theorized schooling through a macro perspective of ideology and power that has no connection to individuality and self. Implicit in their analytical accounts is a notion of state power or a ruling block that is always dark and nefarious in its motives, and that modern schooling in Nepal produces the *educated person* as a sign of historical progress and freedom. Here, the above scholars suggest the emergence of the NESP through a smooth certainty that is free of contradictions. My aim is to disturb this teleological order of thinking education reform in Nepal. I will do so in Chapter 3. First, the notion of “hegemony” applied by the above scholars must be made more clear.

Gramsci and hegemony

I located the word “hegemony” in Skinner and Holland’s works on Gramsci, who used it as his central concept to define it as “cultural leadership exercised by the ruling class” (Ritzer, 2011, p. 281). Gramsci separates coercion from hegemony. Whereas Marx emphasized the material mode of production as the source of oppressive power and inequality in society, Gramsci emphasized the role of culture and ideology (of the dominant ruling groups) as causing this, but he claims it is nevertheless possible to free ourselves from that form of hegemonic control of the ruling class [block] (see Gross, 2011; Ritzer, 2011). It must be made clear that the Gramscian notion of “hegemony” is not “coer-

cion” but the influence the powerful ruling groups exert on less powerful ones in social, cultural and economic terms (Gross, 2011). If it is true that the word “hegemony” means how the dominant groups exert their cultural influence on others or make less dominant ones to submit and surrender, one way to think of the ongoing reform in Nepal would be to argue that the Western donors, without coercing the Nepalese, influence the latter to accept their leadership in Nepal. In Gramscian sense, this happens because the ruling elites in Nepal or the intellectuals work on behalf of this powerful group [donors] to achieve “cultural leadership and the assent of the masses” (Ritzer, *ibid*, p. 282).

For Gramsci, the ideal-typical moment of hegemony occurs when all social resources are marshaled by the historic bloc whose objective is, as he put it, the unity of economic and political goals and, furthermore, ‘intellectual and moral unity... on a universal plane. Comprehensive hegemony is the ‘additional’ power that occurs to a dominant group in virtue of its capacity to lead society in a direction that not only serves the dominant group’s interest but is also perceived by subordinate groups as serving a more general interest. (Davies, 2011, p. 103)

Among the Marxist-oriented scholars, the chhetris and bahuns of Nepal became the bourgeoisie, the bloc which historically has controlled the schools, colleges and universities, the means of production, the law, the police and the army, and enforce this “conformity” on the remaining groups. This is referred to as “hegemony”. But in Gramscian sense, his use of the term “hegemony” may be extended to problematize the Western donors as more powerful group in control of affairs in Nepal. Skinner and Holland, however, argued that the schooling became a site through which the teachers and students in Nepal developed critical consciousness to oppose the state hegemony or what they termed “Brahmanical Hinduism” in Nepal. They argue how the teachers and students possessed a collective will or agency to challenge state hegemony. Adopting their method, it would be impossible to count on the sources of domination and power beyond the rhetoric of Chhetris and Bahuns. In sum, the above-cited scholars present a “metaphysical and anthropological model” of schooling in Nepal (*Max Weber and Postmodern Theory*, p. 116). The use of methods and concepts by the Marxist-oriented scholars are made clearer in the next section, where I distinguish between Foucault and Levinson.

Foucault versus Levinson

Agency/ structure vs. subject/ subjectivity

Foucault is the first to get us thinking seriously about domination along many other dimensions than socioeconomic class...One of the ways we have found useful to think about the mutual importance of education and critical social theory to one another is through the broad concepts of *power, knowledge and identity*. (Levinson, 2011, pp. 14)

My aim of introducing Levinson here is to draw a clear distinction between the two approaches to educational research – one inspired by the Marxian concepts of *agency* and *structure*, and the other approached through the lens of *subjectivity* inspired by the Foucauldian scholars. The previous section only niggardly touched upon these two categories.

Levinson moves away from Marx's grand theory of capitalism as the site of power and domination to identify a more important location of knowledge and power through his critical social theory of education. He underlines the importance of theorizing education through critical social theory by applying the concepts of agency and structure to show the interplay of power, knowledge and identity in the constitution of the schooled person or a culturally produced person as gradually evolving to "freedom". Here, Levinson refers the term to mean access to "basic social and material goods" some social groups enjoy. Following Levinson, Skinner and Holland argued that the access to such social and material goods in Nepal for some social groups was allegedly denied by the hegemony of the Hindu nation state and its rule by members of elite Bahun and Chetri families. However, they argued that the schooling became a site through which the teachers and students in Nepal developed critical consciousness to oppose that state hegemony by mobilizing their agency.

Levinson adds one new concept, "identity", to Foucault's *power/knowledge*. He writes: "Throughout human history, the relationships between power, knowledge, and identity have been constitutive of society..." He further notes that our social positions and possibilities are shaped by identity – "our sense of who we are in relation to others" (ibid, pp. 14-15). In Foucault's term, the notion of "identity" we form of ourselves in relation to others is then problematic. As a name we apply, it does not speak authentically of the object (matter) referred to. Rather, in Foucault's sense, identity is a sign, a representation, rather than a thing in itself. Moving beyond the classical Marxist metanarratives, Levinson, therefore, while acknowledging Foucault's idea of knowledge

as the site of power, places identity in relation to “power” and “knowledge” to theorize education.

In introducing Foucault, I briefly mentioned his discursive approach as a different analytical technique that problematizes subjectivity instead of identity, agency or structure. On the contrary, Levinson argue that individuals can singly or collectively mobilize their agency to liberate themselves from domination. Hence, Levinson et al approach their study of schooling from their deterministic stance or their “ability to predict” (paraphrasing Fendler 1990, 1999, 2004, 2006). In short, they problematized a knowing (observing) subject. Or, to put it in Popkewitz’s (1999) terms, they “identified power and change in the agents or actors” (pp. 29-30). The Foucauldian discursive approach is concerned with the social construction of “reason” (ibid). In Foucault’s sense, it is not possible to problematize collective agency or actors but an individual who reasons through his self.

In his most influential book, *Beyond Critique: Exploring Critical Social Theories and Education: power, knowledge and identity*, Levinson et al (2011) define identity as “our social position formed by our sense of who we are in relation to others” (ibid, p.14). Levinson recognizes the role of schools in this process of identity construction (Levison, 1999).

According to Foucault, it is difficult to affirm the belief one has about oneself in relation to another. This is how I understand Foucault’s notion of subjectivity as “our relation to ourselves” (Paras, 2006, p. 107). I found that Levinson’s uses of identity as “our social position formed by our sense of who we are in relation to others” and Foucault’s use of the self as “our relation to ourselves” fundamentally different from each other. Foucault distances himself from claiming who we were/are supposed to be truly like to profess what we are already is but what we have continuously become through our practices of self. I found that the self as practice and agency as our pre-given capacity to reason or think do not have the same meaning.

In the Foucauldian sense, our identity is detached from our body materiality and has no connection with the “soul”, hence it is an ideology. Things that do not connect to the object referred to is what I understand in Foucault’s sense as representation rather than a matter of fact. According to Foucault, what is not detached is to be located in the body, which he calls the subject (*le sujet* in French) – our perspective through which we think and reason. Levinson’s use of the term “identity” in Foucault’s sense is then a perspective, a picture we form of the body by our practice of truth-telling, not the body itself. By

problematizing the former (the self), we take a perspective not a definite stance on truth.

In sum, Levinson professes the idea of pure reason and Foucault, contingency. Levinson, therefore, implies education offers the possibility of escape from domination. Implicit in this theorizing is a singularity of domination. By “free”, Levinson refers to getting out of “structural domination”, drawing on the theory of “structure” and “agency” developed by Giddens (1979).

In Foucault’s sense, whose general theme of inquiry is the question of the subject, domination exists in infiniteness and a multiplicity of forms. At a particular moment of time, only some of them count as knowledge and appear to be true. Levinson implies fixity. He argues that by altering “structure” through awareness and action “easily” (ibid, p. 12), domination can be overcome. That there is a structure that holds things together or can be rearranged is central to this thought. In this sense, what is assumed to be constraining in society is, for example, the caste social structure in Nepal, which subsumes all individualities into a totality. The role of education Levinson suggests in this sense via production of identity and knowledge is propelling one to action and awareness towards abolition of that structure or “old order” in the World Bank’s terminology. Here, Levinson suggests an ultimate freedom is possible in Nepal through the abolition of the historical rules (caste social structure) via the use of individual or collective agency. “So even though domination may be structurally embedded, liberation is possible through the exercise of individual or, more often, collective agency” (Levinson et al, 2011, p. 12). As demonstrated by Skinner and Holland, schooling in this process works as a site of domination as well as liberation or to put in Bank’s own term “open moment”. Following Foucault, there is no such thing as “liberation” and “freedom” that can account of its singular meaning and represent all contexts and circumstances unique to individuals. Rather, it is the discourse that structures our sense of reality to think of “liberation” or “freedom” and that take the shape of knowledge. In Foucault’s sense, discourse is prior to subject formation. In this sense, rather than how Levinson would prefer agency as an ahistorical and autonomous capacity to think and reason, I argue that it is made to reason in discourse and is shaped by historical context.

As I show in Part II, when the actors in the field refer to “freedom” and “autonomy” as the cause or effects of reform, they refer to the dominant discourse of autonomous federalism. In Foucault’s sense, “freedom” or “autonomy” is a historical density of language. The notion of “freedom” and the schooling playing its part in the liberation of the subject as expounded by

Levinson, Skinner and Holland suggest the permanency of things. Looking at the SHEP document, this notion of freedom and liberation is explicit where it envisages the permanency of things.

Summing up, rather than identity and agency as the site of knowledge construction, Foucault offers the possibility of thinking about the actors as subjects and objects of discourse (knowledge). In *Subject and Power*, Foucault makes it clear how human beings become the subject (of freedom or of repression). Following this, I problematize subjectivity instead of identity, agency and structure as my tool of research. Foucault's notion of subjectivity is made clearer in section 2.11.2 of *Foucault and Subjectivity*.

2.8 “Development” and its epistemological grid

Development has relied exclusively on one knowledge system, namely, the modern western one. The dominance of this form of knowledge system has dictated the marginalization and disqualification of non-western knowledge systems. (Escobar, 1995, p. 13)

Foucault's work on the dynamics of discourse and power in the representation of social reality, in particular, has been instrumental in unveiling the mechanisms by which a certain order of discourse produces permissible modes of being and thinking while disqualifying and even making others impossible. (p. 5)

The aim of this section is to examine the theory of “development”, which is the exclusive enunciator of education policy in Nepal. As stated in the newly promulgated constitution, the aim of Nepal is “development and prosperity” to be achieved via federal democratic republican governance system (*Constitution of Nepal*, 2015). In so doing, it is presupposed that the people of Nepal will have obtained their “right to autonomy” (ibid, p. 1). The notion of “autonomy” refers to “self-rule” and “sovereign right” allegedly denied by the centralized state in the past. Here, neo-liberalism totalizes the world through the logic of a common time, space, history and culture. In the eyes of this form of power, the caste form of social arrangement in Nepal was oddly disturbing. The learning of Sanskrit and Kanjyur/Tanjyur was impractical to obtain the material goods, hence they must be scrapped.

Beginning in 1951, the modern Western conception of economic development came to dominate and dictate education policy in Nepal, making it

impossible to imagine education and social realities in other terms. Consider this policy statement, which tells how the key aim of higher education in Nepal is “to produce skilled manpower essential for the overall development of Nepal” (Tribhuvan University, 2013). Here, the discourse and practice of “development” in Nepal mediates the idea of higher education. According to the National Planning Commission, one of the main objectives of the national education strategies is to tie up education with “national production and development” (see Three Year Interim Plan, 2010-2013). “Education sector objectivities and strategies have been formulated with a long-term vision of producing conscious, competent, productive and competitive citizens for a prosperous and just Nepal based on the demand of national and international markets” (ibid, pp. 123-124). As I will show in the field of practice, the work practices of the donor agencies doing the “development” in Nepal have come to structure a sense of reality where education is thought of in terms of “economic prosperity”.

Assuming that development was the sole aim of international intervention in Nepal, the past 50 years of internationalist intervention in its name has made Nepal further “difficult to live and work” in (see Berry, 2010). This happened despite 76,733 million rupees in aid being funnelled into the country annually through international aid agencies (see Ministry of Finance, 2010). The aim of this section is, therefore, to understand this paradox and to make clear the epistemology of “development” [Nepali equivalent is “bikas”], which mediates education policy and practice in Nepal.

Trying to locate the emergence of the development discourse in Nepal in the historical context of Nepal, I came across the following brief and banal story of how the Rana prime minister, Sri Maharaj Juddha Shamsheer, declined an offer of financial assistance from England and France during the January 1934 earthquake (Pandey, 1987, in Bista, 2011, p. 134).

It was sunny winter afternoon, bright blue sky and a slight breeze from the west. Most families in Kathmandu were on their roof terraces, or in the fields. Suddenly, birds took flight, dogs started howling, there was a deep underground rumble, fields started undulating like waves on the ocean, houses crumbled, long fissures appeared on the roads and a great pall of dust rose over the city. Within a minute, 17,000 people were dead in Nepal and northern Bihar, many of them in Kathmandu Valley. Among the dead were two of King Tribhuban’s daughters and a daughter of Juddha Shumshere. Most houses were destroyed or damaged... Aftershocks kept coming for two weeks, and the survivors camped out in the freezing cold. (Naresh Newar, in the *Nepali Times*, 2004)

If it is true that the Rana Maharaja, haunted by the fear of foreign intervention in Nepal, declined to accept even a small amount of humanitarian aid from England and France, the new generation of “Maharajas” in Nepal accepted both advice and financial assistance from Western donors to orient the Nepalese to northern cosmopolitan dreams. Currently, there are over 40 foreign donors, 170 INGOs and 30,284 NGOs doing “development” in Nepal. Applying a conservative estimate of four persons per donor agency, a minimum of 121,976 development workers are currently stationed in Nepal, steering the country’s “development” wheel. This happened historically after the end of the Rana regime in 1951, when a “friendly invasion” began in Nepal (Mihaly, 2009, p. viii). The sole aim of the international intervention was to “develop” Nepal and the Nepalese people, assumed to be living in poverty.

Thus, as Mihaly writes, a “new Nepal” was being invented through Western aid. To make that dream of a “New Nepal” possible, according to Mihaly, the year 1989 marked the “pinnacle” of foreign aid, which contributed to 80 percent of Nepal’s development expenditure (ibid, p. xxxii). Total foreign aid disbursed in the past 50 years has totalled \$2.3 trillion (Shrestha, 2015). But despite this increase in the volume of foreign aid, Nepal has descended to the status of Least Developed Country (LDC) (Mihaly, 2009, p. xxxiii). Thus, the more international intervention increased since 1951, the more undeveloped Nepal became. It is at this point that I found Escobar (1995) useful for understanding this paradox. According to Escobar, “development” is to be understood not in terms of materiality or substance, but “regimes of discourse” and “regimes of representation”, from where “violence [and desire] is originated, symbolized and managed” (ibid, p. 10).

In this book, *Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World*, Escobar (ibid) shows how “development” – measured in terms of material conditions of life – actually deepens inequality between the industrialized nations and the “Third World” countries. This book tells the story of how the post-World War II discourse of development created the so-called Third World and how the dreams of development promised by the Western industrialized countries, theorists and politicians progressively turned into nightmares as poverty and hunger became widespread in those countries.

In the Foucaultian sense, rather than examine “development” in its own “self-enclosed truth”, Escobar unveils the systems of knowledge and forms of power that constitute it and through which people come to recognize themselves as “Third World”, “poor” or “underdeveloped”, thereby legitimizing the need for international intervention. He shows how in this process, “de-

velopment” became a powerful discourse to shape the thinking and acting of the people in the South even as it continued to deprive them through its very propensity to fuel desire and violence. Following Escobar, I contextualize “development” within the overall space of modernity, particularly Western modernity, and economic practices. I then show how it becomes the “regimes of representation” to denote Nepal as least developed in the world. It is this materiality of hope that guided this country in the post-1950. This material condition of development was promised by the industrialized North to the “Third World” countries but remains a far-fetched dream (ibid).

Escobar shows that the industrialized North produces 78 percent of world goods and services and consumes 81 percent of its energy. Based on these statistics, development is measured in the “Third World”. Likewise, he shows how one US resident spends as much on energy as 900 Nepalis (ibid, p. 212). In so doing, the notion of “development” is legitimized in terms of how many Nepalese can drive cars or consume energy on a par with their American counterparts. Escobar asks us to think about these statistics in terms of “techno-representations” within the “politics of representation of the Third World” rather than the genuine stories of people in desperate need of development and foreign aid. In this process, he shows how the industrialized nations of North America and Western Europe came to be seen as the appropriate models of post-World War II societies in Asia, Africa and Latin America.

Since the adoption of modern Western education in the early 1950s, the search for education policy began in Nepal that is commonly found in the Western hemisphere (see NNEPC, 1956). Inspired by that cosmopolitan dream of the north, Nepalese policy bureaucrats looked for radical alternatives to the purported problems of poverty. But such dreams that are incompatible with local social realities remain illusory. The young people in Nepal as a result found themselves in the “symbolic and material labyrinth” (Madsen and Carney, 2011, p. 116). Educational space in Nepal is thus mapped by the development encounter and, more generally, Western modernity. In this regard, I found Escobar helpful in imagining an alternative way of representing the reality of education in Nepal that becomes embedded in the discourse and practices of development.

Following Escobar, I read the present higher education reform (SHEP) as a construct of development, a domain of thought and action sustained by politics of knowledge and a system of power that refer to it through which it comes into being. According to him, this happens because a system of power regulates its practice, and the discourse about it creates forms of subjectivities

through which people come to recognize it. Escobar recognizes the importance of the dynamics of discourse and power on the study of culture. He looks at modernity with ethnographic approaches that examine social forms as produced by historical approaches combining knowledge and power. Escobar examines how truth claims are related to practices and symbols that produce and regulate social life. As a result, he argues, many people in the Third World cannot think of their situation in terms other than those provided by the development discourse.

He argues that after 1945, the discourse of development began to construct the two-thirds of the world as “poor”, defined as lacking what the rich had in terms of money and material possessions (p. 23). This is how he explains the “Third World” countries came to be defined in relation to standards of wealth of the more affluent countries. Escobar argues that development policies were framed within the advertising vocabularies of “illiteracy”, “famine”, “poverty”, “overpopulation” and the like originating in colonialism and European modernity, and how these languages subsequently became the mechanism for domination of the Third World. Escobar traces the origin of this domination to the creation of the Third World countries.

The introductory chapter, entitled *Development and the anthropology of modernity* (pp. 3-21), traces how the post-World War II discourse brought into use new concepts like “underdevelopment” and created “the Third World”. To show this, Escobar begins with a reference to a “fair deal” announced by the then president of the United States of America, Harry Truman, on January 20, 1949. This came to be known as the “Truman doctrine” which, according to Escobar, aimed at a total restructuring of “underdeveloped” societies. This doctrine came to influence Third World societies’ wish to adopt the models from the industrialized nations of North America and Europe for their socioeconomic transformation. Escobar shows that the Americans had a vision of extending their dream of peace and abundance to all the peoples of the world in the form of “concrete policies and measures” (pp. 3-4), but how such a dream ultimately vanished into oblivion. Elsewhere, this view of “development” is nonetheless endemic.

In *The Anti-Politics Machine*, Ferguson (1994) argues that development programs implemented in Lesotho under the World Bank sponsorship simply helped to open the Western modernizing influence and politicized the problems than met its stated objectives. Drawing from Foucault’s genealogy of prison (1979), Ferguson argues, “...planned interventions may produce unintended outcomes that end up, all the same, incorporated into anonymous con-

stellations of control – authorless strategies” (p. 20). One way Ferguson makes me reflect on Nepal is through the recent construction of the country as a “fragile state”, a bizarre outcome of the past five decades of a “development” industry. According to Ferguson, this happens because the words “Lesotho” and “Nepal” are treated as no different by a development apparatus that draws on Western liberal common sense views to address problems specific to countries and people that are diverse in nature.

Despite critiques of post-development approach that there could be some exceptional examples of development under Western-financed projects (see Kiely, 1999; Storey, 2000), the above cited scholars emphasize the opening of the way for a new discourse. In other words, they argue that the people in the Third World can exercise their own thoughts. Ferguson urges us to distance ourselves from “Western liberal commonsense” way of reading the “Third World”. This view from Nepal is expressed by Nanda Shrestha (1995), who argues how “in the name of development” the institutions of *bikas* maintain their new mechanism of control, making it impossible to count on local indigenous knowledge practices.

In yet another narrative of “development”, Pigg (1992) draws on ethnographic research conducted in a village near Bhojpur Bazar, eastern Nepal, and time she spent in Kathmandu, to show how the institutions of *bikas* became the route for the village boys and girls to move to the *sabar* (city) in the belief that village was utterly poor in comparison to the city. This idea of “development” financed and ideologically supported by Western donors portrayed the villages as wretchedly poor and the people living there as *pakhe* [sloppy or without the knowledge of modern science] (see Shrestha, 1995). As Pigg showed, through illustrations in schoolbooks, the theory of *bikas* charted Nepal into terrains of relative advancement and backwardness. Pigg shows how *bikas* made the villagers assume they “don’t understand things” (Escobar, 1995, p. 49). Comparing the picture of a student not helping parents at home but just sitting around the table engrossed in learning with a bunch of children carrying loads and helping parents at home, the schoolbook gives the message to the readers that the former is the route to development and the latter to poverty.

According to Shrestha, *bikas* killed the ancient cultural practices in which children helped parents at work and the communities helped each other in need without expecting any reward in the form of cash or kind. Before the discourse of *bikas* circulated, he shows how the people of Nepal used to blame *karma* (fate) for their troubles and anxiety. He goes on to argue how that notion of *karma* was soon overwhelmed by the imported discourse of “develop-

ment”, altering its meaning to one of “poverty” or “underdevelopment” (*garibi* in Nepali). Shrestha concludes that “development” is a form of “colonial domination” that has brought about disruption in the cultural life of the people of Nepal and advanced poverty.

Drawing on Pigg and building on Shrestha, Tatsura (2013) uses Foucault’s theory of discourse to study “development” in Nepal. He argues that “the discourse of awareness” is constituted by program development, concluding that “...much of what counts as reality in Nepal, much of how people live their lives [in Nepal], is already shot through by discourses and practices of development” (ibid, 291). Fujikura questions the nature of reality in Nepal that can only be captured in an analytic of development sponsored by aid agency projects. He raises an important question: is it not possible to imagine Nepal other than in terms of “development”? He writes: “...there is virtually no direct access to a “reality” unmediated by the discourses of development in Nepal” (ibid, p. 292). Escobar more clearly presents the Foucauldian notion of discourse as constitutive of the systems of knowledge and forms of power and which fosters subjectivity. Following Escobar, the ongoing higher education reform in Nepal financed and ideologically supported by the Western development institutions is couched in terms of “regimes of discourse” and “regimes of representation” as a methodological principle by avoiding the danger of seeing the source of power/knowledge to the ruling block of Nepal. In Chapter 3, I will show how complex factors came to shape the discourse of education reform in Nepal after 1950 that included, among other things, democratization, modernization, Cold War diplomacy and the fear of communism, the notion of poverty and backwardness in Nepal and the presumed need for Western science and technology to overcome it. By locking the Nepalese into a state of dependency and reducing them to the status of “assisted”, power is exercised over them by the institutional apparatus. If the fear of communism became one of the most compelling arguments for development before 1989, and the promise of science and technology was another ploy of international intervention (ibid, p. 34), in Escobar’s sense, “development” in Nepal must then be seen from the political aim of those displaying it or its commitment to capitalist development. This view from Nepal is maintained by Khadka (2000) and Mihaly (1963; 1966; 2009). Rather than seeking to understand the effectiveness of international aid in Nepal, these scholars who write on international relations and foreign aid have pointed out the political objectives of foreign aid in Nepal. Khadka and Mihaly explain that the main motives of the US aid in Nepal were twofold: one to avoid the emergence of radical communism,

and two, to counter undue interference from India and China in the wake of the overthrow of the Rana regime and the political instability that followed. If this was the real motive of the West, the theory of (under)development used to frame the present discourse of higher education reform must then be examined through a critical lens.

Kiely (1999) criticizes the work of Escobar as containing “still serious inconsistencies” (ibid, p. 47). One of the inconsistencies, he points out, is Escobar’s rejection of official development indicators while using the same indicators to show that development has failed. However, Escobar urged us to think of these official indicators and statistics in terms of “techno-representations” of the Third World rather than the genuine stories of people living there. He argues that these statistics simply entrench development discourse, and are a strategy to shape the culture in the South and to proclaim that the North is more advanced. Another problem pointed out by Kiely in Escobar’s theorizing is his unflinching faith in social movements as an alternative discourse to hegemonic development discourse. Kiely argues that while romanticizing the local subaltern social movements, Escobar fails to see the political colour of these movements. Kiely rejects Escobar’s view that the dominant ideas of development are imposed by the West on the rest of the world.

Despite sporadic critiques, Escobar’s work has been reviewed widely as a provocative analysis of development. Escobar challenged me to rethink “development”, which for him has come to objectify Nepal as a “least developed” or “poor” country by placing it in relation to the industrialized countries of the North. I do so by questioning its relationship to education. When the actors in the field of practice enact the discourse of higher education reform in terms of development, I will not seek to understand the link between them and their assumptions in a taken-for-granted way but as a subject position fostered by the globalization of knowledge circulated in Nepal and operationalized by aid agency projects.

2.9 Applying Foucault in education research

Mark Olssen (1995) writes that since 1993, the influence of Foucault and post-structuralism on education research has been steadily growing, affecting every area of study. Many scholars cite Michel Foucault for his work within social theory and his detailed studies of particular social practices around mad-

ness and reason, discipline and punish, and sexuality and subjectivity, which are now widely recognized. Foucault called himself an “experimenter” rather than a theorist (Taylor, 2011). “Thinking differently rather than validating what is already known lay at the core of his philosophical work” (ibid, p. 1). “Truth”, “power” and “subject” are central to his philosophical tradition. However, as Foucault has said, in reading the work of a particular analyst, it is necessary to be aware of the tendency to invoke the author as the unifying principle in a particular group of writings or statements (Foucault, 1971)⁶ “When summoned to reflect on his various studies, to account for and order their features, Foucault quite deliberately described his practices as “analytical work” rather than as “theory”, and when responding to comments on his analysis of relations of power, he remarked that it is “not a theory, but rather a way of theorizing practice” (ibid, p. 208).

Smart writes: “Foucault was certainly not a sociologist, but there is much of relevance and value to sociology in his writings” (ibid, p. 208). Foucault conducted his inquiries in a critically reflexive manner and his thinking significant implications for social theory. The analytical terrains within which his works are most notably found are *The Archeology of Knowledge* (1969) and *Discipline and Punish* (1977). The general theme of his inquiry is the question of the subject. One of his key arguments is that since things have been made, they can be unmade, as long as we know how they were made. Foucault’s works are shown to be largely useful in the context of the global discourses of education that are dominated by “modernist” projects of “progressive or emancipatory” thought that require a critical understanding (see Popkewitz and Brennan, 1998).

There are many ways of approaching discourse. In their most influential work, *Lifelong Learning – Signs, Discourses, Practices* Usher and Edwards (2007) study changing adult education and lifelong learning trends. Their approach to understanding adult education and lifelong learning is via Foucault’s discourse theory, mainly “semiosis”. They apply a reflexive stance to study texts. They argue how education policies, mainly lifelong learning, are framed within the global discourses and practices framed by economic rationalism. They argue that the currently circulating discourses of lifelong learning tied to knowledge economy goals are narrow, seeking to understand education as tied to the economy and the labour market. A semiotic analytic of discourse, according to them, treats everything as a sign, and there is no original or final meaning (ibid, p. 1). They conclude that in their view, lifelong learning is both “real”

6 In *Orders of Discourse*, 1971, p. 14, cited in Barry Smart (p. 207), “Foucault as a Social Theorist.”

and “enacted”; it comes into force through statements. However, according to Foucault, discourses “are composed of signs; but what they do is more than use these signs to designate things...and it is this ‘more’ that we must reveal and describe” (Foucault, 2002, p. 54).

In the editorial of *Lifelong Learning—Signs, Discourses, Practices*, Aspin and Chapman comment on Usher and Edwards’s work:

...there is no such thing as a ‘grand meta-narrative’ of ‘lifelong learning’, that should determine and dominate what is to count as a valid and allowable lifelong learning policy, program or practice. They have made a major contribution, we believe, in sharply challenging the domination of the economic in fashioning understandings, policies and practices of lifelong learning. (ibid, viii)

Milewski (2010) draws on Foucault’s archaeological method to study education reform in Canada. He examines the paradox of reform and the discontinuity of pedagogic knowledge and the emergence of the child as the subject/object of pedagogical discourse. While there are many ways of approaching discourse, I found Mill’s (1995) interpretation of Foucault’s discourse theory particularly useful. According to Mills, Foucault’s discourse can be useful to ground thought on how at a particular moment of time, “some statements – and not others—will count as knowledge” (ibid, p. 56). After gaining some insights from the above-cited Foucauldian scholars in the international context, I next move to the application of Foucauldian approaches in the specific context of Nepal.

2.9.1 Foucault, Education and Nepal

Robinson-Pant (2010)

Recent studies in Nepal have attempted through a Foucauldian discursive turn in social theory to develop a much more complex understanding of forces negotiating education, literacy and development than overtly relying on the metanarrative of international development (see Robinson-Pant, 2010; Carney and Bista, 2009).

In *Changing Discourses: Literacy and development in Nepal*, Robinson-Pant (2010) applies Foucault’s discursive approach to social theory. In her earlier work *on Development as Discourse: What relevance to education?* (2001), Robinson-Pant attempted to discover not the links between development and education but how a particular ideological notion of “development” actually comes into being

and takes on its meaning through the practice of literacy, textbooks, everyday conversations and aid agency projects in Nepal.

Robinson-Pant writes that although changing literacy and development discourse in Nepal are driven by international donors and their funding trends, we need to be aware of the forces at play at the local level to negotiate those changes. Though applied in the study of literacy and development studies in Nepal, Robinson-Pant's Foucauldian discursive approach is nevertheless helpful for thinking critically about educational changes in Nepal. It calls for the need to problematize the term "political" [and "ideological"] in considering the contested understanding of higher education. Robinson-Pant underlines the implications of the discursive approach both for the educational researchers and at the levels of educational policy and planning.

I argue that the ideological dimension of educational planning and policy needs to be recognized and analysed through a focus on discourse. Instead of suggesting that a certain policy succeeds or fails in "technical" terms, policy makers can then begin to ask different questions which acknowledge the political agendas of the various development players and allow for a greater variety of voices to be heard. (p. 311)

Robinson-Pant takes the view that although international policy discourses and donor funding largely influence policy directions in Nepal, local demands and the emerging political climate ultimately shape the policies. She shows the existence of a "complex web of relationships" at work in Nepal between different actors that include donors, government, INGOs, national and local NGOs, which mediate education and literacy policies in Nepal. At the outset, Pant offers the complexity of understanding the field of practice in Nepal by challenging globally homogenizing policy dictates that reduce everything in Nepal into a simple policy appendix – "decentralization".

As an effect of the policy discourse on literacy, Robinson-Pant, in her ethnographic research, mainly approached through interviews with actors and observations, shows how the literacy programme funded and ideologically supported by aid agencies contributed to civil unrest in Nepal by providing a forum for some people in Nepal to critique the dominant political structure and offering young Nepalese women the skills necessary to join the Maoist cadres (Robinson-Pant, 2010, p. 143). Robinson-Pant exposes both the intended and unintended consequences of literacy interventions in Nepal. Similarly, Carney and Rappleye (2011) show how Nepal's experience with modernity

contributed to civil war. In the following section, I will focus on how Foucault can be applied in historicizing education in the specific context of Nepal.

Carney and Bista (2009)

We operationalize this approach [Foucauldian poststructuralist] to understand education policy via genealogical analysis of education reform that uncovers and make problematic the processes by which new and radical ideas take form as visions, policies, and ultimately, educational practices... Unlike liberal and Marxist versions of the state, in which attempts are made to identify its core elements and hence rationale, Michel Foucault (2008) suggested that we view the state in terms of changing rationalities. (ibid, p. 191)

Carney and Bista, in their study of community schooling, a large scale transfer of the previously government schools to communities in Nepal funded by the World Bank (see CSSP, World Bank, 2003), apply Foucauldian genealogy to trace education reform. First, they traced this back to international policy discourse within the World Bank circulating in Nepal through its financial and technical support. They then uncovered the intense contestations and contradictions that developed locally through the changing historical moments in Nepal. They traced the shifting policy moments to the post-1990s democratic discourse in Nepal. Their study show how different actors negotiated and contested the policy and created a new discursive space for the present education policy to emerge in Nepal. They studied not how the reform was implemented or its processes, but how the concept of community schooling emerged through negotiations and contestations among different actors through a complex process of agreements. Following Foucauldian genealogical approach, the above-cited scholars parted ways with the Marxist-inspired approaches to research. In particular, they positioned themselves in a Foucauldian poststructuralist approach, following Escobar (1995), to understand subjects as constructed through discourses and practices linked to the exercise of power. These scholars challenged me to reconsider the meaning of education as an emancipatory machine of castes/class oppression to more complex problems and practice of power, knowledge and desire.

As these scholars show, through a normative understanding of the community school concept as an efficient delivery of quality education, the state in Nepal implemented the school reform, the ideas of which were informed by the changing historical context of Nepal, mainly through its yet another experiment with democracy. However, as they suggest, education policy con-

vergence in Nepal has followed a complex process of negotiations involving intense contestations, often between irreconcilable ideas and ideologies, rather than following one smooth consensual and orderly succession.

One way they approached the issue is through the study of the project appraisal document of the World Bank (2003). They showed how the World Bank picked on the private school sector as the model for reforming some 28,000 state-owned primary schools. They next revisited Nepal's past, going back to the 1990s restoration of democracy that brought new actors with new visions to the scene. They contested the ideas of education giving rise to new policy moments through which the concept of community school was legitimized.

Carney and Bista conclude from their findings from Nepal that the present education reform traces education as an "economy of production and desire" as well as "closure, difference, and violence" (ibid, p. 208). They show how such an imposed reform has been received differently by different actors. While the political elites seem to be concerned with how to secure their children a route to foreign education and employment as they progress through national education, the poor, ignored by the state, have nevertheless been left at the mercy of the state. They concluded that this happened as a result of the discursive regime which, while seemingly taking schools as a building block of democracy, leaves the state out of its intervening role in education by elevating parents and students as "heroes" of education reform. In short, drawing on Escobar's (1995) Foucauldian approach to power and discourse theory, rather than seeking to understand school reform as a community-based practice, as the state in Nepal and its donors would wish to understand it, the above-cited scholars regard it as a "regime of representation".

As a regime of representation, community ownership of schooling signals both an "economy of production and desire, but also of closure, difference, and violence". (Escobar, 1995, p. 214)

In seeking to figure out the school that signals "desire", I found Popkewitz important for understanding what it means. According to him, "the effects of power are to be found in the production of desire" (1999, p. 6). Rejecting the Marxist perspective that power produces effects at the level of ideology, Foucault has said "power produces effects at the level of desire – and also at the level of knowledge". According to Foucault, knowledge works as a tool of power (*The Will To Power*, 1967). Modern societies, according to Foucault, are to be understood as "bio-powers", and distinguished from their earlier formers

– pastoral and sovereign powers. In taking this stance, I understand the present knowledge about higher education as a tool of power in the hands of the new regimes of truth. Carney and Bista complement my earlier effort to understand the reform as an “economy of production and desire”, when I was initially inspired by Escobar’s post-development critique. Carney and Bista regard school reform in Nepal as oriented to that economy of desire. In Foucault’s sense, “economy of desire” is an “imagined condition of living”. This view is complimented by Carney and Bista (2009), who seek to understand Foucault’s critical traditions to theorize knowledge/power as a discursive space through which education policies take shape.

2.10 Foucault and Governmentality

I use governmentality as a tool to study the tactic or technology of power/knowledge. First, I examine how Foucault’s governmentality approach is applied in educational research.

Foucault’s governmentality tradition is applied by a number of scholars in educational research. Michael Kelly writes that Foucault’s notion of governmentality arose from the combination of two different conceptions of political reason: the Christian model of “pastoral rule”, with its concern for constant, individualized care of the members of a “flock”, and the classical model of the *polis* as a union of individuals who are free to determine their own lives (ibid, p. 287). The two are combined by Christian societies—the city and shepherd—to become the modern state. Peters et al interpret Foucault’s notion of “governmentality” as a “critique, problematization, invention, imagination, and changing the shape of the thinkable”.

Marshall (1995; 1998; 1999) applies the concept to critique the liberal education tradition that focusses on the notions of identity, “personal autonomy”, authority, and other such positivist ideas used to understand human progress through education. Similarly, Popkewitz, in his essay (2006) about the study of education reform, draws on Foucault’s concept of “governmentality” to trace the reform to systems of reason, rules and standards around the administrative practices of the modern states, informed by the notions of “liberty”, “freedom”, the autonomous state and the notion of a self-governing people.

Peters et al (2000) apply Foucault’s governmentality tradition to characterise education reform in the US, the UK, Australia and New Zealand since the

1970s as a neoliberal project concerned with “choice”, “quality”, “freedom” and “autonomy” (see Olssen, 2005). These scholars seek to understand governmentality as a bigger discourse about modern states’ concerns with security, surveillance and control of human nature, containing a presupposed notion of individuals as “autonomous choosers” (ibid, p. 367). Peters et al (2000) argue that the Foucauldian notion of governance is not the ideology of liberalism, political philosophy or an economic theory; it is about how power is exercised (ibid, p. 115).

I have discussed in the previous section power/knowledge but I have not figured out how power is exercised. Following Peters et al, the answer lies in “governmentality”. This takes me back to Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish* and *Power/Knowledge*. In these books, Foucault argues that the exercise of power/knowledge is to be located in both material and technologies (of self). This means that I have to observe in my field how power is exercised through techniques and mechanisms, in that I apply subjectivity as an activity I do to understand how the policy on higher education takes its forms in the practice domains to signify reform.

According to Lather, the study of “technologies of governmentality” include “diplomatic/military and economic” technologies. These techniques are used to regulate behaviour and render populations productive via a “biopolitics” that seek to “minimize resistance and maximize wealth stimulation.” (2004, p. 765). She takes what Foucault calls “the sciences of man” to be based on the “political arithmetic” that makes particular kinds of discourse both possible and necessary.

Drawing on Foucault’s governmentality critique, Hursh (2007) explains the neoliberal discourse of education reform in the US as being reflected in the policies promoting privatization, standardized tests, accountability, competition, school choice, among other factors, that construct the individual as “entrepreneurs of themselves” (ibid, p. 497). Hursh situates the US No Child Left Behind Policy in neoliberal reform. Similar to what Olssen and Hursh have shown, implicit in the current higher education reform discourse in Nepal is an idea of education as a choice and a graduate becoming autonomous, self-disciplined and a self-investing entrepreneur of education. Various technologies and techniques are deployed by power to make the students self-conscious of their impending future of living as unemployed and poor. By “power” I do not refer to the king of Nepal or the World Bank or a ruling block, but a regime of truth, or to borrow from Escobar (1995), a system of knowledge, or a “government of truth” that seeks to make individuals their own government (my

own emphasis). This manifests in how the individuals have taken up the roles in interpreting what counts as truth of the world.

I found that Foucault's concept of "governmentality" has been used in many different ways. His ideas of "governmentality" are found in his book *Discipline and Punish*. In the Foucauldian sense, higher education is a disciplinary institution training students towards particular ends through "disciplinary power" (Foucault, in Smart, 1971; 1980, p. 207).

Following Marshall and Peters, Grant (1997) and Milewski (2010) draw from Foucault in studying education. Grant draws on Foucault's governmentality to examine the construction of a "good" student subject, while Milewski draws on Foucault's archaeological method to study education reform in Canada, in which he examines the paradox of reform, the discontinuity of pedagogic knowledge and the emergence of the child as the subject/object of pedagogical discourse. Grant, similarly concludes from her observation how the "good" student subject is produced. She applies Foucault's governmentality and subjectivities to theorize university as a "disciplinary block" for the production of subjected selves ("good student" subject). Her study was conducted in New Zealand. Rather than seeking to know "good" students, Grant traces the concept to the production of subjected bodies. She writes:

At every level, education is fundamentally concerned with the formation of human subjects. Central to the enterprise of higher education, then, must be a concern with its ethical dimension that is with the question of what kind of people we want our students to become and how our practices are contributing to this formation. (Grant, 1997, p. 101)

As I will show, the current discourse and practice of higher education reform in Nepal has led to the construction of "lucky", "good", and "productive" students. Instead of seeking to discover such a "lucky" or "good" student in objective light, I seek to examine how the discourse of higher education constructs these categories. Based on the above-cited scholars' insights, these names given to the students are then to be approached through the understanding of higher education as a disciplinary institution which fosters these new subjectivities. The "good" student is discursive, that is, a discursive practice around higher education. One way I understand the construction of the "good" student is by observing the techniques and mechanisms of power, mainly governmentality, through which the highly ambiguous notion of "ram-ra" [good] or "utkrista" [outstanding] student subjects are constructed in Nepal.

In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault argues that discipline makes individuals

(Foucault, 1979, p. 170). In this sense, the modern “educated” subject is a product of disciplining. According to this theory, central to this training process is the way it focuses attention on us individually or collectively as an object of control and knowledge (see Taylor, 2011, p. 133). While discourse theory and method were one way to read the bombastic texts and documents concerning higher education reform, I found governmentality as a technique of power useful for complementing the task of studying how the meanings of “good” students are constructed through techniques and the mechanism of control the new “government” brings. The new “government” “is not just the political structures or the management of states; rather, it is designated in a way in which the conduct of individuals or of groups might be directed” (Foucault, in Rabinow, 1982, p. 341). Peters et al apply Foucault’s concept of “governmentality” to gain an understanding of the reform as an “art of government” or a particular “rule” (2000, p. 112). Marshall applies governmentality to critique liberal education, mainly the notions of identity, “personal autonomy” and authority, as well as other positivist ideas used to understand human progress through education.

Drawing on Foucault’s genealogy of prison, Peters et al trace the present policy shift to 16th century Europe, when the notion of the centralization of government emerged and how it changed over time to “technologies of the self, technologies of production and technologies of sign systems” (ibid, p. 113).

In New Zealand we note educational legislation that requires all education to have a vocational emphasis –hence any distinction between traditional views of liberal and vocational occupation...becomes lost, and subsequently, any distinction between education and training becomes occluded. (ibid)

This resonates with Nepal’s recent shift in emphasis from a freely accessible liberal education to more technical and vocationally oriented education, requiring the students to secure vocational skills through stringent entrance examinations that rely on their test scores and financial resources. In this sense, as the above authors argue, the ongoing higher education reform is to be read as a rhetoric of education becoming a choice and the “truths” about the government assuring freedom to individuals through increased economic returns through employment.

2.11 Foucault and Genealogy

To the decentering operated by the Nietzschean genealogy, it opposed the search for an original foundation that would make rationality the *telos* of mankind, and link the whole history of thought to the preservation of this rationality, to the maintenance of this teleology, and to the ever necessary return to this foundation. (Foucault, 2002)⁷

The Second Higher Education Project report begins with a brief statement: the “old order” breaks down and the “open moment” begins. While reviewing the policy, I realized that historical contexts were so important that they produced meanings to social realities. While interpreting Foucault’s archaeological approach to discourse in the earlier section, the discourse of higher education reform was a work of reason which does not become progressively truer, better or worse (cf. Scheurich and McKenzie, 2005, p. 847). In so doing, I treat the discourse of higher education reform as a work of reason not emerging rationally or logically, thus, requiring me to historicize it. It is at this time that Foucault’s genealogical approach became relevant. Following Scheurich and McKenzie (2005) and Mahon (1992, 1993), I connect Foucault’s archaeological method to genealogy as a “bridge”. I apply archaeology as a methodology/analysis of discursive practice and genealogy as the tactics or tool [that is the study of technique or mechanism of power/knowledge]. What a “genealogy” is must be made further clear.

First, if according to Foucault, genealogy is a process through which truth and knowledge are produced, I could not help thinking about applying this method to locate the present understanding of higher education as premised on big events of history. Second, in his archaeological approach (discourse), Foucault moves away from earlier understanding of discourse as the study of language and mere stretch of texts to modes of organization of thoughts, and such things that constitute knowledge in certain time and context. This required me to place the reform in specific contexts and reject the master narrative of history as progress. If it is true, as Foucault asserts, that the discourse is a “ground of thought on which at a particular time some statements – and not others – will count as knowledge” (Mills, 1997, p. 56), then I thought, genealogy is the way to trace the discourse back in time.

It must be made clear that genealogy rejects continuities. It rejects universal

⁷ In *The Archaeology of Knowledge*.

truths and the relentless progress of humanity. It does not seek to understand reason as marching forward in an orderly fashion but in chaos and bursts. Genealogy, thus, destabilizes the stable foundation for understanding, or one knowledge and one truth. It examines how the human body becomes the “play of historical forces” (Foucault, in Smart, 1985, p. 57). Genealogy uncovers the knowledge of the subjugated and those whose voices are silenced by reason and totalitarian systems of thoughts.

Another way of applying genealogy is to see how it offers a method to interconnect the previous concepts and theories discussed (discourse, power/knowledge/governmentality). To make it simple at the outset, I understand genealogy as a technique to trace the emergence of the present policy discourse of higher education reform. This approach is called critical interpretive historical analysis (see Dean, 1994).

Genealogy as “a way of writing history” was introduced first by Nietzsche and extended by Foucault (Saar, 2002, ed.). It is a radical way of critiquing moral attitudes, values, ideals, norms and other institutionalized practices of thinking and acting. It is also a way of critiquing language (ibid, p. 233). The inadequacy of applying linguistic discourse I outlined earlier also calls for applying genealogy as an alternative discourse.

In his book *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969; 2002), Foucault uses the approach of discursive formation. Archaeology is concerned with “discursive rules of formation of objects” and genealogy as “contingent historical condition of existence” (Mahon, 1993, p. 135). To recall once again, Foucault’s discursive approach is not about traditional historical approach that can “memorize the monuments of the past” or “transform them into documents” (ibid, p. 9). Extracting information or “reconstituting” the history from the document is not what Foucault’s discursive approach is about. Foucault’s genealogy is interpreted as “critical interpretive historical sociology” (Dean, 1994), a “critical methodology” (Saar, 2002) or “a way of problematizing something” (Geuss, 2002, p. 211).

Dreyfus and Rabinow (1982) provide the simplest definition of genealogy. They argue that the task of the genealogist is to “destroy the primacy of origins; of unchanging truths...it seeks to destroy the doctrines of development and progress” (ibid, p. 109). Following Dean (1994), Saar (2002), Geuss (2002), Dreyfus and Rabinow (1982), and Blackman, Cromby, Hook, Papadopolous and Valerie (2008), genealogy can be applied as a tool to trace the historical emergence of the present truth. According to Geuss, this approach rejects “binding truth or falsity” (ibid, p. 211). In Saar’s sense, genealogy “expose[s]

the historical conditions of our being” (ibid, p. 233). Saar discusses the application of Foucault’s genealogy as: 1) “a mode of writing history”, 2) “a mode of evaluation or critique”, and 3) “textual practice” or a “kind of writing” (ibid). Foucault’s genealogy is inspired by Nietzsche. In adopting genealogy as my method, I do not, for example, seek to make the gods in Nepal or some mysterious force like Gadhimai animal sacrifice as the “father of evil” [Nietzsche, 1956, p. 151]. While Marxist theoreticians may limit their understanding of this form of social arrangement in Nepal to scarcity and wants, in a Foucauldian sense, it can be seen as a discursive practice of giving gifts to the impersonal gods without expecting any material return in the capitalist ‘exchange’ logic. Framing Nepal within the capitalist development logic or technological salvation is almost an impossible task here. The Gadhimai animal sacrifice in the rural hinterlands of Nepal and the Valentine Day events in pockets of Kathmandu defy any hegemonic and unified readings of modernity as one-sided Western phenomena spreading all over the world or the transnational flows of commodities and values. Genealogy moves beyond such ideological foundation of knowledge to more innovative approaches to knowledge construction via *self* and *subjectivity*. More specifically, genealogy traces the relationship between discourse, knowledge and power and their “practices concerned with the regulation of bodies, the government of conduct, and the formation of the self” (Dean, 1994, in Ritzer, 2011, p. 614). To put it more simply, genealogy is a particular way of analysing discourse.

To start with the basic, genealogy traces the history of ideas. It allows the possibility of applying interpretive historical resources to trace how the present discourse of higher education reform came about. In the following section, I discuss international education research inspired by this approach (genealogy) to make it clearer:

Whereas previous critical scholarship has treated knowledge as part of the epi-phenomena (secondary) through which social material practices are formed, Foucault’s work is illustrative of a move within critical traditions to focus on knowledge as a material element in social life. (Popkewitz and Brennan, 1998, p. 4)

Popkewitz and Brennan locate the problematic of reform through a Foucauldian genealogical analysis. In their co-authored work, *Cultural history and education: Critical essays on knowledge and schooling* (2001), they distinguish Foucault’s genealogy from modernist history. In Popkewitz’s sense, conventional (or modernist) history is to be read as a fiction since it is a “fabricated” work of historians. The construction of knowledge that is tied to such history would then blur

the possibility of knowing the reform. Contrary to the modernist versions of history, Popkewitz presents a Foucauldian genealogy. This approach, according to him, allows one to locate “systems of reason” (ibid), or to understand how “organization” and “changes in idea” occur over time (Popkewitz, 2011, p. 1). In the Western context, Popkewitz traces this to social administration and social reform in 19th century Western Europe and North America. He shows how those systems of reason subsequently became the knowledge and practice around education reform globally through their spread to other colonized countries.

Popkewitz writes how the notion of the “good citizen”, or the “self-responsible” or “self-motivated citizen” came into being from the rise of the modern states through “systems of reason”. He traces those “systems of reason” to the American and French revolutions. Popkewitz also traces the separation of the public and private, state and civil society to neo-liberalism. Following his ideas, the construction of the self-responsible and self-investing entrepreneurs of education in Nepal is to be understood as the modern state’s administrative practices sustained by the “principle of reason” (Popkewitz, 2011, p. 159, emphasis added). To apply Foucault’s “governmentality” concept to the study of education reform in this sense then is to conceptualize the state through the new art of government or what is called “governmentality”. This approach moves beyond the conventional logic of the state or ruling blocks to locate the system of power and knowledge.

The Foucauldian discursive approach allows one to unlock the systems of reason built into the reform by locating the systems of knowledge that organize the “self” through the effects of power (Popkewitz, Pereyra and Franklin, 2004, p. 22). To sum up, the approach by Popkewitz et al to apply Foucault’s theory allows the possibility of focusing on “reflexive knowledge”.

In *Praxis and Agency in Foucault’s Historiography*, Fendler (2004) draws on Foucault’s genealogy to show its implications for educational studies. She draws a distinction between the modernist approach (mainly that of Hegel, Marx and Freud, and the Frankfurt School) to history and Foucauldian historiography. Fendler shows different implications for educational studies from the application of the Foucauldian notion of “power”. Taking this stance, it is possible to read “power” as not only nefarious in its motive with its oppressive function but also positive.

Fendler begins the discussion by contrasting two types of approaches to history, referring to the Habermas-Foucault debate from Kelly’s book, *Critique and Power: Recasting the Foucault/Habermas Debate*. She shows that Foucault’s ge-

neological approach offers the possibilities for “praxis” and “agency” that are not available in a modernist discourse. One significant implication of this approach to research in the field of education is pointed out in “new cultural history” (see Popkewitz et al, 2001).

While thinking about discourse as text and its analytical technique of “questioning of the document” and its style of critique, I found that the study of text was also about the study of power. In the next section, I discuss this by connecting discourse with power.

2.11.1 Power/knowledge

How is it that at certain moments and in certain orders of knowledge, there are sudden take-offs, these hastening of evolution, these transformations which fail to correspond to the calm...? When I think back now, I ask myself what else it was that I was talking about, in *Madness and Civilization* or *The Birth of the Clinic*, but power? (Foucault, in Gordon, 1980.)

Rejecting the Marxist perspective that power produces the effects at the level of ideology, Foucault has said that “power produces effects at the level of desire – and also at the level of knowledge.” While talking about power, Foucault theorizes what he calls “a new economy of power relations”. He uses the word “economy” mainly in the Kantian sense of the role philosophy plays in preventing reason from going beyond the limits of what is given in experience. Foucault acknowledges that power is held to be always present in human relations, “whether it be a question of communicating verbally...or a question of a love relationship, an institutional or economic relationship” (Foucault, 1987, p. 122). Power, in Foucault’s sense, is a strategic field of access one enjoys to tell the truth. It is a name given to a strategic situation in which one tells the truth. In taking this stance, the formulation like an “open moment”, to be read as a strategic ground for intervention; its meaning is hidden in its appearance. A statement like “Nepal is a fragile state” is a form of power that international development agencies alone enjoy the exclusive privilege (access to knowledge) to proclaim. The key problem in this study is unequal power relations between those who claim to possess the knowledge of doing the reform and those to be reformed. This form of unequal power relations is explained more clearly by Escobar (1995).

Foucault’s work on the dynamics of discourse and power in the representation

of social reality, in particular, has been instrumental in unveiling the mechanisms by which a certain order of discourse produces permissible modes of being and thinking while disqualifying and even making others impossible. (ibid, p. 5)

Theorizing higher education as discourse, power/knowledge allows me to move away from the conventional logic of power as king, state, ruling block, high caste Brahmin or a rich man to discursive “regimes of truths”. The discursive regimes of truth are the “systems of reason” or “principles of reason” constituted in the effects of power and knowledge (see Popkewitz, 2001). Following Escobar, theorizing higher education reform as a discourse allows a broader understanding of the reform constituted in the systems of knowledge and forms of power. This allows the possibility of knowing whose knowledge claims prevail in Nepal. Who wields the power and knowledge to decide in Nepal what counts as higher education reform? Answering this allows one to move beyond the rhetoric of the king, a ruling block or the caste system as sources of domination to larger discursive and institutional forces.

For Foucault, power produces effects at the level of knowledge (Gordon, 1980).⁸ Power in this sense is enmeshed with knowledge. “Far from preventing knowledge, power produces it” (ibid, p. 59). Foucault has said that power is a name given to a strategic situation in which one tells the truth. In my bid to understand the concept of power more clearly, I ended up using the following ideas of Foucault: “...power is not an institution, and not a structure; neither is it a certain strength we are endowed with; it is the name that one attributes to a complex strategic situation in a particular society” (Foucault, in Szeman, Imre and Kaposy, Timothy, 2011, eds.).⁹

By taking the above stance, it is not possible to understand higher education reform or whose knowledge claims prevail over what counts as education through the caste or class theory of power but through a complex strategic situation that creates the space to think about it. Taking this stance allows me to understand higher education reform in Nepal through the systems of knowledge/power. To say, for example, “public provision is weak in Nepal” or “Nepal is the 12th poorest country in the world” is an exercise of power not everyone in Nepal has the access or knowledge to do so. Here, the World Bank enjoys the exclusive privilege of telling this truth. To understand the Foucauldian notion of power, I found Popkewitz’s (1999) interpretation helpful, where he argues, power is “inscribed in the rule through which people

8 Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, in Colin Gordon, 1980, p. 56.

9 In Malden, *Cultural Theory, An Anthology*, Wiley-Blackwell, pp. 134—138.

“reason” about the world and self as they act and practice” (ibid, p. 5). Taking this stance, I argue that power is constructed by norms and rules which appear like a government. Discourse in this sense works like a government of truth to structure our sense of reality. For example, the rules for accepting the World Bank grants for higher education reform in Nepal state: “UGC and DOE shall implement, in a manner satisfactory to IDA” (World Bank/SHEP, p. 13). What is satisfactory to IDA is already laid down in its rules that are framed within the problems and practices of power/knowledge around the Structural Adjustment Policies (SAP). Another way I found useful to theorize higher education using power theory is through the technique and mechanism of control that power deploys, or what is called “governmentality” (Foucault, 1976, pp. 124-133)¹⁰. I will discuss this separately.

Having outlined Foucault’s power/knowledge theory, one of the baffling questions I am still left to deal with is where/what is the point of application of “power”? According to Foucault, power produces effects at the level of the “soul” [insightfulness or consciousness] and knowledge. According to Popkewitz and Brennan (1998), the previous critical approach to research treated knowledge as part of the “epi-phenomena” [secondary]. According to them, Foucault’s work is illustrative of a move within critical traditions to focus on knowledge as a material element in social life (ibid, p. 4).

Marshall (1995) takes the view that with few exceptions, such as Burbules, educational philosophers in the Anglo-Saxon and liberal traditions conceptualize power as “necessary evil, something off stage and only to be restored to when authority structures break down” (ibid, p. 23). Following these scholarly insights and reflections, the Foucaultian way of conceptualizing power is to relate it to knowledge, mainly the orders of knowledge, and, in Escobar’s sense, mainly modern Western, which overwhelms and makes others impossible to exist. Foucault becomes important here, in that he explains how knowledge has come to be enmeshed in the problems and practice of power. Following this, I understand the Foucauldian notion of knowledge as constitutive of reflections, an exercise of myself in the activity of thought. The discourse of higher education reform is thus constituted in its relationships with power/knowledge; it requires a reflexive practice to understand this technique of power. This allows me to understand new ways of seeing the relations of power and knowledge and their relationship to the subject. “...the exercise of power

10 In Imre Szeman and Timothy Kaposy (eds.), *Cultural Theory, An Anthology* (2011), Willy Blackwell.

perpetually creates knowledge and, conversely, knowledge constantly induces effects of power” (Foucault, in Faubion, *ibid*, p. xvii).

To sum up, I understand Foucault’s notion of power as a “web” or “a net-like organization” (Foucault, 1977, in Gordon, p. 98), in which there are many players and events caught in the “web” and intersect. Following Foucault, I trace the concept of power/knowledge to that “web”, a discursive space or a vast universe of time. In other words, I understand the notion of power as existing within numerous domains of knowledge. According to Foucault, no one really owns this form of power or is in control of it; rather, one is caught in the web. Power is employed and exercised through this web. In the specific context of Nepal, this web is the space created by the discourse of development to think of education in terms of economic prosperity.

2.11.2 Foucault and Subjectivity

Why subjectivity? According to Martin Saar (2002), “there is a decisive and constitutive relation between subjectivity and genealogy” (*ibid*, p. 232). For Foucault the question of the subject was central to his theorizing of power. Discourse is constituted in the nexus between power/knowledge. Accordingly, the subjectivity is fostered by the discourse through the subjectivizing and objectivizing effects of power. In this sense, genealogy as a technique is helpful for revealing the historicity. In so doing, it is possible to expose the historical conditions of our being (*ibid*, p. 233). According to Foucault, by conceptualizing the *subject* differently, it is possible to conceptualize “new economy of power relations” to what was previously the economic theory of class or caste relations as the site of knowledge construction. The approaches that draw on positivist knowledge and conventional historical analysis therefore differ sharply from Foucault’s approach.

In an interview with Paul Rabinow (1984), Foucault argues how, with the history of different modes, human beings are made subjects in modern societies. He mainly sees three processes that have been responsible for changing human beings into subjects. The first is “sciences”, which through “linguistic generale”, objectivize a “speaking subject”; the second is “economics”, which objectivizes a “productive subject”; and the third is the way a human turns himself or herself into a subject. This is how, he argues, the “subject” of the human being is shaped. I found these concepts used by Foucault (“subject” and “subjectivity”) helpful to critically reflect on how the students in Nepal come to be categorized in official policy discourse as “disadvantaged” and in

the practice domains as “good”, “lucky”, “educated”, “productive” and “employable”. The other is to understand the national goal of education in Nepal that seeks to place education and graduates in relations to “economic production”. In Foucault’s sense, this is how the human beings are made the subjects of economic production. According to him, the subject is produced by power/knowledge. Foucault makes the concept *subjectivity* clearer in *The Problem of the Subject* (in Rabinow, 1984), when he writes:

...the goal of my work during the last 20 years has not been to analyze the phenomena of power, nor to elaborate the foundations of such an analysis. My objective, instead, has been to create a history of the different modes by which, in our culture, human beings are made subjects.... (ibid). Finally, I have sought to study... the way a human being turns himself into a subject. For example, I have chosen the domain of sexuality-how men have learned to recognize themselves as subjects of “sexuality.” Thus, it is not power but the subject which is the general theme of my research. (Foucault, 1982,p. 778)¹¹

Following Foucault, this study locates subject and subjectivities as the sites of deployment of modern domination that is the knowledge/power of education reform manifested in the field of practice through the deployment of the SHEP. Foucault has stated that within the fields of power, we develop our *subjectivity* – to speak, think and act in certain ways. In the Foucaultian sense, subjectivity refers to a kind of understanding developed by those of us over whom power is exercised. In the analysis of interview materials, I deploy subjectivity as my tool.

2.12 Conclusions

Looking at higher education reform in Nepal through the lens of post-structuralism

The best way I have found useful to approach the study is through the lens of post-structuralism. I found Foucault’s two broad concepts – archaeology and genealogy – useful as analytical techniques for the study. Through these tech-

11 In “The Subject and Power”, in *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 8, No. 4 (Summer, 1982), pp. 777–795, The University of Chicago.

niques, I seek to explore reform in higher education as shaped by thinking and discursive practice. First, I sum up what the archaeological approach is.

Archaeological Approach to Discourse Analysis

Recognizing strangeness in all social arrangements

As an analytical technique, one way I found the archaeological approach to discourse useful is to recognize strangeness in all social arrangements. Recognizing strangeness as an analytical technique in Foucault's terms requires observing the social world in strangeness. This approach is different from the traditional anthropological studies of schooling in Nepal I showed in section 2.6 (see *Marxist critique of Foucault*). Contrary to the Marxist-inspired theories examined earlier, archaeology is an alternative site of knowledge construction. *Recognizing strangeness in all social arrangements* is the key analytical technique that is important in the application of Foucault's methods (see Kendal and Wickham, 1999). Accordingly, I will look at the discourse and practice of education reform that places the humans in relations to economic production in strangeness. I also look at the domination of the global knowledge system over other knowledge systems in strangeness. I understand *recognizing strangeness in all social arrangements* as not accepting what appears as decentralization and autonomy in higher education in a taken for granted way in the World Bank scheme of things. Archaeology allows the observing of this practice on the ground in strangeness. According to Foucault, the archive "is first the law of what can be said, the system that governs the appearance of statements as unique events" (Foucault, 1972, p. 145). In this sense, "decentralization" is an imagined condition of higher education or, in Escobar's term, "regimes of representation". "Decentralization" and "autonomy" appear through economic and political logics rather than emerge rationally or naturally from the science of education. There is thus no real or authentic higher education reform to discover; it appears through representation – "developmentalism", "decentralization", "autonomy", "markets" or "business" logics, cost-sharing and so forth. All these complex ensembles of ideas, concepts or theories have led me to apply discourse as my main mantra to frame the understanding of the ongoing higher education reform in Nepal.

Questioning of documents as a specific analytical technique

While my analytical technique to interpret what I see in the field of practice is via *recognizing strangeness in all social arrangements*, one of the techniques I found useful for critically reading the documents and texts is one that Foucault calls

the *questioning of documents*. As cited in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, “Questioning of the document” (Foucault, 1969, 1989, 2002)¹² is one of the keys to Foucault’s method. By questioning the *document*, I take a critical stance on reading the SHEP document. According to Foucault, if we know the rules how things have been made, we can unmake/remake them as well. I apply this technique to read the rules governing “decentralization” and “autonomy” in higher education. These categories establish their relationships with higher education reform via democratization, economic development, neo-liberalism, structural adjustment policies and the global knowledge economy, among others. The need to question arises given these vaguely defined terms used to draw out the reason why decentralization is better than centralization. In Foucault’s sense, the meaning of higher education reform that is made to appear before us as “decentralization” cannot be approached in its *self-enclosed truth*; it comes into being in its complex relationships with other events and forces.

Genealogical approach to studying higher education reform

Conventional history has taught us to memorize the stories of the past written by others on the basis of what we are made to think of as continuous development. The discursive approach affords the possibility of unlearning or relearning that fabricated past and constructing a better future. One way I found useful to unlearn/relearn the present discourse of higher education reform in Nepal that appears through the teleology of reason is genealogy. According to Foucault, if we know the rules of how things have been made, we can unmake/remake them. Foucault stated that “discourse has not only a meaning or a truth, but a history ...a type of history – a form of dispersion in time – that belongs to it alone” (Foucault, 2002, p. 144). Discourses in this sense are constituted in the rules of their formations or historical context they represent. It is here that I found genealogy as a technique useful to accomplish this task. To sum up, the lens through which I see higher education reform in Nepal is poststructuralism, and, as such, my approach will be discursive.

An outline of a discursive framework for the study

The lens with which I see the production of policy discourse and its enactment is poststructuralism. In short, poststructuralism is my epistemological position. That is how I conceptualize the reality of Nepal or the images of the world. Epistemology is the study of how we know or what the rules for knowing

¹² In *The Archaeology of Knowledge*.

are (Scheurich, 1997, p. 29). Accordingly, the formation of the discourse and practice of higher education reform will be approached via a complex set of rules and events. In Foucault's sense, the discourse is constituted in a complex strategic situation. This situation is formed by the nexus of power/knowledge relations through which it produces social realities, practices and forms of subjectivities. Accordingly, I problematize subjectivity in the analysis of interview data to capture the discursive practice on the ground. The dominant form of power/knowledge that sustains this discourse in the specific historical context of Nepal will be couched in terms of development institutions that enjoy the access to knowledge/power and the right to tell the truth. The others are global trends, mainly neo-liberalism, through which so many countries fashion their understanding of higher education and which are used as a justification for reforming the Nepalese higher education. But such internationally legitimated policy discourse acknowledges local political unrest and radicalization less (see Madsen and Carney, 2011; Robinson-Pant, 2010). Madsen and Carney, for example, show from their study on youth and schooling in Nepal that the visions and passions of modern schooling run counter to social realities. They show that the two are often incompatible with each other (ibid, p. 115). These scholars show that the policy visions are driven by the *cosmopolitan images of the north* or are inspired by radical alternatives and revolutionary dreams of creating Northern metropolitan dreams in Nepal that include "individual autonomy", "political", "cultural" and "social emancipation", but remain as a *sign*, an imagery, far from their reach.

In a similar fashion, Robinson-Pant (2009) shows how the donor-funded literacy classes in Nepal teach the women "political awareness" and participation in existing democratic structures but ultimately contribute to civil unrest. She shows that the literacy programme provided a forum for the people in Nepal to critique the dominant political structures fuelling political unrest. These literacy programs encouraged the young women in Nepal to join the Maoists. This is where Robinson-Pant raises the need to problematize the term [local] and "political" in Nepal to consider the consequences of the institutionalized practice of development interventions. It is at this point that Ferguson (1994; 2009) is important. He shows how the donor-funded planned interventions in the South produce unintended consequences. As Ferguson argues, this happens because of a global homogenizing approach to address problems specific to local contexts and countries. "The homogenizing results of such representations can be almost comical – many reports on Lesotho look as though they

would work nearly as well with the word “Nepal” systematically substituted for “Lesotho” (2009, p. 70).

In an interview (see Schouten, 2009), Ferguson, best known for his book *Global Shadows: Africa in the Neoliberal World Order* (2006), discusses modernity, development and Foucault in connection with his own experiences in South Africa. Ferguson studied a World Bank-financed development project in Lesotho, a country in South Africa overrun by foreign aid agencies since the continent’s independence in the 1970s. He sees deficiencies in the global (globally-oriented) thinking in knowing the realities in the South and the alleged problems. He challenges the global hegemonic order of discourse, the Western rationalities and a social science that seeks to understand Lesotho and Nepal as no different from each other by placing them in relation to any Western industrialized countries, assuming that these countries ought to be organized in the same fashion as the industrialized North. Ferguson writes that this is the very “impoverished understanding, I think, because you don’t really understand what *is* going on here” (p. 1).

The literature reveals that the international trend in higher education reform in a number of countries involves taking loans and credits from the World Bank, reflecting that impoverished understanding. This is evident in the rhetoric of neo-liberalism. In Nepal, some of it is reflected in the SHEP document, mainly in the economic rationality of higher education, market logic, decentralization, privatization and the emphasis placed on non-state actors to take on the burden of financing education. But in the field of practice, there are complexities and contradictions that do not necessary connect to the rhetoric of neo-liberalism. Thus, the notion of neo-liberalism is not the all-encompassing frame of action on the ground, except as a small experiment where a private sector efficiency logic is introduced in the public system in the form of new types of students enrolled under the “full-fee” courses within the SHEP of the World Bank.

The main factor shaping the discourse is “development”. But there are other elements that include the armed conflict, ethnic movements, the radicalization of politics and the exodus of young people. The “developmental” logic of the state subsumes all these categories into forming a loose script that moulds a policy framework known as “decentralization” and “autonomy” (a further deepening of decentralization). In the data chapters in Part II of the thesis, my focus is mainly on these two categories that structure the thinking and practices of higher education reform. I capture them via the enactment of the discourse. In so doing, I emphasize that the discourse is enacted in a social and historical

context and is not simply a “disembodied collection of statements” (Escobar, 1995; Mills, 1997). As Mills notes, “Institutions and social contexts play an important determining roles in the development, maintenance and circulation of discourses” (ibid, p. 11). In the specific context of Nepal, the institutional site of the production and circulation of the discourse of higher education reform is the World Bank. It occupies a significant position in Nepal for any donor agency. The Bank is engaged in large-scale interventions in the policy and reform of the public education sector, both school sector reform (which has come to be known as the Community School Support Project [see Carney and Bista, 2009]) and higher education (SHEP). The Bank claims it possesses vast local knowledge and international experience in education reform around the world. In so doing, it establishes itself as an agent conducting the reform by placing local Nepalese policymakers on its dependent clientele list for advice and financial assistance. As I showed in the context of international higher education reform, the Bank promotes neo-liberal policies in low-income and debtor countries through its lending instruments. However, the discourse of neo-liberalism is not the only one, although it is the dominant one in structuring education as the search for economic rationality. Neither is the Bank the sole author of discourse and locus of power. There are ideological struggles that provide the space for the implementation of the Bank’s agendas of education reform in Nepal. Accordingly, the thesis seeks to understand larger and more complex forces shaping the institutional apparatus conducting the reform in Nepal, even as the Bank has established itself as the knowledge guru and the most powerful institution in Nepal. This type of power is not to be mistaken with the name “World Bank” but the knowledge through which the Bank itself came into existence. The other form of knowledge is the political discourse of autonomy that structures the thinking on “freedom” or “autonomy” in Nepal. This is reflected in the political struggles, ethnic movements and the Maoist conflict, all of which come together to influence the policies and practices of decentralization and autonomy in higher education. Following some of these theoretical and conceptual reflections, the thesis does not pursue the people as the object to be reformed or that the reform thinking arises from their sovereign consciousness; it pursues the system of knowledge and forms of power conducting the reform as more important sites to critically understanding the science of higher education.

Ferguson (1994) applied Foucault’s discursive approach to understanding “development” in Lesotho via the study of the institutional apparatus “doing the development” in that country by turning the apparatus into an anthropological object. Escobar more clearly explains the constitution of discourse in

the nexus of power/knowledge. Following Escobar (1995), I turn the apparatus doing the reform in Nepal into an *institutional ethnography* in the sense that development institutions doing the reform in Nepal are powerful forces and agents in the sociocultural production and have their *anterior* relationships with those to be reformed or developed.

Turning the apparatus itself into an anthropological object involves an institutional ethnography that moves from the textual and the work practices of institutions to the effects of those practices in the world, that is, to how they contribute to structuring the conditions under which people think and live their lives. (Escobar, 1995, p. 107)

The basic premise of my argument is that the decentralization/autonomy in higher education is sustained by discursive practices. Without a conscious agent doing the reform, it appears through the chance events. I reject the assumption of agentive agent's consciousness in this discourse. The Second Higher Education [reform] Project (SHEP, 2007) of the World Bank currently implemented in Nepal is only a small window through which I see the interplay of power/knowledge relations. Accordingly, Chapter 3 explores the emergence of this discourse of higher education reform in Nepal via genealogy to show more complex historical and discursive forces behind the reform. It then examines its enactment in the practice domain through the subjectivity of the actors. The *subject* is not to be mistaken here as a synonym for a "person"; instead, the term captures the possibility of being a certain kind of person (see Heyes, 2011).

The main system of knowledge fostering the subjectivity for thinking of higher education in terms of economic development is developmentalism, with the Bank as the institutional site of its promoter in Nepal. Rather than argue in a postcolonial language that the Bank is deliberately marginalizing the Third World countries, I argue that the Bank itself is entangled with the problems and practice of knowledge/power to which it is "not the masters, of which it ["they"] cannot see the whole, and of whose breath they have inadequate idea" (Foucault, 2002, p. 143). The World Bank in this sense is not the knowledge guru even as it appears to enjoy the authority and legitimacy over the production and circulation of knowledge of education reform in Nepal. The other form will be located in neo-liberalism, which places emphasis on "choice", "quality", "freedom" and "autonomy" (Olssen, 2005). It constructs the individuals as "autonomous choosers" (ibid, p. 367). Neo-liberalism is understood in the thesis as an element in the discourse that promotes privatization, standardized tests, accountability, competition, school choice, among other items that construct

the individual as “entrepreneurs of themselves” (see Hursh, 2007, p. 497). In the specific context of Nepal, it constructs the parents and students as “heroes” of education reform (Carney and Bista, 2009). The construction of the “hero” is brought into existence through its operative language, “entrepreneurism” in education. The notion of “entrepreneurism” is referred here to mean the new type of students who pay “full fees” in higher education. The form taking the shape in the field of practice is privatization, but the Bank’s policy framework has used the language “decentralization” to refer to this form of practice. Throughout the thesis, the notion of neo-liberalism is couched in terms of the economic theory of modern states, mainly developmentalism, informed by the systems of reason and rationality that constructs the individual as autonomous entrepreneurs of education (see Popkewitz, 2000; Peters et al, 2000). Following Escobar, the study analyses higher education reform as a discourse through three frameworks: 1) “as a form of knowledge that refer to it [higher education] and through which it comes into being and is elaborated into objects, concepts, theories, and the like”; 2) “the system of power that regulates its practice”; and 3) the forms of subjectivity fostered by this discourse through which the actors in the field of practice think, talk and enact the discourse.

Summing up, the first part of the thesis explores the discourse of higher education via genealogy and the second part examines its deployment in the field of practice through an archaeological method. This is approached through interviews with policymakers, administrators, teachers and students enacting the discourse. My discursive approach rejects objectivist and realist assumptions, in that, I argue, there is no higher education reform I am going to discover in an objective light but a historically contingent and discursively produced regime of truth.

To facilitate the data analysis in Part II, I have summarized a range of categories from the review of the literature and included them in the *List of Tables*. Table 1 summarizes the problems, reasons and solutions to the alleged decline of the public provision of education adopted from the SHEP document of the World Bank; Table 2 summarizes key categories of international trends in higher education reform; Table 3 summarizes key categories of Foucauldian education literature to frame the study; Table 4 summarizes key categories of Foucauldian discursive approaches to development studies; Table 5 summarizes key categories of Foucauldian education and literacy literature produced in the specific context of Nepal; and Table 6 summarizes key categories outlined for reforming the Nepalese higher education system adopted from the SHEP document.

CHAPTER 3

A History of Higher Education Reform in Nepal: Rewriting the Distorted Past to Make a Better Future

3.1 Introduction

Taking 1951 as a point of departure in this chapter, I set out to rewrite the history of higher education reform in Nepal via three key archival materials – *Report of the Nepal National Education Planning Commission* (NNEPC, 1956); *National Education System Plan* (NESP, 1971); and *Second Higher Education Project* (SHEP, 2007). These archives are a “collection of statements that we have received from our ancestors” (Foucault, in Gutting 1989, p. 231). They exist as the rules governing what can only be said about education reform in Nepal. My aim is to disrupt these rules to illustrate alternative pathways that help us understand how we have come to a situation where decentralized higher education is a political necessity. The technique to do this in Foucault’s term is “genealogy” via examining the modes of organization of thoughts.

The selection of 1951 is important for two reasons: one, the 104-year-old Rana regime was overthrown by a revolt that for the first time provided the space for development thinking and for an international intervention in Nepal that began to inject in Nepal a new economic orientation (Carney and Bista, 2009, Mihaly, 2009, Shrestha, 1995); and two, a search began for an education policy “more frequently found in the western hemisphere than elsewhere” (see NNEPC, 1956, p. 136). The same year, “democracy” came to replace “oligarchy”. Here, we are made to believe that it arose naturally from the sovereign

consciousness of the people of Nepal. In Foucault's term, the word "democracy" can be understood here as a "birth of the grammar" in Nepal which was until 1951 outside the Nepalese vocabulary. As a political theory and practice of modern governments in the Western hemisphere, this became the gold standard and a marker for a new era providing the historical context for the education reform in Nepal. In this way, the year 1951 marked the first major historical break in beliefs, values and assumptions shaping a new moral truth about the country's place in the world. The NNEPC emerges from the spirit of that time by rewriting the knowledge base of Nepal. My main sources of data in this chapter are these above cited three historical archives. However, I will complement them with commentaries from other sources. In Foucault's term, these archives are "monuments" of the dead authors who lived and perished in their own times. They wrote these documents having been influenced by interests and circumstances unique to their respective times and intelligible to their own regimes of truth. But the conventional historians have established a unity of thoughts and a coherent type of civilization or a continuously evolving history from these archives. My task here is to challenge the modernist assumptions of total history or uninterrupted continuity (see more on this point in Chapter 2, Section 2.6, *The Marxist critique of Foucault*). The method to be taken in constructing this chapter is what I prefer to as "genealogy" – a process through which truth and knowledge are produced. It rejects the discourse of higher education as the work of a sovereign human consciousness. I have already discussed this methodology in Chapter 2, Section 2.11 (see *Foucault and genealogy*), hence I will not dwell on it any further.

I have been inspired by Foucault's genealogical approach but I am not following the rules consistently as there is no one way of doing genealogy. When reviewing the literature in Chapter 2, I found that there was no particular recipe for applying genealogy. Broadly, I understand genealogy as a technique or a particular mode of writing history (Saar, 2002, p. 233) or a way of exploring the "historical conditions of [our] existence" (Mahon, 1993, p. 135). As a "critical interpretive historical sociology" (Dean, 1994), genealogy studies contingencies rather than causes (see Carney and Bista, 2009; Kendall and Wickham, 1999; Olssen, 2005). Given the aim of this study, my way of applying genealogy would be to examine the historical emergence of the discourse of higher education reform. In so doing, I disturb the teleological order of thinking about reform in Nepal as manifested in the SHEP document through the language of "open moment" and "old order". This document had made us to believe that the centralized system of higher education conceived by the

monarchy in 1971 was at the root of the decline of higher education. Here, the political event of 2006 that established a republican order of thinking in Nepal was used as justifications to legitimise the autonomous campus rules. The archaeological approach to discourse is a historical method of inquiry as DNA is to tracing the ancestry/family tree where the records are lost or fabricated. With my role as an archaeologist, I deploy genealogy as a tool to dig that fabricated past. This is required to chart the history of higher education reform and to solve the riddles behind the reform thinking in terms of past failures and future possibilities or the “open moment” and “old order”.

The methodology I apply in this chapter has been mainly inspired by Carney and Bista’s (2009) approach to the study of school reform in Nepal, in that they trace the discourse of community school to earlier times to show how it broke or re-emerged in new and re-conceptualized forms, excluding other possibilities of knowing and legitimizing only certain ways of talking about education reform in Nepal. These scholars traced the creation of the community school “policy space” through the study of *Basic and Primary Education Master Plan, 1991–2001*, *The Basic and Primary Education Master Plan 2, 1997–2002*, and *The Seventh Amendment to the Education Act, 2001*, accompanied by interviews of education ministry officials (on this point, see Carney and Bista, 2009, in Chapter 2). The World Bank had sponsored a Community School Support Project to improve the massively underfunded state-aided schools in Nepal in terms of quality and efficiency via decentralization technique. But instead of tracing the effects of reform in terms of what the government and the donors would want us to believe as “quality” and “efficiency”, these scholars showed a complex set of historical and discursive forces shaping the notion of “decentralization”.

In sum, I prefer to call my approach to genealogy a survey of policy themes, in that my aim is to excavate key policy moments in order to disrupt the taken-for-grantedness of the current infatuation with private sector or non-state solutions to the alleged decline of higher education. In so doing, I aim to show how other possibilities of knowing are marginalised by the epistemic shifts. These shifts are a complex strategic situations in which an event or ruptures develop that come to alter or modify our thinking. These events provide the breaks in thoughts thereby discarding “centralization” in higher education and legitimizing “decentralization” as the only truth. In sum, my way of doing “genealogy” is via examining the modes of organization of thoughts, or excavating the rules of formation of particular thought through the study of the above cited archival materials.

3.1.1 Revisiting the Policy Moment – 1 (1951–1970) via the Report of the Nepal National Education Planning Commission (1956)

The aim of this section is to locate the first education policy moment in Nepal (1951–1959) via the Report of the Nepal National Education Planning Commission (NNEPC). Described as a “master plan”, this 259-page report was commissioned in 1956 to chart Nepal’s first comprehensive and planned development of education from primary school to university. Rather than emerge freely or smoothly in a logical order, this policy moment followed the accident of history when, in 1951, the Nepali Congress exiled in India overthrew the 104-year Rana regime in Nepal with the backing of India. Following the revolt, India began as early as 1952 to intervene in road building and the US began getting involved in education as part of economic and political diplomacy in a country described as a “yam between two boulders” [India and China] by its founder, Prithivi Narayan Shah in the 18th century. In November 1953, Paul Rose, Director of the United States Operations Mission (USOM) stationed in Kathmandu, ensured there was financial and technical support for Nepal’s Ministry of Education for setting up the proposed NNEPC. Part II of the report (pp. 127–150), which is the main focus of this section, recommended establishing the first centrally controlled, single, unified system of higher education in Nepal. The contract for the development of education was awarded to the International Cooperation Administration/Oregon Contract in Nepal with a budget of \$220,000 (Wood, 1964). The University of Oregon, with Dr. Hugh Wood as the chief consultant, was to furnish technical advice and assistance to the government of Nepal with regard to the establishment of schools, colleges of education and the first university in Nepal – Tribhuvan University – in 1959. With this brief introduction, I set out to trace Nepal’s first education policy moment via the following key text I located in the document.

With the dawn of democracy in Nepal in 1950, there came an awakening of the need for education... Indian independence in 1947 and the introduction of democracy there, of course, had a tremendous impact on Nepal and were more far-reaching than even these other forces. Then came the introduction of democracy in Nepal in 1951 and closely on its heels, several foreign-aid programs...Universal primary education, adult literacy, comprehensive secondary education, a great national university—these and many other goals beckon to the members of the commission and their colleagues in the development of this great democracy here in the heart of the Himalayas...Because of the geographic and population factors, Nepal now needs, and will always need, a strong centrally located teaching uni-

versity...All of the colleges in Nepal—all post-high-school education—should be coordinated under one administrative body and directed from one center...The Commission envisions a strong teaching university located in Kathmandu, comprising all essential colleges...The Commission doesn't believe it is desirable for the University authorities to recognize independent colleges in outlying areas. (Report of Nepal Education Planning Commission, 1956, pp. 129- 238)

This policy moment arose out of a particular historical context, or what I prefer to call a “play of historical forces” (Foucault, in Smart, 1985, p. 57). This report, the first of its kind in Nepal, prepared by the National Educational Planning Commission in 1956 with money and advice sought from the United States, starts not with the question of what is education in its own right but relates it remotely through the story of *democracy, development and modernization* that dawned in India and elsewhere as so essential, inevitable, logical and necessary in Nepal. This policy moment derives its intellectual disposition from a transcendental history of reason and progress, mainly the Indian “freedom” struggle, democratization and modernization phenomena around the world as a sign of “change”. It tells the story of how inevitable it was that the 1951 *political transition* in Nepal was a similar historical transition from “autocracy” to “democracy” to that experienced in India and elsewhere, and to which education was understood as being key. A striking aspect of this document, and something that becomes commonplace in later “development” planning literature, is the interpretation of history as a naturally evolving, trouble-free, smooth progression. Here, Nepal's past is constructed as “autocratic” and a “dark period”, thus establishing a moral basis for Western intervention. As I will show, the theory of “development” was the main driving force for education reform but there were ideological interests of the donors who financed it.

This report begins not with the statement of why education was important in Nepal but with “democracy” as being necessary, inevitable and an unquestionable reality in Nepal, for it had dawned in India and elsewhere. In his inaugural address on March 1, 1955, the Chairman of the commission, Rudra Raj Pandey, proclaimed, “Education is the *sine qua non* of success of democracy”. The commission announced that the new policy of higher education (including administration) would be based on policies and principles “more frequently found in the western hemisphere than elsewhere” (ibid, p. 136). Reading this report, at first I was tempted to think that the people of Nepal had discovered policies and principles found in the “western hemisphere” suitable, appropriate and adaptable to their conditions in the 1950s. But soon I discovered that a group of Nepalese administrators in Kathmandu and a few educators had

been sent for training to Oregon University in the US, from where came that realization, including both financial aid and advice, that the Nepalese education system should be oriented to the Western hemisphere.

Foreign Aid (USOM) has been preferred for the training of key university personnel and the establishment of a University organization commission. As the first step of implementation of the university, the Commission believes that this aid should be accepted immediately ... team of five should be sent abroad for six to twelve months of training under foreign-aid grants. They should visit modern universities and study structure, organization, curricula ... finance ... and multiple of other problems associated with the operation of a university. (p.146)

... The Commission recommends the adoption of *centralized academics credit system* similar to that used in universities of the western hemisphere ... another policy [is] compulsory military training. This practice is common in other countries. (ibid, pp. 137–139)

Dr. Wood, the principal architect of this report, writes in his *Nepal Diary* (1987) several years later that, “It was a project, a program, and a revolution...a historical record or nearly a decade of effort to produce one facet of a democracy in the middle of the twentieth century”. Dr. Wood believes “democratization” of Nepal was necessary and central to planning education in Nepal. The USOM poured in economic assistance to encourage the democratization of Nepal (Mihaly, 2009, p. 133). Dr. Wood sums up the problems in Nepal:

There is a tremendous shortage of trained personnel to tackle the many problems – to help Nepal catch up with the progress of the twentieth century. Ninety-eight percent of the people are illiterate...there are only 278 miles of highways in the entire country...it is impossible for the people to use wheels to move their goods... disease is rampant in Nepal; life expectancy is extremely short (Wood, 1987, pp. 16—17).

The above commentary I located in his *Nepal Diary* makes us to believe that “modern progress” was so essential and inevitable in Nepal and to which education was understood as being key. In so doing, it hides the historical context that made possible for the construction of the above truth the space for which was provided by the overthrow of the Rana regime in Nepal in 1951 with the backing of India. The Rana regime had not only banned Western education and prevented the installation of Western democracy in Nepal, but also supplied Gurkha soldiers to the British in India to suppress the Indian movements in their freedom struggles in return for recognition of Nepal’s sovereignty. It

was a deal the Rana rulers thought had secured Nepal against foreign invasion not knowing what was lying in wait. India got its independence in 1947. The Nepali rebels sheltering there sought its help in overthrowing the Rana regime. What follows is a construction of history that interprets what happened in India or elsewhere as “freedom” and “democracy” and what happened in Nepal as “autocracy”, in which the rules of knowing are not questioned.

The “revolution” that overthrew the Rana regime invited direct foreign intervention in Nepal via international aid. On January 23, 1951, an agreement was signed between Nepal and the US on technical cooperation. In 1955, Nepal joined the United Nations. For all of these developments, justifications are varying and contingent. But Wood (1987), who notes how Nepal was transforming itself from an “autocracy” to democracy” when he visited the country in 1954. He describes 1951 as the “most significant” period of Nepal’s history in that he sought to understand the earlier period before 1951 as “autocracy” where disease was rampant in Nepal and life expectancy was extremely short and the events following that year as “democracy”, free of hunger and disease. Among many foreign diaries, Wood’s is worth mentioning. He describes how the Nepalese lived using primitive farming methods in an idyllic happiness.

On November 9, 1953, Wood describes how he flew through a V-shaped canyon, some 3,000 feet in Nepal sky:

..the sides terraced from the river in the bottom to the very top of the mountains, well above us, as giant stairs ascending to Heaven. So close were the walls it seemed as if our wing tips would brush the farmers tilling the land, many of them well above us!...We swept low across the ground, driving away the cattle and goats... Thus began the most fantastic and romantic seventy-two hours of our silver wedding anniversary. We had achieved the impossible; we had reached Shangri La. (Wood, 1987, p. 1)

While Wood describes Nepal’s romantic landscape and exotic culture, in which he showed that the people of Nepal were living in idyllic happiness, unruffled by phantoms of ambition for modernization, he makes the readers believe through the NNEPC, to which he was the principal architect, that what he saw in Nepal was a desperate craving for transitioning from “autocracy” to “democracy”. The story Wood tells in this report is self-contradictory. As I will show, the opening up of Nepal in 1951 through the process of “democratization” accompanied by foreign aid sets in motion a process of scrutinizing Nepal’s “traditional” past or what Wood would prefer to describe as its “autocratic” past. However, a word of caution: not all the diaries and books

written by foreign scholars describe in the same fashion what they saw or that what was happening in Nepal in the 1950s was a “transition” from “autocracy” to “democracy”. For Mihaly (2009), Nepal was reinventing itself through the “game” of international aid (ibid, ix).

Through what is called “isolationism”, the Rana regime thought a permanent stability and security of Nepal could be secured (see Wood, 1959). That policy led to the banning of Western style education that would interfere with the tradition as well as raise Western consciousness. India, which thought that the decision of the Rana was spontaneous, naturally arising and free from contradictions, was ready to offer any support to the opposition to destabilize the Rana regime. The latter eagerly looked forward to building a new relationship with the US after the British left India. This was needed to counter the growing threat of India, which was waiting for its independence from Britain before settling scores with the Ranas. The Indian National Congress had pledged all its support to the opposition Nepali Congress exiled in India, which was looking for an opportune time to capture political power in Kathmandu. In so doing, India would be placing its loyal supporters in Kathmandu and would feel secure using Nepal as a bulwark against China. India, thus, began development cooperation with Nepal, starting with road projects, while the US began education planning.

For over seven years, the United States assisted democratization in Nepal by supporting the Nepali Congress party which shared common ideals with the US and India. What originally appeared as economic aid was actually coloured by political ends. In this report, Dr. Wood does not state the more important and immediate aim of the proposed 2,200 new primary schools to be established in Nepal in 1959 with US assistance was to increase the number of voting booths (see Mihaly, 2009, p. 134). Here, democratization of Nepal was more important objective for the US to avoid communist incursion in Nepal. How can then one sum up the outcome of an education planning that had its own ulterior motives? The NNEPC report states:

In order to make democracy a real success we have to educate our people within the shortest possible time [when only two-percent of the people of Nepal were literate who didn't know how to fill up the ballot paper] especially since universal adult suffrage has already been proclaimed. The danger of dictatorship or civil war ... must be avoided and this is not possible in a country like ours without proper education.” (NNEPC, 1956, p. 1)

Reading the report, one gets the feeling that the Ranas were dictators and were

anxious to avoid a similar regime arising through democratization. Western education and foreign aid were essential but hide the fact that in the background was Cold War politics, which was a more important reason for shaping American aid on education and democratization in Nepal. This policy moment was coloured by the politics of foreign aid. The report does not provide any further detail on “danger” and “dictatorship”, but the commentaries by Wood and others in international journals show that they believed communism to be the biggest threat to Nepal. This report comes on top of that historical backdrop. But that is not the only historical context that gives the report its intelligibility and force: it followed the end of World War II, Nepal’s membership to the United Nations in 1955, Indian independence in 1947, the beginning of the Cold War, the inauguration of a new era of international aid, which was given form by US president Harry Truman on January 20, 1949, when he promised to solve the purported problems of the “underdeveloped areas” of the world (Escobar, 1995, p. 3).

Described as a “Fair Deal”, funds and advisors were sent to Nepal by the US as part of its new foreign policy. It also welcomed Nepali educators to the US who were not just shown universities and colleges or how teacher training was conducted, but were also allowed to stop by the automobile plant in Detroit, Colorado Springs and similar attractions in New York, Washington, the Niagara Falls, a steel plant in Pittsburgh, among others, as they embarked on their study tour (Wood, 1964, p. 249). The aim here was not just to have an educational tour but to help realise the Nepalese dream of replicating modernization and democracy in Nepal.

More recent studies that have centred on foreign aid and international politics in Nepal take the view that international aid is less about education and development and more about being a diplomatic instrument (Mihaly, 2009, Khadka, 2000). The US’s interest in aiding Nepal must be read in two ways then: One, it would not want Nepal in the event of the fall of the Rana regime to embrace radicalism or communism, which was contrary to its foreign policy. Two, the people of Nepal were assumed to be desperately craving modernization. Establishing diplomatic ties with Nepal was essential given its strategic location in South Asia between a muscle-flexing communist neighbour and the world’s largest fledgling democracy. How to stop the advent of communism in Nepal and democratize the country was the thought of the time. Educational planning driven by the US arose mainly out of that understanding. But the course it took created a sense of loss for Nepal’s economic and political free-

dom, which dragged on to the present through regime change, “revolutions” and violence.

Dr. Wood did not agree that the US aid was in vain, “I have called 1958 the Year of Realization – our basic projects, the Normal Schools and the College of Education, had come into ‘full bloom’”. Dr. Wood was an education advisor and a consultant to the education planning commission, but spoke like a government spokesman in charge of all the affairs of Nepal: “Malaria had been eradicated, roads had been built, large areas of forests had been cleared” (Wood, 1987, p. 307).

India had wished that its old ally, the Nepali Congress party, nurtured in India, would gain a permanently strong base in Nepal for the rest of the century, securing India’s interest in South Asia by relying totally on its financial and technical assistance while working as a bulwark against a hostile China. The US had wished no less. Things did not happen as either India or America had wished. As with the Marshall Plan in Europe, the US pledged its financial and technical support to nurture Nepal’s new experiment in Western-style parliamentary democracy, whose underlying assumption was that the people of Nepal were ready for such a democratic change. But the other intention was to prevent a “Communist incursion” (Mihaly, 2009, p. 32). Educational advice and financial and technical support for education reform that came against this backdrop were actually a diplomatic ploy. However, even if international aid was oriented towards development and democratization goals, nothing like that dream was realized in Nepal. If it is true, as Khadka (1993) asserts, that Nepal seriously lacked the effective democratic institutions, training and political skills required to consolidate democracy (ibid, p. 45), where had all the dollars from the international aid gone? As Mihaly (2009) observes: “The nation drifted; politicians squabbled; unrest flared up” (ibid, pp. 25). The present higher education reform arose out of that chaotic historical moment. First, the story of NNEPC needs to be told.

It so happened that in the fall of 1953, two years after the overthrow of the Rana regime, Nepal invited Dr. Wood of Oregon University, following the advice of the United States mission in Kathmandu, to advise on what kind of education system would suit Nepal. Dr. Wood was initially surprised when he received the offer, “I felt that such an assignment was a task for the leaders of Nepal, not for a foreigner”. Later, he discovered that the “natives” in the developing countries were “incompetent” for the task of developing their own education. He writes, “Left on their own, few local educators would ask for help, simply because they do not know what to ask for ... My experience in Nepal

and India demonstrated ... they [natives] tolerated the ‘advisor’ approach because they needed the financial aid” (Wood, 1964, p. 246). This view of a local polity being unable to question or envisage their needs has been deeply contested by a generation of development scholars from Africa, Latin America and Nepal (see Ferguson, 1994; Escobar, 1995; Shrestha, 1995; Pigg, 1992; Robinson-Pant, 2010). In Ferguson’s sense, Dr. Wood applies his “Western liberal commonsense” to read Nepal. Ferguson writes in the context of Africa how “Western liberal commonsense” is used in social science to see “realities” surrounding those countries that do not tell the truth but construct it.

Western liberal commonsense...starts with a bunch of certainties, a bunch of assumptions...that we know how countries ought to be organized. They ought to be democracies; they ought to respect human rights; they ought to guarantee the rule of law; they ought to be at peace with their neighbors. And then you look at, say, a country in Africa and all you’re able to see is a series of lacks – of things that *should* be there but aren’t ... a kind of impoverished understanding, I think, because you don’t really understand what *is* going on here. (Ferguson, in Schouten, 2009, p. 1)

Through an appeal to “Western liberal commonsense”, Wood makes a commitment to represent the subjective views of all the Nepalese and Indians as to how they “tolerated the advisor approach” but his statement was self-contradictory. First, he said, the Nepalese did not ask for the help (because they did not know what to ask for); finally he said, they needed the financial aid. There is a subjective motivation hidden in the statement – the diplomatic instrument. Even if the Ranas had asked for such help in 1948, the motive was to counter India supporting the Nepali Congress in overthrowing the regime. However, US aid and its consulting advice to the commission came only in 1951 from the USOM in Kathmandu. One way to understand why a country that was not known to the world, beyond a few countries, until 1950 suddenly invites the US to plan its education and development is to read it according to what Ferguson calls “Western liberal commonsense” – that Nepal must be democracy, or to put it in Escobar’s (1995) terminology, its “bonds of cast and ancient philosophies” and mysticisms must be scrapped. But there was also a particular diplomatic instrument that guided Nepal’s education and development policy that the report hides. This was evident in the political language of diplomacy but limited to a brief formulation – “the danger of dictatorship [Commission] must be avoided” (NNEPC, 1956, p. 146) for which the aid should be accepted immediately.

Assuming that the foreign aid was so essential and that the Nepalese peo-

ple had felt its need, it created a battle-like scene in Nepal. This is evident in Dr. Wood's *Nepal Diary*: "Demonstration Against Indian MPs in Kathmandu" (May 28); "Demonstrations in Kathmandu Aided by US Agencies, Says Indian MP. (June 5, 1954)"; "American taking part in Nepal Politics" (May 31); Mr. Allen Denies US Interference in Nepal" (June 12); "Foreign interference, slogans and masquerades [ibid, pp. 18-19]. These headlines from the Nepalese newspapers that Dr. Wood collects in his diary did not come about by themselves. Through a "Western liberal commonsense" view, Dr. Wood assumes that all of the Nepalese and Indians "tolerated the advisor approach", but these headlines in the newspapers he himself gathered later contest his earlier assumptions.

This report tells not just the story of education in Nepal but the political battle around education. This report, authored by Dr. Wood, tells the story of a particular notion of historical progress of, in chronological order, "democracy" first coming to Europe and America, and then beginning to appear in India, and how quickly it went spiralled high into the Himalayas of Nepal, awakening the need for education. It tells how the Nepalese were eagerly awaiting for democratization, with an underlying assumption that what they were living so far was "autocratic" or a "dictatorship" and that they were really deprived of what is called "freedom" that was supposedly enjoyed in India and elsewhere. This document suggests similar democratization, modernization and educational changes must happen in Nepal to those which had happened in India and elsewhere. If the Indians were living "unfree" under the British rule, the report makes the Nepalese believe that they were also living unfree under the Rana rule. Or, if India got its "freedom" from the British rule in 1947, the Nepalese must also get the same from the Rana "autocratic rulers". In this sense, the words "British rule" and "Rana rule", and what is called "freedom", comprising the activities of people in Nepal, India and Britain, are no different. Though Dr. Wood was the educational advisor to Nepal and claimed an unrivalled position in the country for what counts as the knowledge to reform Nepal's education, his concerns were coloured by political aims and the sustenance of American aid for democratization.

Scholars in Nepal writing on foreign aid and international politics contest the claim that international aid was meant for establishing a parliamentary democracy in the country (Khadka, 2000; Mihaly, 2009). Khadka, for example, argues that international aid in Nepal was coloured by political objectives and international diplomacy, mainly aimed at reducing Nepal's dependence on China, India and Russia. The immediate aim was to reduce the influence of communism (ibid). Assuming that US aid was so necessary to avoid commu-

nism and radicalism in Nepal, how would one evaluate the emergence of the communist and Maoist political movements, which have installed throughout Nepal statues and statutes of Lenin, Stalin, Marx and Mao? If the aid was for multiparty democracy, it resulted in frequent *coup d'états*, growing corruption and national emergencies. What then was the role of international aid if it was not about the problems and practice of power/knowledge?

Financed by international aid agencies, this report (NNEPC) constructs the discourse of education as “democracy”, “democratization” or “modernization”. This form of knowledge derives its base from two sources – one, competition for political power informed by ideologies, and two, temporal events in history (for example, how the Nepalese exiled in India were “energized... by their encounter with democracy in India ... of modernity – schools, roads and railways, hospitals, dams and industry” (Sharma, in Mihaly, xxvi). Consequently, modernity in Nepal came to be associated with the notion of *bikas* (development) [Shrestha, 2009]. It made the people to think of objects such as roads, air-planes, dams, hospitals, fancy buildings, etc as signs of progress. “Also viewed as a key component of *bikas* was education, for it was proclaimed to be essential to building human capital. By implication, education could salvage the *abikasi* mind. But education had to be modern, emphasizing science, technology and English, the language of *bikas* (ibid, p. 46). Against this backdrop was born the NESP.

The NESP recommended that the Ministry of Education take the lead in evaluating and planning education. The task of educational planning was entrusted to the research division at the ministry. The research division was to work closely with the research divisions of the Teachers College and other colleges of the proposed university, which later came to be known as Tribhuvan University. The commission entrusted the entire task of education planning, advice and research to the Ministry of Education. Soon conflict of interests developed. Dr. Wood and Dr. Charles Byrne were advisors to the ministry and to the university commission. They wanted Y.N. Khanal, A.P. Pradhan and J.B. Burathoki, who had just returned from the US, as vice-chancellor, rector and registrar respectively. But the university commission, filled by pro-Indian members objected leading to the withdrawal of Byrne as the advisor to the university commission (see Shakya, 2009, p. 52). The NNEPC came to an end in 1959. Members in the university commission began to look for Indian assistance for the proposed College of Engineering, the UK for the supply of books and visiting professors from the US (ibid, p. 53).

The following key recommendations were made by the report:

1. Establishment of a single system of “free”, tax-supported, public education system (ibid, p. 226)
2. An “autonomous higher education” system

It's the university that sets the intellectual tone of the nation. In order that it may discharge this function well, it must enjoy a degree of autonomy to organize its intellectual and cultural life without any undue interference from the state. (p. 129)

The commission recommended one strong, centrally-located teaching university under one single administrative body, directed from one centre comprising all essential colleges. It did not think it desirable to have “independent” colleges in outlying areas. The NNEPC thought a higher education was a “capstone” to learning, using a closely integrated “total education system”. A “strong centrally located university directed from one center” was the thinking of the time.

3.1.2 The Birth of Tribhuvan University (1959)

The curriculum of the Sanskrit Schools, Pathshalas and the Gompas, emphasizes languages even more than the English schools. Although instructions are given in the mother tongue, many hours are devoted to memorizing pages of Sanskrit usually from early religious writings, or texts from the Kanjyur and Tanjyur for hours, children recite these pages in unison, sitting cross-legged, and weaving back and forth to maintain rhythm. These schools are not rigidly graded, class divisions being made in terms of the pupil's ability to read rather than his age or how long he has been in school. Often, all children are taught together in one class...Methods consists mostly of drill and memorization... Many of the graduates of the college enter religious work, reading the scriptures to family and other small groups. (*Education in Nepal*, 1956, p. 44)

Between 1954 and 1956, the NNEPC, led by Dr. Wood, made an assessment of the existing education system in Nepal. They discovered that for the population of Hindus and Buddhists, learning was impractical in Nepal. The NNEPC reported that traditional education in Nepal did not position the Nepalese in relation to economic production that was becoming common practice in Western societies. Dr. Wood, the first architect of Nepal's modern education system, who led to the establishment of Nepal's first modern university in 1959 (see Carney and Rappleye, 2011, p. 1), stated in the report that the Sanskrit and Buddhist education prevalent in Nepal until then were unhelpful for democratization and modernization. The report pointed out that the previous system

of education compelled all categories of students [without individuation] to memorize voluminous texts from Sanskrit and Buddhist religious literatures in “unison”, “sitting cross-legged”, and “weaving back and forth” “in rhythm” in the Hindu ashrams and Buddhist monasteries. The NNEPC reported that education in Nepal must be oriented to economic production to “catch-up with the modern progress of the 20th century” (NNEPC, 1956). One of the key problems for why the Buddhist and Hindus version of education was unsuitable to Nepal was that they lacked knowledge of science (Western).

A rudimentary idea of education in the time preceding 1950 is required here. The earliest institutions of learning in Nepal that continues to this day, albeit in a modified form, is *Gurukul* [teacher’s domain] which places emphasis on the production of spiritual person expected to reap the fruit of his toil on earth in heaven. This form of education is conducted in Sanskrit, world’s oldest language, or what is known as “nobody’s mother tongue”, and is ironically the least spoken (Ramaswamy 1999). The Sanskrit epics have textual traditions with their sources as the Vedic texts composed between ca. 1500 BCE and ca. 500–400 BCE (Witzel, 2005). It continues to this day in Nepal under the Mahendra Sanskrit University established in 1986 with the aim of producing Sanskrit scholars, promoting national culture, “Yogic sciences” and “naturopathy” (as stated by Nepal Sanskrit University in its mission statement).

One of the techniques involved in reading the Sanskrit texts is moving hands and fingers to coordinate sound [matching the rhythm and modulation as directed by the teacher and the texts]. In so doing, the readers brought the deity to mind (Laurie, 2005). When the students finished this form of education, they became pundits or priests. Their role was to discipline the mass (entire population) to bring the god to mind. That form of mass disciplining dominated Nepal before 1950 which led to the production of priesthood and to some extent government bureaucrats (see *Education in Nepal*, 1956, *ibid*, p. 26). The most common in Nepal even to this day is the *Bhagavat Puran*, a medieval Sanskrit text comprising 335 chapters (ca. 9th century CE) [Theodor 2007]. Other areas of learning included in colophons were *Vedic Samhitas*, the epics, *Puranas*, lyrics and dramas, grammar, mathematics, rhetoric, fine arts, music, politics, astrology, *dhanurveda* (art of war, or weaponry), among others (Regmi, 1965). During the 6th and 7th century, several Chinese monks and Indian scholars came to study at the Buddhist monasteries and Hindu ashrams (Shakya 2009; Bista, 2011). Before the Lichhavi, there is an account of a powerful Kirat empire in Nepal. Disciplining in that period is unknown, neither the scope of this study. There are accounts of several Indian scholars who came to Nepal in

the 11th century following the Islamic invasion in India to learn Sanskrit. In his compilation of education reports and recommendations, Sharma (2008) refers to three types of educational institutions prevalent in Nepal between 11th and 17th century, namely, Shaivist, Vaisnavist and Buddhists (ibid, p. 639).

Despite such a long history of Sanskrit and Buddhist education, only the modern education conducted in English came to be associated with *bikas* (see Shrestha, 2009). For it to be modern, it had to be organized only in English even though it was “nobody’s mother tongue” in Nepal. This is how the emphasis on the Western language, science and technology gained ground after 1951. Against this historical backdrop, Shrestha explains how the modern education system was born in Nepal.

Sanskrit, previously the language of the learned as well as the language of Hinduism, was generally regarded as a deterrent to *bikas*. For example, modern science taught us that the earth was round, contrary to what our parents had told us. Suddenly, we began to reject everything they had taught us as being defective, including their deep-rooted experiences. Such devaluation of indigenous knowledge created a big knowledge void...Educated children were viewed as future agents of *bikas* whereas our parents were usually seen as barriers to *bikas*. (Shrestha, 2009, p. 46)

The NNEPC report tells of why education in the period preceding 1951 in Nepal was totally unsuitable for modern needs. “The Buddhist curriculum of the Gompas was designed for training religious leaders of the Buddhist faith, and to lesser extent for training in the practical needs of everyday life” (ibid, p. 45). Second, the form of disciplining involved no mechanism of grading or division of schools, students, or of classrooms and uniforms. Neither did it value the age of students, or their time or ability to learn. As Shrestha explains, in the eyes of the *bikasis*, early Sanskrit and Buddhist education was found to be unhelpful and unproductive. “It was considered archaic and primitive” (Shrestha, 2009, p. 46). The NNEPC sums up the final problem of that form of disciplining in terms of the curriculum that prepared the graduates not for the world of work but for religious work. The most baffling problem of early education in Nepal pointed out in the report was that it constructed heaven (not the world) as the ultimate place to be through a “spiritual nourishment” of the soul and by painting an “apocryphal vision of hell” (ibid, p. 45).

What follows from the above advice that Dr. Wood gave to the Nepalese government is a new form of education – an education that would prepare the Nepalese for the world of work, having the clear purpose of living in the world. This was a radical departure from how the Nepalese understood what

they call “reaping the fruits of toil on earth in heaven”. The committee finally recommended that graduates should develop certain craftsmanship skills, engage in the production of material goods, become self-sufficient and meet their basic needs of life. The new education system thus began to cultivate the utility aspects of the body or, to put it in Foucault’s own words, “fecundity of labor”. For example, as mentioned in the report, how much yarn a person could spin in a day became important measure of bodily utility rather than how many pages or verses a student could recite from holy books. In the Foucauldian sense, the new discourse of education shifted the salvation-oriented truth of living in Nepal to “worldly aims” (Foucault, in Rabinow, 1984, p. 334).

It was a question no longer of leading people to their salvation in the next world but, rather, ensuring it in this world. And in this context, the word “salvation” takes on different meanings: health, wellbeing (that is, sufficient wealth, standard of living), security, protection against accidents. (ibid, p. 34)

This shift in the order of knowledge is made evident in the statement the chairman of the commission, Sardar Rudra Raj Pandey, made in his inaugural address on March 22, 1954, to the secretariat of the government: “The educational programme to be formulated should enlighten the very depths of Nepal’s soul and enrich it with the scientific knowledge of modern times to make the country self-sufficient in every way” (ibid, p. 2).

With that mission and vision, on May 27, 1959, the Tribhuvan University Act was passed, according to which all higher education institutions in Nepal were to be organized and coordinated under a single autonomous university through a “politically neutral” board or commission. The NNEPC defined a university as the “highest national seat of learning” – one that “must enjoy a degree of autonomy to organize its intellectual life without any undue interference from the State” (ibid, p. 129). As I show in the Policy Moment II, that understanding of “autonomous university” free from state interference was suddenly reversed and came under the direct interference of the government.

Reading this document does not shed light on the “suspicion, distrust, jealousy and intrigue” that marked this policy moment. As Shakya (2009b) notes, the Nepalese planners remained divided on the beliefs they had about India and the US. Some favoured American guidance and others, Indian support (ibid, p. 55). In 1952, India and the US agreed to help in road and education development respectively. By 1959, the US withdrew its support for university development and India stepped in both as a financier and advisor. Soon, the

king of Nepal was to organize a coup, beginning educational planning anew. This will be discussed in the next section.

To sum up, with the understanding of history as a transformation from “autocracy” to “democracy” and international aid as a solution to the purported educational neglect and developmental challenges, the NNEPC had thought that it had laid down one single, original, everlasting and final foundation for education in Nepal, as if that would last forever. But there was a betrayal of this ideal. Those great and courageous ideas and pronouncements fell apart amid an unexpected course that subsequent events took.

3.2 Reinventing Policy Moment II (1960–1990) via the National Education System Plan (NESP, 1971–1976)

3.2.1 Introduction

The aim of this section is to locate the second education policy moment in Nepal between 1960 and 1990 via the National Education System Plan (NESP), which came about not as a continuity to the NNEPC but out of the discontinuity, or from a changing historical context. Thus, from the ruins of the NNEPC emerged one more rationale for education reform. This period is important for being the first time the notion of administrative control [“centralization”] of education under a single unified leadership of the king was introduced.

This policy moment was shaped by a number of circumstances, mainly the unexpected outcomes of Western-financed democratization that ended up producing domestic political upheavals, which King Mahendra believed left Nepal more vulnerable than secure from its neighbours in the wake of Chinese occupation of Tibet, and the war between India and China. King Mahendra believed it was essential and inevitable to secure what his great grandfather, who had shaped modern Nepal, once said: Nepal was a fragile nation wedged like a yam between two big boulders. King Mahendra thought Nepal’s neutrality with China and India was necessary to avoid wars and annexation. The intraparty squabbles, leading to a dismissal of parliamentary democracy and the introduction of a one-party rule, provided the immediate spark for this policy moment to emerge. The planning began soon after 1960, when King

Mahendra dissolved the parliament. This time, instead of the academics from the United States, a UNESCO team provided initial advice. The king set up the National Education Advisory Council in 1968 headed by Crown Prince Birendra, which finally prepared the plan. However, the NESP came into force only in 1971. With this brief introduction, I have found the following statement useful as a starting point to understand the policy moment II.

We have confidently moved towards Panchayat democracy by beginning the New Year [Nepali Calendar] with the initiation of the Panchayat system. This Nepali plant, cultivated from below, is suited to the climate of our country. There is no Nepali who does not know what a Pancha and Panchayat is. The development of culture and civilization in our country ... has taken place under this Panchayat system. Parliamentary democracy has proved unsuitable because it lacks the Nepali qualities which are found in the Panchayat system. The nationalistic feelings associated with the awakening are not as possible under ... a clumsy Western imposition incompatible with Nepal's traditions, history and objective conditions. (King Mahendra: April 14, 1962, in Rose, 1963, p.16)

My aim here is to show how the liberal and modernist scholars see this king of Nepal as an “absolute subject of the history [of reform]”, [as if he] [“who”] makes history, who assures its continuity, who is the author and guarantor of its continuity” [Foucault, in Gutting 1989, pp. 228—229]. The SHEP document make us believe that this guy who died in 1972 centralized the education system in Nepal and hence the cause of the weak public provision of education. Another way to begin is to look at how the Ministry of Education describes the report and draws an analysis within the confines of the report, the language and the grammar used to construct a sentence (see Hayes, 1981), but this hides the ulterior motives and underlying assumptions for reform. Hayes looks at the results of the NESP, its achievements and future possible outcomes by analysing only what appears in the report:

The plan is primarily aimed at counteracting the elitist bias of the inherited system by linking it more effectively to productive enterprises and egalitarian principles. It, in brief, is committed to tackle irrelevant and disorganized varieties of education that still exist in the country. The plan calls for unifying education into one productive system that serves the country's needs and aspirations. The concept of education as an end to white collar jobs is being replaced by a new concept that regards education as an investment in human resources for the development of the country. (Hayes, 1981, p. 688, in Ministry of Education, 1971)

As an alternative mode of reading the NESP to gain a more critical understanding, I found King Mahendra, the “good guy” of this policy moment, who

had replaced Dr. Wood, and his speech to be a point of departure. An alternative reading of the above text means that I do not seek to understand these words and speeches uttered as emanating from a sovereign human consciousness (Foucault, in Smart, 2002).

The NESP did not come about at the stroke of a pen. On December 15, 1960, King Mahendra dissolved the parliamentary democracy, which was unthinkable in 1956, reversing the earlier understanding that education in Nepal would be based on policies and principles “more frequently found in the western hemisphere than elsewhere” (see NNEPC, 1956, p. 136). I trace the Policy Moment II to the Panchayat Regime (1960–1990) by placing the above statement in the historical context. Barely eighteen months old, “parliamentary democracy”, the benchmark by which Nepal was to be known and which still enjoyed a two-thirds majority, and for whose sake the US had poured in aid, was dismissed. As events unfolded, the belief that the people in Nepal were ready for a Western-style parliamentary system remained contested.

In justifying his move, the king criticized the parliamentary democracy that had been the sole *raison d'être* of Nepal's foreign aid and educational planning as a “clumsy Western imposition incompatible with Nepal's traditions and culture” (see Rose, 1963, p. 16). As Rose notes, the king preferred “Nepalism” over “clumsy Western imposition”. According to Mihaly, after the December coup, King Mahendra “out of frustration at the *de facto* restrictions put on his country's independence” began to look for an alternative to Western models of democracy in Yugoslavia, Egypt, Pakistan, Indonesia and some Indian states. He believed that a uniquely Nepali political system would help Nepal maintain “Himalayan neutralism” (Mihaly, 2009, p. 74). The new educational plan that came to be known as NESP and was tied to national development goals was part of that political and diplomatic instrument concerned with how to secure economic freedom and political stability in Nepal.

The immediate aim of development and educational planning, including foreign aid that totalled \$90 million between 1951 and 1962, was directed at the political independence of Nepal, a country without vehicular traffic, without its own seaport and maritime trade and having a geography of massive mountains and “flights of stairs” (Gurung, 1973, ed.) terminating skywards, where people lived practising ancient cultivation (see Figure 1, Nepal contour map). How could the economic and political independence of Nepal be secured to reduce the growing influence of India, China and the West? This question haunted the king. The foreign aid was of little help. As Mihaly writes, it led to a further worsening of the financial position of the government, a weakening

of the economy and political instability and turmoil. Out of frustration, the king undertook a “perilous” move in foreign policy (ibid, p. 216). While Nepal’s growing dependency on foreign aid and increasing influence from its big neighbours was seen as a bigger threat to its political and economic independence, this problem was further deepened by the domestic political turmoil created by “power-hungry politicians” (Khadka, 1993, p. 44).

Rose and others who have written about Nepal’s history take the view that “man rules over his own history” (Foucault, in Gutting, 1989, p. 228).

For the Marxists, the king is the sole author of discourse, or that his decision emerged freely. Others have written that there were political motives behind the NESP, in which the monarchy demanded that the people show “devotion to crown, country, national unity and the *Panchayat* system” (see Pherali, 2010; Onta, 1996). For Skinner and Holland (1996), Gillner (2007), and Valentin (2011, 2015), the chhetri-bahun make the history in Nepal and guarantee its continuity. They wrote a different story of the NESP, through the analytics of hegemonic state power or a ruling block, by which they suggest there is always something dark and nefarious in its motives. For Mihaly (2009), Khadka (2000), Shrestha (1995), (Pigg), Madsen and Carney (2009), Carney and Rappleye (2011), the problems in Nepal run much deeper and are complex. For Mihaly, this could be seen in the belief system, mainly founded on a “revolution of rising expectations” that goes back to 1951, and which was used as an evidence for the need for “democratization” and “development” (ibid, p. 204).

How can one evaluate education in the light of the following developments: Nepal had seen more than eight governments between 1951 and 1960, some lasting barely two months, but none would survive beyond a few months; India and China were at loggerheads, flexing their muscles in relation to each other; China had occupied Tibet; A Chinese border security patrol had killed a few Nepalese by encroaching on Nepal’s northern frontier with Tibet; India was growing wary of Nepal building relations with China; The Nepali Congress party, nurtured in India, and from which India and the US had hoped a strong pro-India/US ally would emerge to secure themselves against China and Russia was embroiled in intraparty feuds and non-cooperation from among its own central members. How could one trace the emergence of the NESP? Certainly, it did not evolve out of a smooth and consensual process.

The ambitious king, who was barely 39, believed this was the opportune time to rise to the occasion. His concern was directed at maintaining Nepal’s neutrality and, to that end, a new version of democracy was invented. The focus was to lessen foreign influence, mainly Indian and Chinese, and remove the

widespread fears and suspicions in Nepal. In so doing, it was assumed that the big powers would reciprocate by observing neutrality in Nepal's internal affairs.

Securing Nepal's political independence through national development programmes became the immediate focus of the government. The NESP arose out of that ideological battle but we are made to believe that it evolved naturally and free of trouble from the sovereign consciousness of the kings of Nepal.

A conventional way to locate the emergence of the NESP is to start with the year 1971, when the body came into force, but this misses out on the contradictions that began to build in 1951. In the first section, I traced the contradictions in 1951's belief system that was shaped by the stories of democratization and modernization in India and elsewhere, international aid diplomacy, foreign expedition and the positivist science that began to scrutinize Nepal's past. It is naïve to assume that the NESP arose freely without contradictions out of King Mahendra's autonomous agency or capacity to reason. For Skinner and Holland (1996), the king was the source of hegemonic power in Nepal, with the agency and control to determine the course Nepal would follow. In so doing, their analysis misses out on Dr. Wood going to 3,000 feet in his kayak and observing and advising Nepal on what it must do to change what he saw as an "autocracy" in Nepal. For Reed and Reed (1968), and other historians of Nepal, the king symbolizes "autocracy" or "dictatorship" and hence is the sole problem. On the contrary, the king was only an element in the field, a pawn caught in the games played by India, America, China and the other political parties of Nepal. The NESP emerged out of that complex ideological battle, or as Mihaly put it, the "frustrations", than had followed a smooth and orderly succession of events.

Dr. Wood, later in his diary, acknowledges how the "political turmoil" that occurred between 1955 and 1960 affected educational planning (*ibid*, p. 161). Wood writes that Nepal between 1951 and 1960 saw seven changes in government under King Mahendra, accompanied by rancorous and disruptive activities by political parties that frequently altered Nepal's leadership and policies. From that contradiction was born the NESP that promised to do things differently in Nepal when, in January 1960, the young and ambitious king who had personality clashes with Nepal's first democratically elected prime minister BP Koirala grew wary of the tussle between and within the ruling Nepali Congress and its opposition. He was intent on taking the power to himself as he thought the political parties were "destroying" the country in the name of democracy (Mihaly, 2009, p. 65). From this belief system arose the NESP. But even if that belief ended in 1990 and only remained true, correct, better or worse within

that specific period, the new policy drew its inspiration from that period in time.

The 1971 reforms led to the merger of all kinds of public, private and community colleges with the TU under the unified leadership of the king, who aimed to provide Nepal with a local recipe for securing economic independence by tying education to national development, only to encounter failure as a result of one more democratic uprising in 1990 and a violent Maoist revolt between 1996 and 2006. Prepared by a national taskforce, the NESP assumed that education was a “national enterprise” oriented towards national development, and fully controlled, managed and owned by the state. What was a meaningful way of conceptualizing education in the 1970s fell into disarray in 2007. There was no unity of discourse nor the continuity of thought.

3.2.2 The Fifth Five Year Plan (1975–1980)

This period further solidified education as an object of “development” and “democratization”, a process that began in 1951. As a phrase put into operation by history, international aid and foreign politics, economic development acquired the status of knowledge and an objective perspective for thinking about education and social change in Nepal. From that moment in time, when it was discovered, education took on its new meaning of “development” and continued to the present as a discursive practice. Drafted in an interim period of the NESP, the Fifth Five Year Plan incorporated education into the national development plan in 1975. Constituted through new laws of truth, “development” became the cornerstone of education policy and an interpretive grid to denote Nepal as “least developed” or “poor”. The materials I located to construct this section include a discussion paper written by a former rector of Tribhuvan University, Kamal Prakash Malla. I found this paper, entitled “Higher Education in the Sixth Five-Year Plan, An Approach Paper” (March, 1979), in the archive section of Tribhuvan University Central Library. The preface to this paper begins with a message from King Birendra (Sep. 20, 1978):

The present draft (of the Basic Principles of the Sixth Five-Year Plan) places greater emphasis on employment and productivity. But development begins with the consciousness of the individual. The awakening of the individual is possible only through education. As such, when we allocate our resources, it seems necessary to give priority to education—particularly to technical education and training for skill and employment. Our own experience shows that in the formulation and implementation of development plans our approach should be to utilize, as far as

possible, the indigenous skills, knowledge and technologies. These technologies can be made more productive if proper training programmes in technical skills can be organized. Local resources and materials too can be fully utilized if indigenous technologies are properly developed.

Assuming that higher education was about “national development”, Nepal is currently constructed as the 12th poorest country in the world and the poorest in South Asia. If it was about generating skills for the utilization of indigenous knowledge, such a task was remotely performed by the rules of the global knowledge economy. If it was about “quality”, a mid-term evaluation of NESP showed a further deterioration of what is called the “quality of general education” offered by the TU and a fall in academic standards (see Malla, 1979, p. 2).

Maskay (1980) and Bohara (1993) have passionately defended the stricter admission policy. The NESP did not consider the implications of mass education for graduate unemployment within in its own milieu. It started with the slogan of “National Development”, but instead of securing Nepal’s economic and political freedom, it ended up inviting more foreign intervention and political turmoil. The NESP led to the emergence of educated unemployed youths, who became radicals in outlook, morals and activities, eventually serving various political parties and their interests. Another unexpected outcome of the NESP was politically indoctrinated students, who virtually took over the government campuses, establishing a *de facto* government of their own respective parties and securing a base for the parties to launch their political programmes, be that against the royal coup, for a democracy movement or as a response to the petroleum crisis. Khadka describes the student unions as “the most organized and vociferous oppositional force in Nepal” (Khadka, 1993). The king had thought that he had laid down one final foundation for education in Nepal via NESP, as if that would last forever. But there was a total betrayal of this ideal when in 1990 one more political uprising occurred ending the Panchayat regime and its nationalist dreams of utilising the indigenous knowledge and technologies for national development. Who would have thought that the student political activism would swell up or the Panchayat regime would fall?

3.2.3 Conclusions

International aid failed to democratize Nepal; at least seven governments changed office in eight years; China and India were intervening; and a relatively young and haughty monarch was confronted with a question – how to maintain equidistance between China and India? He thought the mystery of Nepal must

be kept alive. He took two decisions in 1962: one was “guided democracy” (variously called “one-party rule or Panchayat democracy, which was to shape the NESP), and the second was an invitation to foreign anthropologists and zoologists to determine the underlying truth about Nepal while urging them to keep alive some of the secrets, beliefs in spiritualism and mysticism the monarch thought would pay for Nepal in maintaining its neutrality and independence. In the field of education, the most important effect of that policy vision was manifested through the NESP in 1971, when all the administrative control over education hitherto exercised by the local people shifted to the national state as part of the reconstructing of a new political and moral order that the monarch thought was suitable to the local “Nepali plant” his great grandfather in the 18th century had described as “a yam between two boulders”. That “Nepali plant” was called “Panchayat”, a form of local democracy the king thought would guarantee Nepal’s political and economic sovereignty in the face of Cold War politics, Indian and Chinese influence, and domestic political turmoil. The NESP arose from that historical context.

Under the NESP, it was not possible to isolate students into two distinct disciplinary blocks, as shown by the present reform. Neither was it possible to limit how many students could go to college and universities and who were to be admitted or refused; all of the students were accepted through a nationwide open admission notice. The idea was for mass education, mass consciousness and rapid economic development to occur in Nepal. But how did that create a band of unemployed youths and a student political movement that ultimately revolted and overthrew their king? If one aim of the NESP was to produce bureaucrats who would support HMG and feel themselves to be proud or *bir* (brave) Nepalis, (see Onta, 2009), it turned the bureaucracy into a patron of political parties, which remain at the forefront of the struggle against monarchy.

The main aim of the NESP was to make Nepal economically and politically independent and free of the influence of India, China and the West. Stories of ancient Nepal and the heroic deeds of kings, new Nepali language school-books, morning prayers, and other disciplinary techniques and technologies that included the National Development Service (NDS) were included in the curriculum. Similarly, stories of Nepalese heroes, songs and poems that evoked the beauty of Nepal or that glorified Nepal’s magnificent rivers and mountains were imparted to the students (see Skinner and Holland, 1999). Radio Nepal aired patriotic songs sung by popular artists to make the people imagine themselves as made out of those solid rocks and mountains of Nepal and their blood as water that gushed down those mountains and cliffs. No son born on

Nepali soil would surrender, submit, yield or admit defeat; neither will he beg for a crumb of bread from the outsiders (sung by Gopal Yonjon). The best way to secure Nepal's economic and political independence was maintaining "Himalayan neutrality" or what was called an "equidistance" policy between China and India. This required an education system that would value the "fecundity of labor". The NESP, mainly through the NDS scheme, aimed to generate that workaholic spirit through a sense of patriotism generated among graduates. It was unthinkable that a graduate should pursue a global career. All students irrespective of their personal attributes, birth category, learning abilities, and linguistic differences were to be made eligible to pursue education freely. The NESP marked the most important break in the previous ideas of education. As the joint secretary of education revealed during an interview, it became no longer possible for the students to pay teachers' salaries in cash or kinds. The NESP ended that practice for it thought such a sporadic community level effort would not help Nepal develop to secure its economic and political freedom without the state intervention. As I will show in the next section, the present policy regime draws on the failure of the NESP to reason how free education was central to the problems of "weak" public education in Nepal.

3.3 Policy Moment – III

Reconstructing the Contested Present via the Second Higher Education Project (SHEP, 2007)

3.3.1 Introduction

The two policy moments reviewed in the preceding section disturbed the teleological order of thinking about reform in Nepal. The aim of this section is to construct an alternative history of the present from its distorted past. The key material I use as my data in this section is a 132-page higher education reform project document known as the "Second Higher Education Project" (SHEP)¹³. Signed on January 17, 2007, between the government and the World Bank, it

¹³ *Document of the World Bank, Report No: 34916-NEP, For Official Use Only, Project Appraisal Document on a Proposed Grant in the Amount of SDR 41.6 million (US\$60.0 million equivalent) to Nepal for a Second Higher Education Project, January 17, 2007, Human Development Unit, South Asia Region.*

radically shifted the previous understanding of higher education in Nepal from one that had a centralized system to one with a decentralized and autonomous system, thereby creating a new history of the present. This project introduced “autonomous campus rules” in January 2006, with the assumption that the prevalent, freely accessible state-supported higher education system in Nepal was at the root of all the problems of higher education. Thus, my aim here is to challenge this teleological explanation forming a particular way of reasoning.

This project was targeted at TU, which is emblematic of the country’s largest and oldest state-supported higher education system, enrolling 90 percent of the country’s students through an open-door admission policy with minimal fees. By empowering the local campus management, the World Bank’s project attempted to end this practice. This arrangement came to be known as “autonomy” in higher education. The form and name it took was “autonomous campus”.

There are three broad components of this reform project: one, “efficient governance” (governability) of TU campuses; two, increased accessibility of the “disadvantaged” to higher education; and three, the increased “employability” of graduates. The overall aim of the reform was to increase graduates’ productive efficiency in supporting economic growth and social justice in Nepal. “Decentralization” and “autonomy” are two overarching strategies to reach these goals and the names of the new higher education institutions. In the following section, I reduced the entire 132-page long document into brief formulations and propositions. The exact wording and phrases that appear in the document are reduced to font size “10” to distinguish them from the main texts. This document starts with the following “strategic context and rationale” for higher education reform in Nepal:

The political transition in April 2006 has created an ‘open moment’ in Nepal. The enormous popular energy that was mobilized against the old order also lifted many social and political constraints, and the Nepali people have come to feel a peaceful, inclusive and prosperous Nepal is within their grasp.

Project development objectives

1. Enhanced quality and [market] relevance of higher education and research through a set of incentives for promoting effective management (through decentralization first and finally autonomy)

2. Improved access for academically qualified underprivileged students (Dalits, Janajatis, and girls)

Indicators for measuring these objectives: HEIs tracking employment of graduates, cost-sharing levels, and access

The project document mentions three “critical objectives” of reform

1. To enable TU to deliver high quality education relevant to the labour market;
2. Expand decentralization into more campuses”; and “deepen the degree of Decentralization; and
3. Introduce[d] TU Autonomous Campus Rules in January 2006

The adoption of the [AUTONOMY] Rules was facilitated by the dialogue between TU, the Government, other stakeholders, and the Bank that have taken place as a part of preparation of the Project. (ibid, p. 124)

- *Framework outlined for the Autonomous Campus Rules*
 1. The adoption of the TU Autonomous Rules;
 2. Formation of the management committees (approved by the centre, TU Council);
 3. Fixing of tuition and other fees;
 4. Framing curriculum and administration of academic and exams matters (subject to centre’s approval);
 5. Obtaining block grants from UGC; and formation of campus by laws.
- *Framework outlined for funding autonomous campuses*
 1. If enrolment decreases, level of funding will be reduced
 2. Campuses will be funded on a per unit student cost
 3. Design of bachelor’s and master’s degree programmes to be met fully by cost sharing

The overall aim of the reform: Economic development and social justice

To increase the graduates’ productive efficiency to support economic growth and social justice in Nepal.

The overall strategy and name of reform: Decentralization and autonomy

“Decentralization” and “autonomy” are two overarching strategies for reaching these goals.

Key problems identified by the document

1. Decline of public provision in Nepal

This document presumes the centralized management of TU to be the root of all the problems of higher education in Nepal:

Centralized management of TU had been and continues to be realized as the root cause of the problems in higher education. In recognition of this problem, successive education commissions starting in 1982 have recommended decentralizing TU, including granting autonomy to campuses. (ibid, p. 117)

2. Weak contribution to economic growth and social harmony in Nepal

Weak contributions of the sector [higher education] in creating and adopting knowledge to support economic growth and social harmony.

Solutions outlined: Privatization

Opening higher education to the private sector in the beginning of the 1980s – aimed at addressing the decline of higher education associated with the monopoly delivery of the state since 1971 – was a significant step in the higher education reform process in Nepal. In contrast to pre-1971 period when the private provision was limited to not-for-profit private institutions, in the beginning of the 1980s private institutions for-profit were also introduced. This significantly improved the dynamism of the sector. Following the adoption of the multi-university policy, Mahendra Sanskrit University (MSU) was established in 1986 by segregating the Sanskrit Faculty from TU. Establishment of Kathmandu University (KU) in 1991 through a private/community initiative marked a new dimension in higher education. Today KU continues to be pre-dominantly funded from private resources and in the relatively short span of time has been able to gain positive international recognition. Subsequently, Purbanchal University and Pokhara University were established in 1995 and 1997, respectively and were conceived to promote public-community and public-private partnership in higher education. From the outset, these universities charged market-based fees, signalling that they intend to survive in the market (ibid, p. 121).

Project Components

Component 1 is designed to improve the quality and market relevance of higher education by providing incentives for reforms and performance.

Component 2 is designed to improve access to higher education for under-privileged groups, including girls, dalits and disadvantaged janajati.

Component 3 aims at improving the capacity of the University Grants Commission and Ministry of Education and Sports to facilitate development of the higher education sector.

Financial component

Reform grants of \$57million out of a total of \$60 were divided into three types:

1. **Incentive grants:** to encourage TU decentralized campuses to opt for autonomy and small universities to accept formula-based funding tied to delivery of outputs (p. 5)

The incentive grants are designed to encourage TU decentralized campuses to accept formula-based funding tied to delivery of outputs (ibid, pp. 5–6).

2. **Matching grants:** to encourage academic institutions to mobilize resources ... all autonomous campuses and small universities would be eligible for accessing matching and performance grants
3. **Performance grants:** as rewards for HEIs, which achieve major indicators of Reform, 10 community campuses and 10 TU decentralized campuses to be selected on a competitive basis for the above two categories of grants
4. **Student financial assistance:** to address access, equity and social justice

Principal outcome anticipated of the project

- Improved financial sustainability of participating institutions – a proxy for ability to compete in the market delivering quality education at a reasonable level of efficiency

Other outcomes expected

- Increased cost-sharing levels of participating HEIs
- Adoption of autonomy by TU campuses in terms of management authority decentralized to “lowest possible level – i.e., institutes, faculties, campuses and departments”.
- Funding for the HEIs tied to outcomes in terms of increased cost-sharing

levels through private fee-paying students and adoption of other income-generating activities

- Diversity in the quality of programs
- Subsidies to the most needy: “Program based subsidies will be replaced by subsidies based on students’ financial capabilities” (p. 127)
- Govt. to provide grants based on academic research of post-graduate students that supports economic growth and social harmony in the country
- QAA to be established to ensure quality
- Private sector provision of higher education to be supported by funding financially weak students through a voucher system ... (ibid, p. 128).

The social justice component

Student financial assistance

Under the Student Financial Assistance, the project pledged financial assistance to “needy students” (described as “disadvantaged” or dalits/janajatis) at the bachelor’s level for their living costs, tuition fees, admission fees, examination fees and the costs of transportation and learning materials. “Needy students” were to be identified by using “Proxy Means Testing” (PMT). “The PMT indicators will address disadvantaged ethnic groups, *dalits* and also poverty in a regression model”. An “Autonomous Student Financial Assistance Fund Development Board” (SFAFDB) was to implement the Student Financial Assistance scheme. The sources of funding for the SFAFDB were to come partly from the project (\$4 million), but mostly from public sector contributions, donations from individuals, private and public institutions and interest/dividends from SFAFDB’s investments. Commercial banks were also expected to lend the students. A commercial bank would administer the SFAFDB’s funds.

What conditions were attached?

- Students or banks pay all outstanding loans before graduation (p. 89)
- Banks lend without collateral (ibid). (What risks there are is not explained)
- Failure of students to repay loans to result in “withholding” certificates
- Each (bachelor’s level) student to receive up to a maximum of Rs 40,000 (\$540) as scholarship grants
- To meet funding gaps, students could borrow loans from commercial banks (ceiling for the loan is Rs. 10,000 or \$135.)

The introductory page in this project document recognizes the April 2006 “revolution” in Nepal as a decisive historical moment that affected the lives of

the people of Nepal (“politically and socially”). The report begins with two key words, “open moment” and “old order”, to explain the strategic context for the reform. To clarify the meaning of these words, I questioned a World Bank education specialist and the principal architect of this document, who replied:

The open moment referred to above means a window of opportunity. Usually when major political changes occur societies are ready for changes ... Countries cannot develop by continuing to do what has not worked. Major political changes present opportunities for changes in institutions that have not worked.

I have put the 235-page SHEP document into the following three categories:

1) Problems identified; 2) reasons/causes shown; and 3) solutions outlined to reform the Tribhuvan University and its 60 constituent campuses, as follows:

- 1) First: The problem of the decline of higher education in Nepal: The reason given for the “decline of higher education” is the formulation that “state ownership has eroded”. The solution proposed is “privatization” (“Privatization can significantly improve the dynamism of the sector...Example, “Establishment of Kathmandu University in 1991”).
- 2) Second: The problem of the “weak contributions of the higher education sector to support economic growth” is shown in the document as the major problem of the higher education sector, the TU in particular. The solution proposed says “privatization of public enterprises would help improve the economy’s performance.” Another problem shown is “negligible public funding” allegedly caused by “weak state”. The solution proposed is “increased private funding” through what is known as “cost-sharing”.
- 3) Third: The problem of “the widening gap between the quality of public and private provisions”. The effect is shown in terms of segregation of students along income status lines. The solution outlined is “cost-sharing”.
- 4) Fourth: The problem of centralization in terms of centralized TU management. Its effect is shown in terms of “deficient internal efficiency, particularly for the public provision”. Decentralization and autonomy are proposed as solutions.

Key assumptions in the document

- 1) There is no “social harmony” in Nepal; higher education can contribute.

- 2) Nepal is poor because of the decline of public higher education and its dismal contribution to the economy and social harmony.
- 3) Caste system and poverty deny accessibility to “underprivileged” groups.
- 4) The state is “weak” and powerless. The private sector can complement the role of the state.
- 5) Emancipation of the “disadvantaged” groups is possible through greater access to higher education via scholarship and other “positive discrimination” practices.

Private alternative to state monopoly

What is noteworthy in this document is that the World Bank closes off the possible role the government might play in education delivery and proposes privatization as the effective alternative model of education reform while, nevertheless, describing the country as the “least developed” in the world.

Cost-sharing

The “cost-sharing” refers to students paying money to attend public campuses that so far followed an open-door admission policy. “Cost-sharing” referred to increased tuition fees for students going to university. For the operation of this principle, “decentralization” and “autonomy” have been made the key strategy, where the local campus management is given the financial, administrative and academic powers that include raising student fees, donations and other types of funds, generated by the institute through the adoption of a “business culture”.

What happens when the project terminates?

To sustain the program after the IDA resources are exhausted, the Government will need to make annual contributions of US\$ 900,000. (ibid, p. 91)

The Bank’s document states that Nepal has a “weak public provision” (ibid, p. 2). On page 91, it states that this is not true: the government must inject \$900,000 annually in higher education to sustain the reform. In the above statement, the author of this document forgot what he had stated on page 2. On page 91, he thinks just the opposite of what he thought on page 2: the role of the state is not to diminish but to increase.

The Bank identifies one problem on page 17 and suggests a different solution on page 32. For example, it gives poverty a caste/ethnic dimension while giving “financial assistance” to “meritorious students”. There are several ir-

regularities in the use of arguments, reason, words used, language, and potentially objectionable statements and criticisms about the government in this document, which shows that those who devised it demonstrated a remarkable lack of foresight.

Rationale for decentralization

1. The concentration of authority to manage staff – recruitment, promotion and disciplinary action including termination – in the Central Office, which does not have the responsibility for day-to-day operation of the campuses, has made campuses virtually helpless to smoothly deliver instruction as per the curricular requirements.
2. Because of the introduction of the concept of cost-recovery in community and private campuses, a culture of linking tuition fees with service delivery standards is being developed. In this environment, the ability for increasing fees is essentially a function of the service delivery standard. As standards of service delivery differ from campus to campus, the scope for acceptance of a centrally-implemented increase in fees by students is very small. Since the nationalization of community campuses in 1971, the TU central office has been able to revise tuition fees only once (in 1992).” “TU is no longer able to provide, even at the bare minimum level, the resources required to deliver academic programs, compelling TU to allow campuses to charge additional fees. The requirement to seek approval from the central office to spend the income from these additional fees, and the practice of reducing the budgets of those campuses that are able to generate resources, do not encourage internal resource generation.
3. The only way campuses can deliver reasonable quality of education is through increased cost-sharing. In order for TU constituent campuses to be able to increase cost-sharing, they need to be competitive with good private and community campuses. However, centralized management doesn’t give constituent campuses the flexibility needed to compete with private and community campuses.

Other World Bank publications referred to

Next, I located a text from a World Bank publication that explains how decentralization policies are appropriated by client countries.

Typically, after the political decision is made, a country will turn to its development partners – including the World Bank – for support in implementing the new policies and achieving their development objectives. (World Bank, 2008)

The key strategy of higher education reform appears through the word “de-

centralization”. Trying to figure out how this word appears in the document, I stumbled on a brief statement:

When a country finds itself deeply divided, especially along geographic or ethnic lines, decentralization provides an institutional mechanism for bringing opposition groups into a formal, rule-bound bargaining process. (World Bank, 1999).

Reflecting on the SHEP document

Neo-liberalism via decentralization

After conducting a thorough review of the SHEP document, I reduced the document to three parts in a tabular form as follows: 1). Problems identified; 2. Reasons shown; and 3. Solutions outlined (see Table 1). To simplify it, I selected a group of statements under each of these headings. I first analysed this document by making use of Foucault’s archaeological approach to discourse analysis. In so doing, I exposed the contradictions, ambiguities and authoritative claims to knowledge. In reading this material and constructing this chapter, I followed Foucault’s oft-repeated remarks: “Structure of a statement need not be defined by laws of constructions nor limited to only one possibility of use” (see Foucault, 2002 p. 91). I took the whole document as a document of statements and interpreted its meanings at the level of propositions, formulations, words, sentences and everything that makes up statements. The detail problems and strategies for reforms outlined by the SHEP are condensed into key categories and brief formulations in Table 1.

This policy moment created the third major shift in the history of higher education in Nepal, starting in 2007, thus creating the present by displacing and making it impossible to return to the past policy moments created by NNEPC and NESP respectively. Accordingly, I used it as Policy Moment III in the sense that it arose from the most recent breaks in history rather than a continuous development. Thus, I prefer to call this moment a contingent history of the present created by the forces of neo-liberalism.

To begin with the basics: first, this document seeks to make us believe that education must be “relevant to the labor market”. This is made evident in the main objective of the reform as enabling higher education to deliver high quality education “relevant” to the market needs by expanding the decentralization of TU campuses. Here, the relationship between education and markets connects to the neo-liberal policy rhetoric I outlined in Chapter 2 through the review of international trends in higher education. This document takes for granted that higher education must be relevant to the labour market. Thus, an economic rationality of neo-liberal reform is evident in the document. In so

doing, the reform closes off the possibility of imagining higher education in other terms.

Second, the framework outlined for the Autonomous Campus Rules that include the formation of the “management committees”, “fixing of tuition and other fees”, “framing of curriculum and administration of academic and exams matters”, and the condition for the release of funds tied to “enrolment” and the “per unit student cost”, suggest that the reform is about achieving greater efficiencies. Here, a neo-liberal technique is applied to setting up local-level, fee-paying, performance-related funding on the basis of enrolment figures and curriculum development. But the programme autonomy also contains the goal of “social justice”, in that the funding here is tied to performance and enrolment aimed at getting more of the *poor* into the system. Thus, the reform reflects the case of neo-liberal techniques in the *service* of the poor. Here, the notion of neo-liberalism examined in Chapter 2 remains challenged for it does not necessarily aim at privatization; it suggests it is also about “social justice” via increased access to socially disadvantaged students. Yet, on the other hand, what complicates the notion of “social justice” is the logic of privatization or introducing “for-profit” private institutions as being capable of improving the TU. KU and other private models are shown as the examples of reform. Here, we are made to believe that the higher education institutions that receive their funding pre-dominantly from private resources can only gain an international recognition. As an effect, as I will show in the field of practice, this reform introduces fee setting and the development of new privately funded internationally relevant programmes that bring in new types of students who require both high test scores in the nationwide common entrance test and a capacity to pay full tuition fees. In so doing, the aim is to relieve the allegedly “weak” state of its burden of financing higher education. The key question it then raises is how would the *poor* access “full-fee” internationally relevant programmes when they are organized along the lines of the private model?

If neo-liberalism is about privatization, fee-setting and students’ enrolment based on tighter admission policies and new markets-based curricula, how will this help achieve greater social justice? This will be examined in the data chapters. The notion of “social justice” here implies a presumed lack of social harmony in Nepal in terms of the income and caste divide between the people, understood in terms of birth categories (based on who was born to high and low births or who was oppressed in the past).

My aim is to see if neo-liberalism (via mainly fee-setting and enrolment policies, new programmes, etc.) is achieving the aim of greater social justice?

What is “social justice”? It is mainly understood as an enrolment increase or the increased participation of the “disadvantaged” groups in higher education. This is aimed through the discriminatory scholarship provision. As I will show in Chapter 7, rather than achieve such an aim, the policy is actually distorting it by creating new forms of injustice in the field of practice.

Finally, my data will examine the construction of the new types of students coming into the university by giving them new-name “full-fee” students. Here, neo-liberalism works as a technique setting the fee and new study programmes, leading to new elite programmes that serve the well off in Nepal. Because of the “development” mindset in Nepal, the autonomous campuses are using their new freedom simply to reproduce past desires and tendencies by offering abstract, high-brow courses to ever-growing numbers of middle class young wishing to find a way out of Nepal. This tendency will be shown to be evidence in two campuses, in Kathmandu and in Dharan. The exodus of graduates from Nepal is one consequence brought about by the reform.

The other categories are incentives for reforms and performance, which connect to the technique of neo-liberalism. As a form of practice, TU public campuses receive “incentive” grants from the Bank. The incentives are described as formula-based funding tied to delivery and output. It is a technique of neo-liberalism. The reform brought into existence the notion of “competitiveness”, in which the campuses compete each other in two ways – one, their ability to generate private funding through the mobilization of local resources, including mainly tuition fee increase, and two, student enrolment and pass rates. Formula-based funding and matching and performance grants are linked with techniques of neo-liberalism. The incentive grants are also known as “rewards” given to the higher education institutes, which achieve the major indicators outlined in the document. Of the 10 community campuses and 10 TU decentralized campuses originally in the plan to be selected on a competitive basis for the above categories of grants, only one decentralized campus (CCT in Dharan) and one centralized campus (MRMC in Ilam) adopted the autonomy rules by the time this field study was carried out in 2012–2013. Accordingly, I select the actors from the above-cited two autonomous campuses and two decentralized campuses implementing the SHEP for data collection. I also include the interview data from actors situated in one community campus in Kathmandu.

Tracing the emergence of neo-liberalism via decentralization discourse

The original idea of decentralization goes back to 1990s, when the World Bank

launched its first Higher Education Project (HEP).¹⁴ A World Bank review mission that came to Nepal in 1994 to assess the project stated that the TU was “over-dependent on government’s grants-in-aid” and recommended that the university generate its own resources (from land, textbooks, research contracts, and tuition fee, among others). This policy recommendation came against the backdrop of the restoration of multiparty democracy in 1990, and it came to be known as “decentralization”.

As I will show in Part II, as a form of practice, autonomous higher education (referring to further deepening of decentralization) emerged from the SHEP. In Tables 1 and 2, I have summarized the key categories of the SHEP that construct the present policy moment.

This document, which was accepted by the Nepal government as the national policy framework establishes, consolidates the discourse of decentralization in higher education, thereby displacing the previous notion of centralization when the national state was seen as a more resourceful contributor to change in education. I prefer to call this report Policy Moment III because it sharply broke from the two previous policy moments examined in the preceding sections.

This document makes us to believe that the national state and its public provision are “weak” and seriously unable to provide quality education to the people of Nepal, assuming that this happened because of the monarchy (the Bank refers to the “old order”). This statement follows the 2006 revolt in Nepal that overthrew the monarchy, which had conceived the idea of a centralized higher education system in Nepal as if that would last forever (see Policy Moment II in Chapter 3). The SHEP now makes us believe that the autonomous higher education is the only model of reform as if that would also be perpetual. Here, it makes us believe that the SHEP is an improvement or a continuous development over the NNEPC and NESP. Chapter 3 disturbed that teleological reasoning. In sum, the SHEP takes for granted that the decentralization of public TU campuses will solve the problems of the decline of higher education in Nepal and contribute to the economic growth allegedly disrupted by the centralization programs in the past.

In the next section, I trace its emergence via a genealogical approach, with the year 1990 taken as the point of departure. 1990 is important for the restoration of multiparty democracy in Nepal, which led to the emergence of the discourse of decentralization and created the space for the Bank to intervene

14 *Nepal Higher Education Project*, IDA Review Mission, Aide-Memoire (Jan 28, 1994).

in Nepal. In so doing, I will expose the historical condition of the emergence of the discourses of decentralized and autonomous higher education.

World Bank replaces Dr. Wood in knowledge and advice

Following the visit by Dr. Hugh Wood of Oregon University in Nepal from the United States in 1956, with his expertise on educational planning, and his subsequent departure three years later, King Birendra took over the NESP in 1971. By the year 1990, a delegation arrived from the World Bank: “the chief economist and the director of the *World Development Report*” (Wade, 2011) in its Nepal mission. The context for education reform when Dr. Wood arrived in Nepal was the Cold War and foreign aid politics. I made this clear in Policy Moment I. To recall briefly, educational planning aimed at supporting the democratization of Nepal to avoid communist incursion in the country, not because the people of Nepal feared communism or knew about its consequences, but because it was required by then existing forms of power/knowledge systems external to the people of Nepal.

After 1990, the Bank began to influence policy decisions of the governments in many “Third World” countries via a “macroeconomic policy” or what is called “adjustment loans”. No sooner had the wall fallen in Germany and the monarchy in Nepal replaced by democracy in 1990, than a delegation from the World Bank arrived in Kathmandu from its headquarters in Washington DC claiming to possess superior knowledge of reforming the higher education in Nepal. These new technocrats or what I prefer new “doctors” replaced Dr. Wood in his Nepal mission. A cursory look at the way these “doctors” circulated their discourse is required here given their highly authoritative knowledge claims as to how Nepalese higher education had to be attuned to the global context.

The origins of the World Bank lie in the Bretton Woods Conference of 1944, which had the purpose of regulating a post-war international monetary and financial order. The Bank took on the role of “knowledge gurus” in informing policy in Nepal. I use the term “doctors” in inverted commas because the policy was not prepared by academics at Tribhuvan University but by the highly paid World Bank education specialists and consultants, who began to represent this university without being physically present.

The Bank has its origin in a particular historical moment, namely the ending of World War II, the fall of the wall in Germany and US-Soviet ideological rivalries. It started with the Marshall Plan in Western Europe, whose aim was to stop the influence of rising Soviet communism by supplying financial as-

sistance to countries. Even though these events had nothing to do with Nepal, its people or history, they became the reason why Nepal had to tune its education system to that imaginative international reality. After the end of the Cold War, the focus of power shifted to the “Third World” with the Bank as a key player influencing development policies oriented to liberalization and privatization (see Sharma, 2013). The World Bank groups, with the US as its dominant member, began to tie loans and credits to liberalization reform in developing countries or what later came to be known as “neo-liberalism”.

In Chapter 2, I showed that one dominant trend in international higher education reform is neo-liberalism. I use the Policy Moment III term, created by the deployment of SHEP, as a form of neo-liberalism in Nepal. Following Olssen (2010), the emergence of neo-liberalism can be traced to the demise of the Keynesian economic doctrine in the 1970s. Against this backdrop, I have sought to understand the emergence of neo-liberalism as a guiding policy framework for international higher education reform. The system of knowledge here is constituted on the rhetoric of neo-liberalism, with the Bank as its exporter and promoter in Nepal. However, as I will show in the data chapter, the notion of “neo-liberalism” is only one element amongst the complex forces shaping the discourse and practice of higher education reform. Nevertheless, it gave rise to a whole new set of educational vocabulary, such as “cost-effectiveness”, “cost-sharing”, “performance-based funding”, “markets” or marketability of education”, “competitiveness”, “choice” and so on.

At the outset, the Bank’s policy framework contained in this document (SHEP) have several combustible elements and self-contradictory and vague statements, which fail to provide a coherent policy framework or idea of reform. Loosely speaking, it appears like neo-liberal reform project. But in no way does it reflect the whole picture on the ground. There are widely scattered and dispersed concepts and meanings that it is seldom possible to claim with definite accuracy what this reform is about. It is tied partly to economic growth, partly to access, equity and social justice in higher education, partly to efficient governance logic, partly to neo-liberal logic, partly to the ideology of “human capital”, and partly to the “knowledge economy”. Like a Dashain festival shopper in Nepal who goes shopping with a long list of goods, the World Bank came with a long list of prescriptions in this document. First, more about the World Bank, which works like a marketing agency for circulating the discourse of higher education reform.

Recently, the Bank has emerged as a leading international financier of higher education for developing countries. It comprises 187 member countries as its

shareholders (Sharma, 2013). Assuming that the Bank promotes neo-liberal reform policies in Nepal and if that means a market and business logic introduced in education, it aims to provide social justice in Nepal by bringing more poor into the classroom. Rather than the Bank itself as the problem, it is the practice of knowledge/power through which the Bank itself comes into existence. In other words, the economic theories of modern state capitalism are the system of knowledge that has sent the Bank mission to Nepal. This must be of significant interest to the major shareholders of the Bank and its member countries. In other words, the Bank promotes capitalist policies, and its lending instruments become the reason why higher education in Nepal must adopt a “business culture” or become attuned to the neo-liberal reform trends described above. Rather than the public in Nepal desiring such a thing or knowing of its implications, a business culture is in the interests of modern capitalist states and the major shareholders of the Bank, who wish to profit from their business as they dominate international relations. How then can one sum up the World Bank’s current higher education policy moment in Nepal? How do the national policy bureaucrats in Nepal respond to this taken-for-granted relationship between education and economic logic and the markets and business logic in education that connect to neo-liberal policy rhetoric, where Nepal is described as “one of the 12th least developed countries in the world” or the “poorest in South Asia”? This will be tested in Chapter 5 through the interviews with policymakers.

Since 1963, the Bank has been lending to the education sector and playing an active role in developing countries in promoting policy reforms. Since 1990, there has been a growing presence of the Bank in Nepal intervening both in the tertiary education system and in the primary school sector (see Carney and Bista, 2009). The Bank’s policy to orient the Nepalese education to economic development began in 1992 when it approved a loan of some \$30 million to finance school reform under the Basic and Primary Education Program. In what came to be known as the First Higher Education Project (HEP-I), the Bank, for the first time, introduced “decentralization” in higher education. Soon after, it began to intervene in decentralizing all state schools via the Community School Support Project (CSSP) (ibid). Even as scholarly works show how problematic the CSSP and the decentralization of educational institutions are (see Carney and Bista, 2009, Khanal, 2010, Pherali 2012a, 2012b; Edwards 2011), these models, which reflect private provision, nevertheless became the present policy framework for reforming higher education. The SHEP was the

expansion and consolidation of that controversial decentralization project in Nepal that began after the historical break of 1990.

Apart from the scholarly works in Nepal, the Bank's claim to unrivalled international experience in reforming education is challenged by recent scholarly works conducted on borrowing member countries (see Espinoza, 2002; Curaj et al, 2015; Rhoads et al, 2005). However, in places like Nepal, it has established a regime of truth through its concrete practice of regarding decentralized systems as self-evidently better than the centralized system experimented on in the past.

This document (SHEP), which is the focus of analysis in this chapter, was released by the World Bank that was housed inside the former Rana palace, a more expansive building than the national museum. The consultants who work in the Bank draw bigger salaries than the education minister and university professors of Nepal. The Bank is a powerful agency among the 40 international development agencies in Nepal. I prefer to use the term "leviathan" to reflect the sense of its sheer size and dubious presence in Nepal. It currently advises the government to play a diminished role in funding higher education.

A sense of helplessness grips the national state, which has no reform agenda of its own amidst the dearth of financial resources to accept this policy framework from the Bank. The Nepalese people have contributed large tax revenues to the state, as in Denmark, but they live in villages pursuing voluntarism and helping each other in *marda-parda* [during odd times or at birth and death] (Shah, 2008, emphasis added). without the need of the police or an administration or the need for modern Western education and its economic system. Before the Nepalese had time to think of the implications of a welfare contribution, a tax system or even privatization, the globalized knowledge system circulated from outside made it impossible to count on their local indigenous system of knowledge.

The World Bank in 1990 simply replaced Dr. Wood, USOM and their aid mission in Nepal. The Bank's policy advice is tied to the ideology of "human capital", the "knowledge economy" and "globalization", before even the people of Nepal knew their meaning or consequences. As a globally legitimatised ruler, the Bank applies these concepts uniformly in its client countries to assert its legitimate position to inform, advice and set conditions for the release of financial grants. The Nepali policy bureaucrats sooner accepted all advice than squander away any financial aid. The Bank has made a policy scholar believe that the phenomena of the "knowledge economy" and the advent of the "age of new human capital" challenges traditional patterns of governance and or-

ganization of higher education (see World Bank, 2002). The World Bank has declared its commitment to assist in this process. In the specific context of Nepal, it has declared an end to a centralized and freely accessible model of higher education as being incompatible with modern progress.

The Bank is currently advocating for what is known as “new management” and “cost-recovery” or “cost-sharing” in higher education in Nepal by presupposing that the national state is weak and there is a need to “unburden” the state financially. Some of the examples it advances for advocating this policy in Nepal are borrowed from private sector expansions in Chile, Ghana and South Korea between 1960 and 2000 (World Bank, 2002). When contacted, the chief architect of the SHEP document sent me a report of the World Bank-assisted higher education reform project in Kazakhstan. Earlier, during a higher education conference in Kathmandu, an education specialist of the World Bank suggested Nepal borrow models from Chile and Vietnam. Assuming that the Chilean model was needed in Nepal to reform the higher education, the case of Chile demonstrated that the World Bank/IMF-assisted higher education reform led to a reduction in public spending in education. The Bank shows that Chile, Kazakhstan and South Korea made impressive gains in the expansion of tertiary education via an expansion of private tertiary education institutions. Assuming that decentralization is about efficiency and quality of education, examples from Chile, El Salvador and Nicaragua¹⁵ show there is no compelling evidence from these Latin American countries to provide its case (see Schiefel, in Zadja, 2006, ed., p. 20). Cases from Argentina, Mexico and Columbia, cited in the studies, show how a similar decentralization schema has failed to show any evidence of improvement of efficiency and quality of education (ibid, pp 169—188). The study showed how Chile, El Salvador and Nicaragua came under the advice and influence of the World Bank to introduce decentralization in schools, and they finally ended with dismal outcomes. Ernesto has shown that the experience from Latin America is disappointing. He argues that the problems were at the classroom level but the intervention was made at a management level and that the local decision-makers were no better than the central decision-makers. Here, the Bank is not seeking to stop decentralization, even as it fails elsewhere, but to further deepen it.

Yet another World Bank report stated that the Institute of Engineering in Tribhuvan University was a major example of its drive to reform the Nepalese

15 These examples are used by the World Bank in Nepal to rationalize decentralization and community schools concepts.

higher education. This institute had initiated in Nepal for the first time decentralization and a principle known as “cost-sharing” (World Bank, 2002, p.72). This idea of users paying money to acquire an education qualification in Nepal rested on the belief that in the past, users freely obtaining such an education had degraded the quality of public education sector. Rather than a truth that can be located in an academic work, it is limited to the statement through a construct far remote from the specifics of education. The Bank argues that, irrespective of their geographic locations or resource-generating capacity, all of the 60 constituent public campuses under TU must be set free to raise “cost-sharing”. When asked to explain this rationale, a World Bank official replied:

The World Bank was pleased to be associated with ground breaking reforms in the Institute of Engineering during the implementation of the Engineering Education Project, and it also gained valuable experience in higher education reforms through the [first] Higher education project.

Rather than there being a ground-breaking reform, the shift away from monarchy to multiparty democracy formed the political logic of the decentralized and autonomous higher education. This was not ushering in a fulfilling experience for everyone. As I will show, when this fieldwork was conducted, the parents whose children were denied access by the Institute of Engineering contested the above claims. The students and teachers protested. The Bank’s policy made it difficult to access the previously freely accessible higher education after it introduced privatization reform using the carefully crafted words of “decentralization” and “cost-sharing”.

The rationale for reform in this report starts with a statement: Nepal is one of the poorest countries in the world because of its poor state of higher education that is not comparable across industrialized countries. The solution proposed is expansion of private provision through cost-sharing. At the outset, a highly taken for granted assumption of reform was evident in the document. Even more difficult to understand was how private provision would adapt to local economic and social demands or contribute in specific ways to a society and its institutions constructed as “poor”? Would it not be possible to develop Nepal’s only existing public higher education system into a centre of excellence that fully funded and managed by the state? This required a more critical understanding of how and from where those ideas of reform came to Nepal. To answer this, I shall trace its historical emergence through several manifestations.

Structural Adjustment Policies replace Cold War Diplomacy

The Structural Adjustment Policy (SAP) is made evident in the review of the international trend in higher education in Chapter 2. This partly reflects the case of Nepal. If the policy direction on higher education reform during the period 1950 to 1960 was shaped by the United States' international aid tied to Cold War diplomacy, the 1980s was dominated by the SAP of the World Bank and IMF (see Sharma, 2013; Mundy and Verger, 2015). If the historical context was the Cold War shaping the discourse between 1960 and 1980, democratization and modernization (via development) were the ideology [knowledge system] that informed the policy and practice of education. In the 1980s, the historical context shaping education policy in countries dependent on Western aid and advice shifted to a privatization that was allegedly necessary to end poverty. Rather than this being required by the low-income countries, it would facilitate a quicker recovery of loans for the Bank and its shareholders.

The origin of SAP goes back to the “frustrations” of the 1980s with the Bank system, created by the slow disbursement of loans and flaws in its operations (see Sharma, 2013). This problem, specific to the Bank and to its member countries in the West, came to affect the policies in the debtor countries. The Bank advises its borrowing member countries and the countries in debt to restructure their higher education systems from the state-aided free system to privatization, and to introduce student fees and loan schemes through decentralization. As a technique of power, this facilitates the quicker recovery of the Bank's loans. Following Mundy and Verger (2015), the Bank's education policy discourse is to be understood as its overarching response to the debt crisis among its client countries (ibid, p. 6). Education reform driven by the policies that originated in the Bank's concern for slow disbursements of its loans to the Third World countries or the repayment of debt from those countries must then produce unintended consequences for countries borrowing loans and taking advice from the Bank to reform their education sectors.

Alternatively used as SAP or SAL (Structural Adjustment Loans) and originating in 1980, this was the organizational and operational strategy shaping the reform in many low-income countries. As a regime of truth, and with North-driven, big industrialized countries and corporations as its shareholders and members, the discourse of SAP charted out space in which only certain ideas about education could be said and even imagined (Escobar, 1995). In this light, how can one understand the “weak public provision” in Nepal used to justify decentralization in higher education?

To interpret the construction of the “weak public provision of TU” in Nepal in Escobar’s (1995) sense is to trace the discourse back to the SAP conceived by Reagan’s administration in the US in the 1980s. As an organizational principle of the World Bank, SAP imposes conditionality on the borrowing countries. This was also the case for Chilean higher education reform in that the SAP pushed for that country’s higher education system to be removed from state control to the open market (see Espinoza, 2002). The primary motive of the Bank is economic liberalization, devaluation of domestic currencies and privatization of services, including education. The main operational principles for the functioning of higher education in Nepal is “cost-sharing” – rich or middle class parents bear a substantial cost of education to unburden the “fragile state” that is overstretched with complex problems. As I show, in the field of practice, it offered an international transfer facility for high-income and middle-class students in return for four-year, full-fee courses.

Elsewhere, as Bhim Dev Bhatta (1990) writes, “decentralization” was thrust upon Nepal under the rubric of a democratic governance than originated in the genuine need of the people of Nepal. The people of Nepal had not understood its implications. Carney and Bista (2009) discuss in their school reform study in Nepal how the notion of “decentralization” filtered into education policy in Nepal after the country returned to multiparty parliamentary democracy in 1990 but how the people resisted it and demanded a more state-supported system of education. In the following section, I show the emergence of the SAP that discursively constructed the idea of decentralization in higher education in Nepal in post 1990.

3.3.2 Tertiary Education Reform Project (TEP)

What roles do international development organizations play in Nepal apart from assisting “development”? I will begin this section by introducing one most powerful international actor in Nepal, which not only supports decentralization, democratization and peace and conflict resolution but also makes commitments to interpret Nepal’s history. Starting directly with what the UNDP did on the education front would blur how the UNDP constructed the truth about Nepal. This required me to start with the most interesting statement it released in Nepal in 2012, following which I trace back its 1990s Tertiary Education Project (TEP) to locate the emergence of decentralization in education.

In October 2012, the United Nations released a report (see UNHCR, 2012) giving the reasons why the Maoist armed insurgency in Nepal was necessary:

“Nepal was historically governed by a series of royal dynasties ... Traditionally its social life highly stratified, marked by caste and other hierarchies which shaped much of the country’s social, economic and political life” (ibid, p. 3). How can an academic scholar of Nepal read a statement like this? What is a UN? Was it not supposed to do ‘development’? Here is a UN that is also tasked to write a monumental history of Nepal by making a commitment to interpret and memorize Nepal’s past and experiences of a people assumed to be living in perpetual hatred or oppressed by their royal dynasties and rulers. This report suggests that the royal dynasty of Nepal was no different from the French Royal family of the 18th century and, hence, it deserved to be overthrown. The UNDP plays its major role in Nepal not only in the invention of ‘poverty’ and ‘decentralization’ but also in creating an ethnic movement by turning one Nepalese against another through the politics of “inclusion” and “empowerment”. It does so by reinventing the history of Nepal as a violent one, in which some groups of people perpetually suppressed other groups. The UNDP was not just funding the development projects but also the ethnic movements in Nepal through projects creating new forms of social exclusion and disenfranchisement. The discourse of decentralization has its origin in this game of politics the aid agency projects played. These projects incited further violence and extremism in Nepal rather than bringing inclusion and moderation.

When the US and India began intervening in Nepal in 1951, the sole aim of foreign aid was to democratize Nepal, securing its economic independence and avoiding communist incursions. Educational planning and policy was tied to that ideology of economic and political freedom. After 1990, the discourse shifted to decentralization. The UNDP played a major role in this process in Nepal, pushing for the passing of the Local Self-Governance Act (LSGA, 1999) as part of decentralization and democratization processes, based on the belief that the centralized state of the past was oppressive. By introducing political decentralization and autonomous governance, it was assumed that the people of Nepal would get their permanent freedom. But, instead of building a peaceful and democratic Nepal, advocacies like these ended up creating radicalism and violence in a country that had seldom encountered it before?

To gain an understanding of what the UNDP is, I will begin this section by tracing the origins of the United Nations as a post-War II international development agency via the world political theory of globalization, which, as Meyer and others (2012, eds.) argue, emerged out of a notion of the “universality of the nation-state form”, through which these international organizations prescribe for “less developed countries” uniformly applicable rules. Meyer and his

colleagues have shown how, through the consolidation of the United Nations system, a forum was created that diminished the importance of the notion of the nation state (p. 82). Another way I understand the discourse of decentralization, circulated and brought into effect by global organizations, is via “regimes of truth and representation” (see Escobar, 1995). According to Escobar, the United Nations is to be understood via the very ideology of ‘development’ that constructed the “Third World”. The organizing premise for these international organizations is the belief system, mainly modernization through development, as a force necessary for destroying social and cultural practices in “less developed” countries, where such practices are seen as obstacles to economic progress and social transformation.

There is a sense in which rapid economic progress is impossible without painful adjustments. Ancient philosophies have to be scrapped, old social institutions have to disintegrate; bonds of cast, creed and race have to burst; and large numbers of persons who cannot keep up with progress have to have their expectations of a comfortable life frustrated. Very few communities are willing to pay the full price of economic progress. (United Nations, Department of Social and Economic Affairs, 1951, in Escobar, 1995, p. 4)

In order to trace the new policy directions for higher education reform in Nepal that began with the UNDP’s initiation after the restoration of multiparty democracy in 1990, I found the UN’s statement cited by Escobar above important as a starting point. I traced the forms of knowledge and power shaping the emergence of a decentralization discourse in post-1990 developmentalism. In so doing, I found that the UNDP is a multilateral international development agency like the World Bank, concerned with orienting Nepalese social life to particular economic and political ends. In so doing, decentralization serves the goals and the interest of the UN. The UNDP, as an institutional site of this form of power/knowledge, makes us believe that political freedom in Nepal and its economic security comes only from “democratization”, which requires the decentralized management of the state. This idea came to mediate education policy. The most recent advocacy is the creation of micro-entrepreneurs in Nepal after its five-decade long intervention to support the nation state towards creating economic prosperity yielded no desirable result. Through the construction of individuals as self-motivated entrepreneurs, it assumes Nepal’s economic prosperity is assured. As I show, the SHEP introduces the notion of “cost-sharing” in decentralization in the belief that the people of Nepal

have become the entrepreneurs who can self-manage and self-finance higher education.

The discourse of decentralization began in the early 1990s. As soon as the restoration of multiparty democracy in 1990 occurred, the UNDP made an assessment of then existing TU infrastructures as part of evaluating and identifying the reform areas. TU professors were asked to develop curricula for 190 courses, and “experts” from outside countries were invited to review them. The contract for this was administered by the Indian Institute of Technology in New Delhi. Sample textbooks were also purchased from the UNDP grants. The UNDP found that the existing curriculum of Nepal was irrelevant to “market needs”. For the first time in Nepal, education was required to meet market demands. Here, the relationship between education and the “market” connects to neo-liberalism.

Another problem the report noted was that Nepalese higher education did not emphasise generating internal sources of revenue and student tuition fees. “Decentralization”, campus-based management, utilization of lands, buildings and other assets and income-generating activities were identified by the project as the only way to reform TU. As the economic rationality of neo-liberalism or as a historical density of language, “decentralization” became the object of knowledge around higher education reform from that moment in time (1990). Spoken from the system of rules through which the development institutions operate, namely “democracy”, “good governance”, the “political ideology of freedom” and “autonomy”, all of these textual and work practices signalled higher education reform to be beyond the level of their verbal performance. “Decentralization”, as it emerges in this document, sounds no different from the word “democracy”. This led me to question whether one should search for the meaning of higher education reform within the specifics of “decentralization” that refers to it remotely?

The assessment report

Known as *Tertiary Education in Nepal* (see UNDP/World Bank, 1992-2006)¹⁶, and described as the “master plan”, this is a 219-page higher education reform assessment report that came out of an agreement signed between then HMG of Nepal and the UNDP/World Bank in August 1992. This report identified the problems of Tribhuvan University, focusing on five themes – structure,

16 *An Assessment of Tertiary Education, A HMG/Tribhuvan University/UNDP/World Bank Project, NEP/91/011*, Kathmandu.

management, financing, quality and physical areas. This report was prepared by Kamal P. Malla, who was the project coordinator and the rector of Tribhuvan University. The following were the major problems of higher education in Nepal identified by the report or what was not “reform”:

1. Centralized control of higher education
2. Economic/financial austerity of the country
3. Open admission policy for students without entrance test
4. Absence of a “cost-recovery” or “cost-sharing” mechanism

The study found that the earlier periods which took “centralization” to be “reform” were problematical because it was a “traditional system of state control” (ibid, pp. 30-31).

The administrative set-up of the university is centralized. The decision-making authority is concentrated in the top hierarchy of administration to a great extent. Even minor decisions are processed through the central office... It is difficult to work out a strategy of decentralization in a state of confusion created by lack of vision, goals and aims of higher education.

The following were the solutions proposed (what is ‘reform?’):

1. Abolishing “traditional system of state control” to create a “more competitive system with increased autonomy”.
2. “Encouraging private sector to participate in higher education” (ibid, p. 30).

Here was a sinister truth. If the comprehensive United Nations development agenda was to alleviate “poverty”, which presupposes that the people of Nepal are one of the poorest in the world, it proposed privatization and competition as a solution. Is not this rhetorical? Reading the report, I became deeply sceptical about the concept of “decentralization” and the claims to knowledge. The following solutions offered for reforming higher education in Nepal (TU) drew my attention:

There are two broad governance models that the Government can consider in managing the higher education sector:

- a. The State Control Model in which the system is created by and entirely funded and regulated by the state

b. The State supervision model in which the State decentralizes the management of educational institutions and encourages private institutions to develop.

Nepal has already tried the first model during the National Education System Plan – Period. After many years of trial, it was realized that State control of higher education is neither feasible nor desirable. The other policy option left for the Government is, therefore, the State supervision option. (ibid, p.36)

The reason why the state control model will no longer work in Nepal is informed by a transcendental view of history and of the cause being hidden in the statement. Here, the notion of ‘state-control’ refers to the monarchy, seen as an obstacle to individual freedom or autonomy, with the notion of ‘democracy’ being seen as an improvement. The study concluded that “full autonomy” is only “reform”, but it comes from shifting the institutions from the state to non-state actors (ibid, p. 34). The reason for doing so is the “mobilization and utilization of local resources”, assuming that the national state is too “fragile” or “weak” to provide such resources.

3.3.3 The IDA Review Mission, 1995

This review mission further consolidated the discourse of decentralization introduced by the UNDP project as self-evidently necessary to reform the Nepalese higher education. On January 28, 1994, Grant Sinclair, team leader of the World Bank, accompanied by Helen Abadzi, the Bank’s education specialist, and Weifang Min, the Bank’s higher education finance specialist, visited Nepal. The aim was to introduce neo-liberalism to higher education. They stayed in Kathmandu in February 1995. During their seven-day stay, the Bank mission met with the new Vice-Chancellor of Tribhuvan University, the Secretary of Education, the Under Secretary of the Ministry of Finance, and the Member Secretary of National Planning Commission, and recommended implementation of “a package of policy changes” in higher education. The delegation, which introduced “cost-sharing” in education, did not meet a single farmer or student, let alone held discussions with local community on whether they were ready to share the cost of education. In their recommendation, they noted that Nepalese education was “over-dependent on government’s grants-in-aid. It should generate its own resources ...”. The resources included parental contributions, student tuition fees, land, textbooks, research contracts, etc., all of which were assumed to bring about “a systemic change in the administrative, financial and management processes of the university” (see *Nepal Higher Edu-*

cation Project, IDA Review Mission, 12 February 1995). The key problem noted by the mission was an “over-centralized and inefficient higher education system”.

The visit came within a particular historical context and a number of events, including the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, that marked the end of the Cold War and what came to be known as “neo-liberalism”, when the aid agencies stepped up the political democratization of the “Third World” as a prerequisite for economic development (see Tabulawa, 2003). The fall of the Berlin Wall is seen as a culmination of the campaign called “globalization”. It signalled the demise of the Soviet bloc, ending the bipolar world order and ushering in what has been called a “new world order”. Its consequence for education, according to Burbules and Torres (2000, p. 8), was drastic cutbacks in social spending.

That imaginary “new world order” was used to explain a growing integration of economies, creating the notion of a borderless economies. On that premise, the World Bank and the IMF began to prescribe policies for “development”, arguing that the poor countries’ national governments had a reduced ability to control their economies or to define their national economic aims (*ibid*, p. 9). On the surface, this appeared to be a seemingly self-evident fact, but there were many underlying motives that included SAP. The space for the infiltration of that policy was created in Nepal by one more pro-democracy protests in 1990, this time not against Rana regime but against the Shah monarchs, who had centralized the governance of education under the NESP. What was thought an efficient way of managing education by the reformers who belonged to the period before 1990 was blamed for the dismal performance of the public education system at the time. The Nepalese politicians, many of whom had taken part in the 1951 pro-democracy victory rally, inspired by the Indian “freedom” struggle and democracies elsewhere, had become grandfathers by 1990. They took to the street once again for the sake of a “democracy” that had proved elusive over 40 years. The Nepalese congress and its leftist comrades, who had always been at loggerheads, shook hands. On April 8, 1990, they succeeded in restoring their much cherished dream, “multiparty democracy”, when King Birendra, having withstood criticism and protests from the pro-monarchy fronts and family members, succumbed to the pressure of the opposition forces in declaring the end of one-party rule. Along with the end of the Panchayat regime came the demise of the NESP that had conceptualized “reform” as increased social spending or ‘national development’ to counter a growing foreign interference in Nepal that was assumed to have obstructed economic and political independence of Nepal. A ban imposed on political parties was also lifted. A new space was created for the international intervention in education altering

the previous one that the Panchayat regime had thought was a clumsy western imposition. Against this backdrop came the IDA review mission in Nepal.

Recommendations

The World Bank/IDA delegation finally made the following recommendation to the government: “TU is over-dependent on government’s grants-in-aid. The kings of Nepal had thought the TU must depend on the government’s grants-in-aid. The World Bank delegation reversed that order of thinking only after the monarchy was ousted from power. By establishing the link between education and the political events of 1990, decentralization was proposed. The delegation recommended that, “It [the TU] should generate its own resources ...” The resources included land, textbooks, research contracts, and tuition fees. For the generation of these resources, the World Bank recommended “... a systemic change in the administrative, financial and management processes of the university” (see *Nepal Higher Education Project*, 1994).¹⁷ Here, the system of knowledge that constructed the failure of state-owned free education was neo-liberalism mediated by the discourse of development.

The actual process of orienting Nepalese higher education system to neo-liberal reform began on December 21, 1993 (see HEP)¹⁸. The key strategy in this was “decentralization”. The Bank began to assist the Ministry of Education and Culture in preparing a higher education decentralization plan. The \$23.1 million (including an IDA credit of \$20 million) over a period of six years was named HEP-I and launched as a pilot project. Prior to this, the \$599,000 UNDP-financed TEP had recommended the financial decentralization of TU and assisted in curriculum and examination reform and the development of education management information systems (EMIS).

The most important recommendation was that the state-controlled model of higher education in Nepal under the NESP was “neither feasible” “nor desirable” (ibid, p. 36). Following the recommendation, the World Bank finally launched the HEP-I. There was resistance from students and leftist parties. The Bank’s policy dialogue excluded local stakeholders in favour of political groups. On the other hand, there were ideological differences within the communist party of Nepal on the issue privatization reform. The communist party

17 IDA Review Mission, Aide-Memoire (Jan 28, 1994).

18 *Nepal Higher Education Project*, IDA Review Mission, Aide-Memoire (February 12, 1995).

had, for the first time, won elections in the region in 1994. This made it tougher for the Bank to push for the privatization of education in Nepal.

Since privatization is currently a politically sensitive issue in Nepal, the implementation of this component is expected to be subject to review by the new TU management. The Mission requested TU to confirm its intentions in this regard and establish a schedule for implementation. (IDA Review Mission, Feb. 12, 1995)

Finally, the World Bank mission's week-long marathon in Kathmandu ended in a compromise – the reform was not about privatization, it was “decentralization”. Despite initial opposition shown by the leftist parties, the proposed “decentralization” of the TU campuses began between March and May 1995 after the IDA mission left Nepal in February of the same year, having held a dialogue with the new Vice-Chancellor and those in power. The Bank's delegation had reviewed the project and studied future possibilities for its involvement in Nepal. It met the new Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Vice-Chancellor, and members of National Planning Commission. Finally, it convinced the “big boys” at Singha Durbar that the decentralization was not privatization. But the students would not give up agitating as they were required to pay tuition fees. The only institute willing to go for the Bank's idea of reform was the Institute of Engineering (IoE), Pulchowk Engineering Campus, in Kathmandu. But this was also not without student resistance. The Bank's delegation held a meeting at this Campus, convincing its dean and administrative chief to adopt privatization, albeit in the name of “decentralization”. This campus was quickly picked up as a pilot project to restructure all of the 60 public campuses of TU. The principle known as “cost-sharing” was introduced under the Engineering Education Project (EEP). For the first time, the reform introduced “full-fee” students to the public campus in Nepal. Amid student agitation and intense negotiations, the project was nevertheless implemented. Subsequently, this campus became the model and its dean the hero of higher education reform in Nepal. He was ultimately made the new Dr. Wood of Nepal by being offered the position of a Senior Education Specialist at the World Bank, which was to negotiate the Bank's policy agenda with the agitating student unions, politicians and the Nepalese government.

However, only a few campuses, mainly one engineering institute, opted for experimenting with the IDA/World Bank's “decentralization” schema. Known as the first Higher Education Project (HEP), and initiated by the UNDP/World Bank TEP, it introduced “cost-sharing” at the engineering institute under the EEP project. The HEP-I supported a small number of key faculty

staff to obtain advanced degrees subject to the IDA condition of the use of its funds. A three-year Bachelor's degree was among the major focus of reform. The curriculum component of the reform was in fact initiated by the UNDP under the TEP. A delegation from the Indian Institute of Technology in Delhi was in Kathmandu in 1994 to review the curricula.

Beyond “decentralizing” the Pulchowk Engineering Campus, the HEP-I constructed the central campus buildings, the library, the exam controller's office and a few academic buildings. I have bracketed the word “decentralization” to show its ambiguity here. Assuming that the “decentralization” is a transfer of responsibility from the central decision-making authority to the local campus management committee, the project was unable to achieve its intended objective of “decentralizing” all of the 61 campuses under TU as the TU Executive Council, the central decision-making authority, remained suspicious of the Bank's proposal that required the TU council to give up its controlling authority on constituent campuses. The Bank failed to convince the TU authorities as to how the scheme of “decentralization” was going to bring about the reform. Thus, the TU central authorities were unwilling to delegate power to the local campus management committees. This power was given to them by the NESP. The Bank was there to dismantle the NESP in order to push its neo-liberal policy. The Bank recruited the dean of the Pulchowk Campus, assuming that his previous experience of concluding the EEP and negotiation skills with the agitating students could be helpful in negotiating with the government and protesting groups. The dean, charged with the task of supporting the Bank's agenda in Nepal, and as an employee at the Bank, defended the Bank's agenda via a quantitative assessment of the EEP, arguing that a student at Bachelor's level in TU had paid less than \$1 per month. He was trained and “tortured” by the Bank to become the neo-liberal think tank of Nepal. In his report, he writes that the problems facing the public campuses in Nepal would be resolved only by turning to privatization. In so doing, he made the national policy bureaucrats in Nepal believe that the root of the “weak public provision” of education in Nepal was that the students paid only nominal fees. This belief led to the introduction of “Full-Fee Pay System” (students pay full fee to attend higher education). His key argument was: “Bachelor degree students at the IOE paid US\$20 per annum whereas at the private institutions they paid over US\$1,000 per annum for the programs of comparable quality”. The dean picked by the Bank wrote in his report that all of Nepal's public higher education institutions had to be privatized. He also calculated the cost of education in Nepal in US dollars. He believed academic quality and equity would improve

if that happened. The dean wrote a report entitled “Political Economy of Higher Education Reform” (see Joshi, 2001), which finally became the master document for guiding the privatization reform of TU public campuses in the name of “decentralization”, “cost-sharing” and “autonomy”.

Where the Rana rulers in 1934 had rejected a friendly offer of \$100,000 each from England and France for the earthquake disaster relief, here was a World Bank specialist trained and tortured to implement the global neo-liberal reform. A master plan was developed for the construction of the campus building in Kirtipur with the direct assistance of the World Bank. Whereas King Mahendra in 1962 described this as a “clumsy Western imposition”, the new rulers of Nepal after 1990 welcomed direct Western intervention in Nepal. It is described as Phase I or the HEP-I. I trace the key ideas built into the ongoing SHEP to that moment in time –1993/94 – a historic moment in Nepal that occurred soon after the 1990s momentous political change, which had charted out space for the international intervention in Nepal. During the NESP period between 1960 and 1990, a different historical context was prevalent that did not allow for direct international intervention. HEP had to await the 1990s historical rupture for its take-off. It was legitimized by the report submitted by the World Bank review mission that visited Nepal in 1995. The mission recommended that to improve the organizational efficiency of higher education in Nepal, TU had to commit to “decentralization” of its 61 constituent campuses, including the authority for allowing the development of regional universities. This truth claim is supported not by any ground-breaking study within Nepal that showed decentralization was needed but the rules specific to SAP. Accordingly, a “policy implementation fund” of \$500,000 was provided to facilitate the discussions and the implementation of “decentralization” in higher education.

The mission report declared: “Tribhuvan University was over-dependent on government’s grants-in-aid.” This was a statement that would have amounted to treason had it been released between 1971 and 1989 or in 1935 and 1918. After 1990, anything could be said about Nepal. Instead of accepting the statement “Tribhuvan University was over-dependent on government’s grants-in-aid” and its consequential decline in Nepal as true, I treat it as how at a particular moment of time “some statements – and not others – will count as knowledge” (See Mills, 1995, p. 56). In other words, instead of the things-in-itself [TU or Nepal] producing the knowledge or meaning, discourses are practices that systematically formed the objects of which they speak (Foucault, 1969, p. 163). To make it further clear, an object cannot stand alone on its own

right, or with its own meanings. It comes into being via a type of language determined by a historical and social context it represents. In this sense, the “decentralization” of higher education is a subject which takes the form of an object not by itself but through the work practices of development institutions. The archaeological approach to discourse doesn’t seek to understand the subject “decentralization” and the object “higher education” it refers to as same as if they had “same rules, the same operators, or same sensibility” [Foucault, 2002, p. 185]. The word “decentralization” becomes a representation rather than an objective fact. Summing up, it is in discourse the meanings are given to the physical and social realities.

3.3.4 The First Higher Education Project (HEP-I, 1994–2000)

The year 1994/95 marked the most important chapter of higher education in Nepal, namely the shaping of the neo-liberal order of thinking in higher education via the decentralization of higher education reform. It created the space for the infiltration of the neo-liberal policy discourse in Nepal. In that year, the World Bank for the first time began to provide financial assistance and policy directions to Nepal through the project that came to be known as the (first) Higher Education Project (HEP I). This was the first phase and the beginning of decentralization in higher education. It shifted the earlier understanding of higher education as a ”centralization” to a “markets” logic. Apart from issuing credits and loans to Nepal for the maintenance and construction of TU campus buildings, the most important policy directions given by the Bank to Nepal were as follows:

1. Regulating enrolment growth in higher education
2. Improving resource mobilization
3. Decentralizing higher education administration
4. A cost-recovery policy (making use of commercially valuable assets, lands, buildings for rent, student fee, scholarship, waiver, attracting private businesses, etc.).

Of the total of 61 TU campuses that originally made the target, the above policy directives were implemented only by a handful of campuses that included the IOE, Science and Technology, Institute of Agriculture, Institute of Forestry and IOM. A large majority of TU campuses continued to operate under a

centralization programme. The Project also facilitated the affiliation of private colleges with these public institutes. “Decentralization” was the overall policy direction and the name given to these institutes as part of the total restructuring of higher education in Nepal. Despite a smooth and unobstructed implementation of the reform envisaged, the HEP-I was frequently interrupted by changes in TU leadership.

The management team of the Tribhuvan University changed during January 1995 interrupting the decision/approval processes and the project coordination unit is waiting for signals reaffirming the policy framework for the project from the new university management. (IDA Review Mission, 1995, Feb 12)

3.3.5 The Second Higher Education Project (SHEP-2007)

The historical context from which the SHEP emerges is neo-liberalism. It manifests itself through the discourse of the “deepening of decentralization” through autonomy rules. The deployment of this discourse awaited the April 2006 “revolution” in Nepal that ended the monarchy so that it could form a desirable strategic context and rationale. A \$60 million reform project was signed between the World Bank and the Government of Nepal as soon as the monarchy was replaced. The three objectives of the grant were: “Enhanced quality” and “market relevance” of higher education; the “efficient management and financial sustainability of academic institutions”, and improved access to higher education to “underprivileged groups” (*dalit, janajati* and girls). The following key texts I located in this report (SHEP) interested me the most to begin with.

Centralization of authority in the central Office of TU –which has 60 constituent campuses accounting for 61% of total tertiary enrolment –is the key challenge for improving the efficiency of TU... With a view to promote structural changes in higher education to address the issues of centralized management and poor cost-sharing, a Universities’ Act is being prepared and TU has adopted Autonomous Campus Rules... Therefore, campuses that have developed a business culture as a result of decentralization are generally more confident and will be the likely candidates for autonomy. The dialogue between IDA and TU during the course of Project preparation has facilitated adoption of these rules. (World Bank, 2007, p. 2)

We must also describe the institutional sites from which the doctor makes his discourse, and from which this discourse derives its legitimate source and point of application (its specific objects and instruments of verification (Foucault, in *Archaeology of Knowledge*, 1969; 2002).

The institutional site from where this policy discourse that subjects higher education to “business culture” operates is the World Bank. Here, the system of knowledge is neo-liberalism. On the ground, this manifests itself in “development”, particularly modern economic practices (Escobar, 1995, p. 11). Here, the system of knowledge that establishes its relations between higher education and “business culture” is neo-liberalism. It advances the idea of “free markets” in education that calls for a “drastic reduction in government responsibility for social needs” (Apple, 2010, p. 410).

One may still ask why the World Bank is important here as it is not the sole author of the discourse. There is an institutional production of social reality in which the development institutions rely heavily on textual and documentary evidence as a means of representing the given reality in a country where a programme is being implemented. Development institutions in Nepal rely heavily on documents and texts as a means to objectify knowledge. The production of policy relied heavily upon these texts and documentary evidence. Through the textual and work practices, the development institutions make the actors enact the discourse even as those texts are disconnected from the local historical context and do not reflect the given reality (see Escobar, 1995, p. 108). On the other hand, the knowledge and policy prescriptions provided by international development institutions are considered invaluable by planners in Nepal, who do not see the ideology and politics of those displaying them. The stake here is a \$60 million reform project for a country described as “least developed”. By the people being told that they live in poverty and powerlessness, they are made to accept the external guidance and knowledge without any scrutiny.

Reading the text, at first I thought that a World Bank commissioned report, released from that most expensive marble palace of Kathmandu left by one of the most extravagant Rana maharajas and where some of Nepal’s most highly paid consultants work, must be of high intellectual integrity and professional quality. So I was interested to see to know how a causal relation was established between the political uprising that overthrew the monarchy and the strategic context for reform. The most perplexing issue to discover was the relationship between higher education and economic development where it is impossible to conceptualize education in other terms.

This report, while describing Nepal as the “poorest country in South Asia and 12th poorest in the world”, made the Nepalese policy bureaucrats believe that a non-public provision supported by individuals, families and communities was the desired alternative to the alleged “weak public provision” of education. In so doing, it assumes that all the people of Nepal have acknowledged their

readiness to inject resources towards building a non-public higher education system where the role of the state remains minimal. What is evident here is “differential relations of power”, moving the discourse and practice of higher education in particular directions (Apple, 2010). Reading a report like this unveils how the institutionalized system of power works through textual and bureaucratic work practices (Escobar, 1995). However, according to Escobar, to understand the real effects of this form of power/knowledge, we need to move beyond what appears in the textual practices to the practice domains where it structures the thinking and acting (ibid, p. 107). Accordingly, Part II of the thesis will test how this happens.

The present policy moment was founded on the belief that the previous centralized higher education system was the root cause for the decline in higher education and that it was an improvement over what did not work in the past. It, thus, presupposes that the “old” must be replaced by ‘new’. This belief is further solidified by revolutions or political transitions. The authors of this report want the policy scholars to believe that the people of Nepal mobilized their energy and so brought down the “old order” that ushered in permanently “a peaceful, inclusive and prosperous Nepal”. In reading the 132-page report, it was not possible to recognise higher education in its own right but through significations – as an “open moment” and an “old order”. Without any explanatory note, these two phrases were used to explain the “strategic context” and rationale for “reform”. Instead of attempting to understand what this document tells us is higher education reform, in Foucault’s sense, it required me to focus on what it left unsaid and the breaks it created in the earlier ways of understanding.

Construction of the “weak public provision” and “strong” private alternatives

The report constructed the “weak public provision” of education in Nepal. This construction was further legitimized by the invention of a newer representation, of a “fragile state”, by the international development agencies, in which they redefined their partners and priorities from the state to non-state actors (see Berry, 2010). This report derives the value “weak” from the shifting historical context of Nepal, namely the displacement of the monarchy by a republic.

First, this report offers a transcendental view of history. It begins with the description of the historical events of April 2006 in Nepal as some sort of a “Columbus’s egg in the order of politics” (Foucault, in Gordon, 1980, ed.).

That event structured a thinking that autonomy was inevitable and necessary for higher education reform. Approaching the reform through what appears in the SHEP document would blur the systems of knowledge/power, which laid its contours in 1951. The preceding two policy moments already shed light on this.

Second, in drawing up this new policy framework, this World Bank report claims it held extensive consultations with the “stakeholders” (described as “core group of teachers representing a variety of schools of thought” (see SHEP, 2007, p. 127). It also claims it held extensive dialogue with students, representatives of TU campuses, communities, professionals, deans, academics, representatives of commerce and industries, among others, to develop the policy framework. These claims will be put to the test in Part II of the thesis. Finally, the report challenges the Nepalese authorities to replace its knowledge and international experience of reform.

The credibility that the Bank has earned by assisting various reforms in the education sector, the deep knowledge of local context including the political economy of reforms and a rich international experience places the Bank in a unique position for supporting reforms. At present, other donors are not involved in higher education in any significant way, making the Bank’s involvement even more pertinent (ibid, p. 4).

The report constructs the reform outside the consciousness of the people of Nepal, assuming that what they do now, what they dream and hope and how they think is no different from the World Bank consultant who wrote this report and told their stories.

This report seeks to understand education as an individual [private] “good”. The primary goal of the new model (new human capital theory) of higher education advocated by the World Bank was educating workers for competition for jobs in the knowledge economy (see Spring, 2009, p. 16). This puts the focus on individuals as consumers of education who will be self-disciplined and self-investing for their own futures. On the contrary, the NNEPC and NESP thought education was a public “good”, necessary to produce mass graduates for national development. Education as an individual or private good was outside the consciousness of that epoch. This is how the SHEP shifted the earlier meaning of higher education in Nepal and created a new history of the present.

April 2006 uprising as benchmark for reform

Through its unrivalled claims to international experience in higher education reform and financing, the World Bank establishes itself as the repository of knowledge in Nepal. The Bank's SHEP awaited a moment in time for its take off in Nepal. That moment in time was provided by what the Bank calls "open moment". In Foucault's term, the 'open moment' is a "strategic field" in which one tells the truth (Gordon, 1980, p. 56).¹⁹ The April "revolution" formed the domain of validity for social and political life that the Bank used as a strategic space to intervene. It made us believe that the April 2006's 19-day pro-democracy movement in Nepal, whose immediate aim was to overthrow the monarchy, would usher in one final moment of peace and prosperity. It replaced the king with the World Bank as the locus of knowledge and power to plan education and development in Nepal.

Maoist-armed insurrection as inevitable and necessary

The development discourse after 1990 began to unleash violence of a scale unknown in Nepal's recent memory. Five decades of development financed and ideologically supported by Western donors and India since 1951 turned Nepal into a "battlefield" (see Pherali, 2012). The more international aid poured in and the more "dollar-carrying guests" arrived, the more violence and conflict there were. In 1996, inspired by the Mao-led peasant "revolution" in China, the Nepalese Maoists began an armed insurrection to overthrow the monarchy and capture "state power". This was one of the virulent effects of international development and democratization in Nepal.

In the name of "development" failure and the further impoverishment of Nepal, the Maoists organized an underground armed insurrection. The Maoist student union – All Nepal National Independent Student Union (Revolutionary) – began to attack private schools and colleges in favour of what they called "janabadi" [people-oriented] education. The Maoist ideologue and former prime minister, Babu Ram Bhattarai, (2003) justified the war as Nepal declined to the status of the second poorest country in the world (p.117). Bhattarai makes us to believe that the war was inevitable and necessary for Nepal to secure its economic freedom and political autonomy. Scholarly works in Nepal point out that of the several competing ideological interest groups, the Maoists, were among the stronger actors, who made education their "battleground" to secure their ideological interests (see Pherali, 2010; Carney and Bista, 2009).

19 Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, in Colin Gordon, 1980, p. 56.

Decentralization and autonomy suited the party ideology and hence were accepted as national policy.

The fallen monarchy as a strategic context for reform

As history took its course, on June 1, 2001, the reigning monarch, Birendra, and his entire family members were killed. An investigation by a government panel hurriedly concluded amid nationwide protests that the crown prince pulled the trigger and shot himself after shooting nine of his family members. Many Nepalese did not want to believe this story. In a chaotic series of events, the monarchy was abolished in 2007. This report (SHEP, 2007) picked on that moment in time as “open moment” and the time preceding it as “old order” to ground the present reform thinking.

This report made the policy scholars of Nepal believe that the kings of Nepal were the sole “masters” of discourse (centralization reform), who led the decline of higher education in Nepal or prevented the people living in an “open moment” or exercising autonomy. Through a historical *a priori*, the report constructs the object of fallen monarchy and all those ancient philosophies and institutional practices as “old order”. Here, the Bank’s document makes us believe that a “decentralized” and ‘autonomous” higher education system is a reform that can ensure social justice in Nepal as if it was obstructed by that “old order”. Here, the notion of social justice presumes a lack of economic and personal freedom in the past allegedly caused by the centralized state power. Liberation of this type of person in Nepal is sought via the scholarship component of the reform. Access, equity and social justice in education are expected to follow from the dissolution of that alleged “old order”.

The present reason/knowledge about “accessibility” to education differs completely from the past. This takes me back to the 1956 report of the NNEPC, which defined “children with empty stomachs” as lacking accessibility to learning and availability of “textbooks” and a “learning environment” (ibid, p. 227). Fifty years down the road, that knowledge of accessibility and opportunity to education shifted to “underprivileged households” and “disadvantaged” groups seen as so self-evident and unproblematic. As I show in Part II, the actors in the field of practice contest these terms, namely the notion of “disadvantagedness” and discriminatory scholarship provision.

“Decentralization” and “autonomy” as strategic choices and names for “reform”

Summing up, the first strategy for reforming higher education is called, in the

form of a technocratic language, “decentralization”, whose intelligibility is drawn from the alleged failure of the centralized system of education conceived by the NESP. A decentralized system is seen as the only alternative to reforming the public education system. Here, the SHEP document makes the assumption that the centralized education system obstructed the development of an efficient and well-resourced higher education system in Nepal. There were two reasons tied to that assumption – 1. Nepal returned to multiparty democracy in 1990, which required educational institutions to replicate democratic practices, and 2. a Maoist insurgency began in 1996, which further legitimized the discourse of decentralization. Thus, decentralization became the discourse and practice of higher education reform from the necessity of multiparty democracy and the Maoist insurgency. Assuming that decentralization was about democracy, freedom, peace and development, it begot violence and civil war, destroying the reputation of the country as a symbol of peace and the birthplace of Buddha (see Pherali, 2011, Hutt, 2004). Paradoxically, the more international intervention increased in the name of decentralization, the more it begot violence. The role of international development in this process was not to diminish but to intervene further through a “rule-bound bargaining process”.

When a country finds itself deeply divided, especially along geographic or ethnic lines, decentralization provides an institutional mechanism for bringing opposition groups into a formal, rule-bound bargaining process. (World Development Report, 1999)

This statement was hidden in the SHEP document. This left me deeply sceptical about the meaning of the “decentralization” of higher education: it was tied to a reason far removed from the specifics of education. It manifested itself in diplomatic language elsewhere in the World Bank’s publications. As a diplomatic tool of power with its vested interest, a statement like the one above cannot be understood in the taken-for-granted language that appears on the documents: it requires a tactic to read what it does not say. Archaeology as an analytical technique afforded me the possibility of locating this hidden meaning elsewhere in the Bank’s documents as a “manufactured”, “oppressive” and “even sinister” form of truth (Foucault, in *Discourse and Power*, p. 157).

Thus, it must be made clear the word ‘decentralization’ is a meaningless concept in education that emerges not from the science of education but from the rules of neo-liberalism, economic development, democratization, political turmoil and the fall of the royal dynasty in Nepal, all of which structured a

sense of reality of thinking of decentralization as a continuous progress. All these events, even as they begot further war and violence, became the reason why decentralization was so necessary in Nepal, legitimizing more international intervention. If one takes the word ‘decentralization’ out, education turns into nothingness; include the word, and it appears as “democratization”, “good governance” and “freedom”. Thus, the knowledge that is organized around the lives of the people is not legitimate (Apple, 2010, p. 409). As a discourse, decentralization continued to gain credence even as multiparty democracy invited more violence and turmoil in Nepal. As part of a highly technocratic and political language, this word “decentralization” became the objective perspective with which to think of education. The politicians and the donors made us believe that decentralized higher education was the only way to reform the public institutions in Nepal, not because such a concept is supported by ground-breaking academic insights within Nepal, but because such reform happened elsewhere, in Chile, Argentina, Vietnam, and Korea in terms of an increased share of the private contribution to education. Decentralization is used throughout the thesis to refer to the limited delegation of power by the TU to its campuses in collecting student fees, designing new, globally relevant courses of studies, and generating new sources of finance for the public campuses.

3.3.6 Conclusions

Towards consolidating the apparatus of neo-liberalism via decentralization

What emerged finally is a succession of higher education as a discursive space from 1956 to 2007, shaping at least three distinct historically contingent policy moments. To conclude, the discourse of higher education appeared as a “rule-governed” discursive practice across 50 years, in that the discursive practice continued even as the systems of knowledge and forms of power shifted sharply. If the policy direction to education reform in Nepal during the period 1950 to 1960 was shaped by the United States’ international aid tied to Cold War diplomacy, the 1980s was dominated by the SAP of the World Bank and the IMF. As I showed, the period after 1990 was shaped by neo-liberalism. This was made clearer in the review of the international trends in higher education, in Chapter 2. In the case of Nepal, this is reflected in the SHEP. As I showed, the consolidation of this apparatus of power and knowledge began in Nepal with the TEP and the HEP-I.

The three themes corresponded to the three major policy shifts accom-

panied by four major historical accidents in Nepal: democracy (1951—1960); monarchy (1961—1990); multiparty democracy (1990—2006); and republic (2007—). What next? Here, the discourse of higher education reform in Nepal was governed by the discourses of nation building. The first rupture in 1951 introduced the grammar ‘democracy’ that became the new discursive frame for the Nepali state. That period introduced the developmental vision of the state. Consequently, “development” became the dominant interpretive grid and a referent for education. The second rupture introduced the concept “centralization” in education whose aim was national development. The third introduced “decentralization” and the latest rupture that occurred in 2006 introduced “autonomy” in higher education. The SHEP document had made us to believe that these shifts are a historical evolution in Nepal (from centralization to decentralization). This chapter disrupted that thinking to show discontinuities.

If democratization and modernization were the sciences governing the rules of education aid and advice in Nepal between 1950 and 1960, the perceived lack of economic independence and political freedom marked the period between 1960 and 1990 that oriented education policy and planning to centralization in search of a single national unified system. Between 1990 and 2006, decentralization became the discourse and practice of higher education. The autonomous campus rule introduced after 2006 showed the further advance of decentralization into TU campuses. The remainder of the thesis examines the consolidation of this form of power and knowledge in Nepal.

To conclude, the basic premise of my argument throughout the rest of this thesis is that higher education reform in Nepal is a discourse of decentralization (and a further deepening of decentralization in the form of autonomy). It is enacted within a social and historical context. It comes into being through its relations with development and neo-liberalism as the systems of knowledge and forms of power as international development institutions. The forms of subjectivity fostered by the discourse are captured via interviews with the actors in the field of practice. The key words that circulate throughout the SHEP document are *open moment*, *old order*, *knowledge economy*, *weak public provision*, *decentralization*, *autonomy*, *cost-sharing*, *economic development*, *inclusion*, and *disadvantaged*. Highlighted below are key categories in the document that connect decentralized and autonomous higher education systems to neo-liberalism:

- Higher education must be relevant to the labour market

- Autonomy is the further expansion of decentralization into more public campuses
- The formation of new management committees is a must in the above-cited campuses
- The fixing of tuition and other categories of fees is a condition imposed on those campuses for applying for the Bank's grants
- Levels of funding are tied to enrolment.
- Campuses are funded on a per unit student cost
- Market relevance of higher education is emphasised

As a form of discourse and practice of neo-liberalism, decentralized and autonomous higher education institutions emerge on the ground. The institution funding this reform is the World Bank. In Part II of the thesis, I use the above-cited key categories to examine the deployment and enactment of the discourse of decentralization as a form of neo-liberal reform in the field of practice.

PART II

CHAPTER 4

Discourse in Action: A Methodological Reflection

4.1 Introduction

How do policymakers, educational administrators, teachers and students enact the discourse of higher education reform through their acts of submission and resistance? This chapter outlines the fieldwork methods and technique to examine the deployment of SHEP and its enactment in the field of practice. In other words, I examine how we have come to a situation where decentralized higher education is a political necessity. Thus, the rest of this thesis will examine the enactment of the Policy Moment III as a form of neo-liberalism in Nepal.

Archaeological knowledge is quite distinct from the epistemological knowledge (scientific consciousness). The former is a historical method of inquiry that decenters the human subject (Gutting, 1989). In other words, how at a particular moment of time “some statements [“decentralization”] – and not others [“centralization”] – will count as knowledge” (Mills 1995, p. 56). The latter insists on scientific consciousness and primacy of man as the absolute subject of history. The archaeological approach to discourse rejects the idea that man makes the history and guarantees its continuity. Thus, the archaeological approach to discourse is distinct from the subject-centered methodologies which insist on the sovereignty of man. As opposed to those who rely on structure and agency to give absolute priority to the observing [knowing] subject, archaeology decenters the subject. In Foucault’s sense, this is necessary because the observing subject places its own point of view. Approaching the

above question via a human agency would be to argue that the above actors enact the discourse via their pre-given capacity to reason or from their intellectual activities. I move away from that observing (knowing) subject to problematize the self as practice and the site of power and knowledge. Accordingly, I approach the field of practice not as a knowing subject but as a discursive practice by moving away from that deterministic phenomenological position. As I showed in Chapter 3, the present discourse of higher education reform didn't evolve logically or scientifically from its past order of thinking. Instead, it arrived in Nepal via an unexpected historical rupture or breaks in thoughts. This chapter is concerned with a history of the present. It is enacted in a social and historical context. The field of practice is a field of power relations or a strategic situation in which one tells the truth. This situation is created by the discourse of development which came into being by "denying as well as uprooting the existing knowledge base" (Shrestha, 2009, p. 46). It has come to foster decentralization and autonomy subjects in higher education.

The contested context

As I showed in Chapter 3, a year after the restoration of the multiparty system in 1990, the World Bank released a report describing Nepal as a rare country in the world, with its substantial resource limitations and a disadvantageous location in the world map. But the solution to that problem was "privatization". As a form of practice, it came to be known as "decentralization" of higher education institutions.

The discursive space for the convergence of that policy moment was provided by the 1990s restoration of competitive multiparty politics in Nepal. Taking "language as a means of understanding" or a "vehicle of knowledge" would be to miss out on the events unfolding multiparty politics in Nepal thereby limiting the understanding of the reform within the specifics of what only appears as "decentralization" in the SHEP document. Discourse, as an alternative to language, is social; it moves beyond the textual apologists to examine the social construction of reason. In other words, how at a particular moment of time "some statements ["decentralization"] – and not others ["centralization] – will count as knowledge" (Mills 1995, p. 56). In Chapter 3, I showed how this happened after a moment of decisive historical rupture. The present discourse and practice of "decentralization" is not to be misunderstood as the continuation of "centralization" but the breaks in thought, which awaited the multiparty democracy in 1990 and the fall of monarchy in 2007.

The present context under which I discuss higher education reform emerged out of that historical break of knowledge and power in Nepal.

As I showed, the break in thought in the present time is brought about by the global neo-liberal order of discourse. This came to light in the review of the international discourse of higher education reform in Chapter 1. In Chapter 3, I showed its emergence in Nepal through an international aid mission. But the course it took created a sense of loss for Nepal's economic and political freedom, which dragged on to the present through regime change, "revolutions" and violence. The discourse of development has structured that sense of reality by holding the monarchy, religious and cultural institutions as accountable for the alleged loss of economic and political autonomy. These justifications were used by the Maoists who went underground to capture state power in Nepal in 1996. The notion of "autonomy" refers here to freedom. Assuming that the key obstacle to this form of freedom in Nepal was the existing form of state power, by the year 2006, the Seven Party Alliance, which included the Maoists, revolted and abolished the monarchy. A new subject of knowledge, the "autonomous state", emerged out of that political turmoil and regime change. That event led to the objectification of higher education in Nepal as "autonomous higher education". In view of this, rather than the speaking subjects as the focus of the study, the analysis is aimed at the apparatus doing the reform—power/knowledge. This apparatus is maintained in Nepal by the international donors. In view of their authoritative claims to "the deep knowledge of local context including the political economy of reforms and a rich international experience", I turn my attention to institutional ethnography with the development institutions doing the reform and the local Nepalese to be reformed as clients in interactions with them in the production of social reality. I was motivated by Escobar (1995) and Ferguson (1994) to take this approach. However, I underline a much more complex process of power and knowledge in shaping the discourse and practice of education reform in Nepal.

In Chapter 3, I showed that the deployment of the SHEP was awaiting a historical rupture in Nepal. The political event of April 2006 provided the immediate launch pad for its take-off since its first major appearance in Nepal in 1990. The two concepts, "decentralization" and "autonomy", stem not just from the SHEP document, but also from the new political theory of managing the Nepali national state after 1990. Sponsored by the international development institutions and legitimised by historical ruptures, these concepts were accepted by the new political elites in Nepal as a dynamic way of addressing the decline of higher education in Nepal. In sum, the words "decentralization"

and “autonomy” were seen as the best regime *per se*. To facilitate the implementation of these two new rules, education regulation in Nepal was amended four times between 2002 and 2010 (Law Commission, Govt. of Nepal, 2002).²⁰ This, in short, is how the discursive practice around “decentralized and autonomous higher education” unfolded in Nepal. The Tribhuvan University Act 1992 was twice amended, in October 2006 and August 2007, to suit the newly constructed history, shifting donor priorities and the changing order of things in Nepal. Article 35 (3/4) of the amended Act states, “The Tribhuvan University Act, 2028 (1971) [NESP] is hereby repealed ... The Rules and Regulations framed under the ... Act ... (1971) shall continue to come into force only until one year after the date of commencement of this Act” (TU Act, 2007, p. 19). To recall once again, a high-sounding promise was made by the SHEP, namely, equal access to participating in higher education for all categories of people in Nepal. An equitable and inclusive social development was envisaged as if it was obstructed by the constitutional monarchy. As a name, it came to be known as “autonomous higher education” suitable to the newly inaugurated republic and the political discourse of the autonomous state. It is against this backdrop that the deployment of the World Bank sponsored \$60 million higher education reform project is examined in this part of the thesis.

The SHEP began with an ambitious aim of converting all 60 constituent campuses of TU, first to “decentralization” and then to “autonomy”, assuming that it was in the interests of the general public. The inaugural of the reform followed huge celebrations in April 2006 of the “revolution” (see Figure 3, in *List of Figures*) and great expectations of a future full of certainties and free of obstacles. What is so interesting about the reform was that it picked up that historical event (April 2006 revolt against monarchy) as its launch pad. The overall aim of the reform and the national goal of Nepal was “national production and development” (NPC, 2010). This goal is hardly any different from the one conceived by the monarchy. What is so new about the present is the event itself, the republic, for whom this reform was intelligible.

Higher education reform as a sub-sector of the national programme of development was financed by the World Bank through an understanding of decentralization and autonomy as a legitimate way of reforming TU and its 60 constituent campuses. Politicians, filled with an overwhelming sense of opti-

20 According to Nepal Law Commission, the education rules in Nepal were altered or modified four times between 2002 and 2010. This happened on March 29, 2004, August 7, 2005, September 2, 2009, and December 6, 2010.

mism about securing the dreams of the republic – autonomy and freedom – accepted the SHEP without scrutiny. A new constitution was in the air: it was announced that autonomous federal states would be formed soon: a 240-year-old monarchy was dumped onto the garbage of history and a decade-long Maoist conflict ended.

When the SHEP was launched in 2007, there was a sense of optimism everywhere that economic freedom and political liberty were within the grasp of all Nepalese people and that things would now change in Nepal once and for all. This was how the new historical order full of certainties and free from obstacles was created in Nepal in 2006. The World Bank picked up on that event as a defining moment to push the reform. The present policy moment grew out of that sense of optimism.

If the events leading to the restoration of multiparty politics in 1990 established a correlation between education and decentralization, the events of 2006 established a correlation between education and autonomy [republicanism] as if they had “same rules, the same operators, or same sensibility” [Foucault, 2002, p. 185]. Here, the notion of “autonomy” is used to refer to a further deepening of decentralization. With this context and background to the emergence of SHEP (see more in Chapter 3), I will next proceed to the description of the fieldwork method.

4.2 Defining the practice field and uncovering discursive practices

This section will throw light on the fieldwork method to be used. I will analyse the empirical materials via the discursive frame I outlined in Chapter 2 and Chapter 3. In Chapter 2, I explained the analytical technique in more detail. The rest of this thesis will put to the test the application of that framework. Foucault’s methods are applied more as an analytical technique and I prefer to call it discursive practice. This approach requires me to recognize strangeness and complexities in all social arrangements (see Kendal and Wickham, 1999). With education as one form of social arrangement, I view its taken-for-granted universality of meaning by questioning its relationship to economic development in terms of a singular truth of living in the world in the pursuit of material happiness. In this, my technique would be to know the rules and modes of organization of thoughts through which the actors reason this way and enact

these discourses on the ground. According to Foucault, if we know the rules and how one reasons or constructs them, we can as well remake or unmake them. This technique is reflected in Foucault's oft-repeated question in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*: "How is it that one particular statement appeared rather than another?" (Foucault, 2002, p. 30). This will be the key analytical technique used while analysing the interview materials.

According to Foucault, archaeology as a practice requires critical reflections, an exercise of thought, a constant checking. It requires reflecting on our ways of existence and what it means to know ourselves as individuals. It allows us to unlearn or relearn things. According to him, since things have been made, we can unmake them as long as we know how they were made. Archaeology therefore privileges the rules of knowing, how one tells the truths, how meanings are constructed. In Chapter 2, I made it further clear that the application of this analytical technique is via Escobar. In Chapter 3, I applied a genealogical approach to discourse to disturb the teleological order of thinking the reform in terms of continuous progress. This part of the thesis is concerned with the history of the present higher education reform. This is approached through Escobar's discursive framework that I outlined in Chapter 2. By "discursive", I do not, for example, mean decentralization in higher education in itself produces knowledge or meaning. Rather, decentralization is made intelligible or meaningful by discursive practices and changes in historical events. While interpreting interview data, I decenter the subject. By subject, I do not mean a subject that is consciously speaking but a position or space created by the play of power/knowledge relations through which my respondents reason or enact the reform as true, more true or false. It must be made clear that the subjectivity of my respondents is already structured by the discourse of development in which they do not see education outside of economic rationality. Rather than speaking consciously or autonomously, my respondents speak from their subjected selves. For example, the word *dalit* in Nepal, or a statement like *dalit cannot touch water vessel* arises not out of consciously speaking subject but out of the subjected self. The *dalit* might not have accepted this position but he is made, constructed, spoken by discourse. I argue that there is no *dalit* except as a way of representation spoken by discourse. So it is with the present higher education reform: it is spoken by discourse, a particular mode of knowing or *episteme*, which will be the focus of my attention in the interview data.

I am reminded of two very important things Foucault has said: one, not to try to use his ideas in drawing up a conclusion but to read them as an ongoing practice or ongoing conceptualization. There is thus no one methodological

recipe or a permanent conclusion to be reached in this study. Broadly speaking, archaeology is a historical method of inquiry. The fieldwork technique I apply requires a questioning gaze and to become a stranger, unfamiliar with or sceptical of what I see in the field. This requires me to be aware of Nepal as a field constructed by the discourse of development or what is called in Nepal, *bikas*, through which most people reason (see Pigg, 1992, Shrestha, 1995).

Blending experience and theory with my role as a poststructuralist ethnographer

If it is true according to Denzin and Lincoln (2000) that an ethnographer presents a blend of “experiences and theories” (ibid, p. 61), I need to try out some of them here. Educational conferences and seminars I attended in Nepal are too numerous to mention here. On one occasion, I remember attending a higher education conference in Kathmandu (organized at Hotel Himalaya). What attracted me was that a World Bank education specialist for Nepal climbed on to the rostrum and after giving a warm smile to the audience, presented a report entitled *Improving Access and Equity in Higher Education in Developing Countries—Lessons Learnt* (2/10/2011). Her argument was that “higher education is expensive... private sector can lift the financial burden from the government.” With the exception of one Nepali professor who criticized her for presenting a “neoliberal agenda”, almost no one questioned her. Where do these knowledge and visions of reform come from? Who is circulating them in Nepal? Who is qualified to do this? These questions haunted me all along. She urged that the Nepalese policymakers borrow a decentralized model from Colombia, Chile and Vietnam. No sooner had she finished her talks than she was surrounded by a bunch of journalists and freelancers for interviews. Flanked by the security guards, she then got into her latest 4wd car of some unknown sophistication that drove her back to the World Bank office. Conferences like these are used as a platform for the circulation of knowledge produced about the “Third World” (Escobar, 1995, p. 46).

I had a more recent encounter with one more *intellectual par excellence* from the Western hemisphere whose “expert knowledge” based on a book was validated by a local Nepali intellectual as giving complete answers to the question of modernity in Nepal. I encountered this scholar in Kathmandu at *Dhokaima Café* during a talk show. A question in my mind had long been seeking an outlet when I got this platform to ask: What modernity is, how do we make meaning of things, say “modern” or “suitably modern”? Can there be a universalist definition of modernity that can fit the circumstances of all individuals and

societies, including Nepal? Hardly had I finished raising my questions when a local Nepali researcher and moderator intervened, “You got to read his book!” “If reading one or more books was enough to know what the world is about, we must stop right here,” was my reply. All the participants laughed. A few participants seated next to me commented that it was impossible or stupid to question such a distinguished scholar from the West. Following Escobar (1995), this is one way to understand how the production of knowledge and deployment of forms of power takes place in Nepal (ibid, p. 46).

As the author of this research study, first I need to reveal my *self* to the readers before jumping into the data chapter. It is at this point that an autobiographical impulse takes a possession of me. I was born to a Hindu Brahmin family. I spent most of my boyhood days in the village. During my parents’ time, education was conducted in Nepali and Sanskrit and its goal was spiritual rather than materialistic. I have vivid memories of my father who used to recite Sanskrit slokas before heading to the field in the morning. Between June and July, he would toil like a beetle in the dust, ploughing the field, plucking out the paddy seedlings, constructing the timber cottage, or sat like a portrait weaving bamboo baskets in the blazing sun. He returned home when the Sun had set behind the mountains. The next morning, with the crowing of cock setting off the alarm, he would set out to the field once again. Back home, my mother would milk the cows, fetch fodder for cattle, firewood for fuel from the nearby forest, and water from a stream nearby. She also prepared tea, breakfast and dinner for nearly a dozen family members that would include very often a neighbour, niece and nephews, uncle and aunt. When it was night, we slept by the fireside listening to the croaking of frogs in the paddy field. During my time, education began to be conducted in English instead of Sanskrit and Nepali. As soon as I started going to school, I began to inhabit a different world from my father and mother. The discourse of development worked as a catalyst in sharpening my sense of a global belongingness. As soon as I finished college, I was no longer ploughing a field, plucking weeds out of the paddy field or constructing the timber cottage for storing firewood and sheltering cattle. Those activities had been projected by international development (*bikas*) as economically, socially and culturally poor. Consequently, I became the object of “development” falling within the “least developed” or “poor” category. This research study was an important eye opener for me, when I began to doubt such taken-for-granted assumptions I had about myself and others.

My father discouraged us from migrating to cities or going to a foreign country. His biggest concern was how to distribute the lands and property he

inherited from his ancestors equally to all his children. But before he could do that, we began to pack off to city. He came and went like a gliding star that is visible only for a few seconds. His dreams of a permanent home in the village vanished like a puff of smoke. Like a flower in the garden withered in the baking summer sun, he couldn't stand firm on what he thought of his time.

Like a creeper clung to a tree, I lived all my childhood and later adolescent years with my parents, niece and nephews, brothers and sisters. I am now a part of my own existence. Forced out of the country by the development discourse, I now have only a grim prospect of going back to my village. I find myself in a new struggle of life. I am no longer going to the paddy and corn fields. I am no longer wandering among the woods, pumpkin flowers, and creepers; nor do I fetch firewood and fodder or look after cattle, let alone cross that swollen river in monsoon clutching the arms of my brother or play that hide-and-seek game in the rice terrace with my sisters.

A thousand little incidents crowd on my memory from my vanishing past to which when I turn back, the past 30 years appears to me like a broken bridge that can never be mended again, let alone go back into that time. It now looks like each one of us has to set out on a distant journey unpredictable and unforeseeing. This journey or struggle of life now appears before me as though I am lost in a dense jungle, not sure of the object to achieve, neither certain about where am I headed to, who I am supposed to be, and what my place is in history. I am pushed and pulled by the forces that are beyond my command and control. I can only reflect upon what had occurred to me in the past and think of my present and contemplate the future that is uncertain and unpredictable. Rewinding myself to past 30 years, what seems like a lifetime was actually only a short time ago. Yet, a paradigm shift has taken place; and I have struggled like a time machine in a climb I am not sure of reaching the summit. The discourse of development appears to me like that distant summit. It is like my journey from village to city. It has brought about a radical shift in the order of knowledge and activities from the ones that my father found in his native mountain landscape to the struggle I am now undergoing to find a new place in the Western hemisphere. Although spoken in a different context, Margaret R. Somers was useful to reflect on, "Looking at the present social world through time and space changes not only what we actually can see, but also the meaning of that world."

The dominant force which has structured our sense of reality to think of education is *bikas* [development]. This force is knowledge/power which propels us into action. If others would understand the term "*bikas*" as industrial

progress, I understand it as a manifestation of desire or a force of modernity. Others would take me as a “poor” Nepali, but I would not accept that construct. Assuming that I am a poor Nepalese subject, I pay all my education and health expenses in Nepal and receive no cash benefits from the state whose presence is felt only marginally by the people.

I have spent all my adolescent years in India, as a high school student to an undergraduate. I have spent my prime youth in Nepal as a university student and a journalist. I have lived in Denmark for nearly a decade, first as a graduate student for three years and then as a PhD student for four years. I have lived in Spain for a year. In sum, I embody three identities at one (if that is a proper way to define myself). I would rather not use the word “identity” to define myself for if there is such a thing, I cannot see it as a fixity. Neither does it connect to my individuality. Assuming that I am a Brahmin subject, I no longer embody that Hindu individuality or practise its rules of conduct. No longer do I believe in the predictions of astrologers or the postures of magicians, or see some ominous signs of evil or good in almost everything, including the sun, moon, stars, rain, wind and fire.

Assuming that I am a Nepali, I do not live only in Nepal. If it is language through which one is known in the world, I am partly Nepalese, partly Indian, partly Danish, partly American or British, and partly Spanish. I don’t know yet what will be my next identity if that is to be determined by my physical presence in a territory, others would understand it as “motherland” or “fatherland”. I do not see or predict my future, for if there was such a thing, I would have known in advance that I would be in Denmark now. Rather, I prefer to call myself a subject of discourse or “a post-structuralist creature of discourse... labeled and positioned by disciplinary discourses, authorless and robbed of agency” (Taylor et al, 2002, p. 40).

I have no agency of my own, but a *subject* working as my actor and guide. For if there was an agency, I would be in control of my own destiny, make free choices for myself, and be capable of forecasting my future. First, my *self* was shaped by the belief system in Hinduism when I was a Hindu Brahmin. Soon, as I went to high school, I was imparted with knowledge of biology, physics, chemistry and sociology, and I began to doubt my previous *being* (self). Between my high school and undergraduate days, I was haunted by an anxiety to live in one of those skyscrapers of Western capitals shown to me through those glossy magazines in school library. I was deeply fascinated by the stories of modern progress imparted to me in school, and other attractions shown in Hollywood and Bollywood cinema. I still recall vividly how deeply I was

fascinated by the Western imagery of progress and the persona like Rambo, Mel Gibson, Govinda, Salman Khan, Akshay Kumar, Pierce Brosnan, and Brian Adams, to name a few. I was no less fascinated by consumables like Nike, Reebok and Adidas, not to mention the images of cities like New York, Tokyo and London. First, I was subjected to the rituals of Hinduism, mainly wearing a sacred thread, chanting sacred mantras and eating only “pure” food. I was then trained to think of gods and goddesses. Soon, when starting going to college, I tasted my first alcohol and violated the Hindu canons of laws that included not wearing the “sacred” thread about my body. That thread was given to me by a priest when I was about 10 years old in return for a promise not to drink alcohol, not to eat meat, not to have premarital sex, nor do things that were against the rules of Hinduism. The discourse of development reversed that technology of disciplining and the order of knowledge. Schooling as the key component of *bikas* played a crucial role in this process.

After reading Foucault’s works, I began to see how questionable the premises were on which development ideology rests in Nepal. I see that techno-rational, Eurocentric universal metanarrative of economic development as strange as the stories of gods in Nepal that guided my parents and my early years. This is strange in the sense that this development discourse, which guides the present reform thinking in higher education, seeks to transform the knowledge of life and living in Nepal as a gift of God to one of man-made social domination. Assuming that development thinking (in terms of secular science) was better than the god-thinking one, it has come to construct a strange social reality in Nepal based on class and caste and devised projects aimed at the inclusion of one group and the exclusion of another, which the religious discourse had done over the past 300 years in terms of Brahmin, Chhetri, Vaisya and Sudra. I would certainly not call this a knowledge or science but a politics of knowledge. My take on higher education reform as a discourse arose mainly from this problematic of knowledge, in that I argue that there is no such thing as “reform” outside the discourse of “development”. Thus, the discourse theorizing “... much of what counts as reality in Nepal, much of how people live their lives [in Nepal], is already shot through by discourses and practices of development” (Tatsura, 2013, p. 291). My field, Nepal, is constructed by this dominant discourse of *bikas*; it has structured the sense of reality of my actors on the ground to think of education objectively in terms of economic development. The fact that my field is contested requires an alternative mode of knowing. Accordingly, I take my role as a poststructuralist ethnographer, who privileges “new practices of seeing, knowing, and being...” (Escobar, 1995, p. 217). My

role as a poststructuralist ethnographer is not to form one idea or question in advance and go for the interviews and observations afterwards hoping to find the desired answer. Rather, my approach is to allow the field data to speak for themselves first in all possible ways before I interpret them.

It must be made clear at the outset that my use of Foucault's method is not about finding one final truth or ultimate answer to the research problem, for there is no such ultimate or final truth. Neither is it about making a value judgment in terms of past failures and future possibilities, but I argue in Foucault's sense that the knowledge is an ongoing investigation, or an exercise of thought. It requires a practice in thinking. In short, I am writing a history of the present higher education thought which faces the immediate threat of redundancies.

Capturing so many things said about reform

Since I am positioning myself within post-structuralism, I pursue a qualitative research method, defined as one "that permits the description of phenomena and events in an attempt to understand and explain them" (Krathwohl, 1993). "Qualitative methods are deductive: they let the problem emerge from the data or remain open to interpretations" (ibid, p. 311). My approach to a qualitative method is discursive in the sense that I aim to show the complexity through which the discourse is constituted historically in the systems of power/knowledge. In Foucault's term, this study is "a discourse about discourses" (Foucault, 1973, p. 226). In other words, I am not going to assess "the depth of the things said" but so many things said about the reform.

Subjectivity as the analytical frame for the interview

The analysis of interviews, observations and the record of conversations are my main research methods. My take on interviews as a method of meaning-making is a shared exercise. The analytical frame for the interview is subjectivity. It is fostered by the system of knowledge and forms of power. In other words, power/knowledge is the space in which the *subject* may take up a position (Foucault, 1977, p. 201). The *subject* is couched in terms of the space created to think and act by the "play of historical forces" (Foucault, in Smart, 1985, p. 57) or "the shifting relations of power" (Apple 2010, p. 411). In other words, the subject is conditioned by the control and dependence created by the systems of knowledge and forms of power. In the specific context of Nepal, this condition is structured by the discourse of development.

The subject is a historically-contingent actor and product of the poli-

cy regimes examined in Chapter 3. Accordingly, I showed the emergence of decentralization and autonomy subjects and disappearance of centralization subjects in education beginning in 1951. But what continues beneath these shifts is the “development” of Nepal. The rest of this thesis will examine how the actors situated on the ground of practice position themselves within one of these subject positions as they enact the discourse of higher education reform. In Chapter 3, I have shown that instead of these subjects of knowledge emerging out of the sovereign consciousness of the people of Nepal or their autonomous capacity to reason, they were introduced by historical accidents and discursive forces accompanied by international development interventions beginning in 1951.

As a site of knowledge construction, I apply the subject as my analytical category. Instead of arguing that the king, ruling blocks or the ideology of caste is an absolute subject which makes a history and guarantee its continuity in Nepal as shown by the liberal and modernist scholars, I argue that the discourse of “development” sustained by the modern world order and its sciences is the more important site from where to locate how modern domination is exercised. The development institutions enjoy a dominant position in the production, circulation and maintenance of this discourse in Nepal. The SHEP, which is the focus of this study, is a window which offers a glimpse of it. The rest of this thesis examines its deployment on the ground. With “decentralization” (and “autonomy” as a further deepening of decentralization) as the subject of knowledge historically contingent and the focus of investigation, I set out to examine the deployment and enactment of SHEP in action in the rest of the thesis through interviews with education policymakers, administrators, teachers and students.

Interview as a social and negotiated text

If it is true that today’s society is “the interview society” (Fontana and Frey, 2005, p. 697), the best way I found to explore the knowledge of the social world is by interview. Thus, as regards my fieldwork tools, I apply an interview technique to capture the enactment of the discourse of higher education in the practice domains. If an interview is a *social* and *negotiated text* (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2000; Kavle and Svend, 2009), a research study like this must then become a collective enterprise of the interviewees and the interviewed. If it is true that the social world does not exist as an objective reality, we must then collectively construct the meanings of the social world. Apparent realities are only social constructs. We only express them through our thoughts, writings

and talk. Interview as a form of data gathering is then necessary to capture one's subjectivities in thoughts and action.

Discourse is enacted within a social [and historical] context (Mills, 1997, p. 11). To capture the discourse of higher education reform through subjectivity is to apply spatially and historically-grounded experiences (see Escobar, 2010, p. 499). The dominant form of power and knowledge that came to structure the thinking of higher education in terms of economic development is couched as an ideology of modernization (Pigg 1995). This ideology is reinforced by the development institutions (ibid, p. 20). The massive international development intervention I presented in Chapter 1 is evidence of how the development practice consolidates this thinking of modern progress in Nepal in terms of the material goods the West is striving to provide their people. Here, the international development partners position themselves as agents doing the "development" and the local Nepalese as their clients in interaction with them. To capture the subjectivity of the Nepalese people, who have been made to think of that form of social reality, I found interviewing one of the most common and powerful techniques "to understand our [my] fellow human beings" (see Denzin and Lincoln, 2000, p. 645). The interview texts I gather then are of those people over whom modern domination has been exercised.

There are multiple ways of producing knowledge through interviews (see Kavle and Brinkmann, 2009). Interviews may be applied to obtain "negotiated, contextually based results" (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000, p. 646). But what specific empirical result can be shown from a study that traces the arrival of reform in Nepal to unexpected historical rupture? What I am going to discover in this study is a specific and contingent nature of truth about higher education reform. Subject/subjectivity is what I prefer the site of this nature of truth. Interview as a social text concerned with talk (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2000) or a *negotiated text* (see Kavle and Brinkmann, 2009) is one way to locate it. As a site of knowledge construction, I therefore problematise subjectivity as my analytical category.

Subjectivities are fostered by discourse and sustained by forms of power and knowledge (Escobar, 1995, emphasis in original). When I interviewed the actors, I always had in mind the notion of "development" and the global discourse of neo-liberalism as fostering "decentralization" and "autonomy" subjects in higher education reform. These terms are used interchangeably. My focus is the system of knowledge and forms of power that fosters these subjects and objects of knowledge. In other words, power/knowledge is the space in which the ["decentralization"] subject may take up a position (Fou-

cault, 1977, p. 201). The “development” of Nepal is the most important space in which “decentralization” takes its form. This is enacted through thinking, talking and practice. Thus, my role as an ethnographer is to capture this enactment. But there is no one coherent form of thinking, talking and practice around decentralization that I can capture from the multitudes of voices. Thus, I prefer to describe my role as a poststructuralist ethnographer, in that I define my field of investigation as a *contested territory* (Pigg, 1992, p. 495) and a *territory of difference* (see Escobar, 2008). Thinking Nepal as a *contested territory* or *territory of difference* is one of the ways of doing ethnography in poststructuralism. In Foucault’s sense, the contested territory is a social arrangement. Following Foucault, I argue that what would be the proper or final social arrangement in which all men and women live in the world is unknown. We have been trapped in the history we are not its authors. I already introduced some of it in *Chapter 3* by deploying genealogy by tracing the arrival of reform in Nepal to unexpected historical rupture in 1951.

The policy is global. It aims to provide a globally legitimated singular social arrangement. But the forms they take in the practice domains are not necessarily dictated by its terms. There are counter-hegemonic narratives alongside the global narratives. Thus, the effects of power/knowledge cannot be examined in totality but in bits and pieces.

My understanding of Nepal as a *contested territory of difference* runs counter to the theory of structural domination and poverty advanced by the liberals and the modernists. The contested territory is different from the cultural production or reproduction theory that offer comfortable views of Nepal in terms of “Brahmanical Hinduism” as oppressive past, as demonstrated by Skinner and Holland (1996). Not seeing my field as a *territory of difference* would then amount to the same Northern European enlightenment tradition to view my field by relying heavily on the observing (knowing) subject to construct the caste social arrangement. The lens through which I see Nepal is poststructuralism. This is different from the lens the liberals and modernists use to see Nepal from that “high watermarks of western culture” (Madsen and Carney, 2011, p. 131) or through “cosmopolitanism” (Popkewitz 2008). I was least satisfied with the agency and structure approach that locate the site of knowledge and power in Nepal to a particular social arrangement (caste). Applying this approach would then lead to a completely different conclusion – that the modern schooled person in Nepal rises from the fall of the Hindu dynasty to one ultimate kingdom of freedom. Applying this method would then construct a violent past history

of Nepal and a peaceful and smooth future free of obstacles. In Chapter 3, I already destabilised that teleological order of reasoning.

I am inspired by Escobar, who worked with an Afro-Columbian activist network called *Proceso de Comunidades Negras* (PCN), seeking to promote and conserve the culture and ecology of the Colombian Pacific rainforest region threatened by industrial development. However, there is much more than the role of an activist or social movement I wish to underline here. Following this brief outline, the method I am going to apply to analyse my field data is what I prefer to call a discursive practice. It requires an alternative way of reading the field [practice domain] from how it already appears under the construction of development and neo-liberalism.

A *territory of difference* is a non-Western, non-science, context. I use the term “territory” to see my field strangely than take the familiar juridical term “nation state”. This is because by nature what would be the proper social arrangement in which all men and women must live in the world is still unclear. The field of Nepal is complex in the sense that there are multiple social arrangements that do not reflect a coherent form of Western or Nepalese civilization. The aim of the aid industry in Nepal is to orient Nepal to modern sciences, social and cultural practices that are more commonly found in the West. Education and development policies are framed within that logic. In the data chapters, I show how the actors situated in the field of practice contest this. In view of this contest, I prefer to describe my field as *contested territory of difference*. Thus, the contested territory of difference is a hybrid social arrangement, partly science, and partly god. The contested territory is also filled with a motley collections of 55 political parties ideologically driven by Marxism, capitalism, Lenninism, Maoism, Communism, Hinduism, royalism, nationalism, and indigenous nationalities, among others.

The contested territory is a field of struggle. As Pigg writes, it came into being through the theory of *bikas*, mainly the Western conception of economic happiness that charted Nepal as terrains of relative advancement and backwardness. That theory of economic happiness or *bikas* in Nepal came to be measured by a principle known as “Gross National Product” (GNP). In this process, Nepal as a field and object of “development” came into being by “denying as well as uprooting the existing knowledge base” (Shrestha, 2009, p. 46). The theory of *bikas* made the villagers assume they “don’t understand things” (in Escobar, 1995, p. 49). In the field of practice, this view is challenged by multiple forms of subjectivities.

I see the *contested territory of difference* as places of development encounter

that fosters multiple forms of subjectivities. I do so through the lens of Escobar's ethnographic approach to post-structuralism, and Stacy Pigg and Nanda Shrestha's approach to the study of "development" in Nepal. This means I read Nepal through the lens of those at the margins, repressed by the dominant system of power/knowledge, namely developmentalism and neo-liberalism. The contested territories are territories of *difference*²¹ constructed by developmentalism that represent the social reality of Nepal remotely. Through the policies and practices shaped by global hegemonic neo-liberal discourse, contested territories emerge. The policy is oriented to a singular world view of economic development, but the field of practice is a contested terrain of struggle that reflects multiple viewpoints that do not reflect in whole the rhetoric of modernity or a "suitably modern" category (Liechty, 2003). This led me to frame my understanding of Nepal as a *contested territory of difference*.

The territories of difference allow multiple ways of imagining the field. A contested territory is a social space or, to put in Foucault's sense, a "social arrangement", which requires a remote process to understand, by defamiliarizing what only appears in the present. Accordingly, I apply *self* and *subject* as my lens to read my contested field of practice, in which each individual is different from the other in their views, hence the need for an independent inquiry. Thus, my approach cannot take all the actors and their divergent views in the field in one box to conclude one set of knowledge of reform. The application of *self* and *subject* as tools of research requires me to play an activist role and engage in activities with my respondents. Not seeing it as a territory of difference would lead to the same result by simply validating it as "weak" or "fragile" state or by labelling it as a place of aboriginal economies cut off from world markets, and picturing its people and way of life as primitive and traditional (Ferguson (2006). A contested territory is a space to think differently. Contested territories open up the possibility of understanding a contested reality through a spatially and historically grounded experience (Escobar, 2010, p. 499).

Escobar argues that a different, complementary approach can be taken from the various ethnographies to investigate the concrete forms that concepts and practices of development and modernity take in particular communities. In Escobar's theorizing, the particular forms that the discourse and practices of development take in a given community can be studied ethnographically.

21 I borrow this idea from Escobar's (2008) more recent work, *Territories of difference: place, movements, life*, Durham: Duke University Press, in Review, UNESCO (2010), (pp. 497–508), Oxford: Blackwell (p. 500).

Escobar suggests the deconstruction of development and the employment of local ethnographic methods of investigation. Only then, he argues, can those alternative voices of representation and development become visible and discernible. Escobar argues that though it is difficult to find new meanings and interpretations, “The alternative is, in a sense, always there” (ibid, p. 223). Only with “new senses, tools and theories,” he argues, is it possible to locate the alternatives to dominant modes of knowing. He underlines the need for a new theory and research strategy, “one that demands new practices of seeing, knowing, and being” (pp. 195–216).

Ethnography is by no means the sole method of pursuing this goal; but given the need to unmake and unlearn development, and if one recognizes that the crucial insights for the pursuit of alternatives will be found not in academic circles—critical or conventional—or in the a new reading of popular practices and of the re-appropriation by popular actors of the space of hegemonic sociocultural production, then one must at least concede that the task of conceptualizing alternatives must include a significant contact with those whose “alternatives” research is supposed to illuminate. (ibid, p. 223)

The role of ethnographic research becomes important for setting what Escobar calls a “theoretical movement”, “refiguring the Third World” and generating an “intellectual momentum”. Such an intellectual debate may help to reformulate the dominant form of development discourse. It may require dismantling older projects and programmes to construct new ones by, what Escobar calls, “accomplished scholars”, based on the voices of the people. For Escobar, works of such “accomplished scholars” can gain “intellectual legitimacy”, and on this basis, state policy can be formulated.

In *World Anthropologies*, Ribeiro and Escobar (2006) emphasize a new style of thinking and new forms of organization of knowledge. These scholars propose a “world anthropological project”, one that challenges the established anthropological practices such as the one attempted by earlier liberal and modernist scholars I showed in *Section 2.6* (see *Marxist critique of Foucault*). “This approach goes beyond engagement during the field stay” (Ribeiro and Escobar, 2006, p. 17). This approach is different from the modernists’ in the sense that it approaches anthropology not as a global project from where to see the entire world as one in which all the people experience one common space and time, but one that admits of diversity (ibid, p. 24). My understanding of a *contested territory of difference* is a “plural landscape”, where all those communities deprived of voices by the globalization of knowledge by the hegemonic discourse of

development find their space to freely articulate their thoughts and views. Only then, in multicultural and multi-lingual communities “communities of multiple voices” can be heard (ibid, p. 23).

I also read the anthropological and biological history²² of my respondents wherever necessary. This is required given the contingency of discourse in the sense that the discourse is historically determined. The discourse method is not a closure of possibilities as critiques would maintain but a limitless possibilities of knowing the world. In Foucault’s sense, discourse is not just an empty rhetoric, it has effects, limits as well as dangers in the way it is enmeshed in the problems of positivist knowledge and reason. The discourse method offers “limitless performance”, creating a condition of possibility (Escobar, 1995). I distinguish between policy as a statement, or a “performative utterance” and practice as “that does something rather than just say something” (ibid, p. 450). I understand discourse as an activity is doing something or acting (Ferguson, 1994). I argue in Escobar’s sense that subjectivity is fostered by discourse. What I will therefore problematize in the construction of knowledge via interviewing and field observation is the subjectivity. Following some of the above cited research methodologies and gained insights, I will begin with the presentation of the field data in Chapter 5.

Organization of data

Most interviews were tape-recorded and were transcribed as accurately as possible from the oral conversation to written texts. Some interviews were conducted in a mix of English and Nepali, others in the local Nepali language. For the purpose of selection, sampling, and analysing of data, Part II is organized into three chapters under three different categories – 1) policymakers 2); administrators and teachers; and 3) students. Chapter 5 is about policy response to reform; Chapter 6 is about administrators’ and teachers’ responses to reform, Chapter 7 is about students’ response’ to reform. The list of people interviewed is given in Appendix 1. The sample interview data I present in Chapters 5, 6 and 7 is the case stories of four actors – policymakers, educational administrators, teachers and students – who enact the discourse of decentralized and autonomous higher education. The data from the interviews comprise (but are not limited to) four national education policymakers, 14 educational administrators, 13 teachers and 27 students. Also included are 12 local

22 I borrow this idea from Arturo Escobar’s new book, *Territories of difference: place, movements, life*, Durham: Duke University Press, in Review, UNESCO (2010), (pp. 497–508), Oxford: Blackwell, (p. 500).

political leaders (including acting mayors, ward secretaries and social workers). For clarity of purpose and availability of space, not all the interview transcripts could be accommodated. I have reduced the long interview texts to brief formulations, key propositions and words. These interviews were conducted on a face-to-face basis, individually and in groups across multiple locations in Kathmandu, Dharan and Ilam, where the reform was introduced. The questions were mostly open-ended ones. Interview data were grouped according to the following themes and categories: 1. Policymakers' responses to reform were gathered from four key practitioners who share their perspectives on the current neo-liberal policy regime. 2. Administrators' and teachers' responses to reform were analysed in terms of the forms of practice neo-liberal policy regime brought into existence in terms of decentralization and autonomy. The subjectivities fostered by the discourse and practice of decentralization and autonomy were examined across 31 themes outlined in Appendix 2 that show the complexities and contradictions in the field of practice. 3. Finally, students' responses to reform were analysed across the theme of social justice in terms of access and equity promised through scholarship and future economic security assured through employment. Data from local politicians, municipal chiefs and social workers are also included. The framework for the data analysis is discussed at length in Chapter 2 (see Section 2.12). Before I begin presenting the interview data, I first describe the journey involved with the fieldwork and the process involved in gathering the data. I begin with a description of Nepal, where this study was situated.

4.3 Nepal: A contested territory of what it is to be Nepali

...interesting country (with sea of mountains), which contains in itself some of the most magnificent scenery on the face of the globe...the most glorious panorama—a view I have hardly seen surpassed....²³.

If geography is the most visible form of identity...culture is the least explicit perspective on a people... imposing mountains and sacred rivers. (Malla, 1973, p. 1)

23 C. G. Bruce and W. Brook Northey, "Nepal", in *The Geographical Journal*, Vol. 65, No. 4 (Apr., 1925), pp. 281–298; The Royal Geographical Society (with the Institute of British Geographers), www.jstor.org/stable/1782519. (Accessed: 27/12/2013).

Stories confined to village folklore say the god who made the earth was out of shape, so he left the task to three giants to level off in three days. But one of them forgot to flatten Nepal or could not finish the task in the given time, leaving it in its original form. In this folktale, not even the god had wished Nepal to appear in its present form. Another story from the “father of evolution”, Charles Darwin, whose account established its superiority over the above folktales, said all organisms, including humans, evolve by natural processes through purely biological phenomena. The *Origin of Species* and *The Descent of Man* came to replace the Hindu Vedic science. Copernicus and Galileo replaced the theory of the universe, moon, sun and stars in the Hindu divine science of creation, marking the shift to modern Western science to a “mechanical force” of nature. From the flat world, a round earth was discovered. It states that tectonic movements over several millions of years resulted in the movement of the Indian sub-continent towards the Eurasian plate, creating what are Nepal’s imposing high mountains, deep gorges, divergent landscapes and peoples. From the divine, mainly the religions of Hinduism and Buddhism, which formed the system of knowledge and form of power, knowledge about the creation of Nepal shifted to what Nietzsche (1967) called “mechanistic force”. The new knowledge of evolution dismissed the notion that humans have a soul (*atma*), and from God, the truth shifted to Western sciences, physics, chemistry, biology and so on. By the time, this study was compiled a devastating earthquake had killed more than 10,500 people in Nepal. In the Western episteme, it is the result of “mechanistic forces”. In Nepal, it could be a fury of a god.

Prithvi Narayan Shah, the first king who unified the country today known as Nepal, described the country in the 18th century as a “yam between two boulders” – China and India. More recent literature on Nepal states that more than a quarter of its land surface rises above 10,000 feet. Nepali geographer Harka Gurung (1973) puts it as follows: “Nepal may be likened to a giant staircase ascending from the low-lying Tarai plain to the culminating heights of the Himalaya”. He divides Nepal into three major mountain ranges running parallel from east to west. The first mountain range being Chure (Siwalik) rise abruptly from the Tarai lowlands from 2,500 feet to 5,000 feet; the second mountain ranges begin where the first ends and is called Mahabharat Range, with elevations ranging from 5,000 feet to 9,000 feet; and the third begins where the second ends and is called the Himalaya, comprising eight of the world’s ten highest peaks plunging skywards and reaching up to 19,000 feet high (ibid, p. 26). While some of these massive mountains and flights of stairs terminating skywards are obstacles and a cause of Nepal’s poverty, the same

mountains and stairs have an “irresistible mystical allure” for others (Mayhew et al, 2012). Nepal Tourism Board (2011) has invented a new lexicon, “naturally Nepal” – the world’s exotic tourist destination. For still others, the world’s most unusual geography has imposed a long isolation on the people living at those various heights and stairs formed by mountains, spurs, valleys and gorges, shaping their diversities and limiting their mobility (see Bista, 1973). *The New York Times* notes in a recent book review that, “there are as many different languages and dialects spoken within Nepal as in the whole of Western Europe”. But the intelligibility of the reform rests on replacing the languages of our forefathers with English.

Nepal has a population of 27.1 million (Central Bureau of Statistics, Govt. of Nepal, 2012) and an area of 147,181 square kilometres. In terms of a global singular measurement of economic progress determined by industrial production and consumption, it has a GDP of \$18.96 billion and a per capita income of \$750. Based on the notion of the Human Development Index, used to measure all men and women living in cities consuming industrial goods and their physical activities supplanted by machines, Nepal is “one of the poorest countries in the world”, ranking 157th out of 187 countries (World Bank, 2014).

Nepal is enclosed by its big neighbour, India, to the east, south and west and the Chinese-occupied Tibet to the north. It has no shores, coastlines or deep-sea ports of its own, for which it is seen as “poor” or inescapably dependent on India or China. The World Bank describes it as “one of Asia’s lowest road density countries” (World Bank, 2012), assuming that more cars on roads is progress. A government report shows more than 85 percent of the population still lives in villages and only about 13 percent live in cities (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2012). On this basis, Nepal is understood as being poor or least developed. It is assumed that when all of Nepal becomes a city “progress” will have come.

What is Nepal today came into being in about 1760, and is credited to Prithvi Narayan Shah, the king of Gorkha. There is an account of the Licchavi dynasty lasting until 740 AD and a powerful kingdom in the Karnali Basin in the early 11th century. The principality of Karnali was named after the River Karnali in the Midwestern Nepal; the Khasa Mallas and their territories were confined within the Gandak basin and named after river Gandaki in the Western region; the principality lying between the Gandaki and Sapta Koshi was occupied by petty rulers, whose details are sketchy. The central part of Nepal was under Khasa Mallas. In the medieval period, there were Baisi and Chaubisi kingdoms and principalities. From these accounts, the history of Nepal sud-

denly moves to the year 1755 to the central Himalayan belt under one powerful kingdom of Gorkha. In 1846, Jung Bahadur, became the maharaja by capturing power from the Shahs. The Shah kings had ruled Nepal for 209 years. The Ranas became the rulers of Nepal for 104 years. After 1951, in the name of development, there continues what Mihaly (2009) calls a “friendly invasion” from Europe and America. Nanda Shrestha prefers to call that “Western imperialism” in the guise of “development” (Shrestha, 1995).

Nepal’s historian Whelpton (2005) writes that despite its geo-strategically important position in the Himalayas between India and China and its popularity as an exotic tourist destination, a country of “dollar-carrying guests”, Nepal has not normally loomed large in the consciousness of the average educated person in the English-speaking world. The spotlight fell on the country only with the democratic movements in 1990 or with the massacre of the royal family and the intensifying of the Maoist insurgency in 2001 (ibid).

Politically Nepal is divided into 75 districts, 14 zones, five development regions, 3,915 Village Development Committees (VDCs), one metropolitan city, four sub-metropolitan cities and 58 municipalities. But the fact that this ordering was the handiwork of the monarchy in the past came under scrutiny after the declaration of republic in 2007.

The very word “Nepal” conjures up images of not only gods and goddesses of amazing variety or saints and tantric magicians but also the modern epitome of “poverty”. Despite some 76,733 million rupees in aid (see Ministry of Finance, 2012) funnelled into the country annually through aid agencies, why the “development” industry has failed to liberate Nepal from the “scourge” of poverty remains the most puzzling question. “Economic aid fared badly in promoting gradual social revolution...”, neither did it “hasten the pace of the democratization of Nepalese society, as desired by western donors and India” (Mihaly, 2009, p. 208). Babu Ram Bhattarai, the Maoist leader, who was the prime minister of Nepal when I conducted this study, defends the cause of Maoist war even as critics argued it put Nepal back 20 years: “The move should be understood in the context of Nepal’s gradual decline to the status of the second poorest country in the world in terms of various criteria of development” (ibid, p.117).

The birth of ‘New Nepal’

In the *The Kathmandu Post*, Thapa (2012) wrote under the heading, “Promise of a New Nepal”:

Someone must have mentioned it somewhere, but I have yet to find evidence of who made the first reference to ‘New Nepal’ back in 2006. In any case, apart from recording it for the history books the identity of the first proponent of the idea is quite irrelevant. What is important though is that there was a shared understanding across the board that Nepal was going to be a different place following the success of the April 2006 movement. It could be that the aspirational wording of the November 2005 12-point agreement between the Maoists and the Seven-Party Alliance (SPA) presaged the notion of a New Nepal.

On the basis of that euphoria, the present reform was unveiled. Put differently, this reform was legitimized on the logic of “people’s power” over what Gellner (2007, p. 80) calls “autocratic monarchy”. The present reform was drawn from that logic of “New Nepal”, assuming that the years preceding 2006 were “old Nepal” or the “autocratic” past. At the outset, a particular historical reason and revolutionary struggles consolidated the present policy discourse of higher education.

4.4 Fieldwork in Kathmandu

Before I begin with the description of Kathmandu, I briefly mention how one Western magazine represented it:

Kathmandu...resembles Tudor England with its dirty narrow streets and stout poles erected between the houses to prevent them from toppling in on one another. The markets are an experience of sound and colour, every sense being invaded by the sheer spectacle of it all. A butcher squats in front of the skinned carcass of a dog weighing gross lumps of meat on ancient scales. An elephant is led through the square laden with baskets of scarlet chillies. Yes, Nepal is too different for anyone to prevail their own morals on what they see.²⁴

In November 2012, I embarked on my fieldwork, my primary field site in Kathmandu, the administrative headquarters of Nepal. I was returning after a lapse of two years. The first thing that caught my attention upon entering the city was a group of street urchins collecting bottles, papers, plastic and rags. They were chased by street dogs – their principal enemy. The former are called *kbate* (“ragged poor” or “homeless” people), and the latter *bhusiakukur* (street

24 A 1992 extract from *Sunday* magazine by Gavin Bate, who visited Kathmandu, in Sara Mills, 1997, p. 111.

dogs). But what interested me the most was the ancient practice where a Kasai was slaughtering a goat in open air in front of a limping dog in Chabahil, and that reminded me of Gavin Bate's article in *Sunday* magazine. It would be an injustice not to mention the stray cattle and bulls, which had the free run of the clogged up city roads, but their names and stories were not available immediately. Neither was the purpose of this study, which left me contemplating more on what would be the proper social arrangement in which men and animals must live in the world.

Assuming that the Western social arrangement, namely European or North American, was better, they have confined their animals and men through modern scientific laws and rules. On the contrary, here in Nepal, animals are left freely to roam. Assuming that the Western social arrangement was proper or "freedom", there should be no street dogs in Nepal: all animals have to be caged. No meat must be exposed in the open air, all carcasses and bones must have their proper place for disposal so that no one in Nepal must see them when they disappear. As I will show, the reform is driven by the Western rationality of law, confinement, governance, regulation and so on, which displaces the local social cultural practices that Bate found so mysterious in Nepal, where an open-air butchery thrives, or the butcher squats in front of a hungry dog reduced to a skeleton before distributing meat to the customers. Seeing my field through the lens of *bikas* would lead me to a similar conclusion: there must not be street dogs in Nepal; all animals must be enclosed or fenced; all the people of Nepal must live in Western style apartments monitored by surveillance cameras.

Applying the alternative lens as a poststructuralist ethnographer, the first phase of my fieldwork was carried out between November 2012 and January 2013 in Kathmandu. My primary focus in the first phase were policymakers situated across four different sites – the Ministry of Education, the National Planning Commission, the University Grants Commission and Tribhuvan University. My focus in the second phase was campus administrators, teachers and students situated mainly across four main sites – Shanker Dev Campus and the Institute of Engineering in Kathmandu; and Central Campus of Technology, and Mahendra Ratna Campus in eastern Nepal – implementing the reform. The focus in Kathmandu were the first two. However, I also collected data with similar themes from a few more sites to make the analysis more richer and comprehensive. Before I present the data, I briefly describe the place, the journey to those sites and the process involved in gathering the data.

People and places

A new ethnographer or a poststructuralist entering the contested territory of what it is to be Nepali begins his research at a little remove. Based on Denzin and Lincoln (2000), they immerse themselves deeply in the lives of the respondents before interpreting their stories. Ultimately, they argue, an ethnographer will present an “integrated synthesis of experience and theory” (ibid, p. 61). And, if it is true, as according to Foucault, that “the subjectivity is not *something* we are, [and since the knowledge of the social world is not pre-given] but it is an activity that we do” (McGushin, 2011), then I thought I should capture the activities of some of my respondents (actors) in the field while I myself got involved with them. These activities are social arrangements shaped by the dominant practices of power/knowledge. According to Angrosino and Rosenberg (2011), a qualitative social scientist is an observer who observes both human activities and the physical settings in which such activities take place. I interpret this in Foucault’s terms: “we have to refer to much more remote processes if we want to understand how we have been trapped in our own history” (Foucault, 1982, p. 780).²⁵ To know how one is trapped in history, I need to look at the present social arrangement in Nepal with strangeness and inquisitiveness even as I belong there. The method I posited requires me to defamiliarize my field (from how it appears through the lens of *bikas* as the system of knowledge) through a historical and spatial sense of awareness (Escobar 1995).

The first glimpse of the capital city of a secular republic of Nepal, described as “suitably modern” (Liechty, 2003), or “the chaotic modernity of the metropolis” (Madsen and Carney, 2011), unveiled a paradox: a million faces of gods and goddesses inscribed in motley form in the art and craft of temples and homes, and their worshippers offering sacrifices and performing elaborate rituals. If the second glance took me to *Mange-sankeranti* and *Swasthani*, which are large-scale national rituals sustained by the religious and cultural practices of Hinduism, the third glance revealed pockets of Hindi dances, cocktail drink parties and other Western cultural practices that included a Valentine’s Day social event, where young people exchanged “love notes” – a ritual that contrasted with the Gadhimai animal sacrifice in the south of the country, where the devotees sacrificed thousands of buffaloes to the gods (see Figure 2, in *List of Figures*). Before interviewing my respondents, I describe some of those

25 In “The Subject and Power”, *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 8, No. 4 (Summer, 1982), The University of Chicago Press, pp.777–795.

local social arrangements excluded from the modern discourse in the following segments.

Local discourses of life and soul

It was February 24, 2013. A dead body shrouded in an orange colour lay on the river bed next to the famous shrine of the Pashupatinath with its feet half dipped in water. The corpse gleamed as it caught the full moon light from the cloudless sky. It was 7pm. Next to the river, a band performed *aarti*. Two people washed the feet of the corpse and mounted it gently on the funeral pyre made out of a pile of wood. Soon, two more dead bodies arrived for burial. I visited Pashupatinath Temple with my relatives and friends. It is situated close to the airport and foreigners are banned from entering or taking photographs. Pashupatinath Temple is a sacred place of Hindu worship, and a place for burial. Thousands of sadhus who have abandoned their worldly attachments come here during the Śivarātri festival, marked to worship Lord Śivā, one of the three godheads in Hinduism associated with the powers of reproduction and dissolution.

The most memorable event one evening was attending a prayer congregation with my relatives and neighbours. If it is true that the subjectivity is an activity we do, then I thought I should immerse myself in local cultural and religious activities as well. My role as a poststructuralist ethnographer here was to gain an experience of how my respondents think and live their lives before interpreting their stories (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000, p. 61). This was required for the knowledge of the social world is not pre-given but it is an activity we do [together] (McGushin, 2011). What attracted me was a sadhu who was telling the story of life and death of the dead body on a funeral pyre through the metaphorical description of a drop of water on a yam leaf.

I went closer to listen to his sermon, when someone in the group asked, “What would happen to the *atma* (soul) once its leaves the body after death?” The sadhu interrupted and said the human life is a *karkalako pani* (rain water collected on a yam leaf) [see Figure 4, in *List of Figures*]. He described the mortal body as like that water drop, highly unstable and temporary, subject to death and decay. “Look! it is turning into ashes, leaving no traces behind.” He argued that the formless soul that escapes from body is the only *satya* (truth), which is eternal. This form of truth or what Nanda Shrestha (1995) would describe as belief in *karma* came alive in the field work. I met Swami Vedantacharya Chidrupananda, who explained me that the Hindus believe in a soul which escapes from the body in its last breathe and that is the only truth. I also happened to

listen to a week-long storytelling from the *Bhagavat Puran*²⁶ when a storyteller commanded us from the dais that our mind be possessed by only one object – God! By applying a deterministic phenomenological position relying heavily on the observing [knowing] subject, I would disregard these voices as “fatalistic”²⁷, “thoughtless”, and “unimaginative” (Bista, in Fisher, 1996, p. 354). But the people have found these Vedic texts and technologies of disciplining meaningful.

My role as a post-structuralist ethnographer is to lend an ear to the marginalised communities whose voices are repressed by the globalization of knowledge and to open up plural landscapes from where to articulate other forms of truth of the world. Here was a philosophical discourse of life and death that didn't rest on the ideals of “development”. Here was a serious question concerning the soul that didn't rest on the assumptions of capitalism or the materiality of things or substance. Here was a concern beyond the temporality of the physical world. In Foucault's sense, this philosophical discourse was not concerned with the body, but the care of the soul. It is at this point that I was reminded of Radhakrishnan (1974) in whose sense development is a Western conception of happiness originating with the Greeks and that is seen as self-evidently superior to other forms and practices of happiness. Radhakrishnan attributes the Western conception of happiness to Solon and approved by Herodotus in the following lecture he delivered at Oxford University:

He is whole of limb, a stranger to disease, free from misfortune, happy in his children and comely to look upon. If in addition to all these he ends his life well, he is of a truth the man of whom thou art in search, the man who may rightly be termed happy (Radhakrishnan, 1974).

The Greeks were also the first to formulate the [Western] conception of man and to devise an education based on an ideal [of material happiness] (Sim-

26 *The Bhagavat Puran* is believed to have been composed around 9th or 10th century CE (See Richa, P.C. (2003), “Embodied morality and spiritual destiny in the *Bhagavata Purana*”, in *International Journal of Hindu Studies*, World Heritage Press Inc, (6) 2, pp. 111—45).

27 Celebrated Nepalese anthropologist Dor Bahadur Bista explains this term with a liberal-modernist twist in an interview with James F. Fisher (1996): “By fatalism I mean when people are continuously fed, bombarded, brainwashed with the idea that, ultimately, what you are today is not a result of what you made yourself but was determined in your previous life or by some supernatural phenomenon or divine power, whatever you want to call it. Therefore, as long as we continue to preach the Sanskritic, Puranic texts, Nepal will not develop, because such texts directly destroy any seed of personal initiative and therefore any entrepreneurial interest and future-oriented activity. Fatalism comes out of the Hindu Puranic texts... I consider this thoughtless and unimaginative...” (p. 354).

mons, 1977). Far from being repressed or overwhelmed by the globalization of knowledge, the local discourses of life and death shaped by the disciplinary regimes of Buddhism and Hinduism were still vibrant and active.

An encounter with a jogi

Nepal's oldest job comes alive: Driving "devils" out of the home

What a coincidence! I was listening to the taped interview of a Maoist sympathizer who was recently appointed as an assistant dean at Pulchowk Engineering Campus, who took the view that traditional values and institutions were in deep conflict with education and development, when I stumbled upon a vibrant social arrangement excluded from the modern discourse. What caught my attention was a *jogi* performing *phēri ritual* (going round households at night blowing a conch and driving out evil spirits from the households or surroundings).

The first night in Kathmandu, when I arrived for my fieldwork, such a *jogi* came in at midnight blowing his conch and chanting mantras. Dogs howled. At that time, I lived with a relative in Chabahil. I suddenly woke from my deep slumber. The next morning Sabitri didi readied a *dan* to be offered to the *jogi* for warding off some evil spirits she believed become active in the night. When I asked her why the *jogi* came, she said he came to ward off the ghost (*bhoot*) living in Kathmandu. She claimed she had seen that spirit one night at Dhobi khola. She believes it really resides in Kathmandu. Had I lived with a Communist landlord, the response would be different. In the Foucauldian sense, here was a salvation-oriented form of power which imposed a different law of truth. Sabitri *didi* submitted herself to a different reason, and was guided differently in this portrayal of the story of the ghost.

As soon as Sabitri *didi* narrated her story, in that deathly hush of night when she described the figure of the ghost and the living dead that walked in that part of the town, and why the *jogi* was important here, her daughter objected: "There is no ghost except in your imagination". This was at once contradictory to what Durkheim had said, "In order that there be education, there must be a generation of adults and one of youth, in interaction, and an influence exercised by the first on the second..." (Durkheim, 1956). Sabitri *didi* and her ways of thinking were in conflict with her own daughter, who went to college. As I observed, the mother and daughter lived in the same house partitioned by two contested social territories.

Jogis are the disciples of Gorakhnath, a Hindu saint who lived in the 11th century. The saint authorized the jogis to protect the people from evil spirits

(see Jogi, 2012). The evil spirits are believed to be active in the midnight of the Nepali lunar calendar Kartik and Chaitra (ibid, p. 3). One of the oldest professions in Nepal, this form of practice was still legitimate for some people but excluded from the modern education and knowledge system. The job involves blowing a conch and roaming around at night driving out “evil spirits” from homes and locality. This was not the focus of my study; nor is it within the scope of this study. It helped me reflect on the multiple social arrangements in Nepal and my field as a territory of difference. My encounter with the *jogi* was at once contradictory to the global discourse of neo-liberalism and its logic of a common time, space, history and culture. What was allegedly a vanishing job seen to be different and contradictory to modern social practices came alive and active at midnight. This form of social practice finds reference nowhere in the present education and employment policy of Nepal even as it had a meaning for some people. The reform was silent about *jogi*. The reform thinking is fostered by the globalisation of knowledge but the field of practice is far from such assumptions.

An auspicious day to die

After the *jogi*, there came a most auspicious day to die on earth — *māghē sañkerāntī*²⁸. In January, Kathmandu residents took ritual baths in the holy rivers, eating only *tarul* and *ladoo* (pure food) to bring to mind Lord Vishnu²⁹. This came to light when I took part in a ritual bath during that festival. The devotees worshipped the sun god as a symbol of power at rivers by dipping themselves in “holy” waters and offering waters to the Sun God. The devotees believed that to die on that day would be auspicious for the soul to attain its eternity, a permanent salvation. Even if one did not die, this day was a lucky one to go to heaven; a holy dip in the river on this auspicious day was believed to purify the soul. [redacted] told that purifying the soul by eating only “pure” food and liberating it from worldly pleasures and pain dominated the discourse that day. Here was a different dimension of power and domination that didn’t rest upon socio-

28 Hindu festival held in the month of Magh (January–February) throughout Nepal and northern India.

29 Regarded by the Hindus as the supreme soul, Vishnu is the supreme godhead in Hinduism and is known as the preserver of the cosmos in a triad with Brahma and Shiva (...). Vishnu is believed to have nine earthly incarnations or avatars, including Ram, Krishna and Buddha. Some would even regard Jesus Christ as an avatar of Vishnu. The present avatar is believed to be of Kali, which symbolises the present time, what many Nepalese call *kaliyug* [age of the *kali*] marked by a fury of god. The locals reason that this happens as more people leave the path of “righteousness”. Below the trinity, the Hindus believe there are 33 other lesser gods, which include the Sun, the Moon and the Earth.

economic class but a spiritual consciousness. It is at this point I recall Levinson (2011) who had commented: “Foucault is the first to get us thinking seriously about domination along many other dimensions than socioeconomic class...” (ibid, 2011, pp. 14). Here was a subjectivity fostered by a system of knowledge and form of power that didn’t rest upon the internationalised ideology of modern economic practices.

Multiple and contested social arrangements

After purifying our body by dipping our bodies in holy water, we returned home. But soon after, that evening to be precise, a different truth was enacted to which I will now return. In the evening, my landlady organized a dance party. We wore “clean” clothes in the morning and ate only “pure food” that excluded onion and garlic, but at the party we wore leather jackets and boots, drank Scotch whisky and ate roasted chicken with fried onion and garlic. We soon enacted a new version of social arrangement, which did not rest upon the belief of an afterlife. While in the morning we were told that our ultimate purpose in the world was to free ourselves from the cycle of rebirth (*karma*), a sign of suffering, by the time we returned home and gathered for the drinks, that truth was already beginning to fade in favour of a new mode of being. It soon turned out that our purpose in the world was not to die, but to live healthily and long.

The day brought into existence the interplay of two kinds of laws that partitioned our movements and sanctioned activities into two kinds of social spaces. The morning imposed on us the rituals of fasting and purification, whose target was the soul, by offering us the opportunity to eat only pure food, whose meaning was derived from the system of power/knowledge sustained by the discourse of religion; the evening was composed of new laws of truth, of drinking and dancing – advice that at once contradicted the advice from the *punditjee* [priest]. But this practice was limited to the moments of the party. The next morning, Pranita (name changed), a university student, recited the *Svsthānī bratakatha*, a month long recitation, a form of storytelling, accompanied by fasting and eating only vegetarian food for the entire month. Every morning, she imposed on herself the routine of bringing the goddess of Svsthānī to mind by reciting aloud the holy mantra from the book before going to college.

That night, I was invited to a drinks party and disco dance. It was a middle-class family in Kathmandu. They had two sons and three daughters – all going to university. They danced to a Hindi Bollywood song, “Anarkali disco chali”

from the latest Bollywood blockbuster, *Housefull-2*. By taking part in that event, I happened to capture a different social arrangement that did not correspond to the stories of gods.

Mahesh had just completed his engineering course at India's Bangalore, and Raj who was studying charter accountancy in Delhi, was on holiday. There were three college girls – Pranita is newly married to a man settled permanently in the US and waiting for a reunion while continuing with her master's degree in Kathmandu, Sunita was doing her bachelor's degree, and Bhoomika had just returned from India with a degree in IT. I have decided to keep these names anonymous to protect their identities. All of them drank cocktails, a mixture of Scotch whisky and locally available alcoholic drinks. This was an informal social occasion, held between the early evening and midnight. It was December 2012. Taking part in a social event, a drinks party, was, in Foucault's sense, one way to look at the social circumstances or social arrangements of the time.

I sat around the table with the young graduates and their parents munching at the enormous plates of roasted chicken and goat's meat, occasionally sipping black label Scotch whisky dipped in ice. A blend of foreign Hollywood and Indian Bollywood music was playing. For the girls, who started dancing, their favourite was "Anarkali disco chali". The song said "leaving behind her beloved, Anarkali heads off to disco". It was not necessary to know who Anarkali was in context but to imitate the protagonists, Mallika, Abraham and Akshay Kumar, their gestures, and the movements of their body, legs and hands. We constructed a theatrical space in the living room to represent our distant heroes. The college graduates, two of whom had graduated in India, claimed unrivalled experiences from their education in India, including the knowledge of the dances, songs and the consumer goods from outside Nepal. They exhibited the talents and skills to fit themselves in a new social space outside that of their own parents and grandparents.

The next day when I conversed with *Ama*, she was visibly angry with her children and grandchildren violating the rules of purity of her home handed down from her grandparents. But in her 80s and frail and weak, she was like a broken doll, unable to enforce the orderliness of the house now invaded by her modernized children and grandchildren, schooled in Kathmandu and India's modern cities of Bangalore and Delhi. "This world is slipping out of my hand. Let them do whatever they like after I die," she said. She thought the new cultural items her children and grandchildren now consumed would not liberate their souls. She put on swathes of clothes around her body, crowned in a traditional veil, put vermilion on her forehead, offered water to the sun god

and *Tulsī* each morning, and murmured the names of gods all day – a discipline that her grandchildren had failed to appreciate. Her grandchildren were waiting for their grandmother to depart from the world one day when they would assemble in their own space in the kitchen and living room to cook meat or organize a drinks party.

It was not possible to gather one single belief and one single worldview from these social arrangements. Within a family, there existed multiple social arrangements and cultural territories. In Pigg's sense (1992), it was a contested territory of what it is to be Nepali come alive. Broadly speaking, the house where the dance party was enacted presented two world views – one, salvation-oriented, which *Ama* followed, and two, modern and materialistic, aroused by the concern for pleasure and happiness and structured by the development discourse. This led me to contemplate on the globalization of knowledge, one that aims to understand the whole world and its peoples in terms of the common experience of time and space. An education policy shaped by the global singular knowledge system must then have implications for different people.

It is not possible to say which is authentic or true or a more true social arrangement. In Foucault's sense, rather than seeing the one succeeding the other, it can be seen as a rational, or a more rational social arrangement. Thus, two contested social arrangements is what emerges, challenging modernity as a singular world view. There was, thus, “no singular transnational standard [of modernity], with its local digestions” (Rofel, 1977). At the outset, the Nepalese live in hybrid social arrangements, in which the discourses and practices that partitioned the social space for *Ama* are constituted in a different system of knowledge and power, mainly the Hinduism, which existed alongside the Western conception of “development” and happiness that formed a more rational social space for her children and grandchildren. As I show, when the actors talk about the difficulties of implementing modern education reform in the field of practice, they frequently refer to this tussle as if the two cannot exist together. The reform thinking shaped by the globalized system of knowledge does not take into account this hybridity and alternative knowledge of living in Nepal as demonstrated by *Ama*, *Sabitri didi* and the *jogi*.

Education is a social ladder with its endpoint in the West

The dominant imaginative geography of progress among the youth and students in Nepal is the West (Nepali words are *pashcim* and *bidesh* used interchangeably). Structured by the development discourse, it places Nepal in opposition to the West. Education is seen as a ladder, with its first step in Kathmandu and the

last step in the Western capitals. This came alive during a classroom observation in a government campus in Kathmandu. Here, I spotted a lesson taught to the undergraduates on how uneducated Mexicans had to rely on “coyotes” to enter the US illegally through rat-infested tunnels. For those who knew how to read maps, they did not have to fall prey to the “coyotes” or the rats in the tunnels. They easily found their way across the border. I observed the enactment of this lesson during a classroom observation, which left me contemplating a remark made by a senior teacher and a member of the higher education policy taskforce in Kathmandu that the new Nepalese higher education policy was attuned to the US system and the graduates were being offered international credit transfer facilities. Education as a social ladder to think of that dominant geography of progress came alive during this encounter.

I lived in a rented ground-floor flat in Kathmandu. One morning my landlady welcomed me upstairs for a cup of tea. She had “pleasant news” to share: Their eldest son had been selected in a US Diversity Visa lottery program to live permanently in the US. They had just received the “third letter” of assurance to come and live in the US. The first and second letters were required but they were not enough to secure the permanent visa. Their son and daughter, who held degrees in software engineering and nursing respectively, had all the comforts of life in Kathmandu but they had been trying themselves for least three years to settle permanently in the US. The happiness the news brought to the family knew no bounds. In shuttling between the story of the Mexicans immigrating to the US and the US DV lottery euphoria, I found the US was the dominant imaginative geography of progress. The story imparted to the graduates in Nepal implied that education was the only legal route to the US. The young graduate returnee from India obtained his DV Visa to live in the US. His parents were caught in a big dilemma, unable to make a clear choice between living in Nepal but deserted by their children and settling in the US.

Every year, the US selects 55,000 youths from selected countries in the world for settling in that country under its Diversity Visa Program. It is open to countries with low rates of immigration to the US. For a long time, the Nepalese youth have been recruited into the British army to safeguard the interests of the British crown by supplying abled bodied men who have the motto: “Better to die than be a coward” (Moore and Moore 2005). Nowadays, it is not just a few hundred or few thousand Nepalese going overseas to serve as British soldiers, but a hundreds of them leaving Nepal every single day, several hundred building the World Cup stadium in Doha, and those with higher qualifications settling in Europe and America. Twice the figure is serving as

cheap labour in Malaysia, South Korea and India as is farming or herding goats and cows in the Himalayas. The latter type of profession has been projected by international development (*bikas*) as unworthy of living and the life there culturally poor.

As the DV-lottery euphoria unfolded, more relatives and neighbours poured in with wide eyes and curious smiles. They remarked how lucky the man was to get a DV lottery. He had only recently returned from India's Bangalore with a degree in IT and had already two dozen IT companies calling him with job offers. He was unwilling to stay in Nepal. There were a few others in the neighbourhood who immediately wanted to offer their daughters for marriage to him. But no gold, silver or landed property would deter this youth in this desperate craving to leave Nepal. This left me to contemplate how his own country had failed to provide him that modern dream despite having had half a century of development intervention originally aimed at bringing material abundance to Nepal.

These young graduates had learnt the stories of modern progress they were introduced to through the stories of Mexican immigrants to the US during their first semester in college. A DV-lottery was an automatic rightful entry to experience that "progress". For all those who could not qualify, Portugal was the last option, but it still required a student visa to the EU. The DV-lottery was a permanent visa to the US. Another option was Denmark's Green Card scheme, which attracted most youths and students in Nepal when this fieldwork was carried out, but it required the completion of a tough process to qualify, and only a limited number of places were available. At the outset, education evoked the image of a ladder, with its first step in Kathmandu and the end point in the Western hemisphere. Here, the discourse of higher education evokes a social ladder, in which the graduates competed with each other in their climb to experience Western affluence.

Until around 2000, when I completed my undergraduate studies, Kathmandu was still at the top of that social ladder. I at once fell in love with Kathmandu and its food smells: It was here that I tasted my first whisky and broiler chicken, snacks and fast food in a cafeteria. I was enthralled by the Hollywood and Bollywood films. But soon, I was beginning to feel restless and haunted by the anxiety to leave Nepal as most of my close circles of friends began to move to foreign lands with the cheerful disposition of living in a "modern" way. The most remarkable sight was that of my own landlord's son smeared in vermilion and decorated by that enormous marigold garland leaving his home and bidding farewell to his parents and a bunch of friends and relatives.

A score went to see him off at the only international airport. Crowned in that enormous garland of flowers, that proud figure slowly getting into the taxi was a vision that attracted me the most. These new graduates had developed an appreciative understanding of the transnational space. It is at this point that I am reminded of the development discourse, which creates these social differences and subjectivities to make people think of their own country as place of laggards and that imaginary West as affluent. The first question the young Nepali graduates had asked me upon my arrival in Nepal after my European master degree was, “why did you come back? What made you to return to Nepal?” My landlady’s son and daughter were thoroughly unconvinced that I returned to Nepal from Europe with simply a master degree in education. “You ought not to have returned,” “You must have plenty of money then!” Clung to the belief that a university education was in itself my precious possession, I myself was returning. Many Nepalese until recently remarked of educational degrees and diplomas as life’s best insurance worth more than wealth or gold and silver. The main aim of education was to foster knowledge. Many people regarded knowledge as the most secured wealth. Things like money, gold and silver, it was argued, could be easily robbed by thieves or destroyed by natural forces like fire and water but the education was regarded as the safest possession. But the remarks “You ought not to have returned. You must have plenty of money then!” left me to contemplate on how the discourse of development was shifting the thinking and practice of education in terms of economic prosperity. This was made further evident in the review of the SHEP document and the international trend in higher education reform.

To situate the place where my field of study is located in a historical context, I next present the contemporary cosmopolitan Kathmandu that was until 1990, a “brick curtain”, inaccessible to many Nepalese and currently the epicentre from where the development apparatus operates in Nepal.

Rana regime in its new avatar is back in the “brick curtain”

The modern state of Nepal was founded through the unification of the country in 1769 by King Prithvi Narayan Shah, raja of Gorkha. The unification of Nepal was accomplished through the conquest of Kathmandu Valley by that raja in September 1768. There is an account of the people of Kathmandu as “patriotic”, putting up a brave front against the Gorkhali invaders, but ultimately the king of Kathmandu Jayaprakash Malla had to surrender (see Regmi, 1961, pp. 198–224). Kathmandu became the capital of a unified Nepal and a sanctuary, a “fort”, the new ruler himself proclaimed. Initially, there is

an account of the natives of Kathmandu fearing their new ruler and avoiding the attendance of ceremonial events, when king Prithvinarayan Shah is said to have remarked “all subjects of the government were equal in the eyes of law irrespective of community and caste they belonged to” (Regmi, 1961, p. 219)³⁰. Prior to the capture of Kathmandu, the rulers in Kathmandu had repeatedly requested the help of the British East India Company to fight against the Gorkhali invaders but to no avail (ibid). While many countries in Asia and Africa, including neighbouring India, fell to the British, Nepal was not colonized by any European powers. But in the name of “development”, there continues since 1950 what Mihaly (2009, viii) calls a “friendly invasion” from the industrialized countries, or what Shrestha (1995) calls “cultural imperialism”. Whether or not the failure to capture Kathmandu Valley by the Gorkhalis would have made Nepal a British colony, poor or developed, is a guess, but Regmi argues: “If Jayaprakash Malla had his way, the English would have been in the saddle in Kathmandu since 1767 with the Valley of Nepal as their first protectorate even if the Kathmandu ruler might not have liked it” (Regmi, 1961, p. 219). Would it be really different with 60 multilateral and 15 bilateral countries, 170 INGOs, and 30,284 NGOs swarming the country? This question haunted me all along during the fieldwork. It is at this time I found Mihaly useful for describing this internationalist intervention in Nepal as a “friendly invasion” instead of using the words “foreign invasion” or colonial interest (see more on this point in Chapter 3). This led me to reflect on how, in their new avatar, the Ranas were back in the “brick curtain”?

When Kamal Prakash Malla (1979a; 1979b) wrote in the early 1980s, he described the place Kathmandu occupied as “brick curtain” – virtually bereft of its adequate links beyond the “brick wall” to the outlying districts. When this fieldwork was carried out, the centrality of Kathmandu in virtually all matters – political, administrative, economic, education and health – began to be questioned. A new word “federalism” or “autonomy” was in the air to address the problem posed by the centrality of Kathmandu. The notion of autonomous campus rules as a further deepening of decentralization is founded in this logic, in that a centralized system of higher education with its administrative headquarters in Kathmandu was understood to be like a monarchy allegedly depriving its constituent campuses spread far and wide across the country of their freedom. Here, the notion of a centralized higher education is juxtaposed with that exclusive fortress, the high-walled concrete sanctuary, or the “brick

30 See also *Medieval Nepal, Part I, Early Medieval period 750—1530*, Calcutta: Firma K.L. Mukhopadhyay.

curtain” the kings of Nepal had lived with, hidden from the view of their own people. The April 2006 “revolution” that demolished those walls was expected to create a new republican order, so necessary to give all men and women in Nepal their respectable place.

At least 40 international donors have come to occupy some of those most expensive brick-walled residential quarters formerly occupied by the Rana rulers and Shah kings. With their foreign brand cars shining in the driveways, their high-walled residential quarters and iron gates manned by a fleet of private militia, who always stand to salute their bosses while shoving off beggars and passers-by, I got the feeling that the Ranas were still alive in Kathmandu. That absolute space, the shiny city centre, the central location in the national capital, is now invaded by Western donors, including India and China, which provide both money and advice to Nepal. In the ugly and chaotic metropolis uninhabitable to them live a majority of migrants from the mountains, hills and flatlands. Initially mesmerized by a development discourse to leave their respective villages, these migrants, affected by fetid garbage, choking pollution in the city, drying water spouts, a perilous shortage of cooking gas, soaring inflation and a perpetual struggle for a jar of drinking water have slowly been reconsidering going back to their villages.

Between 2000 and 2006, I remember those myriad press events, receptions, cocktail dinners, seminars, talk programmes and press conferences organized by the “government of donors” in star hotels of Kathmandu. A simple rustic coming from a village, it was here that I first came face-to-face with the Western whites, called in local Nepali language *kuire* (understood as wealthy, handsome/beautiful, tall, morally upright and culturally developed). I was filled with longing to meet a Western white, either as a sense of personal achievement or for the sake of prestige, as do many in Nepal. Any opportunity to talk in English, let alone touch a Westerner, was in itself a great achievement. As an education reporter, I was soon flying in helicopters or boarding tourist buses together with such super humans on earth to report on their projects. Revered like gods by everyone, nothing was more appealing to reason and feeling than to listen to their advices. I always thought the Whites were superior in knowledge. Occasionally I covered the news about their projects and interviewed their Nepali representatives. On many occasions, I was airlifted to project sites in MI17 helicopters, along with the project leaders and sometimes accompanied by ‘country representatives’, on short-term, generously-funded contracts, to report on their achievements, most of which were concerned with education, health and nutrition. *The Kathmandu Post* then occupied an un-

rivalled position as the country's number one English daily, and the only official medium for the international aid industry communicating "changes" in Nepal. A reporter in that national daily enjoyed a high level of social standing, being invited to cocktail receptions at foreign ambassadors' residences, rides to sunny restaurants in rolling hills to attend handsomely-funded seminars, or short trips to India. It was here that I came to learn about Nepal's multimillion dollar development industry that was assisted by international donors, their Nepalese spokesmen and women, mainly picked from Kathmandu, their myriad projects and the country representatives, who enjoyed more respect than the national poets, the British Gurkhas, prime ministers and the former kings. Their speeches and authoritative statements and interviews were often placed next to the masthead, and their project reports were given extensive coverage. Kathmandu is the political, administrative and economic nerve centre of Nepal, from where the development industry operates. It is a strategic space to plan and execute the "dollar-kheti".

For youths and students, it is the place for schooling and employment, and a social ladder, including the route to a foreign country and upward mobility. For a farmer, it arouses the dream of a better house, a plot of land or a secured future for their children; for a businessman, a restless desire to earn money. For hungry souls, it offer a bowl of rice or a penny in their pocket; for the sadhus, the hermits, the dying, sick and the old, the image of salvation or the deliverance of the soul from the body; for the criminals, a fertile place for murder and vengeance; for the brokers, a quick route to affluence; for the thieves, the chance to earn a quick buck; for the abductors, a place to secure a ransom; for the victims of human rights abuses, a place of asylum; and for the old and dying, a gateway to heaven. Such is the importance of Kathmandu as a place. A city of merely 300,000 in the 1960s (see Joshi and Rose, 1966), it contained four million in 2012. Official figures show 20 percent of them were youth and students haunted by a desire to go overseas for their higher education and permanent settlement.

Kathmandu has other significance as a national administrative capital and the headquarters of political parties. According to a newspaper estimate, 3,000 protests were organized by political parties in Kathmandu in 2010 alone, either for the sake of "power" or against "power". The prominence of Kathmandu as a city is not only woven into songs but also taught to students in schools across the country. Schools are institutions of *bikas*, a route through which *abikasis* or the underdeveloped move from village to *sahar* (Pigg, 1992). The

only metropolis in Nepal, Kathmandu's role in this process of urbanization and modernization of Nepal is hugely significant.

Locating the institutional site of reform: Tribhuvan University (TU)

We must also describe the institutional sites from which the doctor makes his discourse, and from which this discourse derives its legitimate source and point of application (its specific objects and instruments of verification (Foucault, 2002, p. 56).

TU was the main target of reform. My focus here were the administrators located in the central administrative office building who were implementing the SHEP. My aim was to make them enact the discourse of higher education reform. My initial targets were the rector, the registrar and the vice-chancellor (VC) who were called by a name, *Tri-moorty* (three heads of gods in Hinduism, namely, Brahma, Bishnu and Shiva). Here, the notion of *Tri-moorty* was used to idealize the three top positions at the university. When I reached the central administrative building (also called the VC office where the *tri-moorty* reside), it was padlocked by the agitating teachers. The *Tri-moorty* were under attack from the local idols of worships – the teachers. The three key positions were filled as political appointments, and as a form of practice, it was called *bhagbanda*.³¹ First, I shall begin with the exploration of the Tribhuvan University in Kathmandu, the site where my respondents were located and had become the subject of *bhagbanda* during this fieldwork.

On February 6, 2013, I was at the central administrative building, TU, to interview the vice-chancellor, the registrar and the rector. For one-and-a-half hours, I observed their offices, the visitors coming and going, and the work their personal assistants performed. Two dozen men crowded the registrar's area, another dozen, the rector's. The notice on the door said meeting times were only after 3pm but visitors were already there at 1pm when I arrived. The VC was on a trip to Denmark but two women employed to make tea for him said a dozen *afnoo manche* [his own men] came and left between 10am and 12am after enjoying a few cups of tea and some noodles. Not finding the VC in his office, they waited for an hour. "They were VC's *afnoo manche*," said one of the tea women as she prepared a cup of tea for me. The VC was embroiled

31 A form of political language used to critique appointments at university. It originated after Nepal returned to multiparty democracy in 1990. It gained currency in the post-April 2006 political discourse and entered into the education discourse. I have included an interview on this theme separately in the Appendix (see: *Appendix 4*).

in a dispute over *bhagbanda*. Teachers organized protests against his personal decision to appoint his own people at the Institute of Medicine. It is envisaged that the increased efficiency of higher education institutions in Nepal will only come from displacing the past centralized management of higher education institutions by introducing decentralization and autonomy. But the practice of *bhagbanda* appeared as strange as the centralized system accused of inefficiency.

At the office of the Registrar, two female office assistants and a male personal assistant were fighting a losing battle against an invading army of visitors. They sat in the lobby waiting for their turn to see the registrar who stayed inside his office. Nine visitors, some standing, some sitting on the sofa, some looking impatient to meet the registrar, crowded the lobby where three peons carried out their jobs. The door of the lobby or personal assistant's room is always open. Anyone can freely come and go, but they needed permission to meet the registrar. The regulation mandated only permitted people to enter, but the visitors broke the order. The most formidable was a man talking on his mobile phone, who suddenly dashed in without any permission. He told the assistant, "I have already sought the appointment through mobile phone!" He forcefully entered the registrar's office. As he returned, he continued to talk loudly with someone over his mobile phone. The assistant got very irritated, "Get away, you... can't phone inside our office!" The assistant had the power to enforce the order and discipline but the visitors would not abide by it.

After a moment of hesitation, I approached the personal assistant, "Sir, can I ask you why some visitors enter the office freely and some need your permission?" "There is no system here, *hamro manche* take laws in their own hands, what can I do? The whole TU administrative system is in trouble." The tea women upstairs said *afnoo manche*. But here was a *hamro manche*. *Thulo manche*, *ramro manche*, *hamro manche* and *utkrista manche* circulated throughout the field work. It later turned out that the *hamro manche* was the newest type of person, referred to as political party cadre. This type of person took advantage of his party position and membership to challenge the TU authority and campus management by influencing their decisions in awarding contracts, promotions, transfers and appointments. As a practice, this came to be known as political *bhagbanda*. This was one effect of the discourse of decentralization in education in the post-1990 period. The practice under the centralized program of the king had bred *afnoo manche*, one's close relations, or the most favoured person.

The vice-chancellor, rector and registrar at TU were thrown out of office by the teachers' agitation as they came from *bhagbanda*. They demanded that the

trend of *bhagbanda* be ended in the university. For the next two months, the VC office was padlocked by the agitating teachers, which forced me to knock at the doors of rector, registrar and the vice-chancellor at their own private quarters. At their residences, I thought they would be relaxed and uninterrupted by *ham-ro manche*. However, I found that they were already overstretched and frustrated by having to answer so many telephone calls, hold so many meetings and negotiations with agitating teachers and students who protested the reform. In some campuses where the SHEP was deployed, the agitating teachers and students dragged out their campus managers and obstructed the implementation of the reform.

Shanker Dev Campus

The next institutional site of the discourse and the target of reform was Shanker Dev Campus, a constituent college of TU, implementing the reform signalled by “decentralization”. It was located in Kathmandu. The object of investigation in this campus was the enactment of the discourse of higher education reform in the form of practice known as “decentralization”, whose effect was the creation of a BBA study programme. A World Bank education specialist for Nepal described this study program as a “hot cake”. Speaking on condition of anonymity, the Bank’s education specialist said that after the decentralization of this institute in 2002, the campus management had begun to enjoy the power to raise student fees. But the chief of this institute was already frustrated with decentralization for making him inadequate to exercise powers in matters related to the use of the funds so generated by the institute. The new students of BBA were understood to be self-financing entrepreneurs of education, who even brought their own drinking water to campus and paid all the fees, including educational trips to big Indian cities. Their education was entirely financed by parents who borrowed from relatives and friends. Had it been in Denmark, where GDP per capita spending on education is highest in the world, borrowing money from friends and relatives to go to university would have been scarcely thinkable. Here, the neo-liberalism orders our thoughts into the thinkable when we assume that educational experiences in Nepal and Denmark are comparable even as they remain poles apart from each other. First, a word about the place where the campus is located.

Named after the popular Kasthamandap Tent House, Kathmandu Metropolitan City (KMC) is composed of 35 wards. This campus, where the reform was deployed, was located in Ward 31. This institute was the prime target of higher education reform. The ward 31, my field site, has an area of 103.7

hectares, and its population came to around 14,502. Also located in this ward are household names in Nepal – Ratna Rajya Campus, Tri-Chandra Campus, Law Campus, Padma Kanya Campus, International Languages Campus and Padmodaya High School, among others. Close to the campus is the Old Bus Park from where many parts of Kathmandu and other parts of Nepal can be reached by bus transport. The biggest landmarks of Kathmandu are located around the campus, and they include Ratna Park, the Open Air Theater, Royal Nepal Army Pavilion, Exhibition Center (Bhrikuti Mandap), Nepal Tourism Board, and the Rastriya Sabha Griha.

Home to all major commercial and business activities, crowded by government offices, invaded by donor agencies and diplomatic offices, and populated by temples, factories, schools, colleges, universities, businesses and commercial complexes, Kathmandu is the largest and the only metropolitan city in the country, where the majority of my respondents were located.

Campus profile and its environs

I read the campus strategic plans and visions before interviewing the actors to understand the reform signalled by the BBA. The strategic plan described this campus as a pioneer commerce and business college aiming to become the top business school in Nepal. Established in 1955, the campus was running BBS, BBA, MBS and MBA degrees (a BIM was added recently). It enrolled the 50 percent of the country's commerce/business graduates. There were 5,255 students in the BBS, 2,570 in the BBA, and 2,565 in the MBS. The total number of teachers was 120, and staff numbered 67. The land area of the campus was 9 Ropani, 3 *anna*, 2 paisa (around. 4,572m²). There were 28 classrooms.

The Strategic Plan (2013–2018) of the campus stated it was soon becoming an “autonomous” pioneering commerce and business school in Nepal and a model for South Asia. Included in the plan was “fencing the boundary” (*ghera-bara*), whose aim was to improve the visibility to foster discipline among the students, monitor who was leaving and entering the campus, improve the attendance of teachers and students, increase a sense of ownership among the local stakeholders, monitor campus activities and improve the manageability. In so doing, it was expected to undergo a radical change from the past modes of organization. Boundary lines and fences were required to stop the free entry of students. Prior to this, it had been centrally managed and a freely accessible public campus.

This campus is hailed in the count as the “number-one” business college

and a model to emulate for other colleges across the country. The campus homepage states:

All buildings in use at the present time provide ample space for educational, administrative and financial divisions ... It also contains a fountain, a basketball and a volley ball court, and a separate restroom for students.

Except for a basketball court built many years ago on a tiny grant, the campus had not even a blade of grass in its environs, let alone a fountain or flower garden. Without an auditorium, gym, lecture hall, seminar room, football ground, a park, lawn, or a field to lie down, an idea of a university college was conceived here 50 years ago from just a building and few classrooms. The facility itself was donated by one person, named Shakner Dev, and then built by the state with an stingiest grant. Education in Nepal started as a community undertaking rather than as a state enterprise. Many of Nepal's public schools and colleges were established, resourced and supported by local communities. The state provided small financial contributions. The development discourse that circulated after 1950 tied education to economic and material ends, requiring the state to take control over it in the pursuit of that dream. Prior to that the people had helped each other in the eventuality of *marda-parda* [death and birth] (Shah, 2008, p. 483, emphasis added). Under a "folk" government and society they lived, they rarely came to the hospital. Even if they came, they did so only after the local remedies like witch doctors had failed (Pitt, 1971, p. 725). Surrounded and overwhelmed by concrete buildings of all hues and colours, this campus stood next to an ancient river, which had died from excessive pollution. This river, once named as "Sugarcane River" for its pure drinking water, according to some locals, had turned into sewer. Most students came to the campus wearing masks to avoid the pungent smell of the river. "Development" manifested here as a pollution, a deadly "parasite that devours everything" (Shrestha, 1995, p. 153). Trying to figure out what actually flows now in that ancient river of Kathmandu, there was not one or a few things that was possible to count, but a multitude of different toxic chemicals, faeces, industrial and hospital waste, paper, plastic, worn-out clothes and electronic goods. The water, which was reduced to a thin narrow rivulet, quickly disappeared beneath the maze of trash. This river stood next to the campus building wall. Cleaning this river or surrounding was not part of the education reform, which, nevertheless, supplied students with images of clean European environs through the discourse and practice of education.

Situated in Putalisadak, a highly compact, densely populated business centre

of Kathmandu, full of noise and bustle, the campus, with its 4,000 plus students, was smaller than a downtown department store. There was more space on the road than in the campus. The campus itself looked like an overloaded microbus in Kathmandu. So small was the space in the campus that the students and staff came in multiple shifts. A total of 3,096 came before daybreak, 100 came after sunset, and 790 came between daybreak and sunset.

A multitude of students were huddled on the stairs, floors, gates and doors when I reached this campus on a November morning in 2012. The BBA block, separated by a high iron chain gate, was shown as the prime effect of the reform launched in 2002 under a decentralized mode. A security guard with a mask on his face saluted me. He stood next to the toilet. His duty was to make sure no boys went into the girls' toilet and vice versa. He also ensured that only students who were properly groomed and wearing a uniform entered the new block epitomized as reform. He checked their uniform, tie knots, shoe laces, finger nails **and so on before letting them through the gate**. This guard, who stood for eight hours a day for three dollars a day still managed to send his three kids to a low-cost private school. He asked me, "Sir, can you help me find a job in Europe? I can manage with English." Each time, I met him at the iron chain gate, he asked for my help to fly abroad. He opened the gate when the students and staff arrived and closed it when they left. But he had one more duty imposed on him: to salute every teacher and the student leader each time they entered and left the college. After a brief chat with him, I visited the busiest administrative section of the campus, which issued student identity (ID) cards, maintained student records and collected fees.

Western scientific technology in conflict with local practice

I was spellbound when the chief of the student administration department told me how their Western technology had come into conflict with the local practice. This was in a small one-roomed office, with files and papers haphazardly stacked on shelves. There was no computer to enter the students' data or check past records. Student ID cards were made manually and issued manually; past records and files were searched manually. There were four staff members who worked like ants.

Scores of students were already standing around impatiently for their ID cards when I arrived there one morning. These students did not queue up; they created a logjam. An official in the corner searched for a student record in a six-foot-tall, dust-laden cupboard. She took a long time to find the record. One student impatiently jerked his head. The first student was still awaiting

his card when the second one came in; before the first left, the third came in with a query, “Madam, where can I find a form?” The fourth one came in with the same query. She told him, “There is no more left, come next day.” But in utter disbelief he forced himself, grumbling and fumbling, to go to the edge of the table the officer occupied and opened the drawer. “Look madam, I got one here”. The lady, already overworked with the task of handling a swarming horde of students, cracked a small smile and said, “Good that you have finally found it!” After the student left, I asked her: “How has the reform introduced by the campus helped you? For example, is it not easier and faster to use a computer instead of manually searching students’ records and issuing ID cards?” She replied that the Western scientific technology was introduced at the beginning but that it did not work as the local practice had preceded it, following which computerization of student IDs was banned in favour of issuing manual cards. This happened after the introduction of decentralization in 2002 when the reform gave rise to a new trend of copying and duplicating. At the outset, the science and technology, what Escobar would describe as an “index of [Western] civilization” was in a tussle with the local Nepalese civilization. The chief said her students could not be convinced of the merits of computerized identity cards, due to their duplication by “fake” students.

BBA signalled “reform”

The most important sign of reform was a four-year semester style BBA study program. I will begin with the interview technique that took the form to get this answer. If discourse is a social text concerned with talk (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2000), my format and style of interviewing, if there was one, hinged between a talk, group discussions, chat, *tête-à-tête*, common gossip, or an extempore speech. I sum up my take on interview as a chit-chat. This was required in a non-Western, non-science, context or what I prefer *contested territory of difference*. In most interviews, I stood between empathy and persuasions; that is neither being too flexible nor exercising the persuasive power of saying “stop!” or “no!” to my respondents. It consisted of a one-time brief exchange to multiple overlapping sessions. These interviews were not structured. They were somewhere between haphazard; disorderly and controlled. Some interviews took the form of a talk-show; others were a get-to-know of other. The questions were mostly open ended. They were not sequential or predetermined. On this particular occasion, between a one-to-one-meeting I had with the campus chief of Shanker Dev Campus, an unwelcome intruder came out of the blue to chit-chat. Suddenly one or more visitors comprising a relative, family mem-

ber, party worker, acquaintance, and a colleague crashed in. A babbling noise and laughter filled the room. The people in the sofa spoke at once, instead of turn. The first visitor to enter was a columnist in a local newspaper. Soon, four more people arrived. The fifth finally joined in. They began to talk at the same time. The sixth visitor to enter the room was a peon who came with tea in a tray. But the campus chief was so well trained that he managed to lend his ears equally to all of us, unperturbed by the clanging of vehicles outside. The room facing the dusty road was brighter from the sunlight that entered from the windows than from the dust-laden electric bulb that flickered off and on. The peon brought more tea and some more files. The Chief signed them as he continued to talk to me while lending his ears and eyes equally to all the visitors. The individual interview then took on a lively group discussion in which two or more people talked at a time without any structure or trace of irritation. Had this been in Denmark or in any other country in Northern Europe, it would irritate the two of us in conversations so much that we would have to shout at the intruders, let alone allow them to intervene in an interview exclusively arranged between us. One must be therefore wary of a systematic qualitative interview in a non-Western context. Rather than feel irritated or bored, my respondent appeared more encouraged when the unwelcomed guests arrived and chatted casually, some even phoned their relatives and friends from the office. With the interviewees themselves maintaining the role of the time-keeper, my role was reduced to a recorder and note-taker. This interview took the form of “interactional moments” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 709, ed.). It continued intermittently for about three hours amid tea and guests arriving, when I had to shout at my respondent, albeit politely, “sir, shall we continue another day?” There were so many incidences of gate-crashing during the interviews. It will be inaccurate to suggest that the intruders were disruptive to the aims and objectives of the interview; rather they helped accomplish the objective of the interview by making it open, informal, and lively.

The object of focus in the interview in Kathmandu was a full-fee, four-year, US/EU-style, semester-based Bachelor of Business Administration (BBA) programme launched by Shanker Dev Campus under the decentralization scheme and named as “reform”. The most important thing the campus chief pointed out was that the BBA was the chief outcome of the reform after being asked to point out one concrete example of it.

During an earlier interview, a policymaker in Kathmandu had opined that higher education in Nepal was becoming a self-investment enterprise and a costly affair. He suggested I pay a visit to the institutes which had recently

introduced BBA, BE, BIM and BTech programmes as some of the examples where only self-financed students come through a national competition to relieve the supposedly “fragile state” from its financial burden. The self-financed and “regular” categories of students were banned from working part-time. It made it impossible for the large majority of working students to get onto these new study programmes. This arrangement was still hailed as “reform” in many quarters and the future education model of Nepal that aimed to make the students and parents their own entrepreneurs of education. The system of knowledge that circulated this discourse was neo-liberalism. This campus was the first one to implement the reform in 2002. As a form of practice, it was called a four-year BBA programme. However, unable to convince all of the students and parents of its merits, it gathered only a small group of students at one end of the building by offering an international credits transfer facility to study and work abroad. What was surprising was that 90 percent of the graduates who had completed their BBA left the country to study and settle down in the Western hemisphere. The original aim of the reform was production of a mid-level skilled human resource for Nepal to fulfil its soaring demand for such workers in mushrooming banks and financial institutions.

4.5 Fieldwork in Dharan

Fieldwork in Dharan, eastern Nepal, was necessary because the Central Campus of Technology (CCT) located in this place was one of the first to be targeted by the present policy for deployment of the autonomous campus rule under the World Bank’s SHEP. Out of the 60 public campuses under the TU, this was the only campus after Ilam to implement the autonomous campus rules. The word “reform” here referred to another word, “autonomy”, in this campus. At Shanker Dev Campus, it referred to ‘decentralization’. The CCT was the only modern food science institute in Nepal, and the key target of autonomy that was originally stipulated by the policy was to produce nutritionists and dieticians for hospitals, nursing homes, and the community and public health sectors, assuming that these graduates would stay in the country. However, as I will show in the interviews with campus managers, nearly fifty percent of the graduates leave Nepal to work in the US, Canada and Australia. As I show, this is how the policy and practice contest with each other. I will next describe my journey into the field to collect data.

The journey to the “Hong Kong of Nepal”

This place was known as the “Hong Kong of Nepal”. Whereas others in Nepal might consider this appropriate, I found it a strange description. With this initial reflection, I start describing my fieldwork with a 1971-story of eastern Nepal that I found in a British medical journal.

The whole family sleeps in the same room, the only room of the house. There are no windows, not only because of the intense cold in winter, but because it is imperative to retain the wood smoke from the central fire in the room to protect the timbers from being destroyed by insects. Without any ventilation, these buildings are an ideal media for “galloping” consumption. The saddest name the Nepalese have for tuberculosis is Raj Banshi Rog, royal family disease, or King’s disease, as only a King, or at least a very rich person, can afford to treat in Nepal. The rest have to resort to the witch doctors and their cure for tuberculosis – the meat of the jackal ... It was Chainpur, where Mark Howarth delivered the drugs, that a Himalayan black bear once held the whole village in terror, and where the local policeman had to be carried for five days through the mountains to Dharan, his face having been destroyed by the bear. Our biggest problems were the witch doctors and local folklore, for only after both had been tried unsuccessfully would the patients come to the hospital. (Pitt, 1971, p. 725)

Peter Pitt (1971) narrates the story in the *British Medical Journal* of how the struggle between modern science and local practices developed in Nepal historically. Archaeological approach requires a historical method of inquiry to understand this place. Accordingly, by placing that story in a historical context, I set out on the journey to eastern Nepal. The question here is not really about tuberculosis but a tussle between the Western medical team and local shamans over the question of what method is best to treat the man who was badly injured by the bear. According to Pitt, at that time, people in Nepal came to the hospital only after the local remedies had failed. By replacing and marginalizing the local remedies, the Western system of knowledge began to make inroads into Nepal after 1950 (see Shrestha, 1995). One of the main reasons why the reform targeted Dharan for its deployment arose out of the historical significance of the place as the recruitment ground for the British army and the establishment of the first modern hospital in eastern Nepal that replaced local medical practices. It subsequently became the principal location for the establishment of Nepal’s first modern Western food science technical institute. The aim of this science and technology institute was ambitious: how to improve the health of the potential British recruits while also helping the

Nepalese alter their tradition of vegetarianism and non-drinking attitudes in favour of modern drinks and meat eating at the international level. The CCT started in 1970 as an applied science and technology institute as Nepal began to count on science to address developmental modernity (see Guo 2008). The main focus of this section evolved from that historical context. Currently, the official policy is how to introduce new Western food and drinks to the Nepali people while averting food shortages and minimizing imports from outside as part of ensuring the future economic security of the country. The role of CCT was important in this process. Field work in Dharan, known in Nepal as the “second Hong Kong”, was conducted for about one month, from 15 December 2012 to 26 January 2013. This notion of place and person constructed by development discourse in eastern Nepal was interesting to encounter.

Person and place in eastern Nepal

The Lahure soldierly body

...the disciplined soldier begins to obey whatever he is ordered to do; his obedience is prompt and blind. The training of schoolchildren was to be carried out in the same way (Foucault, in *Discipline and Punish*, 1991).

The choice of Dharan as my field site arose mainly because it is historically associated with that soldier, the iconic Lahure persona which fuels the imagery of the disciplined, “good” and normal human person. The term “Lahure” refers to “one who goes to Lahore, still today the Nepali term for a man who enlists in a foreign army” (Coleman, in Harding, 2001). The word Lahure is associated with the former British India town of Lahore. The British, who then ruled India, came in contact with Nepal for the first time in 1814, through the war popularly known as the Anglo-Nepal war of 1814–16. Whether the British were defeated or awed by the “high soldierly qualities” of the Nepalese or their bravery is beyond the scope of this study, but what became increasingly clear in Nepal was the emergence of that ideal figure of Lahure, glamorized as one who will never surrender in the battlefield. By telling that such an individual chooses not to be captured by the enemy but prefers martyrdom instead, an automatic obedience was sought from the people of Nepal to serve as the frontline troops for the British. This is how a “valiant” warrior was born in Nepal and who first happened to traverse the whole world and returned with bundles of foreign goods and sophisticated cultural items.

Lahure has gained currency since 1850 when the British first officially started recruiting the Nepali youths. What made the Lahure an iconic image of

a modern man in Nepal is his motto: “Better to die than be a coward”, or, instead of being captured by his enemy, he prefers to attain martyrdom for the cause of defending his motherland or foreign allies. Lahure formed the imagery of that never-surrendering ideal man in Nepal. Woven into patriotic songs and film, Lahure became a perfect model to emulate in Nepal. But this gentleman was facing immediate extinction in Nepal following the end of the older colonial development idea of loyalty and service. However, a description of this was required, given that one of my field sites was epitomized as a modern Gurkha town.

A majority of Dharan residents are Adibasi-Janajatis – the prime targets of the British army. They were the first to leave Nepal for overseas duties during the two world wars. In this process, Dharan came to be called “Nepal’s Hong Kong”, an iconic town associated with that British Lahure. The ideal figure of a person in Nepal was a strong, brave, healthy, rich, consumer of foreign goods and exposed to Western modernity. The recruitment of the Lahure continues even today, but the primacy of that ideal figure was for the British shifts to production of the modern individual for the whole of society and the world aroused by a new sense of time and space. The discourse of *Labure* is now replaced by the discourse of development, which suggests that the whole of Nepal must become like Hong Kong and all of the Nepalese *Labures*.

What a coincidence! When I reached that iconic Gurkha town, I was expecting to meet the Lahures but they were leaving for Britain under the new policy of the British government allowing them to settle down permanently there. Prior to this, many retired British Gurkhas in Dharan had received a pension in Nepal, which, according to the British House of Commons (see Caplan, 1991, p. 573) cost £5.6 million annually. A part of that has no doubt gone into the making some of Dharan’s finest private residential homes, Western-style English schools and colleges. Dharan became an iconic image of a “modern” local ‘Hong Kong’ resident town throughout Nepal. That image of the town looked shaky in the wake of the former Gurkhas deserting it as Nepal became the “fragile state”, insecure and dangerous to live in.

An encounter with Luitelni didi

How do locals in eastern Nepal view this social change? Before entering the Dharan campus, I was exploring the surroundings when I encountered a woman who had migrated from her ancestral home in the mountains to Itahari, a bustling town in eastern Nepal in search of *bikas*. She introduced to me as Luitelni *didi* [sister]. It was January 16, 2013. A cold wave had just lifted from

the winter sky and a haze of dust and smoke had taken its place. The hills in the distant stood out in silhouette. A cloud of smoke billowed from the fire nearby. A group of schoolchildren had gathered around the outdoor fire. Some had collected wood to keep the fire going. Nearby, a fleet of tractors unloaded cements, bricks and iron rods. Soon a snake crawled underneath a mango tree. A boy wearing woolly jumper shouted “goman, goman out there!” Luitelni *didi* ran after the snake with a thick stick in hand. A fleet of schoolchildren followed her. But soon the snake disappeared in the bush.

“We killed a poisonous *goman* the other day. It hid right underneath that bush, but this one is so surefooted,” said Luitelni *didi*, who imagines her ancestral home in the mountains as a place of *dukeba* (pain) and no longer liveable. Next to a stack of hay in front of her newly built, one-storey concrete house, surrounded by a cluster of densely packed concrete houses that she imagines as a place of *sukeba* (wellbeing), is a large gravel road that has just replaced the dirt road used only for bullock carts. I was taking pictures of a school bus racing past two bullock carts of early 20th century vintage next to the house Luitelni *didi* lived in. She pointed to the two vehicles and said, “Look how the bus is slowly replacing that old lazy bullock cart that crawls like a snake!” She imagined that when the bus completely takes over the bullock carts, the price of the piece of land she purchased will hit twice the present figure. Luitelni *didi* imagined the bullock cart as “old” Nepal and the bus as “new” Nepal. She imagined the social change as she headed from the bullock cart to the bus service in her hometown (see Figure 10 in *List of Figures*).

Imagine this place in the 18th century. It was a vast jungle, home to wild animals from which Nepal exported elephants, elephants’ teeth and various medicinal drugs to the British empire in India (see Regmi, 1961a). Back then, this place was a sparse settlement for an indigenous tribe called Tharus, who lived in the outskirts of the forest, described by one British India military man, Captain Kinloch, who led the first Nepal expedition as “choking jungle” (Regmi, 1961b, p. 6). Two hundred years down the road, that “choking jungle” had disappeared, along with its elephants, to become a virtual battlefield in which different Nepalese political groups fight over who is the rightful occupant of the place. The place has now become a battleground for builders and settlers from neighbouring hills, mountains and plains, who are divided into ideological camps, some pro-India and pro-America and others anti-India and pro-China. After the declaration of the republic in 2007, the pro-India groups, which occupy some of the flat and fertile areas in the south-eastern belt, wanted an autonomous state here. The April 2006 “revolution” and the interim constitu-

tion promised each of these different ideological groups autonomous states, assumed to be so necessary for securing them economic and political independence. That discourse of political autonomy is presumed to have deprived the Nepalese of their economic and political freedom under the monarchical and centralized state. As I show, this is how the discourse of the autonomous state consolidated the thinking and practice of the “autonomous campus” I am going to investigate.

Entering the “autonomous” Dharan Campus

Situated in the lap of the Siwalik mountain ranges, 1,234 metres above sea level, and covering an area of 10,338 hectares, is the Dharan municipality town where the campus is located. The town had a population of 150,000 in 2012. The word “Dharan” means traditional saw mill. Despite its prominence as a modern replica of Hong Kong, the place has a traditional and historical significance, with its Bijaypur, Panchakanya temple and Budasubba temple (where bamboos have no tops), Dantakali and Pindeswor (bolbom). A majority of its residents are Adibasi-Janajatis, the target of British army recruitment. A large majority of youths in the town work abroad, mostly in the UK and Indian armies, and in Singapore and Hong Kong. Caplan (1991) estimates there are now 100,000 Gurkhas in the Indian army.

Of this place, the locals said there once lived the legendary kings of Bijaypur, who rode on elephants. The campus premises comprise 19.5 *bighas* (13.2 hectares) partly covered by a forest. The CCT was established in 1972 as an Institute of Applied Science and Technology. Managed centrally and funded fully by the state, it then offered a two-year study programme in Food Technology and Laboratory Technology. The campus currently offers a BSc (microbiology major), BSc (physics major), BSc in Nutrition and Dietetics, a BTech (food), an MTech (food) and a PhD in food science. I was visiting the campus after it had been in existence for 40 years, in the winter of 2012. Nevertheless, there was plenty of sunshine. At the north of the town is the campus. It stands between the town and the village.

From the Dharan bus stop, I took a short cut, a walking path to the campus through a woody gentle slope. The piercing horns of motorbikes and buses dissipated and chirping birds and the tapping of the woodpeckers filled their places as I left the town to enter the campus. There were a few bushy trees, plenty of green foliage and undergrowth that had survived the forces of urbanization in the vicinity. The most interesting thing I encountered was a bunch of grey langurs swinging from tree to tree – a remnant of those pri-

mates George Moore in 1952 had mistook for Yetis and fired shots at them. Mystified by the Yeti, the king of Nepal then had invited Western anthropologists to determine the truth (Moore and Moore 2005). It was late morning, around 11am. From the midst of the pendulous primates, I quickly climbed the gently sloping elevation to reach the campus. From the edge of the town, it took me 15 minutes on foot.

What was most spectacular of all was the sight of the grey langur peeping in from the college window next to the campus chief's office. One entered the campus chief office and quickly jumped out when an assistant entered with files. Yet another sat on the office veranda in the sunshine and began to slumber. "Don't take their pictures too close, lest they take your mobile phones," said the assistant campus chief as a bunch of college staff basking in the sun laughed. The grey langur refused to budge from its position. I waited until the campus chief arrived to go into the office building. Finally, the langur slowly rose, shook its body of the dust, and hopped out of the way to a nearby tree, clearing the way to the campus administrative building.

The next attraction was a new campus gate being constructed. But a fierce debate was going on as to the design and shape of the gate. The most controversial thing was the statue of the Hindu goddess of knowledge, Saraswati, being erected. The Maoist party had objected to the statue and wanted a secular form of art. The newest party in Nepal that believed in Marxism and Maoism, defied all things classed as gods. The Nepali Congress and UML party had given permission for the statue of the goddess. When this campus was first erected, the kings of Nepal had ordered a lotus and snake to be inscribed here and fed with a fountain, but the most recent political power wanted a newer representation. At the outset, those who kept faith in God and those who kept faith in Western science and secularism were in a tussle.

Close to the campus gate stood a staff canteen. The *sauni* (kitchen chef) came with a succulent steak of *sag* to cook lunch for a bunch of campus staff. Her daughter grinded *timbur* (green pepper) and chilli to give the curry a spicy flavour. The deputy campus chief explained about the surroundings as some staff ate their way through enormous plates of rice with lentils, *sag* and tomato pickle. Nearby, a vendor assembled a bundle of fresh corn and roasted one of them over the fire until it turned brown. After munching at it quickly with the *timburko achar* I left for the campus to interview the officials. The interview data are provided separately in Chapter 6.

After the interview, I sought the help of Shyam sir, the assistant campus chief, who insisted I visit the campus to see the effects of the reform in the

form of concrete practices. Five things he showed got me more interested. The first was a cow shed-like structure, the remains of the old campus, where a woman was feeding a baby goat with rice. That local woman bemoaned that her goats had no place to move around so she came here. The assistant chief asked me to look at the abandoned building of the 1970s and the new building constructed under the World Bank's grants (see Figures 6, 7 & 8 in *The List of Figures*). In so doing, he wanted me to understand the continuous development of the campus historically. Shyam sir said that the cow shed-like structure represented the NESP, but the new buildings being erected in the vicinity were as a result of the SHEP. The former was used to represent education in "old Nepal", the vanishing past. The latter was used to represent modern education in Nepal. Shyam sir said that to return to the logic of the centralized education system represented by the NESP would be like giving continuity to the cow shed-like structure. He, thus, suggested the impossibility of returning to the past. This was an informal chat we had during a campus tour guided by him.

The second attraction was aborted children/foetuses in glass jars preserved at the laboratory. The third was a decayed window about to fall off the wall. In the pipelines were fences and a Western-style modern meat technology lab. Shyam sir wanted me to interpret all of those signs as reform. As he explained, the aborted babies in the glass jars kept in the laboratory reinforced the idea that modern science could help solve developmental challenges that include human deformities associated with nutritional deficiencies. This was the main goal of the campus and the reform.

As a form of practice, the BSc in Nutrition and Dietetics (BScND) were two newly-introduced four-year, semester system-based study programmes used to signal the effect of autonomy. The need for these was felt by the NPC following reports in other developing countries that people lacked nutritional food to live healthily. The meat and liquor were included in the programme as part of that reasoning. The campus mission statement reads:

There is a prevalence of malnutrition in many developing countries, including Nepal. It is the responsibility of the nation to combat it. In this regard, National Planning Commission prioritized a Bachelor of Science in Nutrition & Dietetics (B.Sc. ND) to address this problem in 2006.

The main objectives of the programme, as laid down in the programme mission statements, are twofold: 1) "to produce graduates with recognized clinical, public health and management skills," and 2), "to produce graduates competent enough to work as nutritionists and dieticians in the hospital settings and

other specialized areas such as community and public health, and food industry sector.” However, as a form of practice and a concrete outcome, it led to the exodus of more than fifty percent of the graduates produced in Nepal to fulfil what the campus administrators said was a “global manpower need.” When contacted, the teachers said that although the reform had introduced the new curriculum, the graduates had no domestic industry to offer them employment with attractive remuneration. Thus, they looked for jobs in India and foreign countries. As an effect and a form of practice, the reform led to the export of graduates.

4.6 Fieldwork in Ilam

The key object of study in Ilam was “autonomy” or the autonomous Ilam campus as a dominant form of practice and effect of reform sponsored by the World Bank under its SHEP. It arose in the presumed need to free the local campus from the central administrative authority. Accordingly, in this section, I show how the discourse of higher education reform comes along with another discourse of state formation (“autonomous state”).

Based on the Constitution of Nepal (2015), the notion of “state” is generally understood as an “autonomous”, sovereign or indivisible. I use the term “territory” to see it strangely than take the familiar juridical term. This is because by nature what would be the proper social arrangement in which all men and women must live in the world is still unclear. Citizenship is understood by the mainstream as “right to belong”, and the notion of “economic freedom” as “right to own natural resources”. Here, we are made to believe that these terms arose naturally from the sovereign consciousness of the people of Nepal. The discourse of autonomy fosters these understandings by placing us in relations to economic freedom. This notion of “freedom” is expected to come by bending the nature to man’s will via the application of modern science and technology.

The campus in Ilam took the first step of adopting the World Bank-assisted autonomy rule. The plan for “autonomy” was carefully orchestrated to fit the new political aspirations for autonomous states. In 2007, politicians in Nepal pledged to replace the centralized and unitary structure of the state with an autonomous federal state structure for which justifications were varying and contingent. The story of the “autonomous state” goes back to the Maoists’

armed insurgency that began in 1996. The Maoist ideologue and former prime minister, Babu Ram Bhattarai (2003), had then justified the war as Nepal declined to the status of the second poorest country in the world (p.117). The other interest of the Maoists was to overthrow the constitutional monarchy and establish a republic to realize their ideological dream. On that backdrop, in 2000, the Maoists broadened their base in the lowlands of Tarai by entering into an alliance with the Madhes-based pro-India political groups. The former pledged its support for “autonomous state” and the “right to self-determination” in return for the latter’s support for armed insurrection. With that common understanding, the Maoists formed a broader alliance with the Seven Party to revolt against the monarchy. But they failed to steer a course between incompatible ideological interests represented by 50 other political parties divided into Marxism, capitalism, Lenninism, Maoism, Communism, Hinduism, royalism, nationalism, indigenous nationalities, among others. As I show, this is how the discourse of autonomous state came to consolidate the meaning of neo-liberal reform sponsored by the World Bank. Thus, nothing would be as naïve and fictitious as to imagine that the World Bank is the soul author of the discourse of higher education reform in Nepal or that it is capable of ordering all the multitudes of thoughts and opinions in Nepal into one coherent whole. Incorporated in Part 4 (d) of the Interim Constitution of 2007, the politicians assisted by the international development agencies promised an “inclusive”, “democratic” and “progressive” state by abolishing the purported problems of class, caste and religious discrimination in the country that was allegedly created by the earlier form of the centralized state conceived by the kings of Nepal. The resolve came soon after the overthrow of the monarchy followed by a street protest in 2006. The most important and immediate resolve was to draw up a “progressive” state-restructuring plan to institutionalize the “gains” of revolution. The discourse of higher education reform was legitimized by that historical moment structuring the thinking and practice of autonomous higher education. But despite such smooth future projections, when this study was undertaken six years later, the politicians had failed to promulgate the proposed constitution as differences widened between them over the question of state restructuring.

The Maoists favoured 11 ethnic identity-based federal provinces and the Nepali Congress and the CPN-UML, a mixed identity-geographic based model of federalism. The minority parties in the 601-member constituent assembly proposed six provinces based on an economic and identity model. The previous division of the country was declared unacceptable and flawed, but the new

proposal created sectarian divides. Amid widespread protests, the discourse of autonomous higher education was implemented in Ilam, a hilly district of eastern Nepal. Thus, Ilam provided the space for the first ever deployment of autonomy rule in Nepal. Prior to it, a few public campuses had introduced the decentralization rules under the World Bank-sponsored HEP-I. The SHEP picked up the MRMC for experimentation with neo-liberal reform. The choice for the selection of Ilam arose out of that concern.

The movement for an autonomous state for the Limbus, the indigenous tribes of eastern Nepal, picked up steam following the pledges made by the politicians to abolish the purported problems of caste and ethnicity divide that were assumed to have caused regional disparities in income and social discriminations in the country. As I show, that highly charged political language of “autonomy” negotiated the meaning and practice of reform at MRMC, Ilam. Local politicians contacted in the initial phase were concerned with how to secure the economic freedom of the region. I found that they had already been colonized by the discourses of “development” and political ‘autonomy’. Most agreed that “autonomy” was reform, but many differed as to the sources of financing the autonomous campus. The autonomy rules constructed the local parents and the communities as the resourceful entrepreneurs of education and the future guarantor of finances to the public campuses without the knowledge of the latter. As to the forms the discourse was shaping as, “autonomy” or “autonomous campus” was mediated by the political discourse of autonomous provinces.

There was a complex politics of knowledge shaping the discourse in action. For example, some politically active groups living in the hilly and mountainous regions expressed their deep sympathy with China to counterbalance what they believed to be India’s political influence in Nepal. Politically active groups in Madhes and some mainstream political parties showed sympathy with India. Within the mainstream political parties, views were divided as to the question of the autonomous provinces, India and China. Some smaller parties feared autonomous provinces would lead to either annexation of the low-lying southern plain, the “breadbasket” of Nepal, by India or its secession from Nepal, which would threaten an economic blockade of the hills and mountains. The politically active groups within the Madhes region were migrants from the hills and mountains of Nepal and from northern India, who were not reconciled to each other on the proposed state restructuring and distribution of natural resources. The autonomous campus was shrouded by that politics of knowledge and the subsequent ethnic divides it would create.

An even bigger concern pervading the hilly and mountainous regions was the perceived fear of an economic blockade by India and its reciprocal effects on exports from the hills and mountains. Against this backdrop, the Nepalese politicians contemplated the development of the hills and mountains to secure their future economic independence. Here was a form of economic colonialism structured by the discourse and practice of development.

Reversing the previous knowledge of the downward movement of people from their mode of farming in the hills and mountains as progress, the Nepalese scholars have recently pointed out that the hills and mountains of Nepal offer enormous potential for salvaging the “failed development” of Nepal (see Bohara, 2012). A professor of economics at the University of New Mexico, Bohara, writes: “The potential of these hills to generate revenue and employment opportunities from its cash crop industries – coffee, olives, herbs, spices, and vegetables – are unlimited”. He adds: “The hilly region and its vast valleys and terraces can be a powerhouse in producing protein through animal husbandry, whereas the Tarai can still be a bread basket.” As demonstrated by the Nepalese economist above, the exclusive enunciator of education policy in Nepal is “development”.

As I show in Chapter 5, development bureaucrats in Kathmandu believe that creating adequate conditions for living in the hills and mountains would entice most people to return to their ancestral place. The new state policy in this regard is towards securing the flatlands (“bread basket”) currently overcrowded by settlements for food production and the hills and mountains for population settlement. To encourage people to stay in the hills and mountains, employment-oriented, technical and vocational education, tourism and research in protein, ornamental flowers and horticultural crops have been proposed. In so doing, Nepalese policymakers believe the flat and fertile lands currently overcrowded by settlements would be brought into large-scale mechanized use for agricultural production. This is how the dream of economic security in Nepal dominates the discourse and practice of autonomous higher education.

As a form of practice, for the first time in Nepal, a new undergraduate programme in floriculture and horticulture management was launched. An ambitious project that reflects the neo-liberal trend, the research and development of horticulture and floriculture in the eastern Himalayan region presupposes counterbalancing the alleged regional and social divide in Nepal. As I show in Chapter 5, the national policymakers in Kathmandu have enacted the discourse of higher education around this notion of economic prosperity. First, the journey to the fieldwork location must be undertaken.

Journey to Pahadki Rani (Queen of hills)

The journey to Ilam, a district in eastern Nepal (ca. 700 sq. miles and 300,000 people and 3,600 metres above sea level), described by locals as *Pahadki Rani* or the “queen of hills”, began in the small hours of a wintry morning at Birtamode, the gateway to eastern Himalaya and a bustling commercial town in Jhapa, eastern Nepal. Perched high on the eastern hills, Ilam is a symbol of multicultural identities comprising Limbus, Brahmins, Chhetris, Tamangs, Rais, Lepchas, Newars, Gurung, among others. It was an independent region before its conquest by the king of Gorkha Prithvi Narayan Shah in the 18th century.

Ilam’s wealth is associated with tea. After tea, the major attraction is tourism. Mai Pokhari, a sacred lake, is the abode of the goddess Mai and a major attraction in the area. Apart from their religious and cultural significance, the mountains have their sacredness as places of meditation and spiritual transformation (see Bernbaum, 2006). For still others, the mountains of the Himalayas are a potent source of medicinal plants. A few local politicians contacted claim that the region’s natural resources are keenly eyed by the Chinese and the Indians for trade.

In technocratic and development languages more prevalent in Nepal, the mountains are projected as places of backwardness, with poor transport infrastructure, where people have to carry loads on their backs. As shown by the NLSS report, “development” in Nepal evokes a sense of life as an outward journey (from mountains and terrains untouched by vehicular road) to the “zero-point of poverty” marked by the bus stop. The journey starts at the periphery, the mountains, projected as poverty due to a lack of vehicular traffic, and ends at the “zero-point” buzzing with vehicular traffic. I was making that “anti-development” journey towards the periphery, the mountains, from the centre, Kathmandu. I was heading to that controversial hilly region.

It was January 28, 2013. At the new Bus Stand in Birtamode, I boarded a minibus overloaded with passengers. I took the seat next to the window. The bus conductor allowed in two more passengers at the last minute before the minibus picked up speed. One person somehow squeezed himself next to me, another stood up throughout the three-hour-long journey without the slightest trace of irritation or complaint. On the return trip, the former president of the Federation of Nepalese Journalists, Bishnu Nisthuri, sat behind, talking to me about his recent trip to Ireland, where he went to meet his son going to university. Prem Ghimire, a high school teacher, sat next to me telling the story of the politicization of educational institutes in Ilam as the jeep rumbled and thundered down the road. Passengers who would normally require three buses

in Western Europe or North America were crammed into a single bus fastened with extra seats. This would be a blatant violation of the traffic rule in the West but impossible for the traffic police to take action on in Nepal, where people have only recently begun traveling by bus or learning to cross the road.

While ascending, the bus sped further into the tea thickets in the hills. The haze began to lift, giving way to a sunny sky. The air turned colder and drier. Despite the claims that this region was dominated by the Limbus, the driver played loud Hindi music instead of the local Limbu songs. The Limbus were allegedly opposed to Sanskritization and Nepali language, assuming that it was causing the disappearance of their indigenous language, but here was evidence of an unstoppable love for foreign music and cinema.

The road meandered steeply upward and grew steeper as we climbed higher. There were numerous twists and turns. Some extra iron rods were affixed at the back for the passengers to hang onto to make sure no one fell off because of the overcrowding. Like a horse with three or more people on its back, the bus pulled itself uphill. After each abrupt turn and curls of the road, the bus tilted to one side and then to the other. It was like going on a see-saw. I struggled to keep myself steady in my seat shared by two more passengers. My initial hopes to take pictures of the spectacularly scenic tea gardens were dashed as I could not move my hands forward. I had to wait for my disembarking at Ilam Bazaar to do that. I sat squeezed against the window for three-and-a-half hours. So cheerfully did the passengers talk to each other throughout the journey that I imagined I was the only one feeling the overcrowding.

As the bus sped on, the hustle and bustle of Tarai dissipated. At the foothills, there were tea plantations. Soon a jumble of cliffs appeared, and high above, houses perched on the hills. The edges of the hills were covered with tea bushes. Horses harnessed with *amlisbo* (brooms) galloped along the tarred road. Ilam supplies this plant to nearly every household in Nepal. *Amlisbo* is the local traditional broom plant that works like vacuum cleaners in industrialized countries. But the reform was silent about the promotion and production of this local organic technology. Even as the broom existed as the vibrant practice of cleaning homes and offices, the vacuum cleaner dominated the knowledge of reform.

The journey after hundreds of flights of stairs formed by hills were ascended in three hours. I was finally in Ilam bazar – my final destination. For a few days, I learnt to balance my body to the slope counters, lest I would roll down like a football. After taking a quick glance at the scenic landscape and eating a bowl of hot and sour goat soup in Ilam Bazaar, I visited the campus. Ilam

was a different experience altogether to Kathmandu and Dharan. The sight of tea and pine trees was incomparable with the urban slaughter of Kathmandu. Amid a wealth of greens and the path littered with *amlisbo* and tea petals, this serenely calm and whimsical spot was totally surprising after choky Kathmandu. First, I asked the locals to talk about the uniqueness of Ilam, and most of them referred to tea as their principal wealth.

The “wealth” of Ilam

Home to second most popular beverage after water, Ilam produces some of the finest quality high altitude orthodox tea. This was considered by the locals as the chief wealth of Ilam. Situated between 1,200 and 3,600 metres above sea level, this mid-mountainous picturesque district of Nepal is described as the “queen of mountains”. With its undulating hills, it is famous for tea, cardamom, ginger, *amlisbo* (*kucho* or broom), *akabare khursani* (red round chili), cow’s milk, cheese and vegetables. The government had recently added horticulture and floriculture on the list for the economic development of the region. The earliest recorded history of tea dates back to 1863 when Gajraj Singh Thapa, *bada hakim* (the governor) of Ilam and the son-in-law of Jung Bahadur Rana (Nepal’s first Rana prime minister) directed the people of wards no. 2 and 9 to plant tea.

Tea first occupied 35 acres of land. More people began to plant tea with the 1965 land reform. After this, tea plantations began to spread deeper into eastern Nepal. In Jhapa, Giribandhu began the private commercial production of tea. Deepak Prakash Banskota began the first private commercial production of tea in Panchthar, 65 kilometres north of Ilam. By the turn of the 21st century, tea occupied nearly all the eastern hills adjoining Darjeeling and Sikkim, India. The tea produced by Kanchenjunga Tea Estate is now hailed as “world famous”. Devi Chhetri Dulal³², a writer in Ilam, argues that tea is the “root of development” in this district. In 1973, King Birendra declared eastern Nepal’s Ilam, Jhapa, Pancthar, Tehrathum and Dhankuta as tea areas (*ibid*, p. 15). After 1990, Ilam accounted for 60 percent of the total 16,594 hectares of land occupied by tea plantations in Nepal. There were 16 processing plants, 13 of them privately owned, in Ilam. But why the reform included no word about “tea” as a possible area of research and study at MRMC haunted me as I began my fieldwork.

Amidst the Bollywood-savvy youth in the town, who have forgotten their

32 *Bikasbko jara: Ilam* (2009), Ilam: Hope Nepal.

own mother tongues, a fading species from the older generation still thrived here, talking in mother tongues and selling *jadibuti* and organic honey. More women arrived in the local bazar wrapped up in swathes of *lungies* that have faded elsewhere with the advent of Indian, American and European costumes. Some others sold *pakhanbet*, organic turmeric and yeast.

“This is a locally grown turmeric, taste it if you don’t trust; it works like antibiotics”, said one Limbuni didi. As she spoke, her nose and ears, overburdened with tribal jewellery, shook like leaves. She was a Limbu, an indigenous tribe member, from Panchthar. I purchased some turmeric. By her side stood another Limbuni didi who sold *marcha* (locally prepared yeast for brewing local wine), which is threatened by commercially available brewing technology.

The third person I met was a Limbu man in his 60s, wrapped in Nepali traditional clothes with *kbukuri* around his waist – a sight I seldom encountered in Kathmandu. He waited all day to sell *pakhanbet* and other local medicinal herbs that had proved inadequate in the face of modern medicines. He stood up, stretched and yawned as a few customers came to buy them. While these tribal images of Limbu came alive in Ilam, there was another modern Ilam represented by those Bollywood-savvy youth mesmerized by Hindi cinema, the music industry and foreign consumer goods. Most of the younger generation carried with them a sense of appreciative understanding of the world outside as culturally advanced.

Sons, daughters forget mother tongue

Next, I went to the campus canteen when I encountered one Tamangni *didi*. She worked in the Ilam Campus canteen. As soon as the old aluminium kettle whistled, she came to serve a hot organic tea to the campus staff. Drinking a cup of tea, I pronounced a few words in the Tamang language. “You’re a Bahun, how did you know Tamang?” “Nowadays my children do not want to talk in Tamang”, she bemoaned. Murmuring some Hindi songs and conversing in fluent Nepali, her son and daughter who left school to help her in the kitchen brought tea as more campus staff arrived. Local social worker and campus management committee member Bishnu Dahal Limbu said: “Nowadays in Ilam you must have observed not all Newars speak in Newari.” Dambar Lorinden, president of Federal Limbuwan State Council, Ilam, bemoaned that Ilam had not been able to produce linguists who, for example, could teach the Limbu and Tamang languages. During the interviews, the campus managers were silent on the question of including local indigenous languages in the new-

ly-introduced campus block. The campus strategic plans mentioned no word about the development of local languages; instead English was introduced.

There was thus a paradox in the sense that the politically active ethnic and linguistic groups were clamouring for recognition of their cultural identity and heritage through the political programme of an autonomous Ilam state, but this aspiration was reflected nowhere in the campus strategic plan/vision. Instead, the strategic vision outlined for the future sought to replicate international educational and cultural practices. The first person I met in this regard was social worker Bishnu Dahal Limbu, who is also the central member of the Nepal Women Association and a member of the campus management committee. She explained:

Horticulture and floriculture are suitable for Ilam. Do you know Ilam is called *pa-barki rami*? It means a very beautiful place, naturally beautiful, suitable for research and learning. There must have already been a university to such a place. There is now an effort being made to establish a university. We are very positive about it.

Before I interviewed teachers and campus managers, I directed my questions to local political party leaders and a city mayor as I gradually developed my fieldwork.

Political discourse of the autonomous campus in Ilam

From the year 2005/06 onwards, we have been struggling for the overall progress, development, luck and future of Nepali citizens hitherto oppressed by the centralized administration. We have been oppressed on the basis of geography and on the basis of class/castes; we have been oppressed culturally, linguistically, educationally, and we have been subjected to all kinds of oppressions. We have been oppressed in villages; we have been oppressed in places where the center couldn't reach, and we realized that our progress and development is not possible unless we fight for our autonomy. (Dambar Lorinden, President, Federal Limbuwan State Council, Ilam)

By applying the interview technique discussed in *Section 4.2*, I wanted to capture the enactment of the discourse of higher education reform with this youth politician as the actor but he started remotely with the story of *bikas*. Taking my theoretical position that the social world does not exist as an objective reality, my aim of this interview was to examine how it is enacted. This led me to problematize the subjectivity of the actors to observe the enactment of the discourse of higher education reform at the point of its application. In so doing, it became further clear that the dominant discourse that shapes Nepalese

subjectivity to think of education is “development” [*bikas*]. Questions in this interview were related to autonomous campus in Ilam, but Lorinden began with the story of struggle in Ilam for “development”, “progress”, “luck” and “future”. Thus, “... much of what counts as reality in Nepal, much of how people live their lives, is already shot through by discourses and practices of development” (Tatsura, 2013, p. 291). To recall Foucault, discourse is a set of rules and practices that produce these meaningful (acceptable) statements that structure our sense of reality. Lorinden enacted that discourse of development that has taken the form of a struggle for the Limbuwan autonomous state in Ilam. The subjectivities like “progress”, “luck” and “future” arose here not from the autonomous agency from where to think of this speaking subject but as a historical density of language shaped by “development” thinking. Thus, we have come to a situation where the autonomous campus is a political necessity. Here is a “political arithmetic” that makes particular kinds of discourse both possible and necessary by rendering the population productive via biopolitics (Lather, 2004, p. 765).

The word “Limbuwan” refers to a political movement for an autonomous state for Limbus, who call themselves an “indigenous tribe” of eastern Nepal. The movement awaited the April 2006 “revolution” and the fall of monarchy before taking off. Limbuwan Council is a new political association that represents Limbus in the region. The Limbus’ movement spanned the 1950s when they waged their struggle against the government to retain *kipat* land (traditional land ownership) [see Kaplan 1991]. From the land movement, the Limbus’ struggle shifted to gaining an autonomous federal state since the 2006 political uprising in Nepal. It then mediated the discourse and practice of autonomy in higher education. Here was a politics of knowledge that established its relationship with education and its meaning secretly. Thus, to recall Foucault, “primary and ultimate meaning springs up through the manifest formulations, it hides beneath what appears, and secretly duplicates it ...” (p. 134). In taking this stance, what appears to us as manifest reality through talks and texts must be suspended and how it appears, with what rules, norms, motivations, among other factors, must be scrutinized.

A linguistic or structural approach would validate the autonomous campus as truly or evidently reform by deploying an observing subject that privileges what appears on the surface content of talks and texts. For example, the Limbus demand that the eastern Nepal’s districts of Morang, Sunsari, Ilam, Panchthar, Terathum, Taplejung, Dhankuta, and Sankhuwasabha be declared a Limbuwan federal autonomous state. The movement intensified as the Constituent

Assembly Committee on State Restructuring started reworking Nepal's provinces and states under the new constitution of the secular republic of Nepal. These justifications would then be used to legitimise the autonomous campus. My interview was directed at the autonomous Ilam Mahendra Ratna Multiple Campus, the first among the 61 constituent campuses of TU, to implement the autonomy rules. My concern was how the local actors enact this discourse of autonomy in higher education and how had it derived its name and legitimacy. Lorinden replied that the "autonomous campus" followed logically from the movement for the autonomous Limbuwan state. Here, Lorinden becomes the subject of neo-liberalism. He is caught unaware of its consequences to the people of Ilam who will now have to become autonomous entrepreneurs of education, mainly in contributing financial resources to the campus. When asked, many locals in the town expressed their ignorance about it, let alone knew of its implications. But the word "autonomy" was already coming into common usage as an objective perspective to think about higher education reform. Meanwhile, I met acting mayor Agni Prasad Adhikari of the Ilam Municipality.

Decentralization and autonomy came to replace traditional womb-to-tomb role of the state. Under decentralization and autonomy, the state limits itself to making the policy; it no longer plays the regulatory role; it no longer controls; it makes certain policies and leaves the local units to do the rest. The state no longer enjoys monopoly. Theoretically, this is a form of decentralization. Local Autonomous Act refers to decentralization. I don't know much about an autonomous campus but I am sure it is just like any other local autonomous institute, say our municipality.

I asked Adhikari to explain to me the meaning of an autonomous campus in Ilam, but he referred to the Local Self-Governance Act of 1999.³³ On April 30, 1999, Nepal passed that act. Under it, municipalities and local bodies were given autonomy. Adhikari suggested educational institutions could not be any different from municipal institutions. After meeting Adhikari and getting him to begin the discourse on the autonomous campus, I read the LSGA 1999. As stated in the preamble to the LSGA, autonomy was granted to the local people for the "enjoyment of the fruits of democracy" and the "utmost participation of the sovereign people in the process of governance by way of decentralization". Thus, the textual and work practices of development institutions came alive here. Shuttling back and forth between the SHEP and the LSGA, the

33 *Local Self-governance Act, 2055 (1999)*, Kathmandu: Nepal Law Commission.

“deepening of decentralization” in Nepal was the core policy in Nepal. The LSGA aims to empower the “ethnic”, “indigenous” and “down-trodden” people through their participation in development. In so doing, it presupposes a fair distribution of resources to achieve social justice in Nepal. The acting mayor enacts this discourse in this interview.

Taking the national political discourse as its phase value, one ends up with the meaning of the autonomous campus as one that replaces the previous centralized education tradition that worked like a monarchy from the centre in Kathmandu. When asked why the centre was a key hurdle for the local, the acting mayor described that controlling authority in Kathmandu as taking upon itself “womb-to-tomb-role” of managing the whole affairs of the country without having the necessary knowledge of the local areas and the expertise to solve the problems specific to local people. Thus, Adhikari enacted the discourses of decentralization, development, democracy and good governance when asked to reflect on the ongoing education reform. At the outset, the forms of practice shaping this discourse, which originated in democratization and decentralization, produced strong normalizing effects on the local actors to the extent that it was impossible for them to imagine education without its other relational categories “development”, “democracy” and “good governance”. I met the local political leaders who shared the views of Adhikari.

Hom Dulal, a member of the campus management committee and the local Nepali Congress leader, who attended the first meeting in the campus that accepted the World Bank’s reform grants to implement the autonomous campus rules, said the idea of reform couched in the language of “autonomy” were very much within his party’s liberal economic policy and globalization. He used three key concepts in Nepali to reason why the reform was necessary and from where it derived its legitimacy – *khula arthatantra*, *udarbadi artha niti*, and *bismabyapikaran*. Thus, liberal economic policy and globalization mediate the neo-liberal reform. Explaining his party’s official views, Mani Kumar Limbu, President, Communist Party of Nepal (CPN-UML) Ilam District committee, shared the following perspective.

We heard that the foreign donors organized high-level deliberations in Kathmandu about new courses of study, their future scope, and production of skilled human resource for Nepal. Our MRM campus took the lead by introducing tea, horticulture and floriculture – the wealth of Ilam. They invited us for talks. Our colleagues at the campus agreed. We discussed with the campus. We discussed what benefits we could get in autonomy, and found many advantages. So we supported the con-

cept. We mainly found advantages in the new courses of study that fit our context. Policy-wise, our party sees more advantages in autonomy.

However, his own party colleague and district secretary Ganesh Parajuli, had a different view. “In such a far-away district like this, why the concept autonomy came was mainly because of the lure of the grants from the World Bank.” Within the same party, Badri Khadka, UML ward chairman, Ilam, shared yet another perspective.

We have learnt that the foreign donors wanted to take Nepal in the path of autonomy. Our friends in Ilam supported the ideas. We support but what we don't support is that if tomorrow the local community has to bear the burden of financing the campus we cannot do this.

In drawing up the present policy framework, the World Bank said it had a “deep knowledge of the local context including the political economy of reforms and a rich international experience” (see World Bank, 2007, p. 4). Further to this authoritative claim to knowledge, it said it had held extensive consultations with the local stakeholders “representing a variety of schools of thought” (ibid, p. 127). Khadka refuted that claim: the local communities in Ilam who are to inject much needed resources to the campus had not been informed about it, let alone understood the implications of the new education policy. This apart, rancorous protests, strikes, lockouts and fisticuffs had been reported in the campus. The campus chief reportedly used the powers he was granted under the autonomy rules to hire temporary teachers ideologically close to his own party. In sum, the discourse and practice of higher education reform that manifested itself here in the form of an autonomous Ilam campus had become a complex ideological battleground between different interests and groups. I next studied the strategic plans prepared by the MRMC for implementing this apparatus.

Strategic plan and the Self-Study Report

The name of the campus I was visiting was Mahendra Ratna Multiple Campus. It was established in 1961 as Shri Mahendra Ratna Mahabidhyalaya. The campus applied for autonomy four years ago, but after a series of infighting episodes between teachers, it was delayed by two years. The vision of this campus was to become Ilam University by 2014. But that was delayed by teachers agitating against the reform.

The mission of the campus was to provide job-oriented quality education, which was expected to result in gainful employment of the graduates at a future date. The only job-oriented education programme, proudly claimed by

the campus chief as having been achieved by the campus under the reform, was signalled by the newly inaugurated Department of Horticulture and Floriculture Management. Only nine students out of the required 24 had been admitted when I reached the site in Jan 2013. Some of these students had been informed through Facebook while others learnt about the programme through newspaper adverts. The grant from the World Bank was tied to student numbers and academic excellence. The campus chief struggled to enrol more students in the campus to meet this requirement through his party networks. I next examined the Self-Study Report (2012)³⁴, prepared by the campus locally, which stated, “Quality initiatives taken by the Campus include physical infrastructure: Construction of labs, sophisticated furniture, extension of classroom buildings, well-facilitated library building and boundary wall” (ibid, p. xi). Included in the plan was a “boundary wall”. Next, I met the gardener, who found it more difficult to get the authority to approve money for buying nails and fencing materials.

The gardener

It was a Tuesday morning. The campus was closed for a public holiday (Martyrs’ Day). The campus chief, whose house was next to the campus gate, sat in front of the canteen drinking tea. Seated next to him was a close acquaintance with whom he shared his new plans for the development of the campus – an act seldom on the list of the erstwhile campus chiefs when directed from the centre. It was crystal clear, as the conversations progressed, that the new campus leader exercised powers aroused by a feeling of ownership, and he was proud of his leadership. The neo-liberalism required here the positive role of the campus management in promoting privatization and markets in education. But the next person who interrupted the conversation took all my attention.

A gardener came with a request for some nails needed for putting up a fence. The chief asked him to bring a piece of paper and pen. He did not have a pen and paper. The chief quickly scribbled an authorization letter for the purchase of nails and left. As the chief disappeared behind the building, Maila, the gardener, turned to his friend seated next to him sipping tea and said, “Eti sanu kamko lagi pani maile sabaiko khutta-dhognu parne?” [“Must I touch the feet of all with my head to get even this small work done?”]

The gardener shared his experience of going through many bureaucratic hassles. My role as a post-structuralist ethnographer is to lend an ear to those

34 Mahendra Ratna *Multiple Campus Ilam, Self Study Report, Dec 23, 2012.*

in the margins whose voices seldom find space in these exclusionary discourses of education and development in Nepal. These discourses are produced and circulated by the network of institutions where only the 'knowledgeable' [*bud'dhijivis* in Nepali] enjoy the exclusive privilege of articulating their thoughts. A gardener or a watchman (*chaukidar* in Nepali) is seldom in the list of 'knowledgeables'. Here, the discourse of development places them in opposition to the *educated person* to make us believe that the former is a villager, one who has no knowledge of *bikas* and hence "don't understand things" (Escobar, 1995, p. 49). The educated ones are those who have emulated the *sabib* [Western] culture through modern English instructions to fit the description of "nascent *bikas* enterprise" (Shrestha 1995). The discourse of development has fostered our understanding of the educated ones as the only ones who understand things. Here was a gardener who contested it in this portrayal of a complex bureaucratic apparatus in the autonomous campus. He contested the autonomous campus as an efficient system of higher education. It was as strange as the centralized system accused of inefficiency.

When I examined the campus strategic plans and vision for the future, the reform was silent about the gardener and his possible contribution to the development of the campus. Nowhere was there a word about the role of a gardener. There was a clear tone of anger and frustration in the face of the gardener. He had no connection with the reform. But he still carried that old fountain pen and a folded paper neatly in his pocket just in case the campus chief would ask him for it. Earlier, in Dharan Campus, the Assistant Campus Chief had asked an assistant to bring him a pen to sign a certificate. Those assistants and gardeners were so important. Yet they had no power to purchase nails without the approval of a hierarchy of officials. Maila had gone from pillar to post to get the approval. Before approaching the chief, he had approached five others just to get approval for purchasing nails. The campus plans to fence the compound and put up a barbed wire was part of the new reform plan to increase a sense of ownership, impose regularity, improve governance, monitor and control who visited and left the university campus (the new policy aims to change the university as an open space for all to come and go), and finally to observe the campus and its activities more efficiently. The fence will now take over the role of the police. In so doing, it is believed that the new arrangement will end the "stone pelting" and all those violent forms of clashes between the students, the campus authority and the police that in the past were assumed to have been caused by the centralized system of management of higher education institutions. The reform had put in place a complex division of labor via

hierarchical ordering of authorities and the formation of various units with functional differentiation.

Students remind teachers to take classes via mobile phones

The most interesting thing the campus chief told me about the reform (signalled by “autonomy”) that began here three years ago was that the teachers had become regular attendants to class, and two students from his campus had reached the “international stage” in sports (spoken with emphasis). One of the reasons advanced by the policy as to why public education had declined in Nepal was that it was a centralized system and that made the teachers accountable to the bureaucracy rather than to the pupils’ performance in studies. The campus chief was so proud that the teachers had become regular attendants to class. By coincidence, I came across the campus sports facility. A badminton match was being played mistakenly over a volleyball net on a muddy field. Four girls played badminton (women’s doubles). The sports teacher took all my attention. He snatched the racket from a student and played at one end of the court until the end of the game, refusing to hand over the racket to the students. A female student sitting next to me started grumbling about her teacher. “Our sir doesn’t give up that easily!” “Really so?”, I asked. She nodded her head. After a pause, she again said, “But in our theory class, we have to remind him several times over his mobile phone to take classes,” adding, “In few days he is leaving for Kathmandu when we will have no theory classes. We will then have plenty of time to play badminton.” Another student joined the conversation, “Our sir frequently travels to his hometown.

More students interviewed shared this problem. The reform aimed to increase teachers’ regular attendance in class but made them more irregular. Students shared how they phoned their teachers using mobile phones and remind them to take classes, thus contesting the discourse of the autonomous campus as better than a centralized system. Thus, the discourse of the autonomous campus was as strange as the discourse of the centralized campus, when the teachers who showed their allegiance to bureaucracy had abrogated their responsibility.

Student discourses of “thulo manche”

This theme [thulo manche] emerged during an encounter with a group of students who were jostling for admission at MRMC. The English equivalent is “big people” but it doesn’t reflect the local practice. They were a bunch of newcomers who came to do their B.Ed. Campus administration had asked

them to fill up their caste identities in the admission form but they were uncertain which caste identity they belonged to. They approached me for a help when we got into a lively chat within minutes of being introduced. While the assistant campus chief helped them identify their caste category, I was interested in their utterance “thulo manche” as a motivating factor for their pursuit of a university degree. Rather than viewing *thulo manche* as someone with a high caste or in possession of landed property or economic wealth, these students viewed them as seniors in the family and neighbourhood in terms of age, knowledge, experience and authority.

Rasha and Menuka Nemwang came from Chilingbin VDC 4 in Panchthar district. They shared a *room* in town [*room baschau*, uttered in their own words]. A room in town is projected as a temporary living space without having the actual property of a home in the village. The sister duo initially got mesmerized to study science but finding it a difficult subject, they opted for a B.Ed. But what surprised me most was their enactment “thulo manche” as a motivating factor for pursuing a teaching career. When asked to elaborate, Rasha said, “Thulo manche is a neighbor.” Menuka added, “Pallo gahrko didi, daju, ama, baba”. Here, the word “neighbor” encompasses sisters, brothers, mom and dad from the house next door to the community at large. The local meaning of this word moves beyond its global rhetoric as a stranger in the next door to mean a *daju* and *didid* or *ama* and *baba* irrespective of whether they are related to each other by mother’s side of the family or father’s side of the family. When asked how a neighbor can become a sister, brother, mom or dad without a blood relation, the duo replied, “This is what we call here. Don’t you call them so?” How strange it appeared that even as these local rustic found themselves meaningful to identify as brothers and sisters in the village, the policy is geared towards replacing this practice by imposing new social identities— BCNs (an acronym for Bahuns, Chhetris and Newars) and DJDUs (Dalits, Janajatis, the “disadvantaged” and the “underprivileged”). At the outset, the reform thinking is fostered by the globalization of knowledge/power but the field of practice is local and particular.

During that impromptu meeting, I came upon the “thulo manche” as one way to think about the effect of the discourse and practice of higher education reform. In Skinner and Holland’s (1996) sense, *thulo manche* is the *educated person* in Nepal who rises from the fall of the Hindu dynasty to realise his ultimate kingdom of freedom. The *educated* subject is fostered by development ideology but the *thulo-manche* is fostered by the sociocultural subjectivities. The sister duo did not define their neighbors, friends, families and their elders by caste identity

or hegemonic relations but by the ancient cultural practices of celebrating seniority (age) and knowledge. Thus, nothing would be as naïve and fictitious as to imagine that the project “development” ideologically supported by foreign donors and scholarly works of Western scholars has erased local memories, histories and cultures in Nepal. In Pigg’s (1992) sense, here was a contested territory of what it is to be Nepali come alive. In other words, it is impossible to approach anthropology as a global project from where to see the entire world as one in which all the people experience one common space and time. Accordingly, my role as a poststructuralist ethnographer will admit of diversities and complexities by challenging the established anthropological practices such as the one attempted by earlier liberal and modernist scholars I showed in *Section 2.6* (see *Marxist critique of Foucault*).

Introducing policy responses to the discourse of higher education reform

5.1 Introduction

This chapter will examine the enactment of the policy discourse of higher education in Nepal through the subjectivity of the policymakers. The economic rationality of neo-liberalism through which so many countries fashion their understanding of higher education is used as a justification for reforming Nepalese higher education. As a form of practice, it has come to structure thinking in terms of “decentralisation” and “autonomy” in higher education. It takes for granted that the decentralisation of public campuses will support economic growth and social justice, and reduce the poverty allegedly caused by the past centralisation programme (NESP). The institution conducting the reform is the World Bank, which makes us believe that decentralisation is an improvement over centralisation by establishing a causal relationship between education reform and political events. In Chapter 3, I disturbed that teleological order of thinking. The aim of this chapter is to see how national policymakers respond to those taken-for-granted assumptions of higher education reform discussed in Chapter 3. In Chapter 4, I discussed the context and criteria for the selection of these respondents and outlined the fieldwork methods and techniques for data collection. Accordingly, policymakers’, administrators’, teachers’ and students’ responses to decentralisation and autonomy in higher education are analysed in terms of the effects of the neo-liberalist policies deployed by the SHEP.

The analytics is directed at the systems of knowledge and forms of power

that have come to consolidate this reform thinking. The second question to resolve was how, in the light of the authoritative stance to deep local knowledge and international experience in higher education reform taken by the World Bank, do national policy bureaucrats affirm what they claim is true? Who controls the production of policy in Nepal? Whose knowledge claims prevail in Nepal? What is knowledge? Must not the Nepalese themselves have the knowledge and power to decide what counts as higher education reform? During the interviews, the Nepalese national policy bureaucrats were asked to reflect on some of these questions. Accordingly, a total of four policymakers, one from the National Planning Commission, two from the University Grants Commission and one from the Ministry of Education were selected for interview in keeping with the aim and focus of the study. The discursive approach I outlined requires me to shift my attention from the speaking subjects to the apparatus doing the reform as “anthropological object” (Escobar 1995, p. 107), so that my focus would be on how the dominant order of thinking about reform in higher education is structured by institutional and discursive practices. Subjectivity will be the key tool and the site-to-knowledge construction in my approach to interview data. These interviews were conducted one a face-to-face basis across multiple sites, tape-recorded and translated verbatim from Nepali to English. I have sorted them into key categories, themes and propositions (see Table 7) to facilitate the analysis of the data.

This chapter is divided into four thematic sections. In section 1, Policymaker 1 connects higher education policy to *samriddha/samunat* [developed and prosperous] *Nepal*. In section 2, Policymaker 2 links education policy with the donors. In section 3, Policymaker 3 connects higher education policy to decentralisation, freedom and autonomy. In the final section, Policymaker 4 talks about higher education and global quality benchmarks, where he suggests that the global discourse of quality, mainly influenced by the Bologna Process in Europe, dictates quality in Nepal. With these initial responses, I set out to describe my engagement with these policymakers before I discuss and analyse the interview data.

Engaging with policymakers

When I landed in Kathmandu for my fieldwork, hot in the news was Policymaker 1. I read some of his biography through interviews carried by local dailies. Earlier that month, a health magazine had carried an exclusive interview on him. He was projected as a rare person in Nepal, who had excelled among all the Nepali intellectuals in knowledge. I was looking for someone at the

policy level who could help me understand national policy. Besides, a senior government bureaucrat at the Ministry of Education had earlier suggested I should contact the National Planning Commission, which, he said, was the chief architect of education policy and planning in Nepal, albeit grudgingly acknowledging that it had to abide by the norms and rules of international development institutions. The president of the Education Journalists' Group, Sudarshan Sigdel, who was part of my previous education journalistic network in Nepal, further suggested that a member of the planning commission who had recently returned from Japan after a long absence was in the glare of publicity for his new vision of education and development in Nepal. Sigdel arranged the interview. On December 30, 2012, we both met the planning commissioner at his private clinic for interview.

Well, thank you. I am a three-times gold medallist [before talking about his official position, he talked about his personal history, status and qualifications]. Right from grade one to high school I continued to top my class. They are there; you can read what is written. These gold medals are all over my chest [he pointed to the three framed pictures hung on the wall]... Can you show me who else has written 158 research papers published in national and international index journals [health science journals]? If there is one, show me [he paused for a reply as I nodded my head in submission]. It is not a joke. I was working in Japan...without becoming an NRN, I came back to Nepal. I wanted to work in Nepal. Now, the government gave me an opportunity to work at NPC.

This policymaker was looking after education and health sector. He was also projected in the local media as a scholar par excellence of Nepal. I thought he was the right person to talk to. After staying for many years in Japan, he had recently returned to Nepal after the Maoists requested him to take charge of the National Planning Commission. He was a member of the planning commission. More than the interview itself, this official's display of a self-congratulatory and pompous attitude attracted all my attention. This interview was conducted in his private clinic in Kathmandu. Here was a national planning commissioner who also worked outside the government office running his private clinic. But what interested me the most was his repeated requests to look at his medals and academic credentials displayed in his clinic to ensure no visitor would be able to miss them. Hardly had I asked him to introduce himself and explain his background and the context of the interview, when he jerked around angrily and said, "Look at my medals, they speak about me, it is no joke."

Here was a member of Nepali elite bred and brought up in Japan, Nepal's largest donor, and who would not tolerate any criticisms of him, the donors or development. I had to present myself in a meek and humble way before him speaking carefully, saying only *hajur, hajur* (yes sir, yes sir) to everything he spoke of lest he became intimidating. The task of interviewing such a person was formidable. He was stern and rude. Each time I asked him a question, he brushed it aside, saying it was unimportant. I yielded to the power of this member of the elite and mostly stood in silence. Here was a form of power that resided in an individual rather than a state or ruling block. Instead of what Levinson et al (2011) would call "collective agency" (2011, p. 12), here was a "technologies of the self" (see Peters et al 2000, p. 113) deployed by power that makes an individual to reason through his self. It is at this point that I was reminded of Foucault, who stated: "We are never dealing with mass, with a group ... we are only ever dealing with individuals" (Faubion, 1994, p. 28).

Before I listened to his story, the first thing he did was repeatedly request me to look at his gold medals and outstanding academic achievements displayed at his clinic. Next was his visiting card, which ran out of space describing his life's journey, first as an outstanding student who came from a village in Bhojpur, then as a professor, doctor, UG, PG (PGI, India); PGIMM, PhD (Medicine), DMSc (Japan), M. Vidhya Bhushan Gold Medals Ka, Kha, Ga (A, B, C), member of the National Planning Commission, Government of Nepal, Chairman of the Nepal Health Professional Council (and his own private clinic), and a member of the council of all Nepalese universities. His CV ran to several pages. He was engaged in a dozen more portfolios. I thought he was the right person to talk to. He reiterated again to read what he had written on the wall of his clinic in Kathmandu: "knowledge is power". "Look what my medals say...It is not a joke; one cannot get gold medals just like that", he said. While rejecting the class/and caste theory of power, he said he had a different individuality as a doctor. Here is a new Doctor Wood of Nepal who had discovered the relationship between education and economic prosperity.

It must be made clear at the outset that the focus of examination here is not on the speaking subject but on the systems of knowledge and forms of power that have come to structure the thinking and practice of higher education in terms of economic development, decentralisation and autonomy. These interviews were analysed in terms of the subject positions taken by each policymaker, who speak within the rules and norms of working with the international development agencies, which enjoy the dominant access to knowledge and truth-telling. I next set out to present more a detail response, followed by

a discussion and analysis. Accordingly, I have organised the long interview data into key themes and propositions to facilitate the discussion and analysis. I begin with the story of Policymaker 1.

5.1.1 “Development” as exclusive enunciator of education policy in Nepal

Theme 1: Education and prosperity in Nepal Policymaker 1

We have pledged our commitments at international level and one of the main goals within those agreements is *samriddha* and *samunat Nepal*. New Nepal is that *samriddha* or *samunat Nepal* we are talking about ... When we talk about education, we focus more on technical and vocational education. This is because of the fact that we have many graduates now but because of lack of technical and vocational skills, they remain unemployed. In other words, if our graduates have technical education, it is not necessary that they work only in offices ... they can work themselves; for example, do their community farming, piggery and so on. I have seen a local man in Fidim where he simply took a three-month long training in agriculture and he now has mobilised 18 houses under community farming. They now have piggery and tomato farming. They are earning good money. That kind of human resource is our target... To stop migration, we are focusing now on technical education in hilly regions and the construction of roads. For example, we are now coming up with a policy to build the mid-hill highway Puspa Lal Lok Marg (road) in a hilly region. This will also help develop the hilly region and bring about the equitable development of Nepal.

Theme 2: Education and development partners

Our external development partners are here to kindly help us. We should own [their] ideas right away. We are very thankful to them ... They are helping us in everything. They are working within our system. But ... but ... we should have positive thinking ... Development should not be seen as donor-driven ... Within the available legal framework and rules and regulations, we are trying to reform the system as a whole. In this regard, as I mentioned already, we are investing 17 percent on education and 8 percent on health sector. This is in keeping with international agreements.

Theme 3: Education, development, voluntarism and entrepreneurship

Key proposition: “Why not use our past experiences?”

Our ancestors did a lot of volunteer work. We are now discussing why not use our past experience wherever we have had success stories to reform the whole system? I am always asking my colleagues at the Ministry of Education why do we not use our past experience where we might have had many success stories. Let us replicate that for the betterment of the education sector, especially while reforming the whole sector. As a citizen, one can spend one hour, one day, two days, or even a week in a year volunteering in public works. The present government is now trying to link volunteerism with national development.

Here, what Escobar has shown comes alive: “Many people in the ‘Third World’ cannot think of their situations in terms other than those provided by the development discourse” (Escobar, 1995). In the specific context of Nepal, Tatsura (2013) writes, “... much of what counts as reality in Nepal, much of how people live their lives [in Nepal], is already shot through by discourses and practices of development” (ibid, 291). Here, the discourse of development has fostered the subjectivity to think of education in terms of *economic prosperity* that connects to the global economic rationality of neo-liberalism. The World Bank makes us believe that this is “decentralisation” or “autonomy” in higher education but it actually introduces the private sector efficiency logic to the public higher education system in Nepal. As a concrete effect and form of practice, it brings new types of students under “full-fee” courses. There are other local political discourses of autonomy and freedom playing their part in the constitution of this discourse of higher education reform.

In *Theme 1*, the above-cited national policy bureaucrat fear there will be imminent food insecurity in Nepal should people continue to migrate from the hills and mountains and overcrowd the flat lands. To stop this trend, the establishment of technical institutes, the generation of self-employment schemes and linking hilly and mountainous regions through vehicular traffic are proposed. The mid-hill highway, Puspa Lal Lok Marg, Sindhuli and BP Highway are some examples of this move. Here, the development discourse has shaped the subjectivity of the policymakers in thinking of education in terms of economic prosperity. This policymaker constructed the relationship between education and development as so self-evident and unproblematic.

In *Theme 2*, questions were related to how the national policy bureaucrats respond to the authoritative claims made by the World Bank to impose a neo-liberal education policy in Nepal. However, the above-cited policymaker

said: “We should own their ideas right away.” In Gramscian sense, here is how the Nepali elite or intellectuals work on behalf of the “capitalists” to achieve a “cultural leadership and the assent of the masses” (Ritzer, 2011, p. 282). In other words, this Nepalese policymaker could be seen as serving the interest of the powerful group that may include economic and political goals of the Western capitalist states. To put in Gramsci’s sense, the chhetris and bahuns of Nepal became the bourgeoisie, the bloc which historically has controlled the schools, colleges and universities, the means of production, the law, the police and the army, and enforce this “conformity” on the remaining groups. This is referred to as “hegemony”. However, in Foucault’s sense, here we are dealing with individuals, not with mass or group, who are trained and tortured to carry out tasks they themselves are not the masters of. The archaeological approach to discourse I am applying here to locate the subjectivity of this actor privileges historical method of inquiry. In so doing, I eliminate the role of the human subject here to argue that this actor’s subjectivity is shaped by the dominant discourse of “development”. Here is an effect of “development” thinking that rejects the primacy of a speaking human subject. The contemporary historiography, as advanced by Levinson (1999), Levinson et al (2011), and Skinner and Holland (1996), would trace what this policymaker is speaking here to his self-capacity to reason. Instead of there being such a capacity to reason, he reasoned through his subjected self.

This policymaker enacted the discourse of “development” and Nepal’s international commitment to secure what he said was *samriddha* and *samunat Nepal* [Nepali equivalent of “prosperous” and “developed Nepal”]. The discourse of development has made this policymaker to believe that Nepal can achieve its future economic security via technical and vocational education. In so doing, he makes us to believe that the youth and graduates will feel encouraged to stay in the country through attractive employment opportunities and entrepreneurial activities contributing to national development. Discourse is not just an empty rhetoric. It orients us into thinking, acting, and practice. As I will show, as a form of practice, new high-profile courses aimed at full-fee paying students have been introduced. These courses include the study and research of ornamental plants and flowers, such as orchids, and cash crops, which include coffee, tea, olives, herbs, spices and vegetables, among others. Animal husbandry, the production of protein, the export of flower products, perfumes and herbs are expected to promote graduate employment and entrepreneurship in hilly and mountainous regions. The role of higher education in this process

is to create future economic prosperity in Nepal. This is how the policymaker enacted the discourse of higher education reform.

As I showed in Chapter 3, this notion of “economic prosperity” arose historically in 1951 in the belief that the people of Nepal were living in poverty in the past that was allegedly caused by the Buddhists’ and Hindus’ monastic discipline, when education did not emphasise economic productivity. Arguing that in the West, economic production was becoming the practice, Dr Wood recommended that the HMG in Nepal introduce a modern Western system of education. Assuming that modern education was necessary to create economic prosperity in Nepal, the above-cited policymaker said that 50 years on, such a prosperity still lies in the future. Of the seven categories that emerged from the analysis of the SHEP in Chapter 3, this policymaker enacted the economic logic of neo-liberalism in higher education.

First, development [*bikas*] as the system of knowledge has constructed Nepal as the object to be developed. This has fostered the subjectivity of the policymaker to think of education only in terms of economic prosperity. Here, the development institutions which circulate the discourse of development in Nepal have “trained” and “tortured” the policymaker to imagine education as being evidently about economic prosperity. This policymaker presupposes technical and vocationally-oriented education and training are necessary to increase graduates’ entrepreneurial skills to obtain future economic prosperity in Nepal. A definite certainty and deterministic stance is taken here to forecast the future and the roles education can play in economic generation. Assuming that technical education was necessary to create future economic prosperity and end poverty in Nepal, this was to be realised through a non-state or non-public approach by keeping the role of the state and its regulatory controls at a minimum.

We had volunteerism in ancient days when our ancestors volunteered in public works. That was a part of development. But later on, the state began to intervene and the people felt that since the state is doing the job, why should they waste their time in volunteerism. This was a mistake we made ... I argue that the state is nobody; it is not an unseen structure or something. It is not that the state gives budget and the money keeps pouring in from above. State means we ... you and me ... That’s why rather than thinking that the state should give us, we should think that it is we who should do something. Can’t one contribute one day’s labour towards volunteerism? One should change his/her thinking.

In the above interview excerpt, the key proposition, “I argue that the state

is nobody...” is important for understanding how in neo-liberalism, the distinction between the state and the market is blurred. Olssen (2010) calls this “marketization of the state”, when the market extends its sphere of influence into the social and political domains (ibid, p. 199). Second, the policymaker acknowledged that education policy in Nepal is shaped by that “rules-bound bargaining process” at international level, and one of the main goals within those agreements is prosperity and development in Nepal. “New Nepal is that *samriddha ra samunat Nepal* we are talking about ...” Here, the neo-liberal discourse structures the economic thinking of education. As a technique of power, it fosters the *samriddha* and *samunat* subjectivity to keep one dreaming of the future even as such a dream turns futile. While he asserted himself as a scholar par excellence, he uncritically accepted all those taken-for-granted policy dictates of the World Bank that calls for the privatisation of education as if the people of Nepal have understood its implications. Here was a scholar par excellence whose knowledge and power had been colonised by the development discourse. Here is a different form of colonialism that appears in its neoliberal form of thinking to colonise all thoughts into a totality of thinking “economic prosperity”. As I showed in Chapter 3, this form of thinking originated through the “friendly invasion” in Nepal in 1951. This mustn’t be misunderstood as a conventional logic of colonialism. As demonstrated by the national policy bureaucrat, a thought can also be colonised and this take the shape of the subject.

This interview was also important for settling the question of the Nepali state that was recently discovered “weak” or “fragile” by the international development agencies and how this construction was used as a justification to privatise education in the name of decentralisation. “Fragile states” are understood via developmental logic as those countries which have “low income, and are prone to conflict, have weak governance structures ... difficult to live and work ... potentially destabilizing to their neighbours and (and possibly globally)” (Berry, 2010). While appearing to profess the idea that “knowledge is power”, the above-cited policymaker accepted the authoritative stance taken by the external development partners to redefine their partners and priorities in Nepal from the state to non-state actors. This policymaker retold that story rationalising “weak public provision” and “fragile state” through his subject position: “the state is nobody”. Rather than use his own reason, knowledge and power, he enacted that taken-for-granted economic logic of education shaped by that metanarrative of development funded and ideologically supported by the international development institutions. Policymaker 1 repeatedly remarked:

“Our external development partners are here to kindly help us. We should own [their] ideas right away. We are very thankful to them ... They are helping us in everything.” In so doing, this policymaker does not see how the five decades of international development intervention in Nepal have ended in dreams. The most interesting observation I made from the above position taken by the policymaker in this interview was the unquestioned desirability for education to create economic prosperity in Nepal. Chapter 3 has already disrupted that order of thinking.

This policymaker presupposes that a technically and vocationally-oriented education generates self-employment schemes and entrepreneurship in Nepal. In so doing, he enacted the neo-liberal policy discourse that treats individuals as autonomous and self-investing entrepreneurs of education. Here, the notion of the enterprising individual is taken to be an “object to be freed from the intervention of the state” (Olssen, 2010, p. 199). The markets are seen as necessary to take on the role of the state. As I will show, when the administrators in the field enact the discourse of decentralisation, they presume this will usher in their personal freedom to run the government campuses freely without the interference of the central executive board. The rhetoric of decentralisation connects here to neo-liberalism, which constructs the future graduates as “entrepreneurs of themselves” (Hursh, 2007, p. 497). This policymaker assumed all the people of Nepal would become self-employed and self-investing future entrepreneurs, requiring little or no state intervention to create that economic prosperity.

When the policymaker refers to “New Nepal” in the present, he presupposes there was “old Nepal” in the immediate or distant past. Here, he enacts the discourses of the “open moment” and the “old order” circulated in Nepal by the World Bank, referring to the fall of the monarchy and ushering in the republic. By placing the two categories in antagonistic relations, antecedent to one another, he presupposes continuous development. To put it in the Nietzschean sense, here was a policymaker who kept a lot of faith in the “ascending order of life”. This belief is structured by the April 2006 “revolution” in Nepal that the Bank had described earlier as a marker for a new era and providing the historical context for the reform.

This policymaker makes it clear that the key operator of education policy in Nepal is “development”, an internationalised ideology of modern economic practices (see Escobar 1995, p. 10). Thus, in an agent-client relationship, the ideology of “development” funded and supported by the international development institutions has fostered the subjectivity of the policymaker to think of

education reform only in terms of economic prosperity. An all-encompassing form of power and control exerted by the development discourse is thus made evident here. In sum, the discourse of development has shaped the subjectivity of the Nepalese planners in such a way that they do not see the “political aims” and ideological interests of those displaying it, thus legitimizing only certain ways of talking about education reform in Nepal (Carney and Bista 2009). Thus, the discourse and practice of development structures our sense of reality by imposing on us the rules of knowing what is only acceptable and normal. In Pigg’s (1992) sense, “development” is a sign that the policymakers in Nepal associate with modern affluence (p. 501). As an ideology of modernization, it is powerful; it has constructed the policymaker as a *bikasi* subject, which places Nepal in an oppositional relationship with the *bikasi* in the industrialised countries. Operationalised by aid agencies, development as a discourse in Nepal takes on its meanings through this dichotomy, and it fosters the thinking of education in terms of economic prosperity. There was no higher education reform outside the discourse of “development”.

When Policymaker 1 talks about international agreements in education, he relates to rules and norms of working within the conditions laid down by development institutions. Reducing poverty and providing universal primary education to all are among the eight agreements/commitments Nepal signed up to with international agencies. When Policymaker 1 refers to “international agreement”, he refers to accepting globally legitimised policy prescriptions in Nepal. Thus, an agent-client relationship is evident in the consolidation and appropriation of the policy discourse. To implement such policies, international development institutions provide finance to Nepal. When the above policymaker in Nepal refers to international agreements, he refers to the treaties signed by Nepal with “the world’s leading development institutions” (example, the UN Millennium Development Goals, 2013). The World Bank and the United Nations are two leading international development institutions in Nepal. Consider this statement from the UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon: “The [MDG] goals are ambitious but feasible and, together with the comprehensive United Nations development agenda, set the course for the world’s efforts to alleviate extreme poverty by 2015.”

Assuming that there is extreme poverty in Nepal, the solutions prescribed to end such poverty are framed within the logic of neo-liberalism, which calls for a diminished role of the state and minimum government intervention. Explicit in the statement made by Ban Ki-moon is the global agenda that takes for granted that low-income countries have reduced ability by their national

governments to control their own economies or to define their own national economic aims (Burbules and Torres, 2000). These global agendas filter into Nepal, consolidating the neo-liberal policy and practice of education reform. Consider these examples: higher education institutions in Nepal must be comparable internationally (UGC, 2010a, 2012b). Nepal must be able to participate in the “global knowledge economy” (see Tenth Plan, NPC, Govt. of Nepal, 2007).

Assuming that neo-liberal reform was necessary in Nepal to share good practices from the West or the “ideas of common good and collectivism” (see Olssen, 2004, p. 235), it created a battleground in the field of practice by doing the opposite, namely privatising education and health.

When Policymaker 1 emphasises entrepreneurship in education, he is already repeating what the SHEP document had said: the “weak public provision” of education in Nepal. In other words, Policymaker 1 affirms the most recent donor advocacy in Nepal for creating micro-entrepreneurs in the belief that this would be counterproductive to the past five decades of budgetary support to the national state that has further impoverished the public education system. Through the promotion of self-entrepreneurism, this policymaker assumes that economic prosperity will usher in the future. He pictures the future graduates of Nepal as becoming self-motivated and self-employed entrepreneurs of education. This position taken up by the national policy bureaucrat connects to neo-liberalism. Most importantly, what he presupposes as “self-help” and “entrepreneurism” are subjectivities fostered by that system of knowledge and forms of power. In Ball’s term, the notion of “self-help” is referred here to mean the parents as the non-public sector, assumed to be more resourceful in effecting educational outcomes than the state. As manifested in the national policy discourse, this form of power and knowledge emphasises “choice”, “quality”, “freedom” and “autonomy” (Olssen 2007). It is at this point that I found Escobar (1995) helpful in reflecting on this nexus of power and knowledge in that, according to him, development institutions position themselves as agents in their work practices and the national policy bureaucrats as their clients in interaction with them. In this process, the clients (local policymakers) are socially constructed in the sense that their relationship with agents is structured by bureaucratisation and textual practices. The agents produce the policy texts seemingly based on their interactions as “facts” (ibid, p. 107). In so doing, they represent the reality of those to be reformed in such a way that contributes to restructuring the conditions under which their clients (those to be reformed) think and live their lives. As demonstrated by Policy-

maker 1, the discourses of technical and vocational education and the notions of “self-help” and “voluntarism” are responses to the institutionalization of neo-liberalism as the dominant apparatus of power and knowledge in Nepal. The discourse of autonomous higher education and the new understanding of students as self-investing autonomous entrepreneurs of education in Nepal that manifest themselves through the language of “self-help” and “voluntarism” in this speech of the policymaker in Nepal is to be seen as a diffusion of neo-liberal knowledge in Nepal. When the policymaker talks about technical and vocational education as the new national priority of the government, he presupposes these disciplines will evidently secure the future economic security of Nepal.

To paraphrase Olssen (2004), there is thus a “naïve confidence” among the national policy bureaucrats in their beliefs about the self-regulating capacity of individuals to generate entrepreneurial skills without the state playing its dominant part. Olssen shows that such claims are empirically less than self-evident (ibid, p. 233). Carney and Bista (2009) perhaps provide the best reflection of this in the context of education reform in Nepal, in that they show how, while seemingly taking educational institutions as the building blocks of democracy and an inclusive state, the policy leaves the state out of its intervening role in education by elevating parents and students as “heroes” of education reform. Rather than dismiss the neo-liberal dictates, Policymaker 1 emphasised and affirmed it in a taken-for-granted way that all the people in Nepal had understood its implications. Policymaker 1 repeatedly asked: “For example, instead of waiting for the state [used interchangeably with donors] to do things for us, why don’t we make a small pond in the village? When we were children, we used to build such things.”

Our ancestors did lot of volunteer work. We are now discussing why not use our past experiences wherever we had made success stories to reform the whole system? I have always told my colleagues at the Ministry of Education why don’t we use our past experiences where we might have had many success stories. Let us replicate that for the betterment of the education sector, especially while reforming the whole sector. As a citizen, one can spend one hour, one day, two days, or even a week in a year to volunteer in public works. The present government is now trying to link volunteerism with national development. The aim of education reform is to help cultivate that spirit of volunteerism. For example, we used to have concepts like *pati-pauma*, *chautara*, *bar peepal*, *biti*, *dharmasala* and so on. These were all built by our ancestors. We should put these concepts into practice once again.

To conclude, Policymaker 1 oscillated between the inevitability of international

aid and the need to reorient what he repeatedly referred to as “self-help” and “voluntarism” as a way to secure economic prosperity in Nepal. Next, I will present the responses to the policy discourse of higher education from a senior bureaucrat at the Ministry of Education, who reluctantly acknowledged how education policies and planning in Nepal were bound up in norms and rules prescribed by the donors.

5.1.2 Education policy discourse and the “donors”

Policymaker 2

The government is taking the lead in education policy. We align our education policy with the National Planning Commission, not with the donors. But what is true is that when we make plans and programmes and asks for funding, we have to abide by certain conditions of the donors. But the government is at the driving seat in the policymaking. We do hold discussions with the donors, no doubt about that, and we may make certain compromises as well. We can't rule out certain influences from donors, but what I don't agree with is that such policies are driven by donors themselves ... After 1990, the policy is to make the people as donors of education. There came *farak farak dristikon* (shifting visions).

Of all the seven categories or forms of neo-liberal trends in higher education reform outlined in Chapter 3, the emergence of the subject of knowledge, “people as donors of education”, quite closely reflected the categories of “weak public provision”, “cost-sharing”, and “fixing of tuition fees” in the World Bank document. In other words, the above policymaker enacted the discourse of neo-liberalism that presupposes the parents and students in Nepal have become the self-motivated entrepreneurs of education. The final proposition: “After 1990, the policy is to make the people as donors of education” substantiated this. When Policymaker 2 refers to “donors”, he refers to the rhetoric of neo-liberalism that constructs the parents and communities as donors of education. I have already shown in Chapter 3 how that process began with the SAP of the World Bank in the early 1990s that decentralised education in Nepal.

His subject position on *farak farak dristikon* was the most interesting in the sense that he referred to the displacement of the earlier regime of truth by the emergence of the present neo-liberal policy regime after the restoration of the multiparty political system in Nepal in 1990. The above subject position “people as donors of education” connects to neo-liberalism, namely the shifting

understanding of parents and students as “heroes of education reform” (see Carney and Bista, 2009). This happens without the parents and students acknowledging this and without their knowledge of what will be the consequences of such a policy for them. They are made to believe that a decentralised and autonomous higher education system is better than the centralisation of the past. In so doing, the discourses of decentralisation and cost-sharing in education have structured the belief system that finances for higher education must come from non-state provision, namely through the fixing of tuition fees. The Bank tied its grants to this condition. Here, Policymaker 2 enacted that discourse and practice of decentralisation in education circulated and put into action by the Bank. His “donors” subjectivity is fostered by the forms of power, namely international donors and their textual and work practices in Nepal, which construct the parents and students as more reliable donors of education after their large-scale intervention further impoverished and made more miserable the public education sector. When Policymaker 2 enacts this discourse, he is unaware of its implications for the people of Nepal, who now have to pay money to gain higher education qualifications.

When the above policymaker refers to “people as becoming donors of education” in Nepal after 1990, he is subject to the discourse of “decentralisation” and “cost-sharing” in education circulated in Nepal by the TEP and HEP-I in the early 1990s, as I have shown in Chapter 3. The SHEP extended that in 2007 by influencing the Ministry of Education in introducing the autonomy rules. Here, the above-cited policymaker is referring to a historical rupture in 1990, when Nepal returned to a multiparty system that opened up direct international intervention in Nepal when international development institutions replaced the kings as the repository of knowledge and advice in education (see more in Chapter 3, Sections 3.3.2 and 3.3.3). The discourse of decentralisation has structured the conditions under which the above policymaker shared his thoughts on education. He, thus, positioned himself as a client in relation to the agent circulating and prescribing neo-liberal policy agenda in Nepal.

Policymaker 2 is the most senior bureaucrat at the Ministry of Education. He dedicated half of the three-hour long interview to reflecting on the shifting policy and practices, including his experiences of negotiating policy with the donors. When he refers to “donors”, he equally positions the Nepalese national state in its clientele dependency on the international development institutions.

Policymaker 2 is engaged in what the World Bank (2002) calls “rule-bound bargaining process” to secure international aid for education in Nepal. This “rule-bound bargaining process” means that the World Bank is not the lone

player in Nepal; there are many interest groups, including the Maoists, making education their “battleground” to secure their ideological interests, thereby redefining Nepal’s educational history (see Pherali, 2010; Carney and Bista, 2009). This policymaker spoke within the official norms required to secure foreign aid in Nepal. He also spoke as a government spokesman protecting the legitimacy of the government in the face of increasing criticisms that the state in Nepal is “weak”. He, thus, carefully balanced his speech between the two rules. He acknowledged a typical situation of being ruled and dictated to by the development institutions. Consider this example: “UGC [University Grants Commission] and DOE [Department of Education] shall implement [education reform], in a manner satisfactory to IDA” (World Bank/SHEP, 2007, p. 13). The above interview excerpt was important for settling the question of the authority who decides how Nepal must organise its education. But this was not enough to see the practice. If, according to Foucault, subjectivity is not *something* we are, but it is an activity that we do (see McGushin, 2011), I thought I must also capture the activities people do rather than simply interviewing them. My take on subjectivity as an activity is observing and reflecting on the field of practice through a critical lens, what people say and do, and how they enact their social world. Accordingly, I observed some of those activities.

Inside the Ministry of Education, I observed that a Danish education advisor frequently meets the joint-secretary upstairs. Had it been in Denmark, it would require a prior appointment. Here was a Danish aid worker who freely entered the office of the joint-secretary bypassing the usual appointment procedure. Downstairs, a Dutchman helps a government official compose emails and set meeting agendas with the donors. At one section, two retired female teachers pressed the official hard to release their pensions that had been due for several months. Outside the gate, a teachers’ protest was being held against decentralisation and autonomy in education. The joint-secretary of education was engaged in multiple negotiations with multiple stakeholders, each with different interests and ideologies.

Disrupted by numerous protests and sit-ins organised by teachers’ unions, the Ministry of Education shifted from Keshar Mahal to a more secure location at Singha Durbar, location of the government secretariat. Getting to the ministry for the visitors now requires complicated bureaucratic procedures. Rather than becoming decentralised, the ministry has become a centralised bureaucracy that has become further inaccessible to the public. Yet, reform is understood as efficient service delivery, highly flexible administration and de-

centralisation of decision-making, all that is necessary to overturn the previous centralised bureaucracy.

At the Singha Durbar gate in Kathmandu [Nepal's administrative headquarters], I inquired with a security guard about the possibility of getting access to the Ministry of Education, when he said: "A 'donor mission' has just arrived in the ministry and it is impossible to visit the ministry at such times." The donors had automatic and unfettered access to the ministry. A few of them walked leisurely into the compound, unperturbed by the heavy security presence. They freely left and entered the gate as the guards shoved away the local passers-by. The donors have fielded their support staff to the ministry: not a day passed during my fieldwork without spotting a white man or woman. At Dharan municipality office, a German woman greeted me with the word "namaskar" in Nepali. She was a technical advisor to the local government. The World Bank was engaged with 16 ministries, the ADB, with 15 ministries, the UN, with 25 ministries, and the EU, with 16 ministries (Ministry of Finance, 2013).

Such was the importance of donors and their presence in Nepal that the security personnel had cordoned off the entire ministry when I embarked on this study. But that did not prevent me from entering the ministry; I used my network and, with a mobile phone, called the joint-secretary who had known me for five years. He instantly granted me entry. What struck me was the security guard at the Singha Durbar gate shoving the local passers-by away while saluting the foreigners. Earlier at the airport, a taxi driver preferred a foreigner as a more valuable client than a local person. Such was the importance of the donors in Nepal doing "development" in the country. The personal assistant to the joint-secretary of education told me: "You cannot come to the ministry when the donor mission is here." When I explained my previous connection, he went all quiet. The office staff were well instructed about the arrival of "donor missions". Sitting on the sofa for long hours, I not only observed their activities but also conversed with them. By a happenstance, this fieldwork coincided with the "donor mission" in Nepal. Meanwhile, the executive director of a student scholarship board in Kathmandu repeatedly urged me to read the World Bank new publications when I asked him whose knowledge prevailed over education reform in Nepal. He said the Bank was the "father" of such a knowledge, not just in Nepal but all over the world and was conducting decentralisation reform.

In Dharan, a campus building was named "fifty-fifty", meaning the first floor was constructed by Nepal and the second floor with the donors' money. In Ilam, the largest campus building was built by India and the second largest

by the World Bank. The Nepal-made buildings of the early 1970s vintage were crumbling under the shadows of the donors-financed buildings and they did not signify reform. The most puzzling thing was that the building built by India did not signify “reform” even though it surpassed the Bank-financed Horticulture and Floriculture building in size and money. The “reform” appeared in its multiple manifestations. It was a bizarre object without one meaning or a stable form of appearance. Rather than what reform would do, what mattered here was who circulated the discourse of reform. Here was the World Bank taking the lead. The discourse circulated and put into action was powerful enough to structure the thinking and practice to the extent that any object connected to the Bank became a possible sign of reform. Even the pick-up van purchased by the CCT in Dharan signified reform. It was called “fifty-fifty” – half the money was paid by the Bank and the other half, contributed by the Nepal government and through student tuition fees. Ilam Campus constructed the road out of the Bank’s money. At the outset, it was not possible to imagine reform outside of those material semiotics of buildings, roads and vans. The word “reform” came with a composite mix with the word “donors”, as if the two were inseparable. The word “Nepal” could not be understood without a corresponding word “donors” [dātā in Nepali]. At a glance, a marriage was taking place between the “donors” and the “Nepalese”, as if one could not exist without the other.

In a Foucauldian sense, the utterance made by the policymaker that the Nepalese government was in the driving seat of education policymaking was hiding another statement from the World Bank: “UGC [University Grants Commission] and DOE [Department of Education] shall implement, in a manner satisfactory to IDA” (World Bank, 2007, p. 13). Here was a rule governing what could be said and what could not be said about who was in charge in Nepal. Apart from the above statement by the Bank, some of the activities that went on inside the Ministry of Education belied the claim that the Nepalese policymakers were in the driving seat of education policymaking. Rather, they showed the dominating presence of the international development institutions. These institutions not just provided finance and advice in Nepal, but also made arbitrary statements about the “weak” state, the “decline of higher education in Nepal”, “public provision is weak” and “state ownership has eroded” (see World Bank, 2007). The solution outlined for the “weak state” and the poorest country in the World Bank project document is privatisation: it must be accepted, not because the public in Nepal has understood its implications, but because the rules of neo-liberalism in education require it to be so.

Next, we gathered outside the official activity and reflected on the SHEP. I insisted to the policymaker that he reveal the necessity of the present reform for displacing the centralised and freely-accessible higher education with a neo-liberal logic of reform that calls for decentralisation. The place we gathered in was a bakery café in Jawalakhel away from his usual official chores. We held informal discussions amid luxurious European-style breakfasts for three hours. My university had generously funded the field study, and I had no qualms about organizing such informal *tête-à-têtes* amid lunch and snacks otherwise impossible in the office settings. We had known each other well for five years when he was the Director General of Education and I interviewed him several times and carried his stories in an English national daily in Kathmandu. We met at education seminars, interviews and related conferences. The network I had then built came very helpful in gathering the responses. He finally unveiled the emergence of the issue of “weak public provision” in Nepal from his distant memory.

When we talk about education in Nepal, we must note that it was not the government [donors] that invented it; it began with the community initiative, neither was there any need of government or donors. The communities took the initiatives themselves. We had a long Gurukul education tradition. Even during my school years, my headmaster was paid by the community. People sold off millet and corn to pay him (headmaster). His salary was Rs. 200. But this was a big amount then. There were no donors, neither government in the village; people themselves were the donors. They donated lands to schools. Our history is different from other countries. Whereas in their countries, local municipalities and the state donated lands and resources to schools, in Nepal it is the local people. Lands that do not belong to any individuals were donated to schools by communities. School buildings were constructed by the locals. This practice ended after 1951, in particular after 1971.

This policymaker traces the discourse of decentralisation in Nepal to administrative control imposed on education beginning in 1971. He repeatedly urged me to go back to 1971 [that is the NESP, see Policy Moment II] as the cut-off point for the emergence of the “weak” state and “weak public provision” in education in Nepal. He has been made to believe that administrative control over education killed the spirit of community attachment and ownership to education in Nepal. In so doing, he believes that decentralisation, that is, the restoring of the ownership of education to the community, will improve the alleged decline of centralised education. This is expected to restore the relationship between teachers and the communities and improve the quality of education.

My aim in the above interview data was to locate which sources “weak state” and the “weak public provision” derives its intellectual disposition in Nepal and that has become the legitimate ground for decentralisation at present. While I have already discussed some of this in Chapter 3, Policymaker 2 makes it further clear by tracing it back to 1971’s Policy Moment II. However, he does so by not seeking to understand how logically it evolved from the necessity of improving the previously existing educational arrangement in Nepal but through *farak farak dristikon* by way of discontinuity and displacement of earlier ideas of education. Policymaker 2 traced the space for the emergence of the policy to historical accidents in Nepal, namely political struggles for power, shifting ideological interests of the donors and political instability in Nepal, thus establishing a moral basis for Western intervention. The reason why decentralisation is required now is informed by the historical reasons here: “Education in Nepal began not with the initiative of the government; it began with the local community initiatives”. Those initiatives included local contributions to educational institutions in the form of millet and corn. The government began to provide block grants only after the locals established the schools. It is fictitious to imagine here that education did not exist in Nepal before 1951. What was lacking was a modern Western system of education and its economic logic. Policymaker 2 reflects back: “We had a long Gurukul education tradition ...” But that placed no emphasis on economic thinking or the Western conception of development concerned with living in the world, and that was seen as the key problem in Nepal in establishing the moral basis for Western intervention in education. Chapter 3 has shown how this happened and I will not repeat it here.

5.1.3 Enacting the discourse of decentralisation via “freedom” and “autonomy”

Policymaker 3

The core policy of higher education in Nepal is decentralisation and autonomy. I was one of the members involved in the development of decentralisation policy from 1998 to 2002. It wasn’t really an international discourse, but there was a widespread awareness among us for more freedom and autonomy. You can relate this policy to the World Bank which is funding the project, but you must know that Nepal has been through struggles for freedom since 1951. This struggle relates to our governance system, which is very traditional and centralised. These concepts [‘decentralisation’ ‘freedom’ and ‘autonomy’] came to more prominence in

the post-1990 democracy movement when the king accepted a multiparty system. These concepts are not inspired or motivated by the World Bank. However, we must recognise the role of the Bank because it has supported us in this process ... [pause]. The challenge now is they [the people of Nepal] don't want to break away from tradition. Here lies our bottleneck.

Decentralised and autonomous higher education is the form that policy is taking, requiring graduates to choose only those high-brow courses that meet international quality benchmarks. The key rationale for this was supported by a reason: "A substantive number of students are going abroad for higher education seeking better quality and relevance" (UGC 2012, p. 34). In view of this imaginative international context of reform that presupposes that quality and relevance reside outside of Nepal, the aim here was to examine how national policy bureaucrats respond to these normative and value-laden concerns. Accordingly, a senior UGC official was interviewed (hereafter Policymaker 3). In this interview excerpt, this policymaker enacts the discourse of decentralisation in higher education via the struggles for "freedom" and "autonomy" in Nepal beginning in 1951. Here, he presupposes that the present policy is a continuous development from that time, as if it arose naturally from the consciousness of the people of Nepal. In Chapter 3, I disturbed that order of thinking by showing how that year marked the first major historical break in beliefs, values and assumptions, shaping a new moral truth about the country's place in the world.

With all the certainty of knowing the future was assured, Policymaker 3 stated: "Educational institutions will get their much-needed funds from the students ... Education will become a costly affair (said proudly). For example, IOE and Shanker Dev get funds from the students." In so doing, he assumes higher education will become efficient and relevant to market needs. When asked to show why only four institutes out of 60 had agreed to implement the autonomy rules, he, however, bemoaned that there was a huge challenge ahead to convince the stakeholders to turn that dream into a reality. The key hurdle, according to him, lay in "tradition" – the stakeholders [actors] do not want to part with the centralised system. This policymaker, while unveiling the contest in the field of practice, nevertheless believes this policy will be executed and is desired by the public.

Assuming that reform was about "autonomy" (a further expansion of decentralisation that began in the early 1990s), the terms under which it had to operate were: the fixing of tuition fees, formation of campus management committees with powers to raise tuition fees and the introduction of market-relevant courses of study. Under the new autonomy rules, a majority of

campuses, which hitherto received state grants, were now expected to rely on non-state sources of financing. But only four out of sixty public campuses adopted the autonomy rules. The Bank's policy framework made us believe that all of the parents and students were ready to share the cost of higher education or replace the state as the guarantor of financial resources. But this was complicated by the unwillingness shown by the campus stakeholders after the students and teachers organised protests. The Bank had said it had consulted with a wide-ranging number of stakeholders while framing the policy. It made us believe that it was useless to continue with what had not worked before. But the above-cited policymaker demonstrated that many public campuses still wanted to continue with what had not allegedly worked before.

Policymaker 3 is a full-time employee at the UGC: his role is to provide technical advice and develop strategies for higher education reform. He assists in policy-making and programme evaluation in higher education. He used the key words "freedom" and "autonomy" as the most important elements constituting the policy discourse of decentralisation and autonomy in higher education. "To understand higher education reform ["development"] as a discourse, one must look not at the elements themselves [freedom, autonomy and decentralisation] but at the system of relations established among them" (Escobar 1995, p. 40).

Here, the rules governing the constitution of the discourse of higher education reform are threefold – decentralisation, freedom and autonomy. This policymaker traces the emergence of these rules to 1951. Here, "decentralisation" must be approached not according to its own specifics but as a historically contingent regime of truth and a way of representing higher education through the rules of "freedom" and "autonomy" that entered Nepal in 1951 along with international aid in education, as Chapter 3 has shown. These elements established their relationship with education reform discursively. Here, the notions of "freedom" and "autonomy" presuppose individuals as a subject of "natural freedom". Or, to put it in Olssen's terms, freedom and autonomy here refers to "markets" that require individuals to "exhibit competition, obey laws of supply and demand" (Olssen 2010, p. 198). When the above policymaker enacts the discourses of decentralisation, freedom and autonomy, he presupposes the state to be an evil force, depriving the freedom of individuals.

Circulated and funded by the donor agencies, named and legislated by the national parliament, decentralisation crystallises into a concrete practice of thinking and acting here. In its several manifestations, decentralisation and autonomy connect to neo-liberalism. Here, his subject position is fostered by the

neo-liberal discourse of higher education reform circulated in Nepal by the World Bank, which introduces privatization in education. The other is the discourse of freedom and autonomy in Nepal. The subject of knowledge “freedom” and “autonomy” presupposes that the people of Nepal lived in chains under centralisation. This belief came to shape the objective perspective about decentralisation as “freedom”, thereby rationalising privatisation and liberalisation in education. Here, the policy presupposes that decentralisation frees the campus manager from state control and empowers him to raise tuition fees to build the efficiency of higher education institutions. What is assumed here is that such an efficiency was prevented by the earlier centralised and freely accessible higher education system that was under state control or, as Policymaker 2 said, “administrative control”. Assuming that the centralisation that introduced the administrative or state control in education was an evil that deprived local campuses of their right to self-govern, the above policymaker demonstrated that 56 out of 60 campuses still wanted to continue with the earlier education tradition – centralisation. Policymaker 3, as a result, unveiled the contest between policy and practice.

The following perspectives shared by Policymaker 3 interested me the most: “The present shift in the knowledge of higher education is driven by a rise in awareness about more freedom and autonomy.” “Freedom” and “autonomy” subjects were repeated throughout the interview and in informal chats by other respondents. Popularised by the dominant political discourse of autonomous federalism, the word “autonomy” connects to the further expansion of decentralisation into public campuses. As a form of technique, the notion of “freedom” or “autonomy” connects to neo-liberalism, which takes for granted individual freedom and autonomy comes from releasing one from centralised state control. Here, the technique deployed by this form of power is to allow the formation of local campus management committees that will have the power to fix student fees, introduce markets-based curricula and privatise education.

When Policymaker 3 unveiled the paradox between the policy and practice, he referred to the TU authorities’ show of unwillingness to delegate power and authority to the local campuses given to them by the earlier regimes and the widespread protests and uproar against the reform in different quarters by teachers and students. The Bank’s earlier claims of possessing a deep local knowledge of Nepal (See World Bank, 2007, p. 4) is challenged here. Not all of the higher education institutions showed a willingness to adopt decentralisation rules. The policymaker stated it became difficult to enforce such a policy. But he nevertheless believes this policy will be implemented by all campuses

in the future. In so doing, he presumes all future students in Nepal know the implications of going to university through such stiff national competition and by paying high tuition fees. He is made to believe that only the newly-launched, four-year bachelor degree programmes that enrol full-time, full-fee students under the principle of “cost-sharing” are examples of “reform”.

This policymaker next outlined the idea of education as an investment aroused by these senses of freedom and autonomy, even as the field of practice showed only a few campuses were willing to adopt this policy through the logic of education as a personal investment for future economic security. Policymaker 3 repeated: “It [education] is becoming costly, meant only for serious and curious students.” Here, the neo-liberal discourse has fostered the “serious” and “curious student” subjectivity. When asked to show concrete examples of such students and the reform, he cited the high-brow courses offered through doing BBA, BE, BTech and BHFM degrees. In the remaining part of the thesis, I will focus on these categories as the forms of practice shaping the discourse of decentralisation and autonomy in higher education that connect to neo-liberalism.

5.1.4 Discourse of higher education reform and global quality benchmarks

Policymaker 4

This section documents the response to higher education reform in Nepal via the global discourse of quality through the interview with the head of QAA, UGC (hereafter Policymaker 4) who found it difficult to implement global quality benchmarks in Nepal. Policymaker 4 presents the story of how Nepalese planners became conscious of quality after the Bologna Process in Europe. He says, that rather than such a consciousness arising spontaneously from within Nepal, it came from Western Europe. I captured his key subject position from the following statement he made:

Quality is a general perception in our community that we need quality ... People weren't informed before; they were unconscious of such a thing. After the Bologna Process in 1993, the need for quality was felt in Nepal ... Out of 60 constituent campuses of TU and over 300 affiliated higher education institutions across the country under TU, only six institutions have applied so far for the QAA. Many institutions are unwilling to apply for the QAA.

Policymaker 4 brings out a contest between the globally legitimated policy and

its implementation. He tells how despite that globalizing one-size-fits-all recipe for quality discovered in the Bologna Process in Western Europe, it created a field of struggle at its point of application. He believes there arose a general awareness about quality in Nepal after the Bologna Process, but when it came to enforcing such a global policy rhetoric in Nepal, it created a difficulty: from the total of 60 public campuses and more than 300 private colleges, only six showed a willingness to apply for QAA. The Nepalese policymakers presupposed there was a general awareness in Nepal about the Bologna Process and the need for global quality standards. Policymaker 4 believes the Bologna Process requires the global mobility of graduates and thus the need for international quality benchmarks. Here, he becomes the subject of discourse, namely international credit transfers and common qualification frameworks. The global quality benchmarks here espouse a system of universal rules, an ahistorical explanation that subsumes all cultures, particular times and places as requiring singular one-size-fits-all prescriptions. Here, the globally legitimated discourse of quality in higher education structured the thinking by providing the “actuality of a given situation” or describing the things as they are in other countries. In Escobar’s sense, the process involved in structuring the thinking that a European quality standard is the only way to reform higher education in Nepal is made invisible in the same way as in the making of film in that the key enunciator of who directs the film is hidden from view (*ibid*, p. 107). Here, Policymaker 4 is not the director or master of the discourse. Rather, he is made to enact the discourse of Bologna. Like a movie viewer, he himself did not see the director, but the images in the screen not produced by him. These images that circulate from outside are so powerful that Nepal’s government is currently bringing “international academics”, known as the Peer Review Team, to help local academics develop internationally recognised, high-profile education programmes. According to the new higher education policy, academic institutions in Nepal must be comparable internationally (UGC, 2010a, 2012b, p. 34).³⁵ Students must be able to recognise or choose which academic institutions meet that imaginary international category. The key rationale for quality in higher education starts with a statement: “A substantive number of students are going abroad for higher education seeking better quality and relevance” (*ibid*). “This phenomenon, although new to Nepal, is already a core concern and focus of

35 “Quality Assurance and Accreditation for Higher Education in Nepal, a Brief Introduction/Guideline, Sanothimi/Bhaktapur, 2010/12.” These two documents were made available by UGC during the field-work.

higher education development in many parts of the world”. Here, the notion of quality and relevance of higher education resides outside Nepal. As I will show in rest of the data chapters, this discourse led to a concrete practice of thinking of reform in terms of a four-year semester system tied to an international credit transfer system.

5.2 Conclusions

With the help of my respondents, I concluded that the policy is framed within the developmental logic that all everybody in the world is becoming one by their common experience of time and space and by definition and the activities they do. Two dominant systems of knowledge structured this thinking in Nepal: First is the economic theory of development that has fostered the subjectivity of the actors to think of education in terms of the economic prosperity achieved by industrialised countries. The other is the political turmoil in Nepal that has fostered the freedom and autonomy subjects, whereby policy-makers assume that the individuals must be freed from state power to exercise personal autonomy and natural freedom. As a form of practice, decentralised and autonomous higher education institutions take the form. As I will show in the rest of the thesis, decentralisation has become the technique of neo-liberalism. It structures the thinking that higher education is an autonomous and self-governing institution in the republic, requiring the reduced need for central control, governmental authority or state financing. In so doing, the policy assumes that the people in Nepal have the capacity and resources necessary to sustain its future efficiency. As a form of practice, decentralisation and autonomy authorise the collection of student fees. In so doing, the reform presupposes individuals and communities as the strong alternative to the allegedly “weak” state. Efficient governance, a client-friendly and responsive administration that is devoid of bureaucratic red tape, is imagined here. The organizational efficiency logic of higher education is expected to come from market and “user-pays” principles.

By applying Foucault’s discursive approach to social theory, this chapter problematised the subjectivity as the tools to interpret the interviews. In so doing, it rejected the sovereignty of the subject or sovereign human consciousness (Foucault, in Smart, 2002). In other words, I rejected the idea of what they spoke of as emanating from their sovereign capacity to reason or free will

to think. Rather, they positioned themselves as clients in relation to the agents conducting the reform. In Foucault's sense, "the exclusive enunciators" of the present education policy discourse in Nepal are not the above-discussed policymakers; they enacted the discourse of development and its rules set by the development institutions. The future imagination of prosperity, freedom and autonomy were the most interesting subject positions fostered by the policy discourse of higher education. In Chapter 3, I showed how this thinking was structured historically in Nepal to create a sense of loss of Nepal's economic and political freedom that continued to the present moment.

Administrators' and teachers' responses to the discourse of higher education reform

6.1 Introduction

This chapter documents the responses from university administrators, campus administrators and teachers as they enact the discourse of higher education reform via “decentralisation” and “autonomy”. Accordingly, the data in this chapter is divided into three key categories: 1) Tribhuvan University (hereafter TU) administrators; 2) campus administrators; and 3) teachers. Rather than the speaking subjects, the analytics is directed at the apparatus doing the reform that has come to structure the thinking and practice of decentralisation and autonomy in higher education. Development institutions conducting the reform are couched as the form of power and neo-liberalism as the system of knowledge in fostering the “decentralisation” and “autonomy” subjectivities in the field of practice. A total of 31 themes were gathered around these two concepts from the interviews of administrators and teachers. In total, 13 teachers and 14 administrators were interviewed (see the list in Appendix 1) across 31 themes (see Appendix 2). I first begin with the TU administrators who are implementing the SHEP through the following key propositions they made in the interviews, before moving onto the campus administrators.

6.1.1 TU administrators

One rector, one registrar, one ex-vice-chancellor and one ex-rector of Tribhuvan University were selected for interview under this category. These cat-

egories were directly involved in administering and implementing the Bank's project. The first two interviews are transcribed and developed into brief propositions and included in the *List of Tables* (see Table 8). These interviews were conducted on a face-to-face basis in their private residences after the university was padlocked by the agitating teachers.

Administrator 1: Sample interview transcript

It [decentralisation] may be explained in our context as giving more power to university campuses. The 2056 regulation was designed to give more powers to campus management committees ... By power, what I mean is for example, when a campus wants to construct a building, the management committee [apex body] has to think over the matters, for example, what materials are needed and decide accordingly. Ultimately, the executive council has to give consent to this. But the idea was to give more powers to the campuses themselves situated locally to do that job. It was becoming difficult for the university to manage all of its 61 constituent campuses and to execute decisions when the World Bank came saying why not give the powers to the campuses. Then we agreed to decentralise and give autonomy to the campuses. Apart from Ilam and Dharan, two more campuses are in the process of become autonomous. They are Ayurved Campus and Tahachal Campus.

Administrator 1 is a senior administrator looking after the administration of the overall 60 constituent campuses under TU, three of them implementing the autonomy rules prescribed by SHEP. In this interview excerpt, Administrator 1 unveils how the World Bank pressed the TU to decentralise its campuses. Going back to Bhatta (1990), "decentralisation" was thrust upon Nepal under the rubric of democratic governance. Rather than originating in the science of education, this discourse originated in the belief that the people of Nepal were deprived of political freedom or rights enjoyed by the people in Western democracies. This discourse led to the restoration of the multiparty system in 1990. This discourse soon filtered into education policy after that event (see Carney and Bista, 2009).

The above subject position taken by the Administrator 1 from the two-hour-long, face-to-face interview confirmed that the core policy of higher education in Nepal is decentralisation. While analysing the data from Policymaker 3's interview earlier in Chapter 5, the core policy of decentralisation and autonomy were informed by the discourses of freedom and autonomy in Nepal. Policymaker 3 had then refuted that it was driven by the Bank or that it was an international policy discourse. Campus Administrator 1, who is directly implementing the SHEP, now contests: "The World Bank came saying why

not give the powers to the campuses. Then we agreed to decentralise and give autonomy to the campuses.” Policymaker 3 then said with definite accuracy: “These concepts are not inspired or motivated by the World Bank.” Here, the policymaker and the administrator contested each other. What was, however, common to both categories of interviewees was the objective perspective on decentralisation and autonomy. Those discourses of freedom and autonomy then systematically formed the object [decentralisation] of which it spoke (Escobar, 1995). “To understand higher education [“development”] as a discourse, one must look not at the elements themselves [freedom and autonomy] but at the system of relations established among them” (ibid, p. 40). Here, the notions of “freedom” and “autonomy” are connected to decentralisation and autonomy in education through a loose postscript of neo-liberalism.

What follows is a discursive production of the policy and practice of higher education reform in Nepal around the concepts, theories, and objects of decentralisation and autonomy that displace what Olssen (2004) calls “the umpiring role of the state” (p. 238). The trend is towards seeing parents and students as more resourceful contributors of change in education (Carney and Bista, 2009).

Assuming that decentralisation was reform, the Bank had made it clear that it arose not from the rules specific to education, but in the “rule-bound bargaining process”, mainly “when a country finds itself deeply divided, especially along geographic or ethnic lines” (see World Bank, 1999). The most important revelation Administrator 1 made was: “...the World Bank came saying why not give powers to the campuses? Then we agreed to decentralise and give autonomy to the campuses.” Here, Administrator 1 is made to believe that the transfer of power held by the TU executive council to the local campus authorities will inexorably improve the alleged “weak public provision”. As a form of practice, decentralisation and autonomy introduced the global quality benchmarks and the modern governance logic. By assuring the Nepalese students of an international experience of education, it gave them tickets to Western countries. For those parents whose children secured such a ticket, this form of practice was a victory; for the others who did not secure an exit from Nepal, they were reduced to tears. This policy was neither bad nor good. In sum, the invention of the “decentralisation” and “autonomy” subjects led to the consolidation of the neo-liberal reform in Nepal and that became the standard practice and name of higher education reform in the country.

In the final proposition, Administrator 1 shared his perspective that higher education in the context of Nepal was about economic development, thereby reaffirming the economic logic of neo-liberalism that presupposes economic

prosperity in Nepal will follow from the individual liberty allegedly denied by the controlling state. This thinking has structured a sense of reality that higher education institutes must follow good governance practice where the managers exercise their freedom freely. The above-cited administrator said: “Nepal is passing through a transition. Everybody talks about education as the vehicle for overall development of the country.”

This administrator was not allowed to go to his office as it was padlocked by the agitating teachers’ union. I met him at his previous law firm. He said, “In an emergency situation like this, I meet people here.” When asked why he was thrown off the office, he reversed the dominant order of thinking on “political transition” used as the strategic context for reform.

Nepal is passing through transition ... but in practice we haven’t been able to move forward as everyone expects. There are many difficulties. First, there is political pressure both from students and political parties. The latter use their sister organizations for their petty interests. As Nepal passed through the April 2006 revolution to a republican state, different forces started creating disturbances in the university. It has become very difficult to maintain law and order. Sometimes parties use students directly sometimes indirectly... Nepal has a very old education system that is resistant to change.

The open moment ... means a window of opportunity. Usually when major political changes occur, societies are ready for changes ... Countries cannot develop by continuing to do what has not worked. Major political changes present opportunities for changes in institutions that have not worked (Senior Education Specialist, World Bank)³⁶.

In the first proposition, Administrator 1 says that everyone talks about education reform within the context of political transition and with all the certainty that it is about overall development of the country, but he himself expresses his disbelief after a number of events, the most recent being a lockout at the university which threw him out of office. He is referring to the political turmoil in Nepal after 2006 and the disturbances it created in university, making it difficult for him to carry out normal routine work. In so doing, he contested the senior education specialist of the World Bank and the author of the SHEP document who had said with all certainty that the implementation of

36 In this interview transcript, the name of the enunciator has been withdrawn to maintain anonymity. The interviewee is a senior education specialist for the World Bank. The questionnaire for the interview was sent via email.

the reform would move smoothly and free of contradictions after the political events of April 2006. Assuming that there was a collective agency to think and imagine, this administrator didn't think like the World Bank specialist. In Foucault's sense, here was an individual who reasoned through his self shaped by his own unique circumstances.

I asked the Bank's Nepal education specialist to respond to the notion of the "open moment" used to signify "reform" in the project document. The questionnaire was sent to him via email. At that time, he was working at the World Bank country office in Ethiopia. He had then drawn an analogy between education and political transition (April 2006 "revolution"). Administrator 1 now contests him. He was deeply apprehensive about the promises and pledges made by the SHEP, the international aid agencies, and the politicians towards the end of the April 2006 street demonstration in Kathmandu against the direct rule of the king that everything that would follow thenceforth would be peaceful, orderly and smooth. This administrator was unconvinced.

Administrator 1 relates the deterioration of the law and order in Nepal and its effects felt by the university in the form of teachers' and students' protests. He himself was thrown out of the university as a result of the protests for more than one month.

The chief architect of the SHEP then thought with a sense of optimism that when the monarchy was dethroned, a new constitution was in the air; politicians pledged that there would be a new state-restructuring via autonomous federalism; and a decade long Maoist conflict would end. He read these events with a great sense of optimism in forecasting the future free of contradictions. There was a sense of optimism everywhere that Nepal was going to be the autonomous federal union so necessary to provide natural freedom to the Nepalese allegedly deprived of such a freedom in the past. Six years down the road, administrators implementing the reform shared their nightmarish experiences of being expelled from the offices as a result of protests.

This interview took place in Administrator 1's private law firm in Kathmandu after the agitating teachers padlocked his office. At the end of the interview, he said, "the reform is necessary, autonomy is essential but the problems lie elsewhere." Thus, this administrator was referring to how higher education was embroiled in a complex problem in Nepal. He was surrounded by enormous problems – student agitation needing resolution, teachers' demands to be met, thesis *byapar* [business] to scrutinise, a thesis scanner to turn on at the central university library, and to improve his own public image enmeshed with political *bhagbanda*. The implementation of the SHEP was only one among those

complex tasks in hand. This became further difficult after he was thrown out of office by protest. The most difficult task before him was to negotiate with the agitating TU professors, who had protested against the reform and had padlocked his office. But this was only one problem. There was no one reason behind the chaos at TU. Decentralisation was only a fragment in those complex struggles. Political interference in the form of *bhagbanda* has increased in the university. The notion of *bhagbanda* was referred to as a practice in which the rector, registrar, vice-chancellor and other key university officials began to come from the party membership. As a form of power-sharing among major political parties, this discourse entered the university after 1990.

After Nepal was declared a republic in 2007, power was to be distributed among 140 political parties. Each wanted its share of TU and its campuses. When the administrators at TU shared their concerns, namely deteriorating law and order and their inability to implement the SHEP smoothly, they referred to this complex game of political *bhagbanda*. Neo-liberalism was only one element in the constitution of the discourse and the practice of higher education reform in this complex game of power.

Administrator 2: Sample interview transcript

In principle, decentralisation and autonomy means good governance, quick decision-making and efficient administration. Based on these principles, three types of reforms were introduced: One, administrative reform. It means good governance. We didn't have this; what we had had was traditional governance. For every decision to take, for every small thing they need, campuses had to ask the centre. It was felt that academic institutions would not develop should more power be not given to them as local units. Thus, we felt the need to delegate authorities [power] to local campuses.

Here, this administrator was made to believe that decentralisation was about “good governance”, “quick decision-making” and the “efficient administration” of higher education campuses in Nepal, but soon he discovers the contradictions between the policy and practice.

We gave them [local campuses] the power [decentralisation and autonomy] but instead of taking the risk of reforming their campuses or mobilizing the resources and community to develop their campus with the funds and power they were given, they started recruiting some people in order to provide them with job opportunities. The drawbacks to reform thus set in.

Administrator 2 tells the story of how the World Bank-financed SHEP was beset by problems when the local campus managements began to misuse the power to hire “hamro manche” [their own people]. Here, the discourse of decentralisation sent a political cadre to the public campus instead of an academic. This practice came to be known as *bhagbanda*. Under the centralised programme (see Policy Moment II), *afnoo manche* (one’s own people, relatives or friends) were favoured. The present policy and practice appeared as strange as the past one.

Assuming that freeing the 60 public campuses from the TU executive council’s grip was so necessary to bring about their efficient management allegedly obstructed by centralisation, only two campuses showed their interest towards the end of 2009 to apply for the autonomy rules under the World Bank grants. The project itself kicked off in 2007. By the time this fieldwork was undertaken in 2013, there were only three institutes that had implemented the autonomy rule. I asked the former rector to comment on this:

TU is the largest university in the country, with 60 constituent campuses administered directly by the university. In addition, there are 826 affiliated campuses. However, TU handles the examinations for all these campuses. It is a giant university. We have undertaken series of reforms. Decentralisation and autonomy are two strategies of reform. Up till now, 47 out of 60 campuses have already been decentralised. A few campuses are left now to be decentralised. In the second phase, we plan to grant autonomy to a number of campuses but the plan couldn’t move on successfully. Only two campuses out of 60 have been granted autonomy.

The project was due to expire in 2012 but was prolonged by its inability to take off. There were several forces at work that obstructed the implementation of the SHEP. The former rector blames the politics of *bhagbanda*. Administrator 2, however, said later in the interview that the hurdle was cleared.

You must have observed in the field, slowly the project is moving forward. Ilam became autonomous two years ago, Dharan and Kirtipur recently. It is early to predict but they will take off, we hope. And since Nepal is becoming a federal state, these concepts [autonomy and decentralisation] will get added local support and fit well in the changing context. We know these campuses cannot become fully independent financially. Worldwide, the trend is such in education sector where some form of government grant is necessary for autonomy. We have kept the option open.

The above-cited administrators demonstrated that the thinking and practice of decentralisation and autonomy in higher education came into being not in a

smooth process but through complex processes of negotiations. After several intense negotiation rounds with the Bank and the TU, both options were kept open: to mobilise local resources and get state grants at the same time. Thus, the actors enacted the discourses in the field of practice in terms that are not necessarily laid down by the World Bank or the new government of Nepal. Neither do they reflect the neo-liberal trend as a whole. The notion of a “reluctant state” or a “weak public provision” of education was misnomer. Here was a state that was willing to add resources to education. Even as the autonomy regulation passed in 2005 and amended in 2007 extended the privatization scheme by introducing privately-organised study programmes, such as BTech and BHFM, they were limited to two campuses. Within the same campus, the reform had only a minimal effect in terms of introducing high-profile courses, which were beyond the reach of so many students who continued to be organised under the centralised system.

The Institute of Engineering was the first to implement the decentralisation rule. In 2002, Shanker Dev Campus launched the BBA under that rule as a private programme. By 2013, some 47 public campuses had adopted the decentralisation rule. This rule originally required the public campuses to generate finance from private sources, mainly student tuition fees and private donations. But the new campus managements were not allowed to make indiscriminate use of the funds so collected without the prior approval of the TU central board. The notion of decentralisation appears as strange as centralisation here in the sense that it allowed the limited delegation of power to local campus managements to spend the money generated privately. What finally appeared so different from centralisation was the act of collecting the fees from the students. In order to encourage these campuses to generate private sources of finances, the World Bank provided incentive grants under its SHEP. The incentive grants included initially NPR³⁷ 455,000 for preparing the strategic plan. To implement the plan, NPR 13 million was provided from the Bank’s SHEP. Finally, a performance and a matching grant of NPR 97 million and NPR 65 million respectively were provided to each campus that implemented the SHEP. The amount so provided for a fixed period of five years was to aid the public campuses to develop strategic visions for the future. The most important vision for the future included new privately-funded academic programmes. The SHEP tied the grants to new study programmes run privately by the TU campuses. These new programmes ran alongside the state-subsidised

37 Nepali rupees. 100 NPR is pegged with *ca.* US\$1.

centralised programmes within the same campus. Often a block was isolated from the main campus building to organise the private model. The World Bank had said this was required to deepen the decentralisation in Nepal (see World Bank 2007). Amended in 2011, the autonomy rule allowed a more full-fledged decentralisation of public campuses in Nepal. Administrative, financial and academic autonomy were granted to the public campuses. Explaining the concept of “campus autonomy”, the SHEP implementation office stated, “autonomy is the freedom” (see FAQs, in the TU SHEP Implementation Office, 2014). The word “freedom” was used to refer to power delegated by the TU to the new campus management committees in the outlying campuses across Nepal to make self-decisions on academic, financial and administrative matters. As a form of practice, students’ admission into university colleges began to be weighted in favour of their test scores in entrance exams and capacity to pay full fees.

The passing of the autonomy regulation also facilitated the public campuses to accept donations. Like a loose federal state in a union, these public campuses were given the power to secede from the TU. This thinking and practice of higher education reform was further consolidated by the political discourse of autonomous federalism. What seemingly appeared as an exercise of “freedom” or “power”, assumed to be so necessary to overhaul the TU and its 60 public campuses, was actually a right transferred by the TU central governing board to the local campus management to find private sources of financing higher education institutes. Nothing would be as naïve and fictitious as to imagine that the need to transfer these campuses from state control to local communities arose from the need and wishes of the people in Nepal. Chapter 3 has already shed light on this in terms of historical and discursive forces.

6.1.2 Campus administrators

Having examined the TU administrators’ responses to the discourse and practice of higher education, this section will gather the responses of the campus administrators directly implementing decentralisation and autonomy rules at the level of effects, outcomes and concrete practices. It must be made clear that the World Bank-sponsored neo-liberal reform was not the all-encompassing frame of action on the ground, except as a small experiment where a private sector efficiency logic is introduced in the public system in the form of new types of students enrolled under the “full-fee” courses within the SHEP. Accordingly, BBA, B-Tech and BHFM, in Kathmandu, Dharan and Ilam re-

spectively, were made the focus of examination in the interviews and the effects of decentralisation and autonomy in higher education. I have reduced the long interview texts to brief formulations (see Table 9 in the *List of Tables*). In Chapter 4, I outlined the fieldwork methods and how I located these actors and the institutions.

The “global context” of reform

In the following interview transcript, the administrator implementing the BBA programme as the key outcome of decentralisation at a business college in Kathmandu contextualises this form of practice in the “global context”. To maintain the anonymity of this administrator, I call him Administrator 3.

Administrator 3

This campus is called Shanker Dev Campus. It was first called Nepal National College. It was founded in 1951 within the premises of Durbar High School, the first school of Nepal, and temporarily moved to Tri-Chandra College. Nepal’s first college opened in 1918. In 1973, it was named after Prof. Shanker Dev Pant who was the founder and a contributor. The TU recognised the campus as its constituent campus the same year under the new education policy. This campus is now the pioneer management campus in Nepal. It offers BBS and MBS programmes under an annual system and a BBA under a semester system. In 2002, the campus launched its semester system. The BBA programme has become very popular since then. Even if we accept only first division students, we get 1,500 applicants every year for just 90 places. This campus caters to 50 percent of MBS students in the country. The campus has hired some of the best brains in the country as faculty members and it attracts top talent. Our BBA graduates go on to do MBAs both in Nepal and India. None of our BBA graduates are unemployed. They are either employed by industries or are pursuing higher education abroad. The BBA has become the most successful outcome of the reform. The programme has now expanded to 21 other campuses. The BBA model is a required in the global context.

I immediately got stuck on the utterance “global context” and I directed him to the next question:

Can you explain what the “global context” is, for example?

What I meant to say by “global context” is “changing times”. What matters nowadays is which university a graduate comes from. We’ve got to see market demand; we’ve got to follow the changing times. By “changing times”, what I mean to say is, for example, someone with a Harvard University BA matters in this era.

As a form of subjectivity fostered by the discourse of decentralisation, “global context”, “changing times” and “Harvard University” emerged as the most important categories shaping the thinking and practice of reform. As a concrete form of practice, it manifested itself in the BBA. As a form of thinking, the word “Harvard” evokes international higher education imagery and BBA its local form of practice. The most important product to come from this thinking and acting was a “good” person with “Harvard” attributes. The discourse of decentralisation has fostered the “good person” subject. This campus administrator repeatedly used the word “good” to refer to the BBA graduates. When pressed, he said the “good person” was one with a “Harvard University BA”. Thus, to paraphrase Whitebook (1992), here was an administrator who had become a “submissive slave” (p. 97) to the neo-liberal order of thinking. The imagery of Harvard was central to his thinking of higher education reform in Nepal. Here, the discourse and practice of decentralisation have fostered the subjectivity to think of Harvard University as the only model of reform. It produced a form of social reality that excluded other ways of knowing education and the world. Here, in Foucault’s sense, power produces “domains of objects” [Harvard] and “rituals of truth” [decentralisation].

A World Bank education specialist for Nepal had earlier described the BBA as a “hot cake”. He had then compared this decentralized campus offering this high-profile study course with universities of California, Cambridge and London in terms of ‘autonomy’. He had presupposed that the students of BBA who brought their own water and lunch packs to the campus on top of paying large tuition fees and who had not even a blade of grass to see in their campus environs were experiencing the same learning environment as their European and American counterparts. Administrator 3 simply parroted that World Bank’s specialist. What emerges is an objective perspective to look at the BBA programme in terms of Harvard University even as such comparisons remain fictitious, existing only in imagination. Thus, the policy is geared towards reproducing the US, British and Scandinavian models (see Madsen and Carney, 2011), but the practice takes its own local form in which the students have to walk to colleges wearing masks to avoid air pollution or carry even drinking water with them, let alone pay for educational tours, project works and stationery. Thus, the reform is a quest for the “authentic copy” even as it doesn’t translate into practice (Madsen and Carney 2011, p. 119). The next question was to settle the relationship between “decentralisation” and “BBA”.

Enacting the discourse of decentralisation

The centre [TU] didn't allow us to introduce need-based courses, nor a market-based curriculum nor fixed the number of students who could be enrolled. It [centralisation] offered education *sitaima* [freely]. *Sitaima pako education ma bidyarthi le dhyan nadeko pahiyō* [We found that the students who got their education freely didn't pay attention to studies]. The centralised system is to be blamed for this. It gave rise to a dangerous trend where students came to college not for knowledge but for certificates. Low cost is high cost became the reality of the centralised education; it gave rise to a tuition culture ... this could be called a social evil.

In the above interview sample, Administrator 3 enacts the discourse of *bikendrikaran* by drawing on the systemic failure of the centralised and freely accessible state-supported higher education. The context in which he does so follows the implementation of the World Bank-assisted decentralisation [*bikendrikaran*] project which makes privatisation pre-eminent. The project was launched in 2002. The object of the focus in this interview was the BBA programme, the prime outcome of the decentralisation scheme. This scheme led to the isolation of a block off the main campus building, which was named the BBA. It gathered a small number of full-fee paying students under an EU-US style, four-year bachelor degree course in business administration organised under a new global semester system. This category of students was epitomised as "good". Thus, through a discursive practice, higher education reform constructed a "good" student subjectivity in Nepal. Here, the new category of students who paid "full fees" to the institutes were named "good", assuming that those who go freely to university or pay a nominal fee are "bad" and responsible for the decline of public higher education in Nepal. In sum, the nature of knowledge that constructed the "good" student category connects to neo-liberalism that locates the individual as a self-disciplined, self-regulated, and self-financed entrepreneur of education. The strategy and name given to this type of construction was legitimised by "decentralisation".

There were various techniques that objectified decentralisation as reform. The strategic plan describes this campus that invented the "good" student subject as a pioneer commerce and business college aiming to become the "top" business school in Nepal. The reform deployed in this institute gathered for the first time self-financed, uniform-wearing English-speaking students, who came through a national open competition. These categories of students were to attend the college on a full-time basis and were named as the "top talents", thus creating a social difference by not accepting those working and studying

in Nepali medium and are isolated in separate block as “top talent”. As a technique of power deployed by neo-liberalism, it made it impossible for working students and those with less economic security to get onto the new study programmes. They nevertheless continued to study under a three-year bachelor’s degree programme subsidised by the state. But this form of education was not recognised as “reform”. When I asked the administrator to show one concrete outcome of the reform signalled by decentralisation, he referred only to the BBA. It would be seriously misleading here to accept this logic, which treated only the full-fee paying students at the BBA as the sign of reform. This logic was tied to the four-year, US-EU style semester, system-based international education programme. The above-cited administrator was made to believe that the US and the EU offer education to their people by charging full fees. Here, the defects in the centralised system of higher education in Nepal that pursued the open door admission policy are seen: “The centre [TU] didn’t allow us to charge the student fee, introduce need-based courses and markets-based curriculum, nor fixed the number of students who can be enrolled. It [centralisation] offered education *sitaima* [freely].” This statement can never be accepted as true. The subject position – “We found that the students who got education free of cost performed poorly” – is fostered by the neo-liberal order of thinking deployed by the World Bank. This subject position reflects the neo-liberal trends examined in Chapter 2 and summed up in Chapter 3 in terms of fee-setting, new enrolment policies tied to national testing, new study programmes connected to market logic, cost sharing and the reduction of government funding. The notion of a decentralised campus here is premised on the logic of freeing the individual from state control to give them freedom to plan, organise and restructure their own local campuses. In actual practice, it has transferred the power to raise student fees to the local campus managers.

The policy produces a picture in our mind of how smoothly the transfer of authority and responsibility for governance or service delivery moves on from the center to the local when these campuses are decentralized. However, in the practice domain, the campus chief demonstrated that he couldn’t exercise his powers to spend the fees collected from the students for the expansion of campus buildings and classrooms. This power was still held by central authority. The reform, however, succeeded in duplicating the European and American “original” in so far as the introduction of the credits transfer system is concerned.

Techniques of neo-liberalism and the “good” student subject

The introduction of the new high-profile study courses such as the BBA, tied to market logic and the fixing of student tuition fees, remains central to the technique of neo-liberalism. In a news bulletin, the Faculty of Management at TU stated, “The test [CMAT] will follow the international testing pattern and standards.” It included areas like verbal ability, quantitative ability, logical reasoning and general awareness. Known as the “new” or “good” students, who began to come to go to university by paying full tuition fees, only those who secured a first division place (above a 60 percent score) were made to qualify for the oral exams. From the oral exams, only those who scored the highest were selected. The finalists were more than happy to pay large tuition fees. For them, the concern for future employment and economic security overcame the concern for high tuition fees; otherwise, the state would require costly measures to be raised. For the people constructed as the poorest in the world in terms of lack of cash income and ready to sell off their lands and farm animals to migrate to labour camps in Malaysia, Qatar and Doha, the international credit transfer facility offered by the reform to study, work and live in Western capitals was a more attractive option. The reform promised the new category of students an exit from Nepal in return for large tuition fees. This was a novel scheme orchestrated by the reform. For the “weak” state, it had no need to inject any more funds to educate some of the “poorest” people on earth. For the “strong” states (including those doing the reform in Nepal), this reform provided the cheap source of human labour that came without having to inject a penny into their education and training. The decentralised and autonomous campuses promised all those students willing to pay full fees an international credit transfer facility after their graduation to study and settle in any part of the world. For those with deep pockets, the new study programmes offered tickets to foreign countries.

According to the campus management, from an estimated 1,500 students shortlisted for the written test, only 90 qualified finally for the entry onto the programme. In the first round, the number of applicants exceeded 50,000. They were rigorously shortlisted and reduced to 1,500. From this, only 90 were finally accepted. In so doing, the aim was to gather a small number of students who paid full fees. For all those without deep pockets, including those 1,410 students who did not qualify to enter the new study programmes due to their poor financial circumstances, and who had to work part-time to study and live in Kathmandu, they were assembled in another space haphazardly under the previous centralised programme. This category of students was in a majority

on the campuses but they did not signify decentralisation and autonomy. In what follows, the discourse and practice of decentralisation and autonomy was limited to the full-fee paying students. This category of students were offered the new study courses tied to the European credit transfer system and the US-style semester system.

The private sector logic used here is drawn from the examples of Chelsea, Clinton, Einstein, White House, King's College, Brookfield and Golden Gate, and all those private schools and colleges in Kathmandu that became hugely attractive alternatives to state-owned colleges in Nepal named after the national poets, the kings of Nepal, local people and religious institutions under the centralised programme. The BBA replicated these private models. The original aim of the reform was social justice that is contested by this form of practice that introduces privatisation, increased tuition fees and tighter admission policies. A selected number of TU campuses were made the targets in this.

The credits system required that the students in Nepal could only be evaluated using criteria that are commonly used in industrialised countries. After continuously evaluating the students from their entry to the programme to its completion, the campus finally issued a certificate specifying the credits so earned by the Nepalese students. In total, the study workload of a graduate in Nepal was made equivalent to 120 credit hours in the European credit transfer system or for American academic usage. Even as they qualified for an entry through a credits-based system, it did not automatically qualify the Nepalese students to pursue their dreams if they did not have the capacity to pay large sums of money. Ultimately, most of the middle class and the elites could qualify to leave the country to pursue a foreign dream.

Apart from the credit system, a new teaching method that emphasised a research-oriented problem-based learning was introduced. Contrary to the centralised annular system, for instance the BBS, the BBA study course was designed to meet the international credit transfer facility. This form of arrangement led some students to believe that they were being treated differently to their peers. This resulted in social differences and a subjectivity being fostered in which the BBA students were constructed as “good”, “exceptional” and “unique” from their BBS peers. This category of students did their project work, and their performance was valued by practical sessions, reports from study tours in India or field trips, internships in banks and financial institutions and the ability to take part in seminars. Their skills in oral presentations were also evaluated to determine their ability to fit the international category and the global quality benchmarks through which Nepal is to be known.

A “good” student must attend a minimum of 80 percent of activities – both theoretical and practical – in order to qualify for the semester examination. These students were also taken to modern Indian cities for exposure and rehearsals during their last semester. To orient these students to live in that imagery world of abundance, that “Brave New World” [a phrase frequently used by a former vice-chancellor in an interview] that has different material practices, exposure to a world outside their own was included in the education programme. In the 1970s, a graduate was exposed to rural life inside the country as part of the educational tour. Operationalised under the “National Development Service” (NDS), all graduates were required to undergo a year-long compulsory service in rural areas of Nepal as part of their practical degree requirement. Students took adult education classes, taught in formal schools, repaired schools, tended gardens, spread awareness on family planning and performed certain community services as part of the approach of education reform conceived in the 1970s under the NESP. As I showed in Chapter 3, education then was viewed as a vehicle for national development through the application of patriotic consciousness. By 1978, there were 1,200 graduates working in 71 districts across the country under the NDS. The aim of the scheme was to expose the students to the socioeconomic conditions prevalent in rural areas, thereby providing them with practical experiences to serve the nation as they started jobs. Thirty-four years down the road, when this fieldwork was being carried out, that idea has been abandoned in favour of the exposure of the students to the outside world as a more important outcome of education.

In its new guise, the NDS scheme was renamed “internship”. As part of that new thinking and new rationale of education, internships and on-the-job training were offered to those small groups of students isolated in the main campus building from their peers who continued to learn under the centralised system. An eight-week long, six-credit-hour internship was offered to the students in banks and the financial sector as they entered their final year (seventh and eighth semesters). A student who completed an internship submitted a paper (report) of their work in that organisation. The organisation enclosed a confidential report of the interns to the campus. The students who secured a minimum of a “C” to pass the internship as part of the overall evaluation of the “good person” was deemed fit to live in any part of the world.

The grading system was organised along the US/EU-style semester model. One senior teacher who was engaged in the design of the curriculum believed the US education to be the right step and the right direction for the Nepalese to follow. These students took a total of eight semesters and four years to gradu-

ate. With internship as some sort of an external evaluation and practical job experience, the internal evaluation was called the “ongoing evaluation”. The internal evaluation carried a 40 percent workload and, externally, 60 percent. The internal (semester exams) evaluation was conducted by the Faculty of Management (FOM) instead of the Office of the Controller of Examinations (OCE). The latter, however, conducted the end-semester (final evaluation) exams. However, the OCE was condemned as being too slow to conduct exams or publish results as a legacy of the past centralised bureaucracy invented by the monarchs that continued to operate despite the reform. The FOM was established as a better alternative to the OCE, but the latter was still necessary to conduct the examinations for the “unfit”, who did not automatically qualify for entry into the northern hemisphere.

The new students epitomised as “good” must secure a GPA of 2 in the internal evaluation in order to qualify in the finals. The “old” continued to be evaluated by their marks (40 as a pass mark). The “good” students who scored 3.5 to 4 were ranked “first”, “second” and “third”, and anybody below 1.5 was marked as a “fail”. This new course of study was hailed as “reform” and was aligned to patterns in industrialised countries. This form of practice was legitimated by drawing on the defects of the national centralised education system. Chapter 3 had disrupted this taken-for-granted assumption by showing the forces of neo-liberalism shaping this practice. When the administrators and teachers enacted the discourse of higher education reform, they mainly reflected on this new arrangement. This arrangement had fostered the subjectivities to think of the teachers as “best brains” and the students who scored highly as “good” and “top talent”.

The discourse and practice of credits transfer

The most important technique used to create that global consciousness of higher education and a more advanced time and space outside of Nepal was a measure called “credits-transfer”. As a form of practice, this arrangement was reflected in the organisation of a Western-style semester programme. I interviewed the campus management officials besides studying the programme and courses of study. In the interviews, most of them referred to a “credits-transfer” facility as the most important outcome of decentralisation. It finally emerged that it was a description of academic qualifications earned by the students in Nepal that ultimately enabled them to transfer their academic credits to another university in a foreign country.

The new arrangement mandated the students to secure a GPA of 2 in the

internal exams in order to qualify for appearing in the final exams. Students who scored 3.5 to 4 were ranked in the first division, and who scored 2, in the second division. Below 1.5, they were a “fail”. Such students were offered what was known as a “make-up” examination, in which they were allowed to re-take in the exams. If they failed again, they needed to re-register for the entire course cycle.

Another technique was an eight-week long six-credit-hour internship offered to the students in banks and the financial sector as they entered their final year (usually in seventh and eight semester). A student who completed an internship was expected to submit a paper (report) of their work in that organisation. The organisation enclosed a confidential report on the interns for the campus. Students had to secure a minimum of a “C” to pass the internship as part of the overall evaluation system. Only then were they considered to be recognised internationally. The internal (semester exams) evaluation was conducted by the local FOM instead of the central OCE. The latter, however, conducted the end-semester (final evaluation) exams. Separate departments, separate exam boards, different times for exams and results, and different fee structures were imposed on two categories of students doing the same bachelor’s degree. At the outset, a complicated ensemble of authorities and a complex division of powers and hierarchies of functions was operationalised by the machinery of reform.

6.1.3 Teachers’ discourses of decentralisation in higher education

Upon the repeated requests of the campus management to interview the teachers partitioned by the BBA block at Shanker Dev Campus, I interviewed a senior teacher who teaches this high-profile course and had previously worked as a member of the National Education Commission – the highest policy-making body in education in Nepal – to explain the practice of decentralisation in terms of its effects on the BBA. He was currently working as a member of the World Bank’s task force in higher education under the SHEP. I thought he was the right person to gather teachers’ responses to the ongoing discourse of higher education reform in Nepal with decentralisation and its prime effect as the BBA as the form of practice. This interview was conducted face-to-face in the staffroom. To maintain the anonymity of this subject, chosen after the repeated requests of the campus chief, I refer to him as “Teacher 1” hereafter.

Enacting the discourse via BBA vs. BBS

Teacher 1

By reform, we refer to BBA [Bachelor of Business Administration], a self-sustaining new study programme launched recently under the decentralisation mode. Our campus is the first to introduce this. It is a number one programme in our campus and in the nation. We get very bright students in the programme. BBA is a job-oriented, market-driven, professional programme. It is relevant to rapidly increasing financial and banking sectors in Nepal. The campus generates its own resources to fund this programme. The university doesn't give any money. Student fee is higher than normal study programmes like the BBS. Demand is very high for this programme. We take only 10 percent of students who want to get in. The BBA is run under a semester system.

Teacher 1 shares his subjective views on BBA as “reform”, thereby validating what Administrator 3 and Policymaker 3 had said earlier. He does so by drawing on the difference between the BBA and the BBS. The former was introduced in the historical context of 2002 and the latter in 1971 [introduced under the monarchy and its centralisation program]. Here, the historical context in which the BBA emerged as the discourse and practice of reform was the SAP of the World Bank, space for which was provided by the 1990s restoration of a multiparty system (see more in Chapter 3, Policy Moment 3). Here, only the BBA is understood as “reform” by juxtaposing it with the US semester system. Consider the following subject position taken by Teacher 1:

We are following American semester system. We are influenced by the American education model. The semester system is becoming popular because it is adaptive to changing times; that is, we orient the courses of study according to the changes in the job markets, the demands the markets generate. I think this is [the American model, the semester system] a right step in the right direction.

Teacher 1 believes that the BBA programme was a right direction and a right step towards reform. He shows that the Nepalese domestic financial, mercantile, insurance and manufacturing sectors, and the banks, are generating enormous employment opportunities for BBA and MBA graduates in Nepal. But Administrator 3, who is implementing the programme, contested this, saying 90 percent of those graduates had already left Nepal (he said it with pride). Evident in the policy and practice was this contest and paradox of reform.

The policy stipulated that the BBA graduates would eventually fulfil the much-needed manpower needs in Nepal required by the mushrooming bank,

financial and mercantile sectors and insurance companies, but these graduates were offered credit-transfer facilities to go overseas. Out of 120 credits, the BBA graduates earned, at least 40 were transferable to universities in US or European zone.

The policy kept the graduates central to the reform, in which it was expected that they would contribute to economic growth and poverty reduction. Teacher 1 said there was a huge need for BBA graduates in Nepal to fulfil the need for mid-level skilled workers. But the campus administrators and the study director showed that the graduates they produce at their institute were actually fulfilling the “global manpower need”. Teacher 1 enacted the neo-liberal discourse of decentralisation circulated and funded by the World Bank.

I already told you that we only have financial decentralisation, that is, the power to generate our own money to run the study programmes. The university has no touch [control] in financial matters. If there is no money to pay the salaries of the teachers, the campus pays from its own savings. This is possible in decentralisation. For example, the BBA is a programme run by the money the campus generates without relying on the university or state grants. The campus also gives incentives to teachers from the student fees.

As a form of practice, it led to the emergence of BBA as “reform” and BBS as not “reform”. When asked to show an example of reform, Teacher 1 showed only the BBA. By drawing on the difference between the BBA and the BBS programmes, the BBA being a private model and the BBS as the state model, he shows the reason why only the BBA is reform and the other not. Here, the discourse of neo-liberalism has structured the belief that the state must refrain from interfering with the market (Olssen 2010). Since the dominant discourse of reform circulated by the SHEP is about displacing the state by non-state contributors to change the allegedly weak public provision of education in Nepal, it became a norm whereby everything that was connected to the state did not count as reform. Teacher 1 states: “They [the BBS and MBS] will both die and the BBA and MBA will take their place”. Teacher 1 is made to believe that the students pursuing the state-subsidised BBS and MBS study programmes conceived by the previous regime bring no money to the campus and hence are not reform.

Assuming that the BBA is a form of practice of decentralisation that brought the self-financed middle class background students to college was better or a more desired education programme, it gathered only a limited number of students who had the capacity to pay full fees. However, as the conversa-

tions continued with the teachers, it became clear that by abolishing the past tradition of working and studying, the neo-liberal trend in higher education reform made it more difficult for students to attain higher education regularly. It was not possible to conclude with definite accuracy how the BBA alone signalled the meaning of “reform”.

When Teacher 1 narrated the reform, he pictured how historically the BBA was emerging from the ruins of the BBS. He was made to believe that “reform” was a gradual progress, headed from the BBS block to the BBA to realise its object – a similar educational arrangement as in the US. He juxtaposed Nepal with the US. In so doing, he believed the former was a distant apart from the latter, and had to catch up. He believed that catching up with the US was “reform” in terms of its education system. Through the subjectivity of Teacher 1, it was not possible to imagine a different education system in Nepal that could account for its own reality.

Teacher 1 was scholar par excellence of Nepal, who had authored quite a few academic books and was involved in policy dialogues. I thought he would distance himself from the politicians who always imagine Nepal in relation to Singapore and Switzerland, but he surprised me: “...we are following an American model of education now. This is a right step taken in the right direction.” He was not just a teacher, but a professor, reader and author. He had also worked as a member of the National Education Commission – the highest policymaking body in the field of education in Nepal in the 1980s and 1990s. He had also worked as a member of the World Bank-funded Higher Education Project taskforce. He was also a member of the expert team that formulates higher education policy in Nepal. He was currently a member of the task force on financing higher education under the World bank-sponsored SHEP. Through his consultancy jobs, he was trained to speak in favour of the World Bank’s policy, and his biographical and anthropological history reflected his strong faith in positivity that appears through his academic books and journal articles. I will show in the next interview how others enact the discourse of higher education reform via a decentralisation logic and its effect, the BBA.

When decentralisation is not “reform”

Epitomised as reform, the discourse of decentralisation and its outcome, the BBA, was only one discourse about higher education, a tip of the iceberg. At the other end of the campus was a Titanic hidden from the discourse, namely the BBS, where there was more than the combined total of the four sections of BBA graduates assembled in a single classroom for their lecture. But this ar-

arrangement was not accepted as “reform”. A close observation showed a spectacle of difference created at the other end of the campus building. This was called the BBS block, a remnant of the past centralised educational practice used to illustrate the reason why the BBA was the only “reform”. In contrast to the BBA block, the BBS embodied the “weak” state. The “old” block did not signify reform even as it gathered 200 students in one single class. The reform resulted in a split of the campus and the activities students and teachers performed into two categories – “decentralisation” and “centralisation”. The former category was understood as international education and, hence, the reform. Another teacher partitioned by “centralisation” into the “old” block that did not signify “reform” was interviewed in the light of Teacher 1 being partitioned by “decentralisation” and speaking only of BBA as reform (see the interview in *Appendix 3*). Teacher 2 was a lecturer of management and marketing, who taught the BBS students and was made to work with less economic security and smaller remuneration than his counterparts in the BBA block, who enjoyed higher esteem and salaries.

I teach management and marketing to BBS students. Basically there are three to four fundamental differences. For example, the BBA is a four-year study programme which is internationally recognised, while the BBS is a three-year bachelor’s programme and is not recognised internationally. This is one difference. A second is that the BBA offers internships to students, while BBS students have no such opportunities. And another difference is that BBA students do class presentations, report writing and so on, but the same does not exist in the BBS. Another facility offered to BBA students is credit transfer, by which a student wanting to pursue a foreign university degree can do so, but such a provision is not offered to BBS students. But the content of the subject matter is almost the same. Whereas the BBA students complete their study in four years and it is organised in semester mode, BBS students complete it in three years or more and it is organised under an annual examination system.

A neo-liberal technique was applied by the discourse and practice of higher education that fostered the above forms of educational differences and subjectivity. Most working students who assembled in the BBS block were not the part of the World Bank’s funded reform project. For these categories of students and their teachers, the reform had no meaning. Yet, the signals the other block released through a differential arrangement that promised international recognition was powerful enough to foster the forms of social differences and subjectivities in terms of “good” students and their oppositional categories. The campus administrator had earlier referred to that block as responsible

for creating “dang-dung-ma-jane manche” [people who resort to violent behaviour], assuming that it was created by the centralised programme. As I will show in the next interview sample, it was not possible to gather the same subjective understanding of reform among the actors implementing the reform.

Enacting alternative discourses of higher education reform

Administrator 4, Institute of Engineering

Administrator 4 is a senior administrator at the Institute of Engineering, the key target of reform and the model engineering institute in Nepal, which was the first to implement the World Bank’s project in 1995. Surprisingly however, Administrator 4 contested the objective perspectives on reform shared earlier by Administrator 3 and Teacher 1. When asked to show one concrete example of “reform”, he brushed aside the notion of “reform” as a “vague matter”. I have reduced Campus Administrator 4’s interview texts to following key propositions.

Proposition 1: Reform is “vague” but it has an aim: the development of Nepal.

Proposition 2: Reform is felt to be necessary because of globalization

Proposition 3: Globalization demands a single quality benchmark

Proposition 4: Reform is not necessary for graduates to stay in Nepal alone

Proposition 5: There is a global market which demands that Nepali graduates migrate

Proposition 6: The state of Nepal is not weak; it continues to provide 85 percent of grants

Final proposition: Decentralisation is manifested in the politicisation of institutes

Reform is “vague” but it has an aim: the development of Nepal

Actually reform of the institution is a vague matter ... We discuss and formulate policies regarding engineering education in Nepal and assist the government in making policies. We are very serious in establishing our roles primarily in Nepal’s development process.

Globalisation means a liberal market. Such a market is an open market, open to all. There is then greater mobility. This means you have to be competent and capable.

This means where opportunity knocks, you go there. This means mobility. You must prove yourself competent and deliver better.

This perspective came as I asked him to show one concrete example of reform. The World Bank had earlier claimed it made a “ground-breaking” reform at this institute by deploying decentralisation in the 1990s. Administrator 4 dismissed the meaning of “reform” as an objective indicator and noted it as mainly a discourse about “development”, “globalization” and the “global market”. He uttered not one single word about the “World Bank” or the SHEP. He contested the policy discourse, arguing that the national state was so important in Nepal that it continued to inject 85 percent of the budget required by the institute. The policy on the contrary had constructed the Nepali national state as “weak”, incapable of providing financial resources. He contested the dominant view of the policy: “without a strong national state, the education system would descend into anarchy.” He was referring to the anarchy following the April 2006 uprising in Nepal that the World Bank had understood as an “opportunity” to undo the past. If it is true that the neo-liberalism is about the free market and is opposed to state intervention (Harvey 2005, p. 598), this educational administrator was circulating a counter hegemonic discourse of neo-liberalism by showing the positive role of the state in maintaining law and order. Here exists a love relationship between the market and the state as something like between a Dalit and a Brahmin in Nepal. This administrator emphasised: “[Nepalese] Society cannot be governed only by strict rules and regulations; it needs to be governed by social phenomena and social behaviours need to be developed....” If one goes by the strict rules of Hinduism, the Dalit and Brahmin cannot marry each other even if they fall in love. Here, this administrator suggests that the state should not stay out of the market; rather, it should play an intervening role in providing the necessary conditions for the market to function (Olssen, 2010, p. 199). The above-cited administrator used the following three key words to describe the reform: “state”, “markets” and “competition”, reflecting the kind of neo-liberalism Olssen describes above as requiring the state to function. He also constructed the future graduates of Nepal as enterprising and competitive entrepreneurs. However, in the second interview, he referred to the forms of practice brought about by that neo-liberal order of thinking as resulting in the politicisation of his institute.

Decentralisation manifested in politicisation

There are lapses within the decentralisation regulation itself, within the acts and

bylaws of the university itself; and there are many legal contradictions between decentralisation regulation and central regulation. So, they need to be clearly spelled out. And, also, the reflections of social behaviours are also being manifested in the university. Political unrest in society is taking place. Different political groups, and their roles, became contradictory to each other and have created problems within the university. That means social unrest is manifested here in a subjective way, or in an emotional manifestation, in terms of groups, in terms of ideology, or in terms of creeds and so on. I call this not politics, but politicisation.

Administrator 4 traced the effect of decentralisation to the politicization of his institute when asked to relate his experience. He found it harder to implement the decentralisation rules the SHEP had made us believe were the ultimate solution to the decline of higher education in Nepal. His institution was picked by the World Bank as a model institute to reform 60 other institutes under TU by way of “decentralisation” in the early 1990s. But two decades later, the campus administrator said: “Decentralisation was not enough.” When asked, he elaborated: “Nepali society is still feudalistic. Nepali society is neo-feudal. We have traces of feudality.”

A linguistic and a structural approach to discourse would validate Nepali society as too bad or feudalistic by drawing on the above utterance. By applying the discursive approach in the Foucauldian sense, I locate the institutional and discursive forces shaping the above subjective position. By “feudalism”, Administrator 4 referred to the difficulty of administering the institute under a highly-charged political climate in Nepal. His office staff were polarised by opinions, and through their membership in political organizations, they challenged his authority. When Administrator 4 referred to the persistence of a “feudal mentality”, he referred to the unexpected outcome of decentralisation that the Bank had made us believe was about improvement or efficiency in higher education.

I visited this institute frequently to understand the outcomes of the Bank’s assisted HEP –which introduced for the first time decentralisation in higher education. The present SHEP was used to expand or “deepen” the decentralisation in higher education by drawing on this example in the belief that SHEP was an improvement or a continuous development of HEP-1. By freeing the institute from central control, decentralisation was expected to make this institute self-governing. But this administrator was in a tussle with the politically-appointed staff members who challenged his managerial authority and neglected their duties. He did not reveal the names of the officials who had been politically appointed or those neglecting their duties and challenging

his authority, given the sensitivity of the issue. Each time I visited the campus, I met the assistants and staff, and sat by their side in the cafeteria listening to their banal, everyday conversations. I sneaked into their offices and spent long hours chatting over tea. Meena *didi* (name changed) was helpful to me in this regard. We met downstairs and she helped me figure out who was who in the institute. I found Meena *didi* one morning when she was grumbling about her office boss. Unable to find him to sign the papers and files, she ran up and down. I met her each time I visited the institute for observation and an interview. She explained how the politically appointed ones challenged the management and frequently neglected their duties. She called this form of practice as “political bhagbanda”. “I bet if you go and look up, their door plates say they are “in” but they are never in ... they are either in a party office meeting or a political rally in the town.” Here, the discourse of decentralisation has fostered the *bhagbanda* subjectivity.

Another meaning of “feudal mentality” connected to the polarization of teachers and students along party lines and their political activities in the campus. Through their membership of political parties, they put pressure on the administration to fulfil their demands. This was also the contention earlier, shared by Policymaker 3, who had said that the Nepalese people did not want to give up their traditions. Here, the notion of decentralisation appeared as strange as centralisation; it simply replaced the practice of *afnoo manche* during the Panchayat regime between 1960 and 1990 to *hamro manche* after the restoration of democracy in 1990. If the former was a kind of person favoured by bureaucrats in academia, the latter was someone favoured by politicians to expand their base in academia.

Through a western rationality of “good governance”, decentralisation was introduced, but this administrator showed that it created anarchy. He showed that decentralisation brought about the new “code of conduct”, but it was harder to implement on the ground. He repeated: “We need to have our own code of conduct, own job descriptions, a rightful environment to live and work.” After 16 years of experimenting with decentralisation in his institute, this administrator contested what the chief education specialist and the architect of the SHEP at the World Bank had said in 2011 to justify the reform:

The World Bank was pleased to be associated with ground-breaking reforms in the Institute of Engineering during the implementation of the Engineering Education Project, and it also gained valuable experience in higher education reforms through the [first] higher education project.

Rather than such “ground-breaking reforms” acknowledged by the public in Nepal, the Bank’s specialist constructs this statement to influence the Nepalese government bureaucrats to adopt neo-liberal reform. Had there been any ground-breaking reform, the above statement would have come from independent academic work. Here is a World Bank specialist who took upon himself the task of doing such academic work in Nepal, produced the documents himself, tied the conditions for grants, and advised the government to adopt the neo-liberal project. The above-cited administrator rejected such a claim made by the Bank specialist.

The SHEP kicked off in 2007 with all the certainty of a future achieving the aim of increasing “graduates’ productive efficiency” to create economic growth and social justice in Nepal. The implementation was expected to follow a smooth and certain passage, and an inclusive, prosperous and peaceful future in Nepal for everyone to work and live was promised. As I show in Chapter 7, the graduates completing their education look for future security in foreign countries.

6.1.4 Discourse of autonomous higher education and “global manpower supply”

As part of deepening the decentralisation of higher education in Nepal, autonomous campus rules were introduced in 2007. In this section, the aim is to introduce the campus administrators who enact the discourse and practice of autonomy in higher education. As a form of practice and effect, it led to the introduction of a four-year semester, system-based study programmes through fee-setting and new enrolment policies tied to fee and student test scores. The BSc in Nutrition and Dietetics (BScND) and BTech in food were the effects of autonomy and the focus of the examination. This institute is called the Central Campus of Food Technology (CCT) and is situated in Dharan, in eastern Nepal. This was the only modern food science institute in Nepal and one of the first two institutes in the country targeted by the autonomy rules that structured the thinking of education as a vehicle for economic development to be achieved via the creation of employment opportunities for graduates in modern food industries. The research and development of modern scientific foods, alcoholic drinks, and meat technology were the effects and form of practice shaping the reform.

The advice for the consumption of meat came from the development institutions. Consider this statement: “A poor Nepali household subsists almost

entirely on rice and dal – a lentil-based gruel – they consume less than 5% of their calories in the form of vegetables and fruit, and almost never eat meat, fish or eggs” (World Bank/UNDP Country Study, 1991, p. 19). That piece of international advice to eat meat came alive at CCT during the fieldwork. Upon entering the campus, I was greeted with the students slaughtering goats and pigs and experimenting with Western foods and alcoholic drinks. The teachers interviewed both face-to-face and on mobile phones acknowledged the economic rationality of this form of practice, in that they viewed it as necessary to generate economic development in Nepal. I have described the journey into this field site and the fieldwork in Chapter 4 (Section 4.5). Another objective of introducing this institute of food science technology (CCT) in Nepal was to tackle the prevalence of malnutrition and to produce graduates with recognised clinical, public health and managerial skills, who were to work as nutritionists and dieticians in hospital settings and other community, public health and food industry sectors in the country. Historically, this place was a recruiting ground for the British army. As a prime effect of the reform, the administrators say that nearly 50 percent of graduates currently go abroad like the British Gurkha, albeit to fulfil the “global manpower need” in the US, Canada and Australia, with nearly the same numbers going to India.

Administrator 5, CCT, Dharan

Administrator 5 enacts the above discourse of reform. He is administering the reform, namely the autonomy rules, at CCT. He unveils in the following sample interview data that the main form taken by the deployment of the autonomy rule led to the renaming of the previously decentralised campus as “autonomous”. He said autonomy was required to effect a structural change in the campus and to produce graduates necessary to fulfil “global manpower needs”. *Modern food science, globalization, knowledge economy, international manpower needs, quality and competitiveness* were the key categories that emerged from the interview transcript. These categories reflected the international trend in higher education reform driven by neo-liberalism, as examined in Chapter 2.

Due to globalization and knowledge economy, our graduates are already working in *bidesh* [abroad]. Globalization means that our curriculum is so designed to meet international manpower needs, not just the national needs. Globalization demands competition. We need to ensure the quality of our products. We follow a competitive student intake policy to ensure more applicants and fewer admittances as part of ensuring a high quality of education. We have fewer students in classes; small-sized classrooms make possible the individual supervision of students and effec-

tive learning. For example, in our food and dietetics, the new study programme launched here, we take only 24 students in each cohort. Our programme has become very competitive and demanding as a result.

Two rounds of interviews were held in the office setting, accompanied by campus tours and a laboratory facility inspection. The interview focus was mainly on the form of practice shaped by the further deepening of decentralisation or what came to be known as “autonomy” in higher education. The campus was named “autonomous” through a new education regulation. The key element of the reform signalled by this arrangement was the production and supply of mid-level skilled undergraduates in the BScND and BTech in food. In the following interview data sample, Administrator 6 pointed out the key effect of the reform in terms of the graduates’ employment, mainly in *bidesh* [“abroad”]. Shaped by the discourse of development, the *bidesh* subjectivity is an objective perspective to view modern progress in Nepal in terms of economic affluence in the West. Administrator 5 was pleasantly surprised that 50 percent of the graduates leaving his institute go to *bidesh*, namely to the US, Canada, and Australia, for employment. Campus Administrator 6 provided more inputs to this.

Administrator 6, CCT, Dharan

Nearly 50 percent of our graduates go abroad, mostly to the United States, Canada and Australia. Our graduates have great scope there. However, it doesn’t mean that our domestic food industries have no jobs for our graduates. Relatively new, these industries demand high skilled workers. Nearly half our graduates are currently absorbed in the domestic markets and India. Our BTech in food technology is getting more popular than the Indian BTech. This is certainly a good sign. The only problem we have is we have not been able to retain experienced teachers.

The above-cited administrators viewed that the export of skilled graduates to India and overseas generate foreign remittance and knowledge transfer. One meaning of the reform manifests through that conceptual map to think of the internationalised ideal of human development as residing in *bidesh*. It regulated the social life in Nepal. The reform targeted this science campus. As a form of practice, it led to the export of graduates and the launch of meat and alcohol technology. As it finally emerged, the aim of this reform was not just to supply skilled graduates in consumer industries but also to alter the cultural practices of vegetarianism and arrest the historic practice of non-drinking in Nepal. While trying to locate how those in power in Nepal took that international advice, I stumbled upon the following text:

Nepalis have not been eating meat according to the prescribed consumption amount. Meat consumption is low as compared to the global average ... A Nepali eats 10.3 kg meat in a year while the global average is 37.9 kg. Adequate dietary need of meat is about 35.9 kg, according to the United States' Nutrition Department ... South Asia is in the bottom of the global meat consumption ladder. Among South Asian countries, Nepal ranked third in meat consumption at 10.3 kg per person per year, followed by Maldives at 8.5 kg, Sri Lanka at 4.8 kg, India at 4.6 kg and Bangladesh at 3.2 kg. Meat consumption by Nepalis is not enough for a balanced development ... It should be increased to the global average level. (Prمود Koirala, senior food officer, Department of Food Technology and Quality Control)

Here was a form of knowledge that suggested that if an average American consumes over 80 lb of chicken (36 kg) a year, his Nepali counterpart should also consume more or less the same amount of chicken. Here, the science of nutrition and diet is the dominant form of knowledge that prescribes the modern food and drinks in Nepal. As a regime of discourse and representation, it was powerful enough to create the domains of thought to singularise Western science and its belief system in Nepal. I characterise this form of power that deployed mechanisms and strategies counter to existing social arrangements and the cultural fabric of the Nepalese people as mainly driven by the “political economy of food and hunger” (Escobar, 1995, p. 18).

I located this apparatus in Building Block No. 8: It was an eight-room *Meat Pilot Plant*. The reflexive methodology I proposed in Foucault's sense allows me to look at all social arrangements with strangeness. In Escobar's sense, this requires a historical and spatial experience. The slaughter of goats and experimentation with alcohol in a country in which the majority of people live in fear of going to hell after death by consuming these categories of food was one way to ground the thought on the effect of the discourse and practice of higher education reform in Nepal. In Pigg's sense (1992), the contested territories of what it is to be Nepali came alive, and that took me back to the salvation-oriented truth of living in Nepal, such as the one *Ama* was experiencing in Kathmandu, with her children and grandchildren eating the enormous piece of goat meat. My own mother had objected several times when I brought meat inside the house. Alcohol was prohibited. But this did not deter me from consuming these items when I started to go to college.

The discourse of higher education reform that came alive at CCT in the form of experimentation with alcohol and meat technology was a new social arrangement in the making in Nepal. The force that shaped this new social arrangement in Nepal was developmentalism, embodying the features of the

capitalist countries and their cultures. In Chapter 3, I showed its emergence in historical conditions that made this process possible, in that I showed the emergence of the development thinking in terms of similar social and cultural models in the West and the presumed backwardness and poverty of Nepal. As a regime of representation, the discourse of higher education reform sustained and consolidated the modern order and rationality informed by the sciences of man. The forms of subjectivity fostered by this discourse led to the birth of new kinds of human subjects in Nepal, *ramra ra yogya manche* [good and capable people]³⁸. Central to the enterprise of reform is to produce a type of human person defined by his new cultural practices of eating meat and drinking alcohol on a regular basis. As a form of knowledge, it makes it impossible to imagine a different social reality.

Campus ongoing strategic vision/plan

The national policy guided by development institutions placed a strong emphasis on the promotion of Western science and technology as a solution to developmental challenges in Nepal. This was manifested in the autonomy rule adopted by the CCT, which aims to open a state-of-the-art butchery workshop as part of the research and development of meat technology. Here, the existing practices of Kasai operating his open-air butcher's, squatting in front of hungry dogs and distributing goat's meat to his customers that Gavin found so mysterious in Nepal cannot become a rational act in the eyes of Western science and technology.

Soon after the declaration of the republic in 2007, politicians approved through the Constituent Assembly a budget of \$125 million (a 12-fold increase) for the Ministry of Environment, Science and Technology (MEST) (Guo, 2008). The idea was to transform the Himalayan nation from a state of poverty to affluence via the development of science and technology. The World Bank reform targeted the CCT for its deployment. The institute prepared a plan of action. Known as the "Strategic Vision", this document was obtained by me from Campus Administrator 6. The summary of the five-year plan prepared by the institute was guided by the guidelines provided by the World Bank for the release of grants. How to secure the grants from the Bank preoccupied the institute. It was required to become "autonomous" from its

38 The reform deployed in his institute has made Campus Administrator 6 believe that the people of Nepal are advancing to a state of being "good" and "capable" from their murkier past. When asked to clarify, he said: "The aim of the reform is to produce *ramra ra yogya manche*... *Yogya manche ni ramro manche* ho..." (spoken with stress and repeated).

previous category of “centralisation” and enclose itself within the 13.2 hectares of land by a strong fence. Campus Administrator 6 said this was required to create a sense of ownership and vigilance, and to discipline students and staff, a process that, he assumes, was not possible under the previous centralised system (see NESP 1971). This document was drafted and handed over to the UGC/TU/World Bank. The most important tasks to be accomplished under the reform (“autonomy”) included the proposed new bachelor and master’s degree programmes. The new study programmes included geology, dairy technology, chemical technology and biotechnology under BTech and MTech degrees in microbiology, nutrition, dietetics and food industry management.

The second category of tasks under the reform included infrastructural development, the search for funds, determining the students’ fees structure and cost-sharing, among others. The construction of 12 classrooms and 14 labs (including a modern butchery laboratory), a library, pilot plants, hostels for 200 boys and 100 girls, the purchase of lab equipment, books and journals, and the search for faculties (both at home and abroad) were included in the ambitious strategic vision. Also included in the plan were the training of staff, the imposition of student uniforms and fencing the 19-bigha campus land property. The campus stipulates the commencement of the new bachelor programme from 2014 and a master’s degree programme from 2015. Top of the agenda was the construction of a modern state-of-the-art butcher workshop. With the following estimated cost of the reform (“autonomy”), the document was submitted to the World Bank/UGC/TU:

Reform [Autonomy] plan	Estimated cost (in NPR)
Construction of classrooms, laboratories, library, office, etc.	30,000,000
Construction of boys’ hostel (200 students)	70,000,000
Construction of girls’ hostel (100 students)	50,000,000
Furnishing of office, library, classrooms, laboratories	10,000,000
Laboratory equipment	40,000,000
Computers and internet connectivity	1,300,000
Books and journals	5,000,000
Fencing of boundary	10,000,000
Advertisement	1,000,000
Tours & training of faculties	1,000,000
Total	218,300,000

Checking claims to truth

The original aim of an autonomous campus was to achieve highly efficient governance and unfettered access to services. But the very implementation of this machinery was delayed by the campus management's inability to use the grants being made available by the World Bank and the UGC due to the delay in the formation of a new management committee, even as the campus became autonomous a year ago. The reform had originally assumed that once a campus decided to become autonomous, all it would take would be a swift decision, without any delay involved. But such a claim remained contested as I conversed with the local politicians and teachers.

I met Pankaj Ghimire, a local Maoist party leader in Dharan, who told me that the news of the campus being granted autonomy came like a bombshell to him. He told me his party was never consulted by the campus when it took the decision to become autonomous. This was contradictory to the claims made earlier by the World Bank that it consulted all of the stakeholders. But the campus managers denied the claims made by Ghimire and said all the political parties had been invited to the meeting. It was not possible to know who was being more or less truthful in this complex game, but there were unique reasons for each party adopting its position. Ghimire feared autonomy would lead to privatisation and the state's withdrawal from its responsibility of providing education to the masses. For the local Maoists, education should be state-supported and free. They argued that the government should be in the driving seat of both administration and financing. The acting mayor of the Dharan municipality expressed his ignorance of the campus being granted autonomy. He, however, said he was invited to the meeting but added that he did not understand the word "autonomy". The mayor was confused about what was meant by an autonomous campus in Dharan municipality.

Once I was invited in the discussion where most participants voted for autonomy. I didn't know what it meant. I nodded my approval thinking that it is a right step in the right direction.

A few locals in the town heard about the autonomous campus but did not know its implications, let alone their roles as resource mobilisers and entrepreneurs. Yet, the policy was to empower the local community as the financier and the leader of the campus without their agreement and knowledge. When asked, many locals jerked their head in disbelief and said "rajya le nai garnu parcha tyo kam" (meaning, the state would better keep that responsibility to itself). But the policy was to unburden the state of its liability to provide education. In the fol-

lowing section, I will reflect on the effects of the reform in terms of laboratory experimentation with alcohol and meat technology at CCT.

Reflecting on the discourse of alcohol and meat technology

By recognizing strangeness as a technique of doing archaeology, I observed closely what was happening in the field of practice through a historical and spatial sense of awareness. In so doing, I saw an animal (goat or a pig) being slaughtered, its meat being cut into proper sizes, alcohol being manufactured, fences and walls being put around the campus, restrictions being placed on the movement of animals and humans around the campus, and end to the historical practice of the free movement of domestic animals, an end to the practice of fodder collection and grass-cutting in waste-ground areas, the confining of animals in caged, and students being allotted a fixed place to study, etc. Instead of ensuring more freedom, the practice is of moving towards creating enclosures, restrictions, differences and violence. The SHEP made us believe that Nepal was headed to an “open moment” (see World Bank 2007). In practice, it actually created more difficult conditions for the existence of the local cultural and historical practices of living in Nepal. Freeing myself from the familiarity of the experimentation in alcohol and meat technology brought into existence by the discourse and practice of education reform, I observed the making of new social and cultural practices in strangeness. Instead of modern meat technology and the Western diet and drink (alcohol) displacing local social arrangements and belief systems, it existed side by side, forming a hybridity. This opened up a contested reality of the Third World (Escobar 1995). Thus, the practice challenged the singular view of modernity, presenting the possibility of re-conceptualizing it as a multiple and hybrid modernity.

Meanwhile, the discourse of education reform mediated by the Western science of development was originally concerned with the production of mid-level skilled manpower for the country to fulfil the increasing demands of nursing homes, hospitals and science laboratories inside Nepal, but more than 50 percent of the graduates looked for employment in the industrialised countries of the North. The advice for the need for the Western science built around a meat diet and drink in Nepal came from international development institutions. Consider this statement: “Locals subsist on barely rice and lentils gruel and almost never eat meat, fish or eggs” (World Bank 1991, p. 39). To be recognised as normal and developed, more Nepalese were required to consume meat, eggs, fish and sausages on a par with Europeans and Americans. The science of nutrition suggested that if an average American consumed over 80

lb of chicken a year (Boyd, 2001), his Nepali counterpart should also consume more or less the same amount to live normally and healthily. This knowledge of diet drinks originated in modern Western civilization, whose people are said to be overwhelmingly carnivorous (Stuard, 1985). The policymakers in Nepal appropriated it, assuming that the people in Nepal could not be any different. In Kathmandu, during the fieldwork, I observed how it created multiple social spaces in the family, for instance between *Ama*, who did not touch meat or alcohol, and her children who had begun to consume these items on a daily basis. However, *Ama* and her grandchildren did not necessarily live in conflict with each other even as they lived partitioned in two or more social and cultural spaces within the same house. This happens because the process of cultural hybridization results in negotiated realities (see Escobar, 1995). In the next section, I will show how an alternative discourse and practice of the science of food circulated to challenge the dominant global hegemonic discourse of food science in establishing a hybrid practice, thereby rejecting what Habermas had said: “The Third World will have no place, because sooner or later it too will be completely transformed by the pressures of reflexivity, universalism, and individuation that define modernity” (Escobar, 1995, p. 221).

Alternative discourses of sciences of food and graduates’ employment

McDonald’s is a modern food brand; it may have more protein due to meat in it. But the *dhindo*,³⁹ if mixed with milk, curry, corn and soybean is a better food than the McDonald’s. *Bhatmas* (soya) contains 40 percent protein. Nepalese eat soya like they do with popcorn in the West. Soya fights against cholesterol. Animal fat has high cholesterol. The most popular local Nepali snacks have been soya, *sishnu* [nettles], *bhuteko-makai* [a local Nepali popcorn], *sagko-duku* [spinach stem], *gundruk* [dried spinach] and *dhindo*. They are threatened by Western foods. But I am encouraging my students to study and promote these local foods.

In this interview excerpt, Professor Surendra Bahadur Katawal tells the story of indigenous food by recalling how the majority of Nepalese live by eating plant-based protein. We met at CCT and had informal discussions face-to-face. “The Nepalese have long been consuming soya, like they eat meat in the West as the main source of protein. Many Hindus do not consume meat on religious grounds; they consume soya.” Katawal said no research had been done on how people in the Himalayas lived in their twilight years by consuming more

39 An indigenous food prepared by boiling millet, barley, buckwheat or corn flour in water or milk.

plant-based protein. “No doubt meat is rich in protein but it also contains high cholesterol,” he added.

In the previous section, the notion of “reform” was signified only by the promotion of alcohol and meat technology. The administrators who were trained by the World Bank’s reform project did not consider the acts Professor Katawal and his students were doing in promoting local indigenous knowledge of food science as a way to think about reform. As it turned out, the administrators trained to speak only about the World Bank’s reform project did not think to discuss the alternative practices going on in their institute. Without any research documenting the importance of indigenous knowledge of foods, the Western hegemonic science of food was gaining credence. I met Katawal, who had recently done his PhD on *sailroti*.⁴⁰ As an indigenous food, *sailroti* is consumed in Nepal mostly during Hindu festivals, offered as a sacrifice during worshipping and other auspicious occasions, marriage ceremonies and rituals. Katawal teaches BTech and MTech students how to make indigenous Nepalese food stand out in the face of global foods threatening its existence. He studied how to improve the quality of *sailroti*, which is prepared from old rice and new rice. “We need to improve the quality of our traditional food ... I am now teaching my MTech students how to increase the protein and mineral content in traditional food.”

To protect these indigenous foods from the advent of global foods like McDonald’s burgers and Japanese sushi, Professor Katawal, together with his students, is also researching *dhindo*, another popular indigenous food. He is studying how to make it richer nutritionally. “Historically, our people combined *dhindo* with *dal* [lentils], curry, milk and other ingredients and consumed ... Millet *dhindo* was the most popular traditional food very rich in calcium. People also ate bitten rice and gram ... people ate less meat”.

Researching traditional foods

I come from Janakpur. I have recently completed my MTech. I am now doing my MTech thesis, which comprises 150 marks. I am writing my thesis on indigenous food. My topic is “indigenous food”, traditional food consumed during *chatb* in the Tarai of Nepal. It is locally called *bhusuwa*. It is a kind of *laddu* or *kasar* consumed during wedding ceremonies. But it is different from *kasar* and *laddu*. The title of my thesis is *Process Optimization and Formulation of the Tarai Indigenous Food, Bhusuwa*.

40 A deep-fat fried, puffed, ring-shaped spongy doughnut-like Nepalese indigenous food prepared from the batter of rice flour, ghee and sugar (Subba and Katawal, 2013).

These kinds of foods are produced in home settings by people but they are threatened by modern foods. People don't know how much ingredients they need to put, how much sugar they need to add, what different spices one needs to add to such indigenous foods.

The material semiotics of reform

The "old" must crumble away

Amid the difficulty understanding what reform is, the assistant campus chief took me to the site where a new building that was under construction was taking all the attention. He pointed to that building and said that it was the future and where the campus was headed to. We climbed onto the roof top of a building. The most puzzling thing, as we both turned back, was the trail of abandoned old buildings left behind each time the campus moved to new grounds. The present imagery of reform the chief shared was the historical trajectory the campus buildings had followed over the past 50 years. For the chief, "reform" had been signalled by that trail of old buildings the campus left behind each time it moved to a new location. Those buildings provided a mental map to think of the reform as an object headed to the future and what was not reform as the vanishing past signified by the old buildings. Reform finally appeared as a sign, as the chief explained.

What interested me the most was the idea that the old must crumble away. During the campus tour, the assistant campus chief showed me three things that interested me the most: 1) the campus building 50 years ago; 2) the campus building today; and 3) the campus building tomorrow (see *Figures 6, 7 and 8*). The "campus building yesterday" wore a deserted look; it was abandoned. The "campus building today" was fast becoming uninhabitable. The "campus building tomorrow" was the future direction. Shyam sir showed how, across a stretch of 50 years, the campus had shifted from its cow shed-like structures to modern concrete buildings. He pointed at the "campus building tomorrow" and said Nepal was now headed in that direction, which he called the "future". He construed the 50-year-old abandoned building, where a woman fed a baby goat with rice, as the monarchical past. Midway between the "campus building 50 years ago" and the "campus building tomorrow" was the "campus building today", whose moss and lichen-laden windows facing the south were ready to crash down with a gentle stroke of the wind. The building was crumbling from years of neglect. The first and the second buildings were epitomised as the "old" education model, depicting the centralised education system experimented with under NESP (1971), when, in that year for the first time, education had come under the domain of the state, in which the national state

began to control and manage education. Shyam sir suggested the old could not be restored to its original state. When asked why not repair the old and flaking building, he said: “It was constructed at the last minute by the builder without going through a tender process.” As the conversation progressed, there was no going back to the old and crumbling, but only going forward to reform. This takes me to Nietzsche:

The period of clarity: one understand that the old and the new are basically opposite, the old values born of declining and the new ones of ascending life – that all the old ideals are hostile to life (born of decadence and agents of decadence, even if in the magnificent Sunday clothes of morality (1967, p. 39).

At the outset, the “old” and the “new” stood at the opposite end of the pole. To paraphrase Nietzsche, the “old” vanishes into “decadence” and the “new” takes on its decency or morality. The interplay of the old and new was how the “reform” gained its credence. Shyam sir took me to the new campus building – “the campus building for tomorrow” – under construction. We climbed onto the roof of the old building and Shyam sir made me contemplate reform as an onward journey from the cow shed-like structure to a concrete building. Half of the building (first floor) had been funded by the World Bank, half (the second floor) by the government. This “fifty-fifty” building signalled the future, taking on the meaning of higher education reform. Reform appeared through the laws of difference (by playing the new and modern against the old and traditional). To paraphrase Nietzsche, the discourse had fostered administrators’ subjectivity to think of reform in terms of “ascending life”. Put differently, going back was not reform; only forward was reform. How to achieve that ascending order of life had gripped Nepal in this portrayal of higher education reform.

6.2 Conclusion

Thinking differently about the new social arrangements

The meat lab, the experiments with alcoholic drinks, the construction of new classrooms with individualised space for each student and the fencing of boundaries figured prominently in the discourse and practice of autonomous higher education. The reform was only signified by the experiments with meat technology and alcoholic drinks that aimed to bring about modern social ar-

rangements. The indigenous food sciences promoted by a group of teachers and students was not taken to be a sign of reform. It was not possible to say with definite accuracy which one was reform, both of them or neither of them? Rather, I preferred to call them, in Foucault's term, "social arrangements". The former can only be seen as a more rational practice. Rather than conclude that the former is reform and the latter is not, I conclude that each one is as strange as the other.

The notion of autonomy was legitimated by convicting the "autocratic monarchy" in the past as the state power that deprived individuals in Nepal of their freedom. This was a politics of knowledge rather than a scientific knowledge that structured the thinking of autonomy in higher education. If this was the logic of reform, I conclude that there was no "reform". Assuming that autonomy was about reform, it led to the search for the standard or optimum space for confining students and the enclosures of campuses within walls, fences and gates. Assuming that autonomy was about freely exercising the authority by the local campus management, this form of power made the campus more closed and inaccessible to the public and the students. Grass-cutters and firewood collectors, who depended for their incomes and livelihoods on the campus, were banned from entering the campus premises. The local woman who regularly came to the campus grounds to watch her young goats graze was unhappy about the fencing off of the campus and restrictions imposed on her movements. If autonomy was about liberty and freedom, the reform increased a sense of being confined, restricted and obstructed, and having limited access. It further bureaucratized the administration and increased political intervention. If it was about efficient service delivery, as promised by the Bank's project, the administration was panicking about not having received the question papers from Kathmandu for the exams to be scheduled the next day. This led me to argue in the Foucauldian sense that the ideology of liberalism, political philosophy or economic theory used to frame the present understanding of higher education is not about "freedom" but how power is exercised (see Peters et al, 2000).

At the outset, I discovered the problems of power/knowledge. For example, an individualised space was assumed to make a student "good" and "normal". How much space one really needs was informed not by the law of nature but within the availability of material technology, the spatial logic, the universality of geography, and science. Explicit in the reform was the spatial logic of confining, directing, controlling or limiting a student and his activity within the campus premises by the use of technology, when he was supposed to be free.

Thus, the governmentality technique of power was evident in the neo-liberal order of thinking the reform. On the other hand, the meat and alcohol technology alone signified reform because it mimicked the Western experience of living. The meat technology reinforced the idea of confining an animal in a cage when, by its nature, it was supposed to be free. Even if it was correct to eat the flesh of an animal to live in Nepal, the reform did not consider the Kasis and his knowledge, let alone accept Professor Katawal and his students as part of the reform. The ongoing reform reinforced a sense in which we must obey the rhythm of technology instead of nature. This technology began to be applied to animals as well. From occasionally eating the flesh of a freely-grazing goat or a roaming hen, the meat technology aimed to alter that practice by supplying the meat of caged and captive animals on a daily basis. This was the new social arrangement in the making under the reform. Thus, the form of power manifested through the governmentality techniques and technologies is trying to regulate the behaviour of the people and render them productive via “biopolitics” (see Lather, 2004, p. 765). Thus, in the Foucauldian sense, in this age of “bio-politics” or bio-power, the discourse and practice of higher education is constructing the “autonomous man”, where the attempt is to give the subject the power to govern itself. The subjectivity fostered by this form of power makes individuals entrepreneurs of “themselves” or “autonomous choosers” (Hursh 1997; Olssen 2005). Foucault’s analysis of neo-liberalism is more clearly discussed by Olssen (2010), in that Olssen describes liberalism as a doctrine that presupposes that individuals enjoy natural freedom and who are then assumed to develop themselves naturally, but the practice take an “anti-naturalistic” form by placing them in relation to the market, which acts as the “state’s political machine” (ibid, p. 198).

There is a radical shift in the way individual students are configured as self-motivated, self-investing persons, aroused by their concerns for future economic security. In Foucault’s sense, if the old forms of political power identified with the Rana regimes and Shah monarchy looked at the “interest of the total [population]”, the bio-power represented by the neo-liberal age in the present is concerned with the interests of the individuals and groups. This is made evident in the isolation of the politics of the campus from the economics of the campus affected by the separation of the docile and disciplined students from their outdoor, unruly peers who, one campus manager in Kathmandu said, “resort to dang-dung” behaviour [violent forms of behaviour]. By enforcing the separation of the “unproductive” from their “productive” peers in the same campus building, the construction of the “top talent”, “high-scorers”

and “international stage goers” are accomplished. As forms of practice, the distribution of individual space to students, the fencing of the campus, plans to install security cameras, enforcing regularity among students and teachers, among others, are evident. In so doing, the ultimate aim is to produce “self-investing” and “self-motivated” entrepreneurs of education in Nepal, who, the planning commissioner believed, live by the motto of “self-help” without the need of the state and its welfare or Western donors’ help in the future. In Foucault’s sense, the bio-power places such individuals in relation to the “fecundity of labor” to arouse in each of them what Lather calls “wealth stimulation” (Lather, 2004, p. 765). However, this form of power was neither sweeping nor without resistance.

While it was impossible to focus on all the categories mentioned in the table, I found myself immediately stumbling in the modern butchery laboratory under the meat technology (B.Sc. in Nutrition and Dietetics, BTech in Food) that emerged from the new rationality of global nutrition and diet. Other study programmes included a BSc. (Microbiology major), BSc (Physics major), an MTech (Food), and PhD programmes (Food). These were the major study programmes in the CCT – the only campus in Nepal offering a master’s Degree and Ph.D. programmes in food technology.

All of these programmes were highly technical, requiring laboratory experiments and practical classes. I closely observed practical classes to understand the effects of the reform. In so doing, my aim was not to explore the reform in terms of the aim of the brewery and the meat technologies, or what the institute and the reformers would want to know, but to examine the problematics of knowledge. However, the order of the discourse broke down as a group of teachers and students generated alternative discourses of reform by promoting local knowledge of food and diets. They imagined alternative ways of living in Nepal. In sum, this may be seen as what Escobar calls the “reconstitution of cultural orders” (ibid, p. 214). This could possibly serve as an alternative knowledge to the hegemonic Western scientific discourse.

The “meat technology” launched under the BTech and MTech programme was the most interesting of all the observations. The meat or meat technology itself is beyond the scope of the study. What baffled me most was the reason why it is required in Nepal, where its inhabitants live without eating meat at industry standards. What puzzled me more was how much must one eat? Two teachers who teach meat technology, when contacted, however, offered the view that Nepal is the third largest consumer of meat in South Asia after Afghanistan and Pakistan. They believed that Nepal must rank as the biggest

meat consumer in South Asia and gradually reach Western levels of meat eating. This form of power and knowledge has subjected some teachers to think of reform only in terms of meat technology. One of the teachers bemoaned that the country had yet to adopt a culture of raising and breeding animals for meat. He was pained at finding the people in Nepal still slaughtering and eating the flesh of freely roaming goats, pigs and chickens. Historically, the Nepalese “consume some meat on one of the very few times during the year” (Shrestha, 2009, p. 44). This was taken to be a sign of weakness unbecoming of modern society.

The two teachers I interviewed via telephone and two more in person during the fieldwork sharply differed in their views – the former category believed that replicating the practices of the industrial West was “reform”; the latter viewed the opposite as reform. It was difficult to privilege one over another. These teachers, who requested anonymity, said the aim of meat technology was to help develop modern slaughtering practices, promote meat quality, develop meat preservation technology and help develop the meat industry in Nepal on a par with other industrialised and developing countries. Professor Katawal did not agree: animal protein was not necessary in Nepal and was supplemented historically by plant-based protein when many people ate soya like they do in industrialised countries with American popcorn.

The teachers engaged in meat technology explained the aim of the programme. They argued that Nepal is highly suited to meat production, but the country continues to import foreign meat. Through import substitution, they believed Nepal could achieve its economic security. They enacted the economic rationality of neo-liberalism that has come to shape their subjectivity to think about the reform only in terms of what is happening in other countries in terms of meat technology. In so doing, they presupposed that the social arrangements in the West and its science and technology that has made possible the birth of cloned animals, genetically modified crops, hybridised plants, abortion, and “healthier” children from surrogate mothers must be replicated here in Nepal. But this view was contested by others. While Katawal and his groups were transforming the nature of the discourse, others were diffusing it. Thus, a contested history of the present is unveiled.

The practice results in hybridity

In what follows, I found that the indigenous knowledge of food and diet wrestled with the dominant, modern Western knowledge of food and drinks. To put it in Escobar’s terms, this could be read as a dynamic interplay of cultural

differences and hybridisation (Escobar, 1995, p. 223). This is made evident by Professor Katawal, who struggles to impart to his students the traditional knowledge of foods while his colleagues impart the knowledge traditions of modern Western science. I understand Katawal's alternative research on indigenous food that includes *sailroti* and his colleagues researching commercial alcohol and meat technology as a hybrid modernity, or what Escobar calls "hybrid reconstructions of modern and tradition" (ibid, p. 224). Katawal, in Escobar's sense, is at the margin in the wake of the advent of McDonald's burgers, American popcorn and Japanese sushi in seeking to prove the competitiveness of the local indigenous knowledge of snacks like soya (*bhatmas*), *satu* (corn flour) and *dhindo*. He is currently experimenting and researching how to improve these local indigenous foods, which include *sail roti* mostly consumed during festivals. This could be read as alternative innovative practices, which might offer unexpected opportunities for the local knowledge traditions to thrive. This may require us to reconsider the global hegemonic discourse of modernity that shape the current policy as a singular phenomenon or the idea of the world heading towards a cultural ensemble of "we". According to Escobar, this entails the need to refigure the Third World (ibid, p. 224) and reread modernity and the internationalised vision of hegemonic global singular ideology of education and development. In Escobar's sense, one way to conceptualise the alternative way of imagining education is that from this hybrid practice might emerge an alternative knowledge to the dominant hegemonic development ideal used to frame the present education policy.

6.1.5 Discourse and practice of the autonomous campus, Ilam

Administrator 7

Ilam campus was in a dire financial state. It was around that time [1997] that Nepal gained entry to the WTO. The time was ripe to think about opportunities and challenges presented by globalisation and the WTO. I thought that our graduates had to be competent in an increasingly globalised world. I thought teaching and learning had to be revised and new programmes of studies had to be introduced to meet those challenges. When I raised these concerns to UGC and the World Bank, they suggested I convert the campus into an autonomous institution. If you go into autonomy, you will get the support, was their response. I accepted it.

Administrator 7, who tells the above story, is the former campus chief of

Ilam's Mahendra Ratna Multiple Campus, who resigned under pressure from an army of agitating teachers for taking the initiative to implement the World Bank's reform project (SHEP). I begin this thematic section, as the title suggests, with his subjective understanding of the autonomous campus as "reform". The background and the context to the discourse of the autonomous campus were explained in Chapter 4 (Section 4.6), in that I showed the discursive construction of autonomous higher education. There is a complex marriage of local political discourses of autonomous provinces and the global neo-liberal discourse of higher education reform shaping the discourse and practice of autonomy in higher education. The national planning commissioner was concerned with the economic security of the hilly regions. The local politicians tied the notion of "autonomy" in higher education to the region's political freedom and economic prosperity. The movement for the autonomous state of Ilam further consolidated the discourse of the autonomous campus. The funding and advice came from the World Bank, requiring the campus to adopt a private modality. Numerous strikes and lockouts were reported in the campus, in which the teachers and students organised themselves against the reform. I place the above story of the emergence of the autonomous campus told by the Administrator 7 in that complex historical context and background.

In Chapter 3, I traced the background to the discourse of higher education reform to the discourse of development and neo-liberalism. The system of knowledge that came to shape the notion of the autonomous campus arose historically in the belief that the people of Nepal in the past lived in chains. International aid was diverted to securing a political freedom that came to structure the belief system that autonomy was proper for organising the people of Nepal. As the acting mayor of Ilam recalls, on April 30, 1999, the Local Self-Governance Act (LSGA) was passed to ensure political autonomy. The legislation provided the municipalities and local bodies with "autonomy". The present policy stipulated that educational institutions could not be expected to run centrally: they had to also function like municipalities and autonomous local bodies. As stated in the preamble to the LSGA (1999), the aim of the "autonomy" was to allow the local people "enjoy the fruits of democracy" (ibid). This idea rested on the belief that that the people of Nepal had become "autonomous" and "sovereign" after revolting against the monarchy. They were now capable of governing themselves. Two strategies were invented to realise that dream – "decentralisation" and "autonomy". To assure this aim, international development institutions diverted their aid to secure the "self-governance" of the people, or what came to be known as "good governance". As

an effect, it led to the birth of “ethnic”, “indigenous” and “down-trodden” subjects through which different groups of people demanded equal participation in development and a fair distribution of resources. These groups were made to believe that the only way to empower them was through a principle called “autonomy”. The Bank’s SHEP picked up that politics of knowledge to create what is known as “social justice”, in the belief that in the past there was just its opposite. Higher education reform was directed to addressing a particular notion of caste-induced social inequality by bringing more “ethnic” and “indigenous” groups into classrooms through positive discrimination and scholarships.

The problem unique to the Ilam campus, as the Campus Administrator 7 relates here, was how to secure the financial resources to expand the campus, hire teachers and renew the curriculum. He approached the World Bank and the UGC for financial support. The UGC had no additional finance apart from its limited regular grants. The Bank agreed to finance the project but laid down “autonomy” as a condition. It would be fictitious to imagine that the word “autonomy” emerged from the logical necessity of education reform or the problems specific to the Ilam campus. Assuming that the reform was authentically about introduction of autonomy, it created a furore on the ground. This is exemplified by the above campus administrator who was locked up for three nights in his office, dragged out of his office and forced to resign by agitating teachers and students.

Administrator 7 resigned under pressure from agitating teachers for circulating the discourse of autonomy and bringing the World Bank’s SHEP to the campus. In this section, I capture his subject position on the autonomous campus, that is, how he positions himself with respect to the contest around autonomous higher education.

Administrator 7 had earned quite a name in Ilam and was embroiled in a dispute over his heavy-handedness in dealing with the teachers. He had to ultimately resign over his controversial role in applying for the World Bank’s SHEP. I met Campus Administrator 7 at his private residence and asked him to explain how it had all happened.

Administrator 7 began his teaching career in this campus in 1984. In 2007, he became the campus chief. The same year, the World Bank signed the \$60 million higher education reform project with the government of Nepal. Autonomy was the overarching strategy for reform. Administrator 7 tells how his campus was reeling under acute financial crises when he took over the campus leadership that year. He discovered the problem of his campus at a particular

historical moment. A number of events led to the discovery of the object of reform, “autonomy”. The most important were the events of 2007, which displaced the constitutional monarchy and unitary state with a republic and autonomous state, which created a new space for the World Bank to circulate the discourse of the autonomous campus through its new higher education reform project. Second, the financial condition of the campus was appalling. Third, when this administrator took over the campus leadership, some 12 teachers and five other employees were working in Kathmandu, Dharan and Biratnagar while they continued to draw their salary from the campus. Administrator 7 wanted to hire part-time teachers to replace the absentee teachers but had no such powers. Before the World Bank offered the reform grants, when the monarchy was in control of Nepal’s affairs, an autonomous campus was outside his consciousness. He had no power to punish the absentee teachers. Such a power rested with the central administrative authority (TU). The absentee teachers used their political and personal connections with those in power to remain absent. The World Bank-assisted decentralisation discourse circulated the post-1990 restoration of the multiparty system. At that time, it was thought that “decentralisation” was the best word to describe the changing political landscape of Nepal to suit education reform. But the campus administrator now says that it politicised the campus, and the teachers began to challenge the managerial authority. Administrator 7 was helpless to take any action on the absentee teachers. The Bank’s reform project assured him of all three kinds of power – administrative, financial and academic – but put conditions on drawing down the grants. Some of these conditions were to make the campus autonomous, form a new management committee, fix tuition fees, determine other private sources of income, adopt a per unit student cost, and introduce new courses relevant to market needs. As a form of discourse and practice of neo-liberalism, the autonomous campus emerged. But this was not the only force shaping and consolidating this discourse and practice; there was another discourse of the autonomous state and the politics of freedom circulating through the declaration of the republic in Nepal, which aroused the desire for authority and “personal autonomy” (paraphrasing Marshall, 1995; 1998; 1999). The Bank played the role of a marriage-broker here between the two big elements within the local micro-politics that came to shape the discourse of the autonomous campus as self-evidently reform. One big element was economic development; the other was the political discourse of the autonomous state. Yet another element constituting this discourse was the global discourse of neo-liberalism, mainly the notion of “choice”, “quality”, “freedom” and “au-

tonomy” (Olssen, 2005). When Administrator 7 enacted the discourse of the autonomous campus, he was subjected by these complex forces to think that educational institute must be autonomous. In that, he presupposed the need for control and the exercise of power to make it happen. All of these made the Administrator 7 think of the autonomous campus as necessarily reform and his role in the campus as an entrepreneur. This campus administrator was made to comply with not only the Bank’s vision, but also the national political discourse of the autonomous state to believe that education was a choice, the educational institution was autonomous and the students were self-investing entrepreneurs of education.

The original problem was the financial crisis of the campus and teachers shirking their duties. But that was presumed to have been caused by the previous centralised management of the campus. Within the systems of knowledge and power operationalised by the centralised programme, autonomy was outside the consciousness of the reformers. This consciousness came with the historical break of knowledge/power not through the problems specific to the campus. This consciousness partly came from the rules laid down for drawing down the funds that were specific to the World Bank and its shareholders. Since 1995, when the Bank started intervening in Nepal, its rules were in conflict with the local social and political realities. However, the April 2006 “revolution” demarcated a space for the Bank to engage in Nepal via negotiations with different conflicting groups. The historical break of 2006 provided one more spark for the Bank to engage in Nepal.

By laying down the condition of “autonomy” for the release of grants, the Bank imposed new managerial responsibilities that required the campus administrators to exercise autonomy, freedom, power and authority to introduce “cost-sharing” in higher education. The aim here was to unburden the alleged “fragile” state financially by generating alternative sources of income for the campus. But soon after implementing the reform, Administrator 7 was surrounded by mountains of problems: he was in big trouble with the teachers, who opposed his move. He could not convince the teachers why autonomy was essential. In framing the understanding of higher education via “autonomy”, the Bank had earlier claimed it had “the deep knowledge of local context including the political economy of reforms and a rich international experience” (see World Bank 2007, p. 4). The teachers now feared that “autonomy” was privatisation, which threatened their future job security by shifting their sources of salary from the “fragile” state to parents and other non-state sources as guarantors of finance. Despite all the opposition from a section of

teachers, Administrator 7 thought the World Bank's money had to be secured by any means. For his close coterie of supporters, the Bank's project was a huge stake. He enjoyed the support of pro-UML teachers and local parties. Bypassing the TU and brushing aside the agitating teachers, he finally approached the UGC and the World Bank with a plea for help. He justified his action by narrating how difficult it was to approach the TU council in Kathmandu and its several hierarchical sections and officials for taking decisions to introduce a new curriculum, adding a new section, hiring teachers or generating funds for the expansion of and repairs to the campus. Administrator 7 repeatedly referred to the "centre" and "up" [*mathi* and *mathibata* in Nepali] as the locus of power and authority that he assumed deprived him of his proactive role to reform the campus.

He tells the story of how he had to seek prior permission for the collection of private donations, tuition fees from students and foreign donors' contributions from the centre (TU executive council). "It was a lengthy process." The Bank and the UGC officials assured him that he would have the powers to decide himself should he apply for autonomy. He stated: "Though, theoretically, a campus chief had power, he was pulled by his *tuppi* [pigtail] by the centre". He was made to believe that centralisation was the key hurdle.

Administrator 7 repeatedly travelled to Kathmandu and met the chief education specialist of the World Bank and a chief technical advisor at the UGC. The former prepared the SHEP; the latter was negotiating with the Bank to promote neo-liberal reform in Nepal. When Campus Administrator 7 thinks of centralisation as a hurdle for him to overcome to take a proactive role in campus management, he enacts the discourse of neo-liberal reform circulated in Nepal by the Bank's SHEP.

Campus Administrator 7 also approached UGC chairman Kamal Krishna Joshi and the World Bank education specialist, Rajendra Dhoj Joshi, for help. At the same time, the indigenous people (Limbus) in his home district of Ilam, who were launching a movement for an autonomous state, thought of an autonomous campus as very much within their ideology. They supported him right away, even as teachers and students rose in rebellion. Meanwhile, the political parties had promised to draw up a new map for Nepal under an autonomous federal republic after the fall of monarchy. The campus administrator thought this was an opportune time to approach the Bank for help.

During that time, while talking to TU officials as to how can I revive the campus, I was told that the World Bank cannot invest in the campus in its existing situa-

tion. That is, I found that the Bank was unwilling to support the campus governed centrally unless we made institutional changes. I found that the World Bank was unwilling to invest any funds for reform if the campus was not given power/authority and should TU continue to accumulate all powers to govern its campuses from the centre. You must know in depth how this idea was originally floated by the World Bank in its First Higher Education Project.

Administrator 7 is referring to the HEP of the World Bank, which provided a small number of campuses that were willing to be decentralised with \$100,000 each as incentive grants. The project could not move forward as expected by the Bank as the TU central authority remained unconvinced about delegating power to the local campuses. The Bank wanted to deprive the TU council of its controlling authority on local campuses. The aim of the Bank was to deregulate, liberalise and privatise education. “The first HEP ended just like that. No evaluation was made of the project.”

Another way Campus Administrator 7 thinks of autonomy as necessary reform is via the discourse of globalisation and the WTO, which, he believes, require the graduates to be competent in the global labour market. This awakening led him to think of new programmes of studies. But the lender, the Bank, put down a condition that the new study programmes must be financed entirely through “full fees” and the teachers’ were to receive their salaries from such fees. This created a furore, as teachers doubted the ability of students and parents to meet their future salaries and perks. No local parents contacted in Ilam knew what an autonomous campus would mean, let alone the consequences it would bring them in the form of having to guarantee financial resources for the campus after the expiry of the Bank’s project. Finally, the Bank moved its SHEP office to the TU to convince the TU authorities to continue providing regular grants, which partially resolved the conflict. The reform continued amid complex negotiations and teachers’ strikes.

Finally, as an incentive grant to push the camps to autonomy via full-fee models, Campus Administrator 7 received Rs 600,000 from the Bank. This amount was released for further discussion and to make plans for autonomy. Soon, another Rs. 13 million was released to the campus. The grant was contingent on 14 indicators being met. The grant was tied to performance and matching funds. The performance grant was based on student performance (pass rates). Under this heading, the campus received Rs. 4.5 million. In the second instalment, the campus received Rs. 2200,000. The third instalment was Rs. 3.5 million. Among the 14 indicators, quality assurance and accreditation were key. For the release of all of these grants, the campus was mandated to

become “autonomous”, that is, the campus was obliged to adopt autonomy rules. In so doing, it allowed the campus management to take decisions locally on introducing markets-relevant study programmes, raise tuition fees from students and hire temporary teachers.

This campus received Rs. 584 million after it signed an MOU with the World Bank. But the story of the autonomous campus did not move along smoothly as expected. As soon as the MOU was signed with the World Bank and the first instalment was released, Campus Administrator 7 was pressed hard by the opposition groups to give up part of the money. The World Bank grants became a bone of contention between different players. Soon, teachers protested. Campus Administrator 7 had to ultimately resign.

Despite all the opposition, lockouts and protests by agitating teachers and students, the reform was nevertheless implemented through a complex process of negotiations with the new campus leadership. Campus Administrator 7 succumbed to the pressure of the agitating teachers to resign. The new (acting) campus chief was accepted as the campus leader after he agreed to recruit seven people from the opposition camps (three UML and two each from NC and the Maoists) to non-essential posts in the campus. The appointment of those men from the opposition saved the World Bank project from failing. After a two-year standstill, the SHEP resumed once again. Despite the implementation, campus administrators continue to feel some form of control “from above” [the Nepali word is *mathibata*]. They blame this on the TU authorities, who do not want to give up their power and intervening roles granted to them by centralisation rules dating back to NESP. When I asked the TU Administrator 2 to comment on this during an interview, he showed how the campus operation committee and the campus chiefs started to misuse the powers granted under autonomy rules to hire “their own people”. However, Campus Administrator 7 refutes this claim to argue that the TU registrar and rector were opposed to autonomy. He conspicuously abstained from blaming the VC. This was necessary because both of them belonged to the same party [UML]. Ideology, thus, played its part in this contest.

Economic rationality of the autonomous campus

Towards securing the economic development of the Eastern hills via horticulture and floriculture

In this section, I will show the effects of the discourse and practice of the autonomous campus through the subjectivities of teachers and administrators.

The main object of focus in the interview is the newly-opened, privately

organised technical education that introduced horticulture and floriculture as subjects of knowledge, seen as necessary to create economic prosperity in the eastern hills. Of the 61 TU public campuses, Ilam campus was the first to implement the autonomy rules under the SHEP of the World Bank, despite protests from teachers and students. Reform in this campus was signalled by the newly inaugurated Department of Horticulture and Floriculture, the Institute of Science and Technology, Tribhuvan University. It was a small science department, isolated from the main campus building, whose aim was to develop the eastern Himalayan region of Nepal as a “global floriculture and horticulture market” (with inputs from the newly-appointed head of the department).

Teacher 5

Teacher 5, who was the head of the newly inaugurated department that signalled “reform”, shared the following position:

We are rich in rhododendrons, epiphytic orchids, alpine flowers [Primula, Mecynopsis, Gentiana, Rheum, Potentilla, etc.]; we are also rich in foliage plants [ferns and cycads] and hedge plants. These are some of the species of wild flowers we have identified as potential sources of the eastern Himalaya as a global hub for the floriculture industry.

Subjects taught under the newly-inaugurated, full-fee private model programme were coded, teaching hours were fixed, credits were awarded and the objectives of the study programmes were outlined. One of the main objectives of the new study programme was to provide the students with the knowledge of Eastern Himalayan resources, mainly the potential of horticulture and floriculture in supporting the economic development of the country.

I am the newly hired teacher and the study director. I am also entrusted with the task of preparing the teaching module. This curriculum is still under review and there are few books on shelf, which you saw, and a poor lab facility.

Two teachers, one of whom had just returned from Norway after completing his master’s degree, were hired by the campus chief using his personal network and ideological connections. Skilled and trained teachers were applying for settlement in the West. The campus management resorted to many tactics to attract teachers. Both teachers shared their ideological connections with the campus manager to support each other even as radical teachers opposed the reform. The new teachers were paid half of their salary by the TU and half by the local campus out of students’ tuition fees, lest they would not stay in the

jobs. Other teachers were deeply embittered to learn about this discriminatory salary provision as they continued to teach for several years on low remuneration. These teachers challenged the management and became uncooperative. The new category of “full-fee” students learnt of the existence of the new internationally validated programme through Facebook. Only nine out of the required 24 turned up at the last minute to study the new curriculum. As part of the programme, the students were introduced to basic knowledge of the ecology of the Himalayas, its flora and fauna and biodiversity-related issues. The lesson included how to identify, collect, develop and preserve wild plants of horticultural and floricultural value.

I spent most of my time with the three young teachers. One was named Chandika Parajuli, who was my guide and help, and two others were the new recruits, including the head of the department, Manoj. I learnt a lot from this young generation of teachers, who could have easily secured their way to foreign countries or ended up in handsomely-paid lucrative jobs offered by INGOs in Kathmandu. The campus manager used his party political network to bring the new teachers to Ilam. The campus chief, who fought a losing battle to secure the World Bank grants, had one more task in hand: how to secure the party position on the campus. These teachers revealed their anthropological and biological history as they conversed. We often had our drinks, lunch and dinner together, walked down the streets of Ilam bazaar, spent hours inside the campus library, chatted with students, sunbathed in the courtyard and gathered at the bamboo cottage that stood next to the college in the open field for tea, snacks and lunch. After dinner, we would meet at the hotel lobby and chat.

From two, when we started, when you were here with us, we are now four full-time teachers. We are assigning more contract teachers on the basis of the subject they teach. At present, the Bachelors in Horticulture and Floriculture Management has come up with a revised name, “Bachelor of Science in Horticulture”. As you know, we can admit only 30 students each year. When you were here, we had just nine students. We are now running on second year with 59 students at present. We are facing some problems with the administrative unit of the multiple campus. Except for that, all is running quite well (department head updated me via email, 2014).

In the next interview, I will show the different subjective views of the teachers on the discourse and practice of the autonomous Ilam campus.

6.1.6 Teachers' alternative discourses on the autonomous campus

Teachers 6 and 7

Teachers 6 and 7 shared a different perspective on reform. Despite having the happy disposition of people with an apparently good vision of autonomous higher education, these teachers who represented the multiple campus (as opposed to the World Bank-sponsored horticulture and floriculture department organised privately) brazenly challenged the reform.

I will start with a little historical background. Three years ago [2010], our campus chief called a meeting. He proposed decentralisation of the campus because a fund was being made available for improving the infrastructure from the World Bank. All teachers, representatives of student unions, teachers' unions and local political parties who attended that meeting agreed to the proposal. But soon after we realised that we were made to sign for autonomy, not decentralisation. This led to a series of protests ... We soon realised that autonomy regulation was not in our favour. As per the regulation, TU will send a block grant to a fixed number of teachers based on headcount, but it nowhere mentioned how the temporary teachers and staff would be paid and how the local people could afford to run the campus financially in the long run. So, it put a question mark over the teachers' professional security (Teacher 7 with inputs from Teacher 8, MRMC, Ilam).

This interview was held in the open air, in the campus ground, where a group of teachers were basking in the warm winter sun. Teacher 6 and 7 volunteered to talk in the group. Others agreed. The assistant lecturer in political science summed up the discussions above. A contract teacher who teaches history provided further inputs. These teachers felt threatened by the reform. They feared for their future job security.

The general question put to them was concerned with how they experienced the reform implemented in the campus. But these teachers narrated the two-year-old story of protests, not reform. They narrated small details as to how the agitating teachers dragged out their campus manager forcefully from the office, smeared his face with black soot, locked him up for three nights in the campus building, and finally forced him to resign. But how soon, through intense negotiations, a new campus chief was appointed and the World Bank-assisted SHEP was pulled back from the brink. The new chief had promised to listen to the agitating teachers' grievances and solve their problems. With great difficulty, he had convinced them to return to work. Despite the promise, the TUTA unit of the Campus continued to oppose the reform. It did not send its representative to the Campus Operation Committee. Teacher 6 and Teacher 7

said their main disagreement with the reform was that an autonomous campus was silent about their future job security even as the reform placed on them a new task of accountability for improving graduates' test scores and the quality of instruction and learning while shifting the sources of their salary from the state to the local parents without the latter's knowledge and a guarantee. The policy here takes for granted that the reform takes place independently of teachers. The reform did not anticipate the unlikely outcomes as demonstrated by the teachers, who remained highly dissatisfied, angry, insecure and uncooperative with the management. When asked to show a concrete example of "autonomy", Teacher 6 replied: "Autonomy is invisible ... There is nothing you can see with your eyes as autonomy. In the papers [the strategic plan], there may be something." Teacher 7 added: "There is of course one new course of study introduced this year ... the horticulture and floriculture programme, which may be called autonomy." These teachers argue that even as their campus became autonomous, the remote control is always *mathibata* [from above, referring to the TU Council].

Temporary and contract teachers who protested the most said they were waging a purely professional struggle. The reform had put a question mark over their survival by tying their income sources to the student tuition fees. Should more students fail, these teachers would lose their salaries and future job security. When asked repeatedly what "autonomy" was, they replied: "We still do not know what it means to be autonomous. It is a dark secret. We are the majority in this campus, but how come we were kept in dark about this project and our voices are so muffled."

The key paradox of the reform was that out of the 84 teaching staff in the campus, there were at least 52 temporary and part-time teachers who it assumed would be brought into automatic compliance with the autonomy regulation without a corresponding increase in salary. As it finally turned out, there were only 32 permanent teachers who felt secure about their job. The autonomy regulation was challenged by temporary and contract teachers through protest programmes. Even as the Campus Operation Committee was made powerful, having the right to take disciplinary action on the teachers and the right to hire and fire them, the opposite was what actually happening here: the teachers forced the Operation Committee to resign under protest. The order of the discourse did not work.

Most of the teachers interviewed understood the concept of the autonomous campus as "privatization". A meeting convened by the campus Operation Committee ended in a brawl. When I suggested a joint meeting of all

teachers to resolve the dispute, most teachers narrated from their previous experiences of violent clashes. “We still remember how chairs were thrown as teachers engaged in fisticuffs. We suggest you talk to them (teachers) individually, lest there would be confrontations.” The World Bank had said it held extensive consultations with the “stakeholders”, including teachers, in formulating the new policy framework for an autonomous campus. Teacher 6 and Teacher 7 contested the claim. I then interviewed the president of the teachers’ union (the local TUTA unit of the campus). For the purpose of protecting his identity, I use “Teacher 8” as a code name to identify him in this interview data.

Teacher 8

Teacher 8 had 34 years of teaching experience. He teaches political science and rural development at bachelor degree level. He is ideologically attached to the UCPN (Maoist) party. Teacher 8 shared views on politics, resistance, conflict and paradoxes around the reform implemented by his campus. When asked to point to a concrete example of “reform”, he hinted at the introduction of a new four-year international semester-style bachelor degree in Horticulture and Floriculture Management as the only outcome of autonomy granted to the MRMC. However, he said that the teachers’ union had boycotted the reform.

Teachers have boycotted autonomy than supported it. The union [TUTA] has no representative in the campus management committee. Autonomy has threatened the future job security of teachers. This is a huge concern for the teachers and that is why we protest. Autonomy regulation is silent on our job security and professionalism. The key dilemma is how will the autonomous campus generate its own resources when the World Bank-funded five-year project ends after one year? Under such a confusing state, autonomy was granted to the campus. The campus administration ignored our demand. This led to nearly one year of padlocking of this campus administration. But it didn’t affect the normal classes.

Like Teacher 6 and Teacher 7, Teacher 8 understood an autonomous campus as “privatisation”. He reasoned that the transfer of power to the campus management was to expedite privatisation reform. He also shared the view that the reform invited more politics and political intervention in academia than brought genuine reform.

The government made the campus management powerful but it led to increased political intervention in the campus, thereby sullyng academic freedom and the scholarly life of the campus. Political interventions led to crippling strikes and

shutdowns affecting students' academic performance. The teaching community believes it is just another World Bank-funded CSSP that increased the politicisation of schools.

Teacher 8 uses ideology to critique and challenge the reform (object). Relying on language as a site for knowledge would then mean holding on to the truth of “privatisation” being an evil. Privatisation was helpful to those teachers in the Horticulture and Floriculture department. But in the multiple campus where the reform had nothing to do, it generated a conflict. Teacher 8 told this complex story of reform.

The major strikes and shutdowns in the campus were organised by the teachers and student unions affiliated to Maoist organizations. While Teacher 8 opposed politicisation, he thought that this writer was unaware of his ideology. Originally suited to the Maoist ideology, autonomy soon became unacceptable to the local Maoist unit because of the campus being dominated by the UML party. Before I met him, I talked to several other teachers about his ideological interest and beliefs. Getting to know a person and his belief system was important for capturing his subjectivity. Presenting himself as a senior teacher and academic in this interview, Teacher 8 appeared to be politically neutral and made satirical comments about his own ideological position and strikes in the college. It would be fallacious to claim that Teacher 8 was the only ideologically oriented teacher in the campus. Several teachers were ideologically oriented to one or more political positions and to get their perspectives about reform, it became necessary to go deeper into their biographical histories. Broadly, opinions about reform were split into five different ideological camps. Earlier, a teacher who was my guide and a colleague had revealed that this campus was UML dominated; over 50 percent of the 80 plus teachers in the campus were UML supporters. They supported their campus chief, who belonged to UML ideological orientation, in implementing the reform. Others were divided into mainly the Nepali Congress, the Maoists and Limbuwan. The Congress and the Maoists categories were in a minority in the campus and in the district and they challenged the management. To get more perspectives on the contest around reform, I organised several small informal discussions with senior teachers. The following is sample interview data from the group 2 discussions, organised in a staff-room setting on the initiative of the Assistant Campus Chief, Dipendra Prasad Dulal. While group 1 represented the views of the contract teachers, temporary staff and part-timers, group 2 represented the permanent category who, nevertheless, felt apprehensive about the reform.

Teacher 9: Political Science

Teacher 10: Nepali

Teacher 11: Political Science

Teacher 12: Social Science

Teacher 13: Assistant Campus Chief

The Assistant Campus Chief summed up the discussions:

Actually none of us present in this room here were directly involved in the decision leading up to the granting of autonomy. I was at that time doing my MPhil. Some of our senior managers and locals pushed for autonomy; others didn't agree. Thus, the dispute. But there seems to be a consensus finally building up in favour of utilizing the project funds so long as they are being made available.

The group discussions ended with the above note in which the above category of teachers agreed, albeit temporarily, on utilising the World Bank grants rather than indulging in prolonged conflict as to how the local contributions would be channelled in the long run to secure the economy of the campus and the jobs of the teachers. The World Bank-assisted reform was all set to displace the “weak” state with the non-state actors and the public provision of education by non-public provision in the belief that all the people of Nepal, irrespective of geographic location, income disparities and different capabilities, had demonstrated their willingness and capacity for shouldering the task of financing and managing a public campus through the April 2006 “revolution”. The Bank made us believe that the people of Nepal had developed self-consciousness through the revolutionary expectations they expressed through the April uprising towards securing their own futures. The Bank assumed that all the parents and communities were ready to take up the role where the national state had failed. The teachers clearly indicated above they would first wait for the World Bank project fund to end in 2015 to anticipate the local response. Should the locals not guarantee the resource contributions to the campus, these categories of teachers would resort to another round of protests. This idea of reform was mediated by the political assumptions of the republic, where people would add local resources automatically to secure the public campuses their autonomy, independence and economic freedom. Without the local people at the receiving end of the policy pledging such support, the reform was limited to the policy discourse driven by the World Bank.

The new Campus Management Committee is the highest decision-making body, comprising a motley 35 odd members from local political parties, social organizations, senior professors and former campus chiefs. It is the most senior committee. Paradoxically, however, three years after the reform was initiated, such a committee was already defunct after the chairman resigned under pressure from agitating teachers and students who opposed autonomy. The campus is temporarily managed by the Operation Committee, headed by the campus chief and assisted by assistant campus chief and department heads. The teachers argued that even if the new Campus Management Committee is formed, with so many hands, the task of management would become more complex to carry out. They contested the original idea of reform as efficient governance and easy and fast service delivery.

Some more contradictions

After interviewing the actors, I studied the campus “autonomy” regulation laid down by the government. In so doing, I came across many contradictions between the regulation and the actual practice.

- The campus chief of an autonomous campus is to be selected from among one of the three senior faculty members by an executive committee (*kar-yakari samiti*). This regulation remained questioned as the campus chief so nominated came from political *bhagbanda*.
- The Campus Development Fund to be set up. This fund means that the income of the campus will come mainly from student tuition fees, security deposits, fines, rent, grants, donations, loans and other supports. However, the campus depended largely on the TU, which continued to provide block grants to this fund. The campus was largely dependent on the state as a significant contributor of finances. This ran counter to the logic of an autonomous campus that was expected to become self-reliant.
- The most controversial thing I noted under the Campus Development Fund, Clause 16, sub-clause 2, no. 3, is that this campus, despite being autonomous, still needed to keep funds collected in a bank account specified by the university (TU). It had no independent authority to open its own bank account; the university was still the final arbiter in this, including having the authority to evaluate and monitor the use of the funds so collected. The centre continued to exercise some form of control over the campus. The campus enjoyed only limited autonomy.
 - Article 40 of the TU autonomy regulation states property rents and

leases by the autonomous campus require the prior approval of the university. The property includes the campus' own buildings and land and any other property. This means that the centre (TU) continues to exercise a form of control over the campus. Autonomy was limited; the campus could not independently decide on leasing or renting out its own property.

All vacant teacher and staff positions were to be filled through open competition. But some of them were hired as *hamro manche* through backhand channels and political networks.

- Article 42 (5) states that the appointment of permanent teachers is to be made according to the recommendation of the Service Commission and approved by the TU council. The autonomy enjoyed by the campus was further limited by this regulation.
- The salaries and allowances of privately hired teachers were decided by the Campus Management Committee. Some teachers drew more salaries than others. These teachers drew their salaries both from the centre (TU) and the campus. This left the teachers who draw their salaries from the TU only angry and uncooperative.
- The original idea of reform was efficient governance of educational institutions and less cumbersome administration. But it created a complex division of labour, a hierarchical ordering and the formation of various units with functional differentiation in the campus that mimicked the TU central executive council. The notion of autonomy appeared here as strange as the notion of centralisation conceived in 1971 (see more in Policy Moment II).

6.3 Conclusions

For some teachers, the reform threatened their future job security. For others, they had no qualms about accepting the neo-liberal reform. For some, it was so meaningful that it gave them more salary and high esteem. For still other, it amounted to nothing. There was no single truth about the discourse and practice of autonomy in higher education reform. The most important aim of the reform was securing the economic and political independence of the TU constituent campuses (61 in all) so far dependent on centralised governance and state grants. But that notion of the “autonomous” campus created

the battleground for political *bhagbanda* – a reconfiguration of that previously controlling centre – the TU. The reform, despite all the rancorous protests, nevertheless continued.

In Ilam, the agitating teachers opposed the programme and challenged the management, often refusing to carry out orders. Some teachers boycotted classes and meetings, and for some, students had to repeatedly remind them using mobile calls and text messages to take classes. For still some other teachers, they forgot to take classes as they stayed longer talking among themselves or browsing the Web through the freely accessible Wi-Fi in the campus. While some wholeheartedly supported the reform, others brazenly challenged it. Yet the institute continued to function amidst protests and lockouts. The implementation of the policy was originally seen as being free of contradictions. The reality was far from such assumptions. It finally turned out that the World Bank's project had become the subject and object of contest for many people and ideological groups. It was at this time that I found Foucault helpful to reflect on this game of power played out in Nepal:

... so many authors [and stakeholders of higher education discourse] who know or do not know one another, criticise one another, invalidate one another, pillage one another, meet without knowing it and obstinately intersect their unique discourses in a web of which they are not the masters, of which they cannot see the whole, and of whose breath they have inadequate idea – all these various figures and individuals do not communicate solely by the logical succession of propositions that they advance, nor by the recurrence of themes, nor by the obstinacy of meaning transmitted, forgotten, and rediscovered, they communicate by the form of positivity ... a historical *a priori*. (Foucault, 2002, p. 143)

The first task in interpreting the discourse of higher education reform, in which each actor was caught in a multiplicity of force relations, was to first get rid of *a priori* – that is, to read it as a discursive practice. The second was to free up the actors as the sole autonomous agents of discourse and to understand them as caught in a larger web of a power/knowledge regime in which they themselves did not know how they were made to play the game where they had not set the rules. Finally, the task was not to understand the ideas the actors advanced on higher education reform as emanating from a logical or coherent order of things or from their deep meditation and reflections on how to reform higher education, but from the rules specific to neo-liberalism.

Students' responses to reform

7.1 Introduction

This chapter will document students' responses to reform via their subjective experiences of reform. In so doing, this chapter will put to test the original promises made by the reform, namely "social justice" in terms of access to higher education for the "disadvantaged" groups via discriminatory scholarship provision, and a peaceful, inclusive, and prosperous Nepal envisaged for everyone to live and work in (World Bank, 2007, p. 1). The notion of "social justice" here implies a presumed lack of social harmony in Nepal in terms of the income divide between the rich and poor. The notion of "disadvantaged" is supposedly caused by the previous regimes of truth, namely the alleged caste-induced social order assumed to have caused income inequality. But the solution envisaged by the reform through which it aims to achieve the social justice is private models. The key question it then raises is how would the *poor* access a "full-fee", locally relevant programme when it is organised along the private model? If neo-liberalism is about privatization, fee setting and students' enrolment based on tighter admission policies and new markets-based curriculum examined in Chapter 3, how will this help achieve greater social justice? In the light of these contradictions, this chapter will first examine how students enact the discourse of social justice in higher education in terms of access and equity. After the social justice component, it then put to test the claims made by the reform towards creating a peaceful, inclusive and "open moment" for the graduates to live and work in Nepal. The other aim of this chapter is to test the earlier claims of the World Bank that it has deep knowledge of Nepal's local reality and consulted all the stakeholders of reform that included students in designing the SHEP. How do the students respond to these claims?

This chapter is divided into five thematic sections: 1) Students' discourse

of *why go to university?* enacted in a classroom setting; 2) Students' discourses of access, equity and social justice enacted at a community campus as the model of reform; 4) Students' discourses of employability, global mobility and future economic security enacted at multiple sites; and 5) Reflecting on discourses of entrepreneurship in education that attempts to make the people as donors of education.

7.1.1 Students enact the discourse: *Why go to university?*

The chief wealth of a nation, some economists believe, is not its land, natural resources, or population. Switzerland is fairly poor in all three, yet it is one of the world's wealthiest nations. Brazil is rich in all three, but incomparably poorer. The German and Finnish experiences after World War II even raises the possibility that, if placed on a barren island, an educated people could, in twenty years, create a more prosperous society than the one now enjoyed by Brazilians and Nepalis. To be sure, countries like Switzerland often enjoy a more congenial climate than Nepal, they are freer, and they enjoy greater political stability ... higher educational levels prevailing in these prosperous nations contribute to their affluence ... Knowledge has many other practical applications. If you are a Mexican wishing to immigrate illegally to the US, the ability to read English and study maps minimise contacts with coyotes and rat infested tunnels ... excellent scholarship can be found nowadays ... in democracies of North America and North Western Europe. [*Moti Nissani, USA (1947)*, pp. 73–78, a lesson included at bachelor's level in Nepal]

The above lesson was enshrined in the national curriculum and enacted in the class between the students and their teacher. It was a small class of neatly dressed 30 students. They hotly debated the question, *why go to university?* This was the very first thing that stuck me during the fieldwork in Nepal in the winter of 2012.

Where the reformers between 1960 and 1990 had said that Western democracy was a “clumsy” thing unsuited to Nepal (see Rose, 1963, p. 16), the lesson included in the present college curricula shows the undergraduates in Nepal how to distinguish between Nepal and Western Europe. Where the NESP had preached the graduates nationalism, national culture and civilization, the present policy moment preaches that Germany, Finland and Switzerland as wealthier than Nepal.

Seated in their individualised space and isolated at one end of a college building in Kathmandu from their outdoor outfit peers and epitomised as “ramra manche” [good people] and the prime effect of the ongoing higher

education reform, these students had their English lesson when I happened to observe that lively classroom interaction by a happenstance. It was a small and silent classroom in tip-top condition. It gathered only a small number of students there. These students learnt that Germany, Finland and Switzerland are wealthier than their own country. I observed the class after the campus chief repeatedly requested me to observe what the “new” types of students of “new Nepal” learn. The chief remarked that the new categories of students were embodying the essential characteristics of a future disciplined citizenry in Nepal but were not required to live only in Nepal. He used the expression “ramra manche” [in Nepali] to describe them as “good people”, globally mobile and the prime effect of reform. This category of students paid their entire cost of education without the state having to invest per capita student funding. Here, a form of neo-liberal technique is applied. The block these students assembled was epitomised as “Naya Nepal” [New Nepal]. In another block, a legacy left behind by the 1970s NESP (free and mass education) continued and was regarded “Old Nepal”. Through the play of the difference, the meaning of “reform” was enacted in terms of “ramra manche”.

Instead of a swarming mass of students in their outdoor clothing who came to the campus and left it again unnoticed, attendance and uniforms became obligatory for this category of students isolated from their peers. Instead of leaving them freely to occupy any desk and benches in the classroom or gossip during the lecture, their movement was controlled and they were assigned fixed places according to their roll numbers or ranking in the class. In sum, the new campus block was programmed to mimic a private boarding school, where the students assemble for morning prayer in neat rows according to their height and the teachers walk between the rows in order to have a full view of each student and to ensure that each one is tidy and no one is unwashed and unkempt.

The study director monitored this category of students from a separate staffroom: the security guards routinely checked their ties, nails, and hair; he permitted only those with a uniform to enter the new block through a controlled point of entry marked by a high iron channel gate used to separate the new types of students by connecting them to labour market logics and economic rationality. After completing their eighth semesters, more than 90 per cent left Nepal for the US to pursue higher education and possible settlement.

The students I observed were in their first semester. Binod sir first marked their attendance. He was greeted with “good mornings”. He called out the roll numbers. No student was absent. After taking the roll, he asked two students to

present the story: *Why go to university?* The students read the story aloud in turn. The lecture was conducted entirely in English. The class was interactive. As the students finished reading the story, the teacher finally summed up the moral of the story. “Going to university liberates one from blind faith in religion and orthodoxy ... (pause). Education frees us from political indoctrination. Had our political leaders been to university, things would not have taken such a nasty turn. Education helps to eliminate inequality. Education destroys dead habits. Tagore has said this... What we call our religion is usually little more than a direct consequence of our accidental birth.” Students listened in rapt attention. Soon, the next lesson began, entitled: “Marriage is a private affair” The teacher asked two students to read the story. Two students read the story in turn. One of the students could not pronounce the word “cosmopolitanism”. The teacher helped him out. The morale of the story was that in modern times, one must be free to choose one’s own partner. As the students finished reading the story, the class was open for a question and answer session. The following is how they debated:

Teacher: “Which one do you prefer: arranged marriage or inter-caste?”

Student A: “I favour arranged marriage.” (Other students laugh)

Student B: (Seated at the back row, this student suddenly interrupts): “No, I favour a love marriage!”

Student A: (Retorts back): “Do you think old ideas are always wrong and new ideas are always better?”

Teacher: (Jerks his head up and interrupts): “Why not follow the middle path, the Buddhist way?” (all laugh)

Students debated which was the correct way of marrying – “love” or “arranged”. What interested me the most was that the role of the university in that portrayal of the lesson was to subjectively guide the students towards certain ends, mainly to dream of modern Western cultural practices. This was made clearer by the next lesson:

Plato’s Allegory of the Cave

After two students presented the story, the question and answer session began.

Student D: Sir, why are Europe and America better?

Teacher: It is because the people there enjoy perfect freedom. The word “democracy” is misinterpreted here in Nepal by politicians ... (pause).

The teacher finally asked the students if they had more questions.

Student E: Sir, can you tell us why everybody wants to go to America nowadays?

Teacher: For money, but also for freedom. There is perfect freedom, so everybody wants to go to America.

Student F: Sir, isn't there democracy and freedom in Nepal?

Teacher: Nepal has too much freedom; it is not democracy, it is anarchy. Freedom comes only with discipline. Such a discipline is lacking in Nepal.

The class concluded.

I asked a Free Student Union leader to comment on the lesson imparted.

The following is how he reacted:

Our books are authored by foreigners. Our course content is driven by foreign experts. However, it may be that not all things from foreign are bad. There may be good examples. But our unique geography and abundant natural resources and potentials are subsumed by the emphasis on foreign curriculum. For example, Nepal is highly mountainous country but many of our students do not know their own country. Most of our students are raised in Kathmandu and study in Kathmandu. They know more about Europe or America than their own country (Shuva Ram Basnet, President, Free Student Union, Shanker Dev Campus, Kathmandu)⁴¹.

Most students who come to Kathmandu to study have a clear mental map about leaving Nepal. Higher education is the only legal route to the US-Euro zone taught in college through a case study of Mexican migrants going to the US. The story tells how the uneducated Mexicans cross over to the US via rat-infested tunnels aided by the “Coyotes”. For an educated person, the lesson relates how there is a legal route to the affluent West. When I directed this question as to how he evaluates the present curriculum, Sharad Rasaili, leader of the radical Maoist student union, commented:

Janabadi education is our model. It means an education that matches the soil of the country. The present one you observed is international education, which is encour-

41 This interview was conducted face-to-face on December 24, 2012, in Kathmandu.

aging our graduates to migrate abroad. Education should be identifiable with the national resources available within the national boundaries. We want to completely abolish the present education system and introduce *jana-sikshya*.⁴²

Next, I listened to yet another lively classroom interaction for the entire 50 minutes at Shanker Dev Campus, when two students raised a most interesting question:

Student C: “Sir, why does everybody nowadays want to go to America”?

Before even Binod sir replied, **Student D** asked, “Sir, why are Europe and America better”?

These questions took all my attention, not because they had been asked for the first time in Nepal but because these were the imaginary places, the “markers of civilization” [Escobar, 1995, p. 36]. These places fuel the imagery of social change in Nepal.

Shuttling back and forth between Policy Moment II and Policy Moment III, there was a sharp break. If the former preached “Nepalism” and national consciousness, the latter was espousing international development and global consciousness of time and space. That lesson imparted to the undergraduates across Nepal at once reminded me of Pigg (1992) reflecting on how the internationalised vision of development mediates educational practices as a result of which youth and students in Nepal associate *bikas* with modern Western economic progress and think of Nepal as another category – *abikas*. In Pigg’s sense, *bikas* is a discourse, a sign that constructs these ideal social imageries. Development ideology comes embedded in textbooks, the practice of literacy and as aid agency projects in Nepal (Robinson-Pant, 2001, 2010). As an imported discourse, it came to replace the meaning of life and living in Nepal from the *karma* people in Nepal associated with happiness or suffering (Shrestha 1995). Consequently, good *karma* came to be interpreted as being developed and bad *karma* as underdeveloped (ibid). Explicit in the lesson was the internationalised vision of modern progress as “an imaginative geography[ies]” (Escobar 1995), or what Ferguson would describe as “Western liberal commonsense” (in Schouten, 2009, p. 1). These images are shaped by discursive practices, mainly the discourse of development. Carney and Bista (2009) perhaps provide the

42 Rasaili is the student union leader of the All Nepal National Independent Student Union (Revolutionary), affiliated to Maoist party faction led by Mohan Baidya. This interview was conducted under the initiative of the Education Journalists’ Group in Kathmandu, on December 29, 2012.

best reflection on this, mainly to think of the discursive practice of education in Nepal as shaped by a “development” category that fuels the “economy of production and desire” (ibid, p. 208). As I will show in the rest of this chapter, the discourse of development mediated through textual and pedagogic practices has come to structure a sense of reality whereby students dream about how to secure a route to foreign education and employment through which to secure their economic desires that are far from their reach in their own country. With this initial reflection from the classroom observations, I present the student interview data in the rest of this chapter.

7.1.2 Students’ discourses of access, equity and social justice

The aim of this section is to put to test the policy discourse that promised scholarship, equity, and social justice. As the title suggests, the first context in which this interview took place was concerned with the promise made by the reform to help the “disadvantaged” and “poor” secure a place in higher education, but as I will show, the students contest these claims.

The present reform draws its strength and reason from the dead text “Muluki Ain” (civil code), which formed the previous moral, political and social order in Nepal. The reform invented new categories of students to legitimise the present as different from the past (an example is “disadvantaged”) and the presumed need for discriminatory scholarship provision (see World Bank, 2007). The notions of equity and social justice enshrined in the policy were to be realised through a discriminatory scholarship provision. This policy holds God in Nepal as responsible for the “origin of evil” (paraphrasing Foucault, 1980, p. 124)” through a different understanding of Nepali history that others have written.

Historically, the people of Nepal are the most sophisticated subjects I have ever stumbled upon. Before 1951, they were divided into four categories by invoking the divine origin theory of power and ruled. These categories were invented in the 13th century and each was given specific duties to perform. In 1951, this form of truth (the divine origin) was questioned and replaced by a modern scientific evolutionary truth. Instead of eliminating the old truth, the people were categorised into 101 ethnic/caste groups and 92 different linguistic collections, as per the 2001 census.

According to the divine origin theory told in folklore even to this day, when God made man, he first gave birth to four types of people – Brahman, Chhetri,

Vaisya and Sudra. God is believed to have created the Brahman from his head. This became the reason why he must become the torch bearer of truth and knowledge. As a form of practice, that discourse made him the priest, the interpreter of history and the advisor to the king. The next in line created by the God was Chhetri. He was assigned the task of king maker and warrior because this body was believed to have been born from his shoulders. As a practice, this category played the dominant role in the formation of modern Nepal by war and conquest. However, the discourse of development after 1990 constructed Nepal further “poor”. It began to lay blame on the ruling blocks (Chhetris and Bahuns) in Nepal for causing the poverty of other groups below them through their roles as “suppressors” and “oppressors”. On the basis of this truth, the students categorised under Chhetri and Bahuns are deprived of scholarships and positive discrimination in education. The Nepali national planners and the external development partners believe this form of positive discriminatory practices would end the presumed socioeconomic inequality and purported poverty in Nepal.

Included later in the 18th century within the major four categories were several occupational sub-categories – Kami⁴³ as metal workers, blacksmiths and goldsmiths; Damain as tailors; Yadav as herdsmen, Sarki as cobblers, Teli as oil-makers, Chamar, Harijan and Ram as leather workers, Koiri as the kitchen gardener, Kurmi as the cultivator, Mushahar as the labourers, Kumal as the porters, Thakur as the hajam (barber), Dhobi as the washerman, Majhi as the fisherman, Haluwai as the sweet-maker, Marwadi as the trader, Gaine as singers, and Patharkata and Kuswadiya as the vegetable growers. There are at least 131 sub-categories developed from the four main categories. I traced the above representations of the body from the *Muluki Ain* of 1854 (civil code of Nepal). Hofer had made a painstaking effort to interpret Nepal’s history from

43 The earlier regime of truth in Nepal, mainly sustained by the *Muluki Ain* (1992 BS/1935 AD), constructed this occupational category. The *Muluki Ain* exists as a historical document containing the Hindu code of conduct, detailing the arts of disciplining and punishment that existed in Nepal between ca.1300 AD and 1951 AD]. This document categorises the people of Nepal into many occupational groups, one of which is “Kami” [blacksmiths and goldsmiths]. In 1951, that form of power/knowledge was abolished through a political revolt. After the restoration of multiparty politics in 1990, these categories of people in Nepal are understood as socially and economically excluded. The “Dalit” subject was born as a newer form, representing what was earlier “Kami”. The word “Dalit” is now used to objectify a speaking human subject in Nepal as a previously “oppressed” or “repressed” category. In so doing, the present regime of truth makes us believe that all the alleged socio-economic and cultural problems in Nepal would be resolved in the future (see ILO, 2005). The ILO is one among those 40 international development partners of Nepal responsible for setting labour standards. This international standard for labour implies that a radically different social reality cannot exist in Nepal from those existing in the Western hemisphere what Escobar (1995) calls the “markers of civilization”.

this document. He translated and interpreted it as the *Civil Code* of Nepal (see Hofer, 1979: 2004). The book entitled *The Caste Hierarchy and the State in Nepal, A study of the Muluki Ain of 1854* makes the commitment to interpret Nepal's history by keeping two pictures in mind – the secular West and its oppositional Nepal other, in which it is suggested that the former (secular) is the only correct way of classifying people in Nepal. On this basis, the modern history of Nepal is written and understood. This book, reviewed widely in Nepal with fulsome praise for its author, makes us to believe that in the past, social life in Nepal was murkier and violent, and the people lived in a time of hatred. Under the present reform, a \$20 million scholarship (later reduced to \$4 million) was announced by the World Bank to realise the goal of social justice in the belief that the previous social order created by the *Muluki Ain* caused inaccessibility to education, and hence inequality of wealth and income in Nepal. Thus, the present education reform in particular, on the question of access and social justice, is rationalised and made intelligible by returning to that very logic of castes – the story of who was the ruler in the past, who was the ruled, who was the soldier and who was the shoe-maker, who exploited whom in the past, who migrated to Nepal and who was indigenous, and so on.

A more rational classification of the human body is being planned now. But the same “table of bodies” [I prefer to describe it this way given that the theory and methods I employ do not seek to recognise Brahmins, Chhetris and Dalits as authentic representations of the people others have constructed under the “caste” system]. To put it in Foucault's terms, I prefer to call it “a sequence of representations” (Foucault, 1970, p. 127) or a contingent nature of truth sustained by the shifting knowledge/power in time and space. Instead of abolishing the practice, the government of Nepal, assisted by the Western donors, simply rearranged the words – BCNs as opposed to DJDUs. The former categories cannot receive scholarships and other positive discrimination because of their past social positions but the latter will receive them. One of the main goals of education as laid down by the government in Nepal is to “help and bring the DJDUs into the mainstream of the nation”. In so doing, it is expected that it makes them “insightful to social equality and justice and develop conduct accordingly to help create an inclusive society” (see *Nepal: Principles and general objectives of education*, 2010).

The “New Nepal”, under which the present scholarship provision is contextualised, has made further advances by inventing a new scientific metric system of measurement and calculation of human attributes. It measures the wealth and health of its population in terms of material possessions. A recent

survey (Bennett et al, 2008), conducted with funding from USAID, says, for example, only 45 percent of Dalit households have radios compared to 75 percent of Brahman/Chhetri households. But in terms of access to improved drinking water, there were 76 Brahmans who enjoyed such a facility compared to 80 Dalits. Assisted by the international development agencies, “new Nepal” aims to distribute radios, drinking water, electricity, jobs and other goods equally to the population. The erstwhile Sanskrit scholars are of no help in this regard and interpretation of what counts as equality in Nepal; a scholar of international repute funded and hired by international donors states:

Bahuns and Chhetris together – just 31 percent of the population – had two-thirds of the jobs, whereas hill janajatis (i.e. excluding newars and tharus), with 22 percent of the population, had just 7 percent of the jobs, and madhesis, with 31 percent of the population, had only 11 percent of the jobs. Dalits, with nearly 9 percent of the population, had just 0.3 percent of the jobs. (Gellner, 2007)

When I undertook this study, a new history of Nepal was unveiled based on the above logic of the measurement of economics and wealth. In their newer representation, ultimately, the Nepalese became what Foucault calls “object of knowledge” (1974, p. 312). Such a change in Nepal arguably brings into play new power relations among different groups and individuals by playing them against each other and telling them the old social order in which they lived in the past kept them vulnerable and poor. Can we see this as the original idea of modernity, that the “new order” was possible only if the traditional order was broken down (see Eisenstadt, 2000, p. 4)? As I showed in Chapter 3, this is how conventional historical reason was used to construct the present social reality in Nepal. Education policy and practice were tied to that historical reason. As I will show, the discourse of higher education reform picked up that conventional logic of history to distribute scholarships to those believed to have been deprived of their rightful occupation and place in Nepali society in the past. However, as I will show, the students enacting this discourse in the field of practice contest such ideas and promises.

Sample case study

After receiving the suggestions made by the executive director of the Student Financial Assistance Development Board (SFADB) established under the SHEP, with the aim of creating social justice in Nepal, I selected Pashupati Chabahil Campus, a model autonomous community campus in Kathmandu, where several less well-off students work and study and received no scholar-

ships. I present three sample cases, who, their teachers said, were among the most deserving for scholarships. All of the three cases I selected told of the immense economic and financial hardships they endured to pursue their college degrees.

Students 1, 2 and 3 contest access and scholarships promised by reform

In this interview sample, students 1, 2 and 3 contested the access, equity and scholarship promised by reform. They tell a different story about reform, about how it denied them positive discrimination. This category of student finds it very difficult to manage the time between work and study in Kathmandu. The reform made it impossible for working students to attain newly introduced high-profile courses of studies. These students were not informed about the existence of scholarships, which could have helped them to cope financially and to find more time for study. I have reduced the interview text fonts to 10-point size for reasons of space.

Student 1

Student 1 cooks food for the ambassador to manage his educational expenses. Excerpts:

Q: Can you tell me about yourself ?

A: Please don't write any complaint about my *malik* [master]. Please make no negative comments about him. Please don't write anything in newspapers that I am working in my *malik's* house and studying.

Where is your home?

Bardiya

How did you happen to stay in your malik's house?

I replaced my brother, who is now gone abroad for employment.

How do you get money for your study then?

I get some *kbarchapani* from my *malik* and some from home.

Where do you live?

Dhumbarahi

When does your class begin?

At 6 am. But I have to cook for my *malik* before I make it to college so I often get delayed going to my college.

What are your problems now?

Padnasakirakhyachaina (not being able to concentrate on studies).

Why?

You know I am a cook in somebody's home and it is been hard to manage time between work and study.

Are you a janajati?

Yes, I am

Did anyone tell you about scholarships?

No, nobody told me about this.

Why is your teacher absent today?

Don't know

What class was this?

Accounts

Thank you

Student 1 cooks food for the ambassador to manage his educational expenses he understands as *kebarchapani* (spoken in Nepali). The word *kebarchapani* cannot be replaced by the words “education finances” in English; only an approximation can be provided. It arises out of a unique biography of the student in the specific context of Nepal, or to put it in Foucault's term, *kebarchapani* is a “contingent body of expression” (Foucault, 2002, pp. 167–168). He studies a BBS part-time while working as a housemaid for the former Nepali ambassador to France or Switzerland [he was unsure which country]. He contests the scholarship and accessibility component of reform as he finds there is a lot of hardship involved finding the time between work and study.

Student 2

Student 2 repairs mobile phones to fund his attendance at college

What is your name?

Bijay. I am from Palpa, Tansen.

What do you study?

BBS II year.

Where do you live?

I live with *afnoo manche* (relatives)

Have you heard about any scholarships?

Nobody told me about any. You are the first one

How do you manage your finances for study?

I live with my sister and brother-in-law... help repair mobile phones in a shop. They help me financially, but it is hard for me. I have to stay in the shop repairing mobile phones all day; I can't concentrate on studies.

Thank you

Student 3

Student 3 teaches LKG in order to support her studies

What is your name?

Anamika (Janajati)

Where do you live?

I live in a rented room in Arubari, Kathmandu, with my brother.

How do you manage your finances for study?

My brother works in a furniture shop to support me. But I also teach in UKG at a private school. I get Rs 3,000 a month. With this I have to manage everything. The bus fare from my home to college alone is Rs 600 a month. College fees are Rs 350 every month. Besides, living costs are very high in Kathmandu. My problem is to manage finances and time between work and study. I get hardly one hour a day to concentrate on my studies.

Why did you choose a BA and BBS, and not a BBA?

BBA is a full-time study programme meant only for regulars who have lot of money; its costs are so high that I could only dream about it [students 1 and 2 nod their heads].

Any other problems you face?

Load shedding. By the time I am home after work, I feel so tired. There is no electricity. How can I do my homework?

What is your main problem?

Income! [Reply all the three] ... but also managing time between work and study.

What is income?

Money (all reply).

How much time do you devote to study?

A total of one and half hours a day [two others nod their heads]. Another problem is we don't have regular and full classes. Teachers do not regularly take classes.

Thank you

Summing up, officially, students 1 and 3 are entitled to a scholarship or some other forms of positive discrimination because they belong to the Janajati category ("low born"). Student 2 is not entitled to a scholarship because he is "high born". But, in practice, none of them received any scholarship. Nor did they reflect the official assumptions about high-born people being automatically capable of self-financing their education and low-born being incapable of doing so. Student 1 cooked food, student 2 helped his brother repair mobile phones, and student 3 taught LKG in a low-fee paying private school to manage her education finances. Each of them had a part-time job unique to them. They worked long hours and, consequently, spent less time on studies. All of them came from rural areas of Nepal. These students undermined the original aim of the reform, which presupposed that all the needy and deserving students get scholarships and financial assistance to access higher education. These students did not reflect any correlation between birth (caste) and poverty or affluence and, hence, challenged the notion of positive discrimination.

Assuming that a high caste person was born rich without the need for a scholarship, then Student 2 demonstrated a different reality; he had to work

practically a whole day at a mobile repair shop in Kathmandu and was left with little or no time to study. He did not receive a salary, unlike Student 3, who got a small *kbarchapani* for his living expenses and bus fares to college from his big brother. By introducing full tuition fees and full-time study programmes, the reform made it impossible for these working students in Nepal to attend the high-profile job-oriented education programmes introduced by the reform. For these categories of students, the reform had no meaning. All of the three cases contested the claims made by the reform that had originally promised them easy accessibility to employment-oriented quality higher education. At the outset, in Foucault's term, the "dividing practices"⁴⁴ of the past (example, the caste system) have simply been transformed into "focusing practices" or individuation in the present. Assuming that this form of power puts emphasis on surveillance and focuses on specific individuals, giving them a new hope for their existence in the world through positive discriminatory practices, the reform placed the above categories of students off the radar screen. Thus, the social justice assured by the reform via discriminatory scholarship was a promise that was impossible to keep. Rather than achieve such an aim, the discourse and practice of reform actually created more injustice by denying them access to high-profile full-time study programs.

7.1.3 Student discourses of employability, global mobility and future economic security

The second context in which this interview was conducted was concerned with a different group of students with different life circumstances and who called themselves "luckier" than the previous categories. The discourse of higher education had fostered the "lucky" and *bidesh* [abroad] subjectivity. This section will examine the promise made by reform regarding national development via students' employability and future security accruing from their access to quality higher education and enhanced academic qualifications. In drawing up the new policy framework, the World Bank claimed it had held extensive consultations with the "stakeholders", which included students "representing a variety

44 "...those procedures which, through classification and categorization, distribute, contain, manipulate, and control people. Such methods divide people from each other and within themselves, giving them an identity which is both social and personal. In *Madness and Civilization* (1967), *The Birth of the Clinic* (1975), and *Discipline and Punish* (1977), Foucault shows that "dividing practices" interconnect with the growth of the social sciences, that they relate historically to humanitarian rhetoric on reform and progress ... usually applied to dominated groups" (Kenway, 1990, pp. 167–213).

of schools of thought” (SHEP, 2007, p. 127). In addition to the above, this chapter will put to the test promises made by the politicians and the donors to create a peaceful environment for everyone to live and work in Nepal after the April 2006 “revolution”, which provided the immediate launch pad for the present neo-liberal reform movement. How do students review that claim? The key theme to be resolved in this section is the contest between policy and practice, mainly how, despite such a promise to make Nepal peaceful and prosperous to live and work in, more young people and graduates are restless to leave Nepal? The “*bidesh*” subjectivity was fostered by the discourse of higher education tied to the international credit transfer facility on the one hand, and, on the other, the increasing domestic violence and political turmoil through which these young graduates see the unfolding of an uncertain and insecure future in Nepal.

The idea of a national university conceived by the NNEPC in 1956 was to stop the drain of wealth to India in the form of large exoduses of students to pursue studies in Indian universities by paying money (NNEPC 1956, p. 127). The Nepal National Education Planning Commission was then deeply concerned about graduates seeing their country “unrealistically” with “foreign spectacles” (ibid, p. 128). Half a century down the road, the exact opposite of what was thought would happen occurred: the country has descended into chaos and a “fragile state” has been created – one in which many youths and graduates find it increasingly difficult to live and work.

In sum, instead of creating the conditions necessary for the graduates to live and work in Nepal, the discourse of higher education reform, shaped by the developmental vision of the state and sustained by the international aid industry, has led them to question “why did you come back to Nepal?” This was the first question I was thrown upon my arrival in Kathmandu after doing my master’s degree in Europe in 2009. The most important discourse that structured this foreign thinking was “development”. This discourse fosters the *bidesh* subjectivity and structures a different sense of reality to imagine development as residing outside the country. I myself was flummoxed by that question, “You ought not to have returned to Nepal.” This statement was uttered not just by relatives and friends but also by distant relatives.

When this study was carried out, most students I interviewed shared their dreams of settling in the US, Denmark, Canada or Australia. When asked why, they often answered: “It is difficult to live and work in Nepal”. Many youths and students clung to the hope of securing a US DV or a Danish Green Card to secure an exit from Nepal in the belief that a dignified job, social security

and an easy life were not available in Nepal. My own *Sauni's* [landlady's] son and her daughter, who had every comfort in Kathmandu and had obtained engineering degrees in India, were packing off to the US and London respectively. They grilled me: "what really brought you back to Nepal?" If it was wealth that was needed in Nepal, they had all the comforts of life in Kathmandu, including an expansive, modern five-storey bungalow and other properties, but they were looking for an exit from Nepal. Whereas they were seeking an outlet from Nepal, I was returning with barely a master's degree certificate, which surprised them the most. Soon, Samir called me from Sydney inquiring about my "next journey of life". Samir and Nimesh had recently purchased homes in Sydney. Ishwor stayed in London, Puru left for Kuala Lumpur, Bhuwan settled down in Burlington, and Manish in New York. Back in 2003, we all were part of a family working for *The Kathmandu Post* while still clawing our way through university. Back then we had a glimmer of hope of going to *bidesh*, mainly to US or Europe and live in modern cities. By 2006, I left for Copenhagen to do my master's. By 2012, when this fieldwork was conducted, nearly all of my close circles of friends and relatives had left Nepal and were scattered all over the world.

When I finished my undergraduate degree in 2000, the development discourse had had its colonising effect on me, and it made me think of the West as the only place to be wealthy, happy, and comely. This discourse was powerful enough to provoke at least half a million youths from Nepal to go to the Gulf countries and another half a million to the industrialised North (see Gillner, 2007). This discourse is powerful: it wills us to action in search of cash and comfort. The effects it brings can never be summed up in the totality of pain or pleasures. Here is a form of power whose effects are both positive and negative. While giving to some such a comfort, it nevertheless denies the same to others. According to a recent CNN Freedom Project, every day, there was one dead body of a Nepali youth in the Gulf returning in a coffin. Here, "development" is silent on the death and destruction it creates and circulates only positively. In 2013 alone, an estimated 200 Nepali workers died in poor working conditions in the Gulf countries; others were building the World Cup stadium. Despite the death and destruction, according to recent media reports in Nepal, at least 1,300 Nepali youths flee Nepal every day. Several of them work in the murky world of armed conflicts in the Middle East. When this study was conducted, thousands of youths swarmed foreign embassies for work and study visas. Hundreds queued up at the airport immigration office every day, bidding farewell to families and friends as they headed to foreign countries with hyp-

notic dreams of experiencing the *bikas* their own country had denied them. The “development” discourse has shifted the struggle of life from the farms in the Himalayas where the villagers worked and lived unruffled by phantoms of ambition for modernisation (as demonstrated by Dr. Wood in his Nepal diary) to one of desire for cash. The present education policy is oriented to that imaginary of *bikas* and a cash economy, the service sector, industries, and the global knowledge economy, even as such things remain a distant goal in Nepal.

Graduates completing their final semesters contemplated on what would be the rightful country to belong to in the future? The present discourse of higher education reform picked up those young graduates’ modern dreams of settling in the West. It invented a novel schema to reform higher education by exploiting this dream. It did so by introducing a four-year semester system in place of the previous three-year annual exams, with a credit-transfer facility that automatically guaranteed the graduates overseas study and settlement. These graduates who were already mesmerised by the prospect of experiencing the affluence in the West agreed to pay their colleges large sum of fees. In return, the colleges promised them degree equivalence and the credit transfers required to secure overseas student visas.

The present reform is no less about national development. King Mahendra, King Birendra, Dr. Wood and the World Bank have visualised it, but the practice shifted: the export of graduates from Nepal. The NESP had thought by sending the graduates to do community work as part of doing a master’s thesis more graduates would love to stay in the country and help in the national development process. The present reform led to a mass exodus of graduates. The national policy shifted to foreign employment and remittances to secure Nepal’s economic independence despite the presence of the massive international intervention to do that job. It shifted the free state-supported education system to a “full-fee” private education system requiring the “fragile state” to inject not a penny into the education provision and health of the citizens. The campus chiefs and deans interviewed said reform was about the export of graduates from Nepal to “global markets”. They argued that in a globalised world, it was unnecessary for the graduates to stay only in Nepal; they could live anywhere in the world (as shared by the Dean, Institute of Engineering). The role of international development is not to diminish but to remain crucial in this process. The key puzzle I pointed briefly to in Chapter 1 and in more detail in Chapter 3 about the present policy moment was one of its assumptions that Nepal has a “weak public provision” of education and is the 12th

poorest in the world (see World Bank 2007). The solution prescribed was the less intervening role of the state in higher education.

The second puzzle to solve was the “positive discrimination” included in the policy. This was a principle based on the belief that some people in Nepal continue to live in oppression because of the caste system practised and enforced by the ruling block (the monarchy) in the past. Informed by the works of the liberal and modernist scholars handsomely funded by Western governments and their universities, that highly ambiguous notion of positive discriminatory practices was used to frame the notion of accessibility to higher education and natural resources through which alleged social injustice in Nepal was to be corrected. Known as the “cost-sharing” approach to higher education reform, it was assumed that certain social groups born to a high caste were ready to meet all their educational expenses without the need of state intervention. The aim was to create social justice and harmony in Nepal in the belief that in the past, there was nothing but hatred and discord everywhere. The immediate launch pad for these ideas was provided by the SHEP via the decisive historical break in 2006 through which politicians and Western donors promised to create a peaceful environment for everyone to live and work in in Nepal.

As it emerged, between the promises made and the execution of the promises, roughly after six years, the political turmoil worsened. Over 1,200 strikes were organised, costing Nepal Rs. 117 billion in loss (see Shrestha and Chaudhary, 2013). Over two million unemployed youths and graduates left the country and the interim parliament was dissolved. Prolonged political turmoil, a large exodus of youths, slow economic growth, and unemployment marked the decade after the so-called April 2006 “revolution” (see Sapkota, 2013). Nepal was christened the “fragile state” – meaning a country with lowest income in the world, vulnerable to conflict and violence, weak government, and most importantly “difficult to live and work in” (see Berry, 2010). These discourses further widened students’ subjectivity of Nepal as a *territory of difference* from the West (Escobar 2008, emphasis added).

Thousands of graduates mesmerised into leaving Nepal, settling down in Western industrialised countries and experiencing the economic freedom denied by their own country found the four-year undergraduate international style education programme, based on the EU/US semester system-based with credits-transfer facility and degree equivalence, the most viable route to realizing their dreams. The local Nepali cliché for going overseas is *bidesh palayan* (settling overseas). It evokes a romantic imagery of living in abundance of wealth, health and pleasure of everyday life. The only way to secure a lawful

exit from Nepal to that imaginative geography of progress was a US diversity visa and, more recently, Denmark's green cards, but they were too limited. A few 'lucky' ones who arrive here confront with harsh realities of having to cope with local language and compete with their Western counterparts (exempted from tuition fee) for part time jobs to pay fees to attend colleges and universities. In Copenhagen, we frequently meet to play football. We also meet to celebrate Hindu festivities. As in Nepal, we meet each other frequently and chat. Many do menial jobs like cleaning even after graduation as they eventually settle here. Yet, they find this struggle worth than to return to their own country which had fallen too low on the global development index.

With the introduction of the four-year semester with an automatic transfer of credits and qualification recognition, more avenues have been opened to the students to secure their way out of Nepal. Parents are willing to sell properties or take out loans to send their children to *bidesh* all in the hope of a secured future that they believe is not in Nepal any more but in the West, that dominant imaginative geography of progress fostered by the discourse of development. Here, education is seen as a social ladder, with its first step in Kathmandu and the last step in the Western capitals. The new Western-style semester system introduced by TU campuses under the World Bank-assisted neoliberal reform promised overseas student visas and possibility of international career and, hence, was hugely popular. On previous occasions, the three-year bachelor degree completed on an annual exams-based system had not assured them of their automatic recognition in the West without going through several tests. The present reform picked up on that problem and introduced a four-year semester model framed by the idea of globalisation and the knowledge economy as requiring graduates to compete in a "global skills race" (see Institute of Engineering, 2013, Strategic Vision). Incidentally, the Institute of Engineering was the first to implement the "cost-sharing" approach to reform in 1998. Following the Institute of Engineering, more TU public campuses applied for the World Bank's grants to orient their courses of study to "global skills race" and market demands. With the launch of the present reform moment, public TU campuses, which cater to more than 90 percent of student enrolment in Nepal, joined in the scramble for the export of graduates. In so doing, the national state hoped to accumulate more foreign remittances to secure Nepal's economic development. Until now, foreign remittances were sent by blue-collar workers working in India, Malaysia and the Gulf countries. With the introduction of a Western style semester system and credits-transfer facility, it aims to send more skilled graduates to the Western industrialised countries in

the hope of a future increase in remittance and knowledge transfer. The more students secured their overseas study and work visas, the more the quality of the education was the logic of the reform. The following excerpts show how the students responded:

A *guf-gaf*⁴⁵ with engineering undergraduates

Site: Institute of Engineering, Kathmandu.

Focus: Students of BE Mechanical Engineering, IOE (waiting for transcripts to move to foreign countries).

In this section, I introduce a bunch of new engineering graduates, who enacted the discourse of higher education totally differently from those categories of students who had difficulty in managing *kbarchapani* and time between studies and work. These engineering graduates had no qualms about *kbarchapani* but had genuine concerns regarding future job security in Nepal. However, these categories of students were the happiest I encountered, and who were assured an easy exit from Nepal to experience Western affluence. With this initial reflection, I shall next present the case stories of five young BE engineering graduates who were preparing to leave Nepal for overseas education, career and settlements unable to satisfy themselves in Nepal. The original aim of the reform (development of Nepal) via graduates' productive efficiency shifted to the export of skilled graduates to foreign countries. In an interview, the Dean, IOE, made this clear:

Because of globalization, we all have a particular standard. Meeting this standard is also called quality. That means we are producing human resource which is competent and capable enough in the global market. And of course they will have better employability in the country but will not only stay within the confines of the national border.

The dean said it was no longer necessary for a graduate to stay only in one country or his hometown in a globalised world. I show how the students enacted this discourse of higher education through the following sample interview texts:

45 The Nepali equivalent of an informal chat.

Table 10

Interview Category: Students” responses to higher education reform			
Categories	Grade	Institute	Key proposition
Student 5 Pyuthan	BE	Institute of Engineer- ing IoE	“More than 50 percent of my colleagues have got jobs.”
Student 6 Kathmandu	BE	IoE	“In two years from now, most of the students from our cohort will be abroad [<i>bidesh</i>].”
Student 7 Bhaktapur	BE	IoE	“I am preparing to go to the US ... waiting for the transcript.”
Student 8 Khotang	BE	IoE	“I am thinking about study and settlement abroad”.

To maintain confidentiality and protect the names of the students, I used their hometown names in brackets. This is required for the reader to make sense of the geographic distributions of the student population data.

On Friday, November 30, 2012, in the Institute of Engineering (IOE), Pulchowk Engineering Campus, Lalitpur, a group of students was basking in the winter sun and relaxing on the grassy lawn. They were waiting for the arrival of the transcripts of records from the OCE to travel abroad for further studies, jobs and settlement. These categories of students who were shaped by decentralisation called themselves “lucky” in comparison to their peers who were continuing to study under centralisation. Their campus had become decentralised in 1992 when a World Bank delegation arrived in Kathmandu reversing the order of thinking from centralisation to decentralization. By establishing the link between education and the political events of 1990, decentralization was introduced. I was there to examine the enactment of this discourse when I met them sitting in the sun. They had just finished their four-year bachelor degree in engineering (BE mechanical engineering) and were making future plans when I spotted them by a sheer coincidence. Unlike the students who cooked food for others or repaired mobile phones to go to college and who saw bleak prospects for their future wellbeing, these categories of students shared completely different views about higher education and their future possibilities. Most of them were waiting for their transcripts to apply for studying abroad.

I followed an exploratory method of interview. I prefer to call it a “chat” (my respondents preferred to call it a “guf-gaf”), an informal, verbal, face-to-face talk, without any direction or structure. I took no authoritative posture,

but acted as one among equals in the group while controlling the flow of the discussion. It was an outdoor chat and we all sat around on the grassy lawn talking informally in the warm winter sun. I acted like a coordinator although I took no authoritative position. My questions were unstructured, open-ended ones. From the interviews, I gathered the following key themes and categories.

Student 4 contests the decentralisation discourse

I directed a general question to the group about whether they had seen any dramatic changes in their campus during their last four years. Student 4 volunteered to reply.

When the TU was shutdown, our institute also was affected. Even if our institute publishes the results on time, students have to go to the centre [Balkhu] to collect their transcripts [certificates]. It takes us 45 days to get the transcript. Still, we are called luckier students in comparison to those in arts, social science and humanities. We hoped autonomy would solve this problem.

Student 4 is doing a four-year BE in mechanical engineering. He said nothing new had taken place at his campus in the last four years of his education. He said that despite decentralisation reform, the students still had to wait several months, even years, for a decision of the centre to get a new teacher or a new study programme. He said another problem is the delay caused by the university in publishing results and conducting exams, which has delayed students' continuing their further education and getting employed, added an extra financial burden. He said the campus administration is slow to act, being dependent on the centre. "When the TU is shutdown, our institute also is affected. So there is no real change that we can see." "Decentralisation" is supposed to be reform, and it should have decentralised the job of publishing the results locally. But students continued to visit the centre (Balkhu, Kathmandu) to collect their transcripts (certificates). "Still, we are called 'luckier' students in comparison to those in arts, social science and humanities." Student 4 believed "decentralisation" had introduced no significant differences compared to centralisation. "It still takes us 45 days to get the transcript. We hoped autonomy would solve this problem." The "lucky" student subjectivity appeared as one effect of the reform. Next, I examine the enactment of the discourse of higher education reform via students' employment and *bidesh* subjectivity.

Students' discourses of employment and *bidesh*

Student 4: When compared with other faculties, mechanical engineering is demanded more in the employment market. For example, a week after our results were published, out of 46 in our batch, 25 had already got jobs.

Student 5: More than 50 percent of our colleagues have got jobs a week after the results were published.

Student 6: I was among those who got a job. Now I am the managing director of an NGO, *Hamro Prabidi Ramro Nepal*, in Kathmandu's Juhagal.

Student 5: I have already got a job as a teaching assistant. Of the total of 46 students in our class, 25 of us have already got jobs.

Student 6: Over 50 percent have got jobs. But most of us will leave for abroad. These jobs are temporary and do not fulfil our aspirations [others nod their heads].

Student 7: I am preparing to go to *bidesh* ... [pauses for a while] the US. But the OCE is a problem...it delayed my transcripts and other certificates. Anyway, I have to apply to US colleges this year. I will surely go next year. First, I am going to study a masters in design and production. These subjects are in great demand in the international markets. So I will be able to get a job anywhere in the world. At first, I thought of Europe but there are less possibilities for employment. Besides, language is an issue. There are more possibilities for employment in the US after my masters degree. But in Europe, though the opportunities for scholarships are high, they kick you out of there as soon as your masters is over.

Student 8: In two years from now, more than 25 of our friends from our batch will be abroad (all five students nod their heads).

Student 4: After doing engineering, our family, relatives and society expect a lot from us. But the government and the private sector provide us with very small salaries and poor facilities to work in Nepal. So, in order to fulfil the aspirations of our family, we are forced to go abroad. If there were good salaries and facilities and a secure environment created here in Nepal, this trend would be reversed (others nod).

The above categories of students enacted the discourse of higher education reform via employment subjectivity. The discourse has fostered the subjectivity of thinking that education is self-evidently about employment. As a form of practice, most students found jobs in various industries. However, Student 6 revealed that ultimately most graduates were unhappy with their job security in

Nepal and were soon to go abroad in search of better opportunities. Thus, they contested the inclusive, prosperous and secured future promised by the reform. If the reform was about creating economic development in Nepal through the cultivation of the graduates' productive efficiency, the practice was leading to the exodus of the graduates from Nepal. The policy is towards remaking the Nepalese higher education in the global imaginative space of economic prosperity. The practice is geared to preparing the students to experience that ideal of "good life" residing outside their own country in the "cosmopolitan images of the north" (Madsen and Carney 2011, p. 116, emphasis added). Rather than the students themselves making these choices freely by mobilizing their agency, the forces outside their realm are working on their selves as they undertake a new journey to that make-believe world of progress.

In what followed, most engineering students I met were waiting for their transcripts to arrive from the Office of the Controller of Examinations [Balkhu] to move to that imagined world they associated with abundance. Student 8 was panicky about missing the deadlines for US university applications by the time the transcript would arrive at her college. These students contested the original aim of decentralisation, which they found less helpful in securing transcripts on time.

Student 8: I am waiting for the transcripts to arrive from Balkhu to go to the USA. It takes 45 days more from the date of publication of exam results to get my transcripts. This delayed me in seeking admission to US colleges.

Student 4: By the time the transcripts come from Balkhu, some universities in the US will have already closed admissions for this session. We have to wait for another academic session. The same is true of some companies which come to us with job offers: there will be no transcripts in our hands for applying. This is the problem we face now. That's why we pressed for independence for our campus [others nod their heads as they look on].

A *guf-gaf* with BBA students

In this section, I introduce a *guf-gaf* with the BBA students as they enact the discourse of decentralisation. This *guf-gaf* was conducted with a group of first, third and final semester BBA students. I asked these categories of students, whose course was described as "hot cake" by a World Bank education specialist, to share their future dreams and expectations. The aim here was to understand the effects of decentralisation rules that had fostered "lucky" and "good" student subjectivities. Instead of arguing that the students have dis-

covered themselves “lucky” or “good” out of their autonomous capacity to reason, the analysis is directed at the power/knowledge that constructs these categories. Their teacher was absent and I had the opportunity to meet them in their classroom. Earlier, the campus administrator had said on record that the teachers who teach at the BBA block were never late to class, let alone bunk off classes. He had repeatedly said the reform ended the “disease of absenteeism”. He assumed that teachers’ absenteeism was caused by the centralisation of education. The reform had promised to put an end to that practice without considering teachers’ salaries and other working conditions. Rather, they felt more insecure after the reform replaced the state with parents and students as their guarantor of their salaries. The campus administrators had directed me to the BBA block to find the evidence of how his teachers had become highly regular attendants to class after decentralisation. To the utter surprise of the campus chief, I met a group of students at the verandah of the campus building who said their teacher had not turned up. The campus management didn’t know that one of the teachers was absent. As it turned out, not all of the teachers were regular in their attendance; some continued to bunk off or were late for class. For the next month, I regularly visited this campus.

Taking advantage of that situation (an absentee teacher), I asked the students if they were willing to talk to me and make use of their freetime. They all nodded their approval and we began talking. Seven students volunteered to stay in the class as others left. Another round of group interviews was conducted in the cafeteria. The next week, we again met at the cafeteria. This time we had more intense and informal discussions over tea and biscuits. The classroom discussion was short and the students did not reveal much as the campus director and the administrator poked their noses through the window gesturing to the students to talk only highly of the reform. Therefore, the informal setting was necessary to get an insight into the lived world of the students. I also went to cinemas and restaurants with a few more students from other colleges to gather more perspectives from them, and learn about their dreams and future aspirations. A few of them were my neighbours and we knew each other. My main focus was the BBA students, who were named “good”, “best” and “lucky” by their management. We sat around tables in the campus cafeteria drinking tea. I ordered some biscuits for the students before we started the chat. I threw out an open-ended general question to the group to answer after explaining the purpose of the interview.

Question: I am here to study the reform implemented by your institute. Your

campus management repeatedly told me to talk to you when asked to show me what “reform” looks like. Shanker Dev Campus is the first institute in Nepal to introduce a BBA programme with a US/EU-style semester system and is hailed in the country as the “number-one” job-oriented, market-driven business study programme that focuses on industries, the banking sector, problem-solving, economic issues, marketing and finance, with an emphasis on an interdisciplinary approach to learning and opportunity to studying and working in foreign countries. Can you share your experiences with me? What is so special about the BBA? Please start with your names before you begin.

Student 1: I am Shyam. I am a third-year BBA student. Currently in Nepal, financial institutes are increasing, and therefore the scope of BBA is also rising. Previous education was theory based, now it is practically oriented, without which a person cannot win a competition.

Student 2: I am Prasikshya. I am from Kathmandu. I chose to study the BBA because our BBA model is matched with the US model. I also chose the BBA because our courses focus on research, analysis and presentation skills. I don’t know exactly what I will do after my BBA. I might continue with my MBA in TU or in the US. I want to go abroad, but there is a problem ... (pause). I need to wait for a year, so it is a waste of time.

Student 3: I am Sanchita, I am from Biratnagar. I chose the BBA because it is internationally valid. I am doing my seventh semester. Second, I chose the BBA because the course of study is quite different. There is no limit to job opportunities for BBA students. Our grading system is internationally valid because we have credit-transfer facilities. In a way, the BBS has been modernised and renamed the BBA. In the BBS, only limited subjects are taught, but in the BBA we have more subjects to study, such as psychology, sociology, geography, finance and marketing. I have seen good scope for the BBA ... I have heard that the MBA is coming to our campus soon. The TU is not allowing other private colleges to open an MBA, and you know this means our campus will be very popular.

Student 4: I am Bhuwan from Dolakha. I first had no interest in the BBA. I did my plus 2 in science but had no interest in science. I don’t know why I studied science [all laugh]. I heard about the BBA after I finished my plus 2 and then discussed my plans with my parents, who encouraged me to join the BBA. Also, I heard about the reputation of this campus.

All of the four students enacted the discourse of the BBA as a new and different study programme from the others and, hence, that it was “reform”. Student 1 said he chose the BBA because it was a practically-oriented study programme preparing him to face “competition” (said proudly). The subject “competition” was fostered here by the thinking and practice of decentralisa-

tion. Student 2 took the BBA because it is matched with the US education system. Student 3 chose the BBA because it was internationally validated by the credit-transfer facility. Student 4 joined the BBA because his parents suggested it to him. All of the four students interviewed said the BBA was evidently different from other study programmes because it offered them: 1) a credit-transfer facility to foreign universities; 2) great scope in the job markets; 3) quick results/transcripts; and 4) classes undisrupted by strikes and lockouts. To recall Lather (2004), here was a particular technology of governmentality used to regulate behaviour and render populations productive via a “biopolitics” that seek to “minimize resistance and maximize wealth stimulation.” (ibid, p. 765). Here was a technology of the self deployed by power to make the students self-conscious of their impending future through which an automatic obedience was sought from the students to pay tuition fee voluntarily without the use of force. As a technique, it arouses desire and fear of an impending future of being unemployed, unkempt or poor. As a concrete form of practice, the above category of students was taken to modern cities in India during their final semester (8th) as part of their educational tours that made them believe they are evidently “good”, “better” and “luckier” than their BBS peers. The same group of students shared their experiences of educational tours in India’s cities of Mumbai, Delhi and Kolkata as they volunteered to chat once again. I captured the following subject positions from their experiences shaped by the ongoing discourse and practice of higher education reform.

Student 2: We were taken to so many different places in India, including Bombay and Goa. We paid Rs. 5,000 each for the trip. There is also another reason: in the BBA class, students must have an 80 percent attendance. The opposite is the case in the BBS. In the BBA, attendance is compulsory, so the students come to class. Besides, exams are conducted on time and the course has to be completed in a timely manner.

Student 3: There is no question of postponement of exams in the BBA. In the BBS, we often hear about exams being postponed. Ours is different; it may be “preponed”, but never postponed (laughs).

Student 2: Our course must be completed on time; that’s why it is like this (said proudly).

Student 3: In the BBS, there are so many complaints. In ours, there are no complaints. At first this classroom was meant for the BBS. They had too many students. Now, this classroom is for the BBA. There are more than a hundred students in one

BBS class. In our class we have only 30 students. But in terms of infrastructure, we are not happy. We don't have lockers or drawers in our desks. Our class is also not clean. Desks and benches are not good. Chairs are scattered here and there. The room is also unclean.

Student 2 was pleasantly surprised to see Bombay and Goa, India's two biggest modern cities. She believes she would not have got any opportunity to visit these cities had she joined the BBS block (projected by the management as a place for "unruly" students seated haphazardly). Only the students from the BBA block were shown those cities. Prasikshya believed that this happened because she agreed to pay full tuition fee whereas her BBS peers paid much less. Prasikshya was made to believe that the Nepali state is really "weak" or "fragile". She thought an education system organised under the "weak" state would also be weak. She decided to join the privately-run BBA programme as an alternative to the "weak state". For her, the BBA was better and a dream come true. Prasikshya was upbeat about her future prospects. She had no qualms about paying high tuition fees because she felt more secure about her future and her parents were willing to invest in her education. But the reform brought no new infrastructure except for the partitioning of the old campus building into two by a high "iron curtain". Even though each student paid over Rs. 308,000, they were not given any lockers. Their desks had no drawers. The classroom was cold; the floor had a lot of holes, and it needed basic repairs and maintenance. Old flaking desks and benches had been painted red at the last minute and made to appear new and shining. The campus did not even provide drinking water to the students, let alone sponsor their study trips. These students brought their own water and lunch packs to the campus, and paid an additional Rs 5,000 each for their study tour on top of paying large tuition fees. When asked to comment on the ongoing reform, a World Bank education specialist for Nepal described the BBA as a "hot cake". The Bank specialist, who did not allow interview to be recorded or his name to be quoted, said in a face-to-face interview that the universities of California, Cambridge and London had more autonomy; higher education in Nepal could not be any different. Here, he assumed the local campus in Nepal that runs under the stingiest grant from the government was a true replica of those foreign universities. This campus had collected an additional Rs 1 million from the shop outlets it rented out to businesses but forced the students to study in a suffocatingly congested and unhygienic room. For those people whose thoughts are colonized by the globalization of knowledge, they will be quick to blame on the people of Nepal or their government for this overcrowding and scanty resources. Viewing Nepal

from the high watermarks of Western culture, the intelligibility of reform will come only from the copy of the European or American “original” (paraphrasing Madsen and Carney, 2011, p. 116). Assuming that the Nepali national state was reduced to a clientele dependency on the Bank and its shareholders for loans and policy directives, this reform was not moving smoothly in the direction the Bank and its shareholders had so wished to accumulate profit from their business or dominate international relations. Here was a reform that was concerned more with how to raise student fee after the Nepali state failed to generate its own finances to provide the European and American “originals”.

How to make the students voluntarily part with their money to the college gripped the campus management after the World Bank’s neo-liberal reform project introduced decentralisation rules in the campus that were allegedly necessary to dismantle the centralised rules. Rather than convince the entire students in the campus to study the new courses it introduced, it gathered a small group of full-fee students at one end of the building. These students were lured by the new EU/US semester-style, four-year undergraduate degree that promised them an exit to foreign countries. In so doing, this arrangement overcame the students’ concerns about the hopelessly poor study environment offered to them by the campus and full tuition demanded of them. Prasikshya learnt from her sister prior to joining the campus that even though the BBA cost a lot of money, it would assure her of a job, amazing study tours and adventures, and, more importantly, a guarantee to overseas study and possibly a future career abroad. For Prasikshya, what was more important than a clean place to study was her concerns for future job security and overseas study to be allayed.

Prasikshya and her classmates were not shown rural living as part of their study tour. During the Panchayat period (see Policy Moment II, Chapter 3), the reform emphasised how the graduates should experience rural lives in the country as part of doing a masters thesis. In contrast, the present one experienced by Prasikshya was directed at arousing international consciousness and cosmopolitan dreams. Thus, it is a reversal of the previous structure. Prasikshya and her classmates were taken to Mumbai city as part of that rehearsal. The 1950s vision of higher education as spelled out in the report of the NNEPC (see Policy Moment I, Chapter 3) was “a center of excellence fully funded by the state, aimed at training a critical mass of graduates to take up the challenging task of nation-building”. The present one (Policy Moment 3) shifted that understanding to an international career. Instead of training a critical mass to take up the challenging task of nation-building, the policy is to supply a compe-

tent and capable manpower to the industrialised world by making the students their own entrepreneurs of education and their future security.

Apart paying the entire cost of her education (Rs. 308,000), Prasikshya paid Rs 5,000 for the study trip through her college management. Prasikshya unburdened the state, which did not have to spend a dime on her study tour, let alone her education or health insurance. She brought her own water, lunch, and books and stationery to college. Rather than the “fragile state” having to invest in her education, Prasikshya became a self-entrepreneur of education. Of the 15,000 students vying for the BBA, Prasikshya was among the “luckiest” 80 candidates who won the race. For many of those who did not qualify, private colleges were the last alternative. The discourse of higher education reform has shaped Prasikshya’s and Sanchita’s subjectivities to think of themselves as “luckier” or “better”, or what their campus manager repeatedly remarked as “ramro manche” [good people], in comparison to their BBS peers. Through the technique of individuation: arresting their movements within the building and classrooms, painting old desks and benches, putting up curtains and isolating them from their BBS peers by a high “iron curtain”, a sense of difference was created through which these students were made to believe they were different from their BBS peers. Through their individualised space and through their travels and tours, they developed a different notion of themselves, their place and time from those who did not have the same opportunities in the BBS block. Through the lesson *Why go to university?*, Prasikshya’s and Sanchita’s class was epitomised as a German, Finnish, Swiss or US model that Nepal now follows and the other block as a replica of past Nepal that former reformers had championed. In the Foucauldian sense, the reform deployed a technique of power through spatial technologies to discipline Prasikshya and her colleagues. The “reform” took on its meaning by playing two categories of students against each other through the law of “antagonism” (Foucault, 1991). Applying a modernist methodology, I would have ended up with a conclusion how the “reform” led to the production of social differences or inequality in Nepal by confining them to two different locales and two different times, taking one on a tour and leaving the other uncared for and unrecognised. But most working students who assembled in the BBS block wouldn’t agree. For some 200 who assembled in the BBS block as against 30 in BBA who were taken to tours, their circumstances, interests and motivations were different. For this category of students, the BBS was still a meaningful education programme. The BBS block and its students were not the part of the World Bank’s sponsored reform project. This became the reason why only the BBA block signalled the

reform. The students in the “old” disciplinary block were expected to reform themselves through the signals the “new” students produce in the new block. According to the campus management, this signal was emitted not only by the tip-top condition of the classroom offered to the BBA students but in their act of leaving Nepal to pursue a foreign degree and eventually settle down or fulfil the “global manpower need”. Next, I will discuss what the new students think after doing their BBA.

What comes after the BBA?

I was equally curious to know what these students do after their BBA. Most students contemplated going abroad (bidesh). The management had said 90 of them (the entire first cohort) had already left Nepal. It was not possible to contact those who had already left to capture their subjectivities. However, I interviewed a group of fresh BBA graduates ready to move to foreign countries. The aim was to capture the enactment of the discourse of higher education in terms of the concrete practice it creates in the field of its operation. The aim of the BBA was “to develop socially responsive, creative, and result oriented management professionals to fill up the middle level managerial positions in the rapidly growing business sector in Nepal and abroad” (see the mission statement issued by the Nepal Commerce Campus in Kathmandu). Further inputs to this was provided by the President of the Free Students’ Union of this campus and Teacher 1. Most students demonstrated they wanted to study and work abroad. In the following sample talk transcript, I gathered the perspectives shared by the BBA students. Rather than follow a formal or structured interview the modern scientific order would need, I spent long time with the students mostly in chat. We sat chatting on the verandas, classrooms, and canteens. We even chat on the move. No prior appointment was needed. There was no time-keeper or boundary line in this format of interview. Several students in a class of 30 volunteered to speak during the lunch break and in the class when one of their teachers was absent. This time, I preferred to use their first names and keep the last name anonymous in protecting the identity of the students.

Suman is packing for Germany

I passed my eighth semester recently. I am soon leaving for Germany. We are all in the same batch. Each of us is planning to go abroad [he points to his friends seated next to him who nod their heads in agreement]. I will do my masters in business

or finance. I have chosen Germany because there is free education and the cost of living is very ... (pause) most of my friends are there, they recommended me go to go there.

Pratigya plans to leave Nepal “soon”

I have just finished my eighth semester. I am now planning to study an MBS overseas. I am not decided yet where I will go but certainly I will not stay here in Nepal. I'll go abroad soon.

Raju sees no future in Nepal

I don't want to reveal my name. I am a student of Shanker Dev Campus doing my second years. I completed my diploma in education from India. I feel like we are lagging far behind in education in Nepal when compared with India. I see no future for myself in Nepal. It is really not worth studying here. I have seen many of my friends who have completed their masters but have gotten no jobs. They are so frustrated now. About 15 of my friends are unemployed. They are in Kathmandu. They are now looking for foreign employment for a living. My father left for India to work to pay off the debt I borrowed for my education. I wanted to come to Kathmandu because Kathmandu is developed. I came here in the hope of finding a better college and to study foreign courses to go abroad. I see no future for myself in Nepal [“Raju” requested an anonymous name].

Asking the students to say what they dream of after their BBA/BBS was one way to capture the enactment of the discourse in practice, but before I raised that question to the students, a signboard spoke to them from the campus skyline: “The Co-Op programme USA ... what after BBA?” There was no one discourse of education and no single or few ways of conceptualising the practice taking shape. It appeared in multiple and manifold forms.

Shanker Dev Campus is based at Putalisadak, the commercial heart of the city. This advertisement was placed on a hoarding facing the BBA block directly. It asked the students to contemplate going to the US after they finish their BBA under a “co-op program”. Next to that billboard, I caught an educational counsellor peeping at the students through the window. She organised an “entrance preparation” for the students wanting to pursue an BBA, BIM or BHF/M/BFM. On the first floor of the glass-windowed building stood an advert that offered a “safe abortion”, which is outside the scope of this study but was very much within the discourse enacted in the classroom that told the students to part with their ancestral ways of being when abortion was a deadly crime and unthinkable. On the ground floor stood Asmita Books and Statio-

neries, which sells exam guides, “guess papers” and academic books with their white Western counterparts on the covers depicting a more “beautiful” and advanced world outside Nepal. Sunita (name changed) was pleasantly surprised to see that imaginary world she thought was full of beautiful people (see Figure 9, in *List of Figures*). She expressed her longing with a group of her friends, ““O my god, how beautiful are the whites! Herata kati hau, kati ramra kuire!” [How beautiful are the whites, look girls!]. This form of discourse was one way to understand how social realities are constructed through pedagogic practices. This book at once captured my attention. It left me contemplating how the new academic books had begun to come to Nepal with photographs of the *kuire*. It had not been possible under the sovereign power exercised by King Mahendra (1960–1970) to publish a book like this. Instead, the thought that governed that era was the opposite: “...the clumsy Western imposition was incompatible with Nepal’s traditions, history and objective conditions” (see Rose, 1963, p. 16). The most important question the book gave rise to is: why use only the animated pictures of anonymous white students instead of local Nepali girls and boys or the mountains and rivers of Nepal on the book cover? This question led me to look at previous forms of practice in Nepal.

In the 1950s, academic books and reports carried images of the Buddha, monarchs, Limbu, Magar, Gurung, Tharu, and Rai dances, Jyapus, Khas and Chhetri, wedding processions, wheat harvesting, prayer wheels, lamps, Machhendranath rath jatra, rice terraces, hillsides, pastoral villages, mountain-fed streams weaving through hills, women peeling corn, weaving *saries* and drying grain, temple squares, village gates, Hindu and Buddhist temples, arts, crafts, marketplaces, bridges and trails, schools, and, most noticeably, local Nepali students attired in traditional costumes at university (see *People of Nepal*, 1967). The 1956 report, *Education in Nepal*, was dedicated to King Mahendra. Dor Bahadur Bista dedicated his 1967 book *People of Nepal* to king and country. The comment by an anonymous reviewer who identified himself/herself as “motherland” on the back page states: “The book is a good introduction to Nepal only not for inquisitive foreigners but a useful compendium for Nepalese themselves who want to know about their fellow countrymen.” The 1973 book *Nepal in Perspective*, edited by Pashupati Shumshere J.B. Rana and Kamal P. Malla, and contributed to by Nepal’s anthropologist, Dor Bahadur Bista, and the country’s first geographer, Harka Gurung, among others, carried the national flag of Nepal. How is it that those pictures became at once unsuited to the modern time and purpose? Should Nepalese students not see wildlife and birds on their book covers? Should students not learn about their national

rivers and mountains? What kind of thinking led to the production of euro/US images on academic books? These are questions outside the scope of this study. But it nevertheless left me contemplating the multiple ways of imagining the forms of modern domination that go beyond what Marxist-inspired scholars analyse around the conventional logic of the state and ruling class. Here was a form of power that at once induced someone to speak out and say, “O my god, how beautiful are the whites!”

I next turned to the Kathmandu sky space to look at another form of domination. The largest hoarding board peeping at the students of Shanker Dev Campus was the Harvard Education Consultancy (P.) Ltd., which enthralled most students: “complete abroad study solution!” [See Figure 5, in *List of Figures*]. The next hoarding asked the students to think about going to the US after completing their BBA. Here was a discourse of higher education reform that extended beyond the confines of the campus and utterances of campus leaders to dominate the entire Kathmandu skyline. How can one evaluate this form of practice and discourse of education reform? It is here that I am reminded of the need to look beyond the production sites of the discourse (see Rofel 1997). “We must pay attention not just to the production of discourses but to their consumption as well – and how consumption unexpectedly and in small ways subverts the dominant order” (Rofel, 1997). In *Rethinking modernity: Space and factory discipline in China*, Rofel discusses the spatial disciplining of silk factory workers in China to conclude that by rearranging the spatial modes of authority in the factory, the Chinese state authority had imagined building a modern nation state. These silk factories were constructed as global interconnections, mimicking Western techniques of disciplining. Rofel observed these interconnections in the form of German managers coming to lecture, factory engineers and cadres going to Italy for training, and the American bestseller, *In Search of Excellence* (1982), being used as a handbook. Rofel discovered that under the influence of American Taylorism, the factory workers weaved Western desires and tastes into the clothes they produced instead of Chinese desires and tastes. Instead of Western goods and commodities and transnational flow of cultures into China, it was China exporting such things to the West.

Following Rofel, what emerged in the current discourse and practice of higher education reform was that the state in Nepal looked upon Western modernity as a force that would overcome Nepal’s perceived poverty and archaic past. But the effects it created led the Nepalese to embrace modernity in a way the state had not imagined. The state in Nepal has imagined building a modern Nepali nation state by mimicking the practices of the industrialised West. In

its search for excellent graduates, it embraced neo-liberal reform. But as the graduates demonstrated, instead of contributing to the economic wheel of the nation, through which social transformation similar to the West was imagined in Nepal, they were leaving Nepal to do that job elsewhere in the industrialised countries. These graduates were expected to mimic their Harvard counterparts or their European counterparts. But, in Rofel's sense, instead of the conditions necessary to create Western desires in Nepal, the country was exporting the graduates so produced in Nepal to experience such a desire that remains unfulfilled in Nepal. While Rofel was important for making sense of this form of practice, I found Ferguson complementing that task here.

Intentional plans are always important, but never in quite the way planners imagined ... in the case of a development project in Lesotho, intentional plans interacted with unacknowledged structures and chance events to produce unintended outcomes. (Ferguson, 1994, p. 20)

Ferguson unveils how the World Bank-attempted "unsuccessful" economic development of Lesotho ended up producing an "authorless" outcome, that is, leaving the people themselves to overcome the alleged poverty in ways the reformers themselves are puzzled about. Following this, I couch this effect of the discourse in terms of the unexpected outcomes of higher education reform in Nepal that manifested in the exodus of young and skilled graduates. Here, the neo-liberalism as the dominant form of power/knowledge works at the level of desire orienting the students to experience economic prosperity outside their own country. The discourse of higher education reform despite its propensity to generate this unexpected outcome continues. This takes me back to Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*, where he writes how despite being a failure, prison continues to be used as a corrective device to reform humans. And, how, instead of reducing crime, it multiplied and increased crime or increased the chances for more prisoners to go back to prison than reduce the crimes or functionality of prisons. "Instead of releasing corrected individuals, then, the prison was setting loose a swarm of dangerous delinquents throughout the population ..." (Foucault, in Rabinow, 1984, p. 227).

Following Foucault, I conclude that rather than producing an intended outcomes (skilled graduates who would contribute to the economy of their own country), it made them dream of industrialised countries as perfect places to work and live in. Power/knowledge that deployed the present reform did not obey one order or one rule. It produced results that were complex, that did not confirm to the usual rhetoric of neo-liberalism or the hyperbolic claims to

create social justice and an inclusive society, let alone fulfil graduates' modern dreams that the ideology of development so promised. As Foucault argues, the prison, instead of sending a swarm of corrected prisoners, after normalizing their behaviour, back to society, who would now support law enforcement agencies, it led to more crimes. The prison failed in reducing crime. So did this reform apparatus, while fulfilling certain goals of reform, mainly by introducing student fees to unburden the allegedly "weak" state of its financial obligation to public education, make a certain group of students, without having to resort to costly measures, pay full fees to their campuses. It nevertheless made them to move to foreign countries after graduation in search of better education and future careers.

The sign that reads *Harvard Education Counseling* that now recruits students from Nepal to the US was not originally included in the reform plan. Rather, the idea of reform was to produce educated and skilled person who would contribute to national development. Young graduates, as demonstrated by those in their final semester in the interview and interaction, had made a clear mental map to go overseas for their higher education and permanent settlement. They were willing to surrender large amount of fees to their colleges in the hope of gaining an exit from their own country. The campus assured them the tickets through credit transfer facilities while the counselling centres made money by placing them in Western universities. This reform meant business and profits for some. For others, like the BBA, BE and BTech students, it gave easy access to jobs and foreign settlement. For still others, like Raju and Chaudhary, who had to work and study, it amounted to nothing.

Discourse and practice of entrepreneurship in education

To sum up the effects of the discourse of neo-liberalism in higher education via entrepreneurship, I provide the story of an encounter with a group of agitating parents. Another aim of this section is to unravel the puzzle of how, despite the promise to make higher education a vehicle for social justice through accessible and affordable means of securing better qualifications, the policy produces the opposite effect in practice domains – stringent entrance tests, tighter admission policies, and only those with high test scores and deep pockets getting access. The policy was to make the people their own donors. The idea of individuals as self-motivated entrepreneurs of education, manifested in the field of practice as "self-funded", "private", "full-fee paying" and "regular" students, is assumed to be so necessary to relieve the "weak" state from its burden of providing education. This logic was contested in different

quarters. This title came about after encountering a tussle between UGC officials and a group of parents whose children were prevented from attending the new high-profile courses through an entrance test, depriving them of their chance of choosing their dream institute to study in.

I arrived in Sanothimi, Bhaktapur, on Monday, December 3, 2012, to collect data. The first thing that caught my eye upon entering the UGC premises was a group of parents pleading for their sons' places in engineering – an activity unbecoming of the purpose and aim of the organisation. At the outset, the agitating parents challenged the policy and practice of education. They questioned the credibility of the World Bank to have “deep knowledge of local context” (see SHEP 2007, p. 4). The agitating parents pleading for their sons' admission at the UGC office distracted all my attention. Had it been at St. Xavier's School in Kathmandu, it would be a normal thing. Here was a policy-making body in higher education invaded by agitating parents. This led me to question how the neo-liberal policy that places parents as the contributors of financial resources to higher education takes its form of practice in the field as a theatre of resistance? The reform is oriented towards making the parents “autonomous entrepreneurs” or “entrepreneurs of themselves” (Hursh, 2007, p. 497). The practice is of disallowing their children from attending their dream colleges through the provision of stiff competition.

I was seated next to a group of parents who were lobbying for admission of their sons disqualified by competition at the Institute of Engineering. The UGC was established in Nepal in 1993 by an act of parliament. It allocates and disburses state grants to universities, develops and implements QA standards, and regulates, monitors, and formulates plans and policies for new universities. Now it was entrusted with one more task, albeit unpredictably, to convince the parents whose children were disqualified by stringent entrance tests to stay calm and find alternative, low-ranking private colleges. That would have been one option, but the discourse of higher education reform circulated a story of the Institute of Engineering as the best institute that guarantees them job overseas and constructed the students of this institute as “lucky” subjects. The agitating parents were deeply saddened after their children were rejected by the admission gatekeepers. They had dreamt of how one day their children, wearing vermilion on their foreheads and crowned in marigold, would board the flight to America or Europe with an engineering degree. But now their dreams had turned into nightmares: they were unable to secure places for their children in such a reputable institute.

7.2 Conclusions

If the reform was about making higher education more accessible to all and creating social justice in Nepal through positive discriminatory practices, the practice made it more inaccessible to some. If the reform was about the economic development of Nepal via the cultivation of students' productive efficiency, more students wanted to leave their country after graduation. First, it was puzzling to know who actually got scholarships. During the fieldwork, I found that those with high test scores and deep pockets alone secured their way to newly-introduced high-profile, job-oriented, internationally-accredited study programmes. Some parents whose children were disqualified by the competition knocked at the door of UGC, pleading for a change in the education policy. The knowledge of who deserved special attention for getting scholarship and access was informed by the politics of caste and the class logic of power. Assuming that the caste system was depriving one of access to higher education, the practice led to open competition that valued students' ability to score highly in the entrance test. The notion of positive discrimination was as strange as the caste system. It was inappropriate to think that a positive discriminatory practice was better or worse than the caste system. It was as bad as the caste system. It simply replaced the caste system with new techniques and the new scientific logic of social discrimination. As a historically contingent truth and subject of knowledge, it was soon facing redundancy. If the 1970s thought of "poor" students as those living in villages and included all categories defined by lack of income to access education, the "poor" subject is now simply replaced by a "low birth" social category. As a form of practice, the reform made it more difficult for some working students to attend the new high-profile courses; for others, it secured an easy access. The reform led to the invention of at least four categories of students – "donated", "full-fee", "private" and "regular". As a form of practice, a "full-fee" student or "donation" student paid Rs. 250,000 (US\$2,500) to complete a four-year, BE mechanical engineering entirely funded by the parents, but a regular paid Rs. 24,000 (US\$247) for the same course and was subsidised by the state. Out of 48 students, there were 24 "regular students" in BE final semester year. From nearly a thousand who disqualified for the entry into the limited 24 seats at IOE, a small number of them had been accepted as "private" students in return for tuition fees. This category of students paid at least Rs. 750,000 (US\$ 7,700) [checked and confirmed with the admission/finance officer, IOE]. For still others disqualified by the stiff national competition, private engineering

colleges in Nepal and India had accepted them in return for similar sums of money.

More sub-categories of students were invented from the main four categories and given the names “exceptional” and “top talent”. The reform gave birth to competition, which constructed some students as “heroes”, “top-talent” and “outstanding”, and others as “low-achievers” and “poor” through test scores. A few students who scored highly received a 50 percent scholarship or a tuition waiver; others paid full fees. But no student was admitted into the high-profile courses according to their birth category (caste), poverty or household indicators as originally promised by the reform. All of the students interviewed and cross-checked with the administration records showed there were no positive discriminatory practices. Rather, high test scores in the common entrance exams and an ability to pay tuition fees determined the access in general. For some students who secured access to the high-profile courses via a nationwide competition and who found an exit from Nepal after graduation, this reform meant a victory; for others who didn’t secure it, tears. Here, the notion of “freedom” or “prosperity” resided not within Nepal but in that imaginative place outside Nepal shaped by the singularity of knowledge of “development” that constructs the Nepalese as an object to be developed in social and cultural terms. For still others who studied in colleges untouched by the SHEP, this reform meant absolutely nothing. This reform could never be called good, better or worse, but a problem and practice of power/knowledge immanent in time and peculiar to the present historical era.

In Chapter 6, campus administrators in Kathmandu implementing the decentralisation reform had said with pride that more than 90 students from their campus had already gone to the US through the credit transfer system. They were referring to the new category of students studying the BBA. To recall one of the administrators, the reform had made the campus a supplier of “global manpower”. The effect of the reform in his own words was: “supply of standard manpower targeting the global need”. The campus administrators in Dharan traced the effect of autonomy in higher education to the exodus of at least 50 percent of the graduates they produced to the United States, Canada and Australia [said with pride]. They understood the reform as being designed to meet international manpower needs. The original idea of the reform that appeared in the policy was creating national economic prosperity and a secure and prosperous future for the graduates. The practice contested it. More students found it increasingly difficult to contribute to national development by being employed in a domestic job market that

paid them smaller salaries and provided an insecure environment in which to work. Many students considered frequent shutdowns and political unrest in Nepal as detrimental to their earnings and future security. Students 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8 demonstrated that they wanted to leave Nepal as soon as they received their transcripts. These students challenged the original aim of reform, which was about the economic development of Nepal via the increased productive efficiency of graduates. To analyse this paradox between an education policy oriented to national economic wellbeing and the practice it gave rise to in the form of the mass exodus of graduates, it is at this point that I recall Pigg (1992). What Pigg calls *bikas* charts social territories: it creates the space to think of the less developed and the affluent. As a subject and object of knowledge created by the discourse and practice of education reform, the *bidesh* subjectivity locates Nepal in the *periphery of development* (Pigg, 1992, p. 511). This discourse is powerful for inducing young people to migrate to foreign countries in search of future economic security. A development discourse that filters into the discourse and practice of education conveys its message to the students through signs people in industrialised countries associate with affluence (ibid, p. 501). The diffusion of this “development” knowledge takes place through academic disciplines, including methods of research and teaching that ultimately attain the status of truth (Escobar 1995). In Pigg’s sense, *bikas* becomes an ideology of modernization, which, through pedagogic practice, creates a dichotomy between Nepal and the West. As this thesis demonstrated, Nepal, in this process, becomes distanced from the “developed” North, fostering the *bidesh* subjectivity among the students. Education in this sense becomes a social ladder, with its end point in the West. The introduction of an international credit transfer facility in Nepal offers those with high test scores and deep pockets a ticket for settling abroad as more Nepalese youth and students are willing to become the non-resident Nepalese. To sum up, the reform mediated by the discourse of economic development and April “revolution”, which had promised everyone in Nepal an “open moment” to live in peace and prosperity, created a paradox in which more graduates wanted to leave their country. This reform raises anxieties, hopes and fears as more graduates struggle to find their “rightful” place in the world.

8. Concluding comments

The key operator of the discourse of higher education reform in Nepal described in this thesis was a “play of historical forces” (Foucault, in Barry Smart, 1985, p. 57) or “the shifting relations of power that are constructing and reconstructing the social field of power” (Apple 2010, p. 411). It originated in the historical rupture of 1951 accompanied by Western intervention. In sum, the thesis showed the emergence and disappearance of a succession of regimes of representations that came to shape the policy and practices of higher education reform, first originating in the politics of Cold War, US foreign policy and the presumed need to democratise and modernise in Nepal, and then it showed the emergence of neo-liberal reform sponsored by the World Bank between 1990 and the present. Despite the shifting discursive space to think of higher education in various representations, the discourse of development that places education in the scheme of economic prosperity is the exclusive regime of representation of higher education that continues to the present. I couched this regime of representation as systems of knowledge that link education to an “economy of production and desire” (Escobar, 1995, p. 214). The thesis has shown its emergence in Nepal, beginning in 1951. I couched this regime of power as development institutions that sustain this order of knowledge in Nepal. The thesis disturbed that dominant order of thinking around the reform in Nepal by problematizing the discursive interplay of rules that constructed the object of knowledge “decentralization in higher education” as reform. What the thesis finally discovered was not one global or ideal or everlasting discourse of higher education in a “form”, but a vanishing truth with a set of rules contingent and specific to time and immanent in practice.

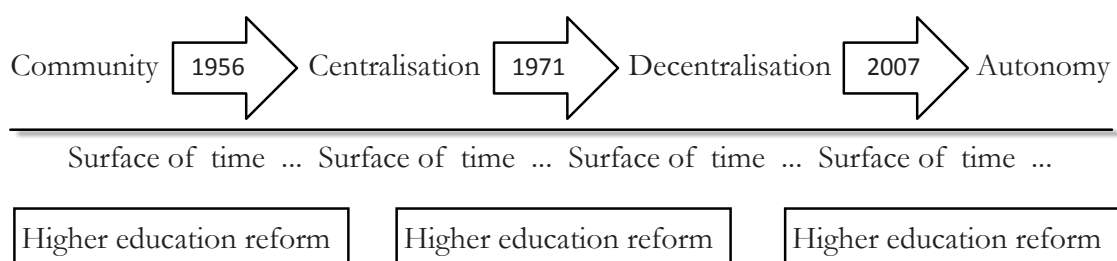
In Part I, I examined the international trend in higher education reform that is reflected in Foucault’s (1972) terms of “a single mind” or “a collective mentality” (p. 4). That single or collective thinking is manifested through the globally legitimated neo-liberal reform that has impacted on OECD countries over the last 30 years (Olssen 2010). Irrespective of differences and diversities, the phenomena used to describe the experiences of OECD countries have

informed the policy and practice of higher education reform in Nepal. In Part II, that is, in the field of practice, I showed that the relationship between the neo-liberal policy and the field of practice existed only at the “meta-theoretical level” (Apple 2010, p. 421), in that, the policy field remained disconnected from the actual field of practice. Here, the idea of reform, namely neo-liberalism, manifested itself in the search for a total history that is impossible. To put it in Foucault’s sense, the neo-liberal reform reduces all the differences and diversities of a society or the world to a totality or a single form, and presents a singular world view and a coherent type of civilization (Foucault, 1972, p. 14). Part II examined that discourse in action where the actors, through their acts of submission and resistance, challenged that collective global consciousness used to inform the policy and practice of higher education reform. The thesis showed a different history of the present that corresponded neither to the notion of past failures nor to the smooth and certain futures envisaged by the reformers. As a form of practice, it brought into existence what came to be known as a “decentralised” and “autonomous” higher education system that was intelligible only in the present. The most important institutional form sustaining this order of thinking and knowledge in Nepal is international “development” partners which establish themselves as a laboratory of power/knowledge. The shift away from monarchy to republic formed the political logic of the decentralized and autonomous higher education. This was not ushering in a fulfilling experience for everyone. If this political shift was so necessary to allow the people of Nepal to regulate their own affairs or enjoy political autonomy, they were being forced into accepting external conditions and knowledge traditions. If the reform was about promoting national culture and identity, it was silent about vanishing local languages. In place of mother tongues, it introduced English as the medium of learning and instruction.

When the actors in the field of practice enacted the discourse of higher education reform in terms of economic happiness, I did not seek to understand such assumptions in a taken-for-granted way but as a subject position shaped by the discourse of development circulated in Nepal and operationalized by aid agency projects. However, I wish to conclude in Foucault’s sense that the developmental modernity that sustains the modern world order is a ‘web’ in which these aid agencies are only one element. In Foucault’s sense, it is naïve to imagine that anyone is free from the problems and practice of power/knowledge sustained by the modern world order and its sciences of economic development. This apparatus can neither be seen in Weber’s (1930:1992; p. xix) sense as an “iron cage” [of capitalism] in which modern man has to exist, for

in Foucault’s sense it is not proper to think of this apparatus as totally evil. Perhaps this may be described as what Anthony Giddens calls the “juggernaut of modernity” that “crushes those who resist it, and while it sometimes seems to have a steady path, there are times when it veers away erratically in directions we cannot foresee” (Giddens, 2011, pp. 549—550). However, it must be made clear that this Nepalese “development” ship, unlike Weber’s *iron cage* or Giddens’ *juggernaut* is not steered by the conscious Nepalese agent but in Foucault’s term “regulation imposed by power” (1991, p. 153). The key actors in Nepal imposing this regulation or who claim to possess this power [of steering] are the international development partners. But despite their claims that they have the undisputed knowledge of steering it, they have left the passengers [Nepalese] trapped in the wreck. But in Foucault sense, this is not to suggest that the crew members and the captain have been rescued from the wreck, leaving all the passengers trapped. In other words, it would be futile and fictitious to imagine that the salvation oriented discourse and practice of living in Nepal had not suffered any wrecks. Imagining the knowledge as a vast universe of time and space without its end or beginning, middle or periphery, “development” can be understood then only as one experiment with truth on the surface of time, and is not a final answer to the sociology of knowledge. It can be only conceptualized as one chapter of anthropology (Escobar 1995) and not as a universal truth. Following this brief summary, I now outline the major findings in more detail.

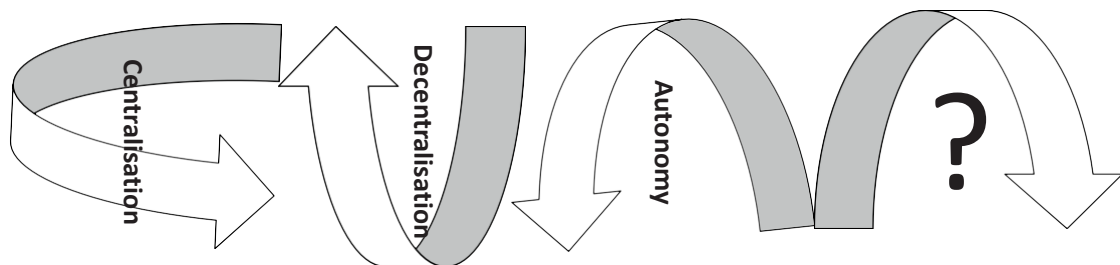
Motionless higher education, *moving discursive frame*



As illustrated above, education in Nepal until 1956 was community owned, albeit where ‘community’ referred to a limited sub-set of the populace. The year 1956 changed that order of thinking, repositioning education as government undertaking intelligible to its discursive regime. In 1971, education was fully-centralised and made free to suit a particular historical time and the interests of its operators which included the impetus towards nation-building. From

1990 to the present, it was named as a “decentralised” and “autonomous” higher education system intelligible to its operator, namely the economic logic of neo-liberalism. None of those three policy moments followed a logical order but, rather, can be viewed as accidents of history, or in Foucault’s term a “play of historical forces”, a phase of nation-building subsequently shaped by the politics of the Cold War and then, at present, the “new world order” shaped by the forces of neo-liberalism. These policy moments have traversed along an uncertain path, thereby creating a contested present. Many words and languages have been invented in its name, but the object “higher education” has remained motionless, with at least four shifting names coming into being. What moved beneath the motionless “higher education” was its frame of reference, what Ball calls a “moving discursive frame” (Ball, in Gale, 2001 p. 386). Any name could be given to higher education reform depending on the system of knowledge and forms of power that referred to it. The following order of thinking was apparent in the genealogical analysis of the discourse of higher education reform in Nepal that I showed in Part I:

Distorted past, contested present and an unknown future: *A plastic continuity*



Where the reformers had shown continuous development, the thesis showed discontinuity. Neither Dr. Wood nor King Mahendra could forecast the unexpected course history would follow. Who would have thought that the 238-year-old royal dynasty would fall? This thesis disturbed continuities, timelessness, universality, relentless progress and a smooth romanticised future. Accordingly, a distorted past, a contested present and an unknown future are what have emerged from the review of the three historically shifting ideas of reform. I preferred to use the above titles and figures to come to the conclusion of what is, in Foucault’s sense, ‘*a plastic continuity*’. In *The Archaeology of Knowledge* and *The Order of Things*, Foucault provides the best answer to this kind of brake in thought: “Discontinuity – the fact that within the space of a few years a culture

sometimes ceases to think as it had been thinking up till then and begins to think other things in a new way” (Foucault, in Laing, 1970, p. 50). Accordingly, I constructed the ribbons with twists and turns. Instead of the straight arrows of thought used to frame the history of higher education reform, the names I designated to them are used to demonstrate the twists and turns produced by the shifting regimes of discourse, first a centralised higher education, second a decentralised one, and third, an autonomous higher education, each arising out of rules specific to historical contexts. If others understand higher education as a continuous development or one moving history, the thesis revealed many shifting histories and discursive practices in their complexities.

Some reflections from Part II

Towards neoliberalism, the rhetoric of a *weak state*

Part II of the thesis showed that the neo-liberalism is the dominant force shaping the history of reform in the present time (manifest mainly via fee-setting and enrolment policies, new programmes, etc.). The thesis showed that it was not achieving the aim of greater social justice through the discriminatory scholarship provision. As I showed in Chapter 7, rather than achieve such an aim, it created more injustice in the field of practice by limiting the working students and those with less economic security to get onto new study programmes. Instead, the field data showed the construction of new types of students in the university sphere by renaming – indeed Christening - learners as “full-fee” students. Here, neo-liberalism worked as a technique of setting the fee and new study programmes, leading to new elite programmes that served the well off in Nepal. The autonomous campuses offered high-brow courses to ever-growing numbers of middle class young wishing to find a way out of Nepal. Thus, the exodus of graduates from Nepal emerged as one consequence brought about by the reform. The other major effect emerged through the policy of incentive grants offered to the TU public campuses by the World Bank as part of its push to introduce a notion of “competitiveness” in which the campuses competed with each other in generating private funding through the mobilization of local resources, including mainly tuition fee increase, and in terms of student enrolment and pass rates. However, if neo-liberalism was about the free market and was opposed to state intervention (Harvey 2005), educational administrators implementing the reform complicated matters: “without a strong national state, the education system would descend into anarchy” (see Administrator 4). Thus, there was an institutional production of social reality

in Nepal in which the development institutions represented the given reality in Nepal as “weak” and “fragile state”. With this ground cleared, the World Bank-assisted reform aimed to displace the “weak” state with the non-state actors and the “weak public provision of education” by non-public provision. However, this approach to neo-liberalism required the positive role of the state in promoting privatization and markets in education. Thus, the state became a moderator for market futures in education; playing an intervening role in providing the necessary conditions for the market to function (Olssen, 2010, p. 199). If neo-liberalism was about “drastic reduction in government responsibility for social needs” (Apple, 2010, p. 410), the case of Nepal demonstrated that the national state was so important that it continued to inject 85 percent of the budget required by the educational institutes.

Through a totalising notion of historical progress premised on the logic of the “open moment” and fall of the “old order”, this apparatus of neo-liberalism was inaugurated in Nepal in 2007. Contextualised within the April 2006 “revolution” and the rhetoric of the “weak” or “fragile state”, there was a sense of optimism that everybody in Nepal would support the implementation of the neo-liberal reform and it would thus move forward smoothly and free of contradictions. The study disturbed that teleological thinking. To recall briefly, Administrator 1 implementing the reform narrated the story of political turmoil in Nepal after 2006 and the disturbances it created in university, making it difficult for him to carry out normal routine work.

Instead of there being a large public support or a ground-breaking academic study informing the practice of decentralisation and autonomous higher education, let alone the capacity of the Nepalese to become self-investing entrepreneurs of education or develop the ability to pay high tuition fees, this practice was informed by the necessity of neo-liberalism and funded and ideologically supported by the international development institutions. The study showed a strange form of neo-liberalism that didn’t correspond to the exact definition shown by its authors and reviewed in Chapter 2 that connected this phenomenon to the making of a ‘weak’ state. If neo-liberalism was concerned with decreased public support for higher education, the thesis showed a complex mixture of public, private and community support to education. Thus, Nepal presented a complex situation for framing the understanding of reform in the global rhetoric of neo-liberalism. As demonstrated in the field of practice, there were complexities and contradictions that did not necessarily connect to the hyperbolic claims of neo-liberalism or the logic of private sector. Far from being one acceptable and collective wisdom of the diverse range

of educational stakeholders, the global neo-liberal policy discourse turned the educational institutions into a battleground to secure their ideological interests. Thus, the notion of neo-liberalism was not the all-encompassing frame of action on the ground, except as a small experiment under the SHEP where a private sector efficiency logic was introduced in the public system in the form of new types of students enrolled under the “full-fee” courses. This, in short, was the effect and outcome of the SHEP. The other forces shaping the discourse were “development”, armed conflict, ethnic movements, the radicalization of politics and the exodus of young people. The “developmental” logic of the state subsumed all these categories into forming a loose script that moulded a policy framework known as “decentralization” and “autonomy” (a further deepening of decentralization). The data chapters in Part II of the thesis showed these two categories as structuring the thinking and practices of higher education reform in Nepal. As I showed, there were winners, losers, advocates, enemies and the confused and the disenchanted, as well as those for whom this reform meant absolutely nothing. When the actors enacted the discourse in the field of practice, they didn’t imagine only decentralisation and autonomy as evidently being reform. The thesis showed vibrant social arrangements and local knowledge practices excluded from the modern discourse.

The dominant system of knowledge at work in shaping autonomous higher education in the present time is the discourse of development. In Foucault’s sense, this discourse is constituted in the problems and practice of knowledge/power from which no one is free. In Foucault’s sense, there can be neither optimal or perfect knowledge, nor the end of experimentation. In this sense, there will just be rational and more rational knowledge that will continue to dominate other knowledge systems. This was demonstrated by Dr. Wood, who saw farmers working in the Himalayas from his kayak 3,000 feet in the sky as living in “autocracy” and “poverty”. Soon, that experience became the standard knowledge that came to shape education and development intervention in Nepal by justifying its past as poverty ridden, violent, autocratic and requiring Western intervention. Here, the dominant system of power constructed Nepal’s past differently by assigning Dr. Wood in the 1950s and the World Bank after the 1990s to intervene in Nepal. This led me to conclude that there was no proper, fundamental or essential rationale for why the Nepalese education system should be decentralised and made autonomous. It was the system of power/knowledge that defined it and made it appear necessary and inevitable.

The study showed that despite those shifting historical and discursive forces, higher education continued to be understood and talked about in Nepal

through the metanarrative of “development”. The thesis underlined the need to imagine the alternative to this form of discourse. To challenge the theory of “development” that connects education to economic prosperity supported by more than 40 international development institutions is a Herculean task in Nepal. For the World Bank, which claims it draws on “operational and policy analysis experience” to implement neoliberalism reform, an academic research like this would evoke a derisive laughter in that marble-adorned palace in Kathmandu from where the neoliberal project operates and the development bureaucrats so strongly defend it. This ironical situation notwithstanding, as the study demonstrated, a discontinuity in thinking of homogeneity and linear progress is set in motion, where one day the people of Nepal will reflect upon how irresponsibly the international development institutions operated in Nepal by providing international policy prescriptions, taking upon themselves the sole authorship to interpret the history of Nepal in a fabricated way by excluding local knowledge practices, and supporting programmes that were counter to the local societal conditions.

The biggest challenge to counter the present discourse of higher education in Nepal will come from the internationalized vision of modern economic practices that are seen so unproblematic and self-evidently necessary in Nepal and for whose sake the international development institutions exist. Thus, even bigger challenge to confront will come from the hegemonic position of international development institutions which provide both money and advices to Nepalese policymakers. And since it is guided by a developmental vision, foreign diplomacy, politics among nations and power struggles, the Nepalese may continually fall into the trap of not being able to speak against a rationale that has made them suffer for more than 60 years. The real challenge therefore lies in “unthinking” the present higher education reform and its economic development ideals. Unmaking and unlearning development would free education from its ambiguous aim. In a different context, Escobar argues that this is possible. He refers to what he calls “grassroots movements”, “local knowledge” and “popular power” as capable of altering the present hegemonic discourse. This, he argues, can be approached by breaking oneself out of the cocoon of dominant “development” thinking. To add, a new way of seeing and imagining the social world is necessary. The role of Nepalese poststructuralist ethnographers is crucial in this regard, in that they can step outside the dominant modernist methodologies that have come to dominate the policy and define the social life in Nepal from the “high watermarks of western culture” or the Northern European enlightenment hope of humanity via a scientific logic and

economic desire. By going beyond the modernist history, this approach allows us to locate the “systems of reason”, or to understand how changes in idea occur over time. It requires a deconstructive approach in the study of Nepalese education, history and culture. However, an academic enterprise of this type would not come to fruition unless ethnographers produce a flurry of research articles, make significant contact and engagements with the locals and proactively debate with development practitioners, international organisations and professionals who have been trained and tortured to think and carry out tasks within the field of power/knowledge they themselves are not the masters. As this thesis has illustrated, research knowledge can contribute to understanding the world and rewriting its histories by being vigilant and imaginative.

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List of Tables

Table 1: A summary of the problems, reasons, and solutions outlined for reforming higher education in Nepal adopted from the SHEP document 2007. The entire 132-page-long document is reduced into following statements, brief formulations, key propositions and words.

Problems identified	Reasons/cause shown	Solutions outlined for reform
Poorest country in South Asia and 12th poorest in the world.	<p>Weak contributions of higher education sector to support economic growth.</p> <p>Inequalities resulting in educationally disadvantaged dalits and janajatis along income status.</p> <p>Exclusion, oppression, and domination by advantaged chhetris, bahuns, newars and the rest to dalits and janajatis.</p>	<p>[a] Creating and adopting knowledge to support economic growth and reduction of poverty.</p> <p>[b] Contribute to poverty reduction by developing quality professional work force who provide the knowledge and technological base capable of supporting economic growth.</p> <p>2. Breaking unequal power relations. [a]. student financial assistance -- student's equity contribution, income from work study programs, scholarship grants, and loans from commercial banks.</p>
Decline of higher education	State ownership has eroded	Privatization can significantly improve the dynamism of the sector...Example, "Establishment of Kathmandu University (KU) in 1991 through a private/community initiative marked a new dimension in higher education...private sector can play a significant role in the delivery of higher education...and there is a considerable scope..."
Weak contributions of the (HE) sector in creating and adopting knowledge to support economic growth and social harmony.		Privatization of public enterprises would help improve the economy's performance.
Poor quality and market relevance of education.	Centralization	Enhanced quality and relevance through effective management and financial sustainability of academic institutions.
Poor access to higher education for students from underprivileged households.	Power and domination, inequality and oppression	Student financial assistance
Deficient "internal efficiency", particularly for the public provision.	Centralization	Decentralization— transferring the powers or delegating/devolving the authority by Tribhuvan University to its 61 constituent campuses.
Weak financial sustainability of the public provision.	Centralization	Decentralization and autonomy

Widening gap between the quality of public and private provisions resulting in segregation of students along income status.	Monopoly delivery of education by the state	“Breaking the monopoly”—decentralization –and equity
Negligible public funding for community campuses.	Weak state and poverty	Increase private funding
Monopoly delivery of education by the state	Centralization	The multi-university concept (that is allowing the operation of more than one university) and private provision.

Table 2: Key categories of international trend in higher education reform that reflect the case of Nepal as manifested in the SHEP document in Table 1

Country examples	Institutes driving/influencing reform
1. Chile	World Bank/IMF
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Structural Adjustment Policy (SAP) of the World Bank/IMF Forms of practice • Reduction of government spending • Privatization • Neoliberal higher education reform 	
2. Romania	World Bank
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Second Private Sector Adjustment Loan (US\$84 million) of the World Bank Forms of practice • Abolition of free education • Privatization • Promotion of business culture in education • Cut costs 	
3. Kosovo: University of Pristina.	EU/Bologna
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policy influenced by developments in the EU, Bologna Declaration Forms of practice • Readjustment and restructuring of higher education with the education system in the EU • Adoption of European Credits Transfer System (ECTS) 	
4. Norway & the Netherlands	EU/Bologna
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EU-driven higher education reform Forms of practice • Search for competitiveness & int'l comparability • New Public Management and efficient organization of higher education • Economic growth-focus • Globalization, global knowledge economy 	

Table 3: Key categories of Foucauldian education literatures to frame the study

Foucauldian scholars	Neoliberalism in education
Popkewitz (2011, eds.)	“systems of reason” or “principles of reason” shaped by problems of power/knowledge (ibid, p. 1)
Olssen (2005)	.A neoliberal project... emphasizes “choice”, “quality”, “freedom” and “autonomy” ... a presupposed notion of individuals as “autonomous choosers” (Olssen 2005, p. 367). “...abandon the state in preference for individual self-reliance, radical forms of decentralization, or to abandon public goods in favour of privatization and markets” (Olssen 2004, p. 235).
Peters et al (2000)	Ideology of liberalism, political philosophy, economic theory...how power is exercised (ibid, p. 115)
Lather (2004)	“Sciences of man”...concerned with how to “minimize resistance and maximize wealth stimulation”... “political arithmetic” that makes particular kinds of discourse both possible and necessary...renders population productive via “biopolitics” (ibid, p. 765).
Hursh (2007)	Situates the US <i>No Child Left Behind</i> within the rise of neoliberalism in that he writes, “Policies that promote standardized testing, accountability, competition, school choice, and privatization, reflect the rise and dominance of neoliberal and neoconservative policy discourses over social democratic policy discourses”.

Table 4: Key categories of Foucauldian “development” literatures

Discourse, power/knowledge	Key categories
Escobar (1995)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development as discourse • Internationalized vision of modern economic practices • “Regimes of discourse” and “regimes of representations” (p. 10) • Domain of thought and action sustained by system of power and knowledge (ibid) • Geopolitical imagination or imaginative geographies
Ferguson (1994)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Studied the World Bank-financed ‘development’ project in Lesotho, a country in South Africa swarmed by foreign aid agencies • ‘Development’ as discourse, sustained by “Western liberal commonsense”, produces unintended consequences (in Schouten, 2009, p. 1).

Table 5: Foucault and Nepal: Key categories of “development”, literacy, and education literatures

Pigg (1992)	<p>Development as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Signs people in Nepal associate with towns and affluence (p. 501) • A dichotomy between village and city (developed [North] and its oppositional [Nepal] other category). • Social territories, or a space it creates to think of less/more developed and affluent/poor.
Shrestha (1995)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shifting meaning from <i>karma</i> (fate) to the imported discourse of ‘development’ [from karma to garibi] • A form of ‘colonial domination’ that brings about disruption in the cultural life of the people of Nepal and advances poverty.
Robinson-Pant (2001; 2010)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘Development’ as discourse, a particular ideology; takes on its meaning through the practice of literacy, textbooks, everyday conversations, and aid agency projects in Nepal. • Contributed to civil unrest in Nepal & unintended consequences
Carney and Bista (2009)	<p>Education policy in Nepal</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shaped by discursive practices • Creates “economy of production and desire” (ibid, p. 208). • How to secure [their children] a route to foreign education and employment • Discursive regime which while seemingly taking schools as building block of democracy and an inclusive state leaves the state out of its intervening role in education by elevating parents and students as ‘heroes’ [entrepreneurs] of education reform.

Table 6: Key categories of neo-liberal trends in higher education reform adopted from the SHEP document

5. Nepal	Responsible Institution: World Bank
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Name of reform: The Second Higher Education [Reform] Project (SHEP) International Development Association (IDA) Grant of US\$60 million • Theme of reform: “education for the knowledge economy” <p>Aim of reform</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enabling Nepal to participate in the global knowledge economy • Creation and adoption of knowledge to support economic growth & social justice • The overall aim: to increase graduates’ “productive efficiency to support economic growth” <p>Modus operandi</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction of decentralization, autonomy, and cost-sharing approach to reform • Adoption of global quality benchmarks & modern governance logic • Constructing parents and students as self-motivated entrepreneurs of education <p>Forms of practice</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decentralized and autonomous higher education system as the form of practice 	
<p>Highlighted below are key categories that connect decentralized and autonomous</p>	

higher education system to neo-liberal policy rhetoric

- Higher education must be relevant to the labor market
- Decentralization or further expansion of decentralization into more public campuses
- Formation of the new management committees
- Fixing of tuition and other categories of fees
- Levels of funding tied to enrollment. For example, if the enrolment decreases, level of funding will also decrease
- Campuses will be funded on a per unit student cost
- Market relevance of higher education

Table 7: Key interview categories of policy makers

Interview theme: Higher Education Policy		Final propositions
Key categories		Education and prosperity in Nepal
Category 1	Institute	Sub-categories
Policy Maker 1	NPC, Govt. of Nepal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education for economic prosperity • Technical and vocational education as key • Economic prosperity as vision of “New Nepal” • International commitments/agreements in education • Voluntarism and entrepreneurship as new priorities
Category 2:		Education policy and donors’ influence in Nepal
Policy Maker 2	Ministry of Education	Sub-categories
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Govt. at driving seat of policy but while asking for the funding we have to be abided by certain conditions of the donors. • Education policies shift with regime change • Hold negotiations with the donors on policy matters • There is a <i>farak farak dristikon</i> on education policy in Nepal <p>Final proposition: After 1990, the policy is to make the people as donors of education...State can no longer intervene.</p>
Category 3:		Higher education, decentralization, freedom & autonomy
Policy Maker 3	UGC, Govt. of Nepal	Sub-categories
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decentralization and autonomy as core policy • Widespread awareness among us for more freedom and autonomy • Traditional and centralized governance as problem • The World Bank has supported us in this process ... • The challenge: “they [people of Nepal] don’t want to break out of tradition. Here lies our bottleneck.”
Category 4:		Higher education & global quality benchmarks

Policy Maker 4	Head, QAA, UGC, Govt. of Nepal.	Sub-categories <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We need quality... • Bologna process in Europe made us aware of quality in Nepal...
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Table 8: Key interview categories of TU administrators

Actors/key themes	Institute	Key propositions
Administrator 1 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decentralization • Power • World Bank • Autonomy • Development • April revolution • Republic • Disturbances 	TU	<p>Proposition 1: “It [decentralization] may be explained in our context as giving more power to university campuses.”</p> <p>Proposition 2: “The World Bank came saying why not give the powers to the campuses. Then we agreed to decentralize and give autonomy to the campuses.”</p> <p>Proposition 3: “As Nepal passed through the April 2006 revolution to a republican state, different forces started creating disturbances in the university.”</p> <p>Proposition 4: “Everybody talks about education as the <u>vehicle for overall development of the country</u>”</p> <p>Proposition 5: “The reform is necessary, autonomy is essential but the problems lie elsewhere.”</p>
Administrator 2 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decentralization • Autonomy • Good governance • Political changes • Old rules and regulations • Power 	TU	<p>Proposition 1: “Decentralization and autonomy means good governance”</p> <p>Proposition 2: “Reform was needed as the political changes came about, the university couldn’t run as per the old rules and regulations.”</p> <p>Proposition 3: “We gave them [local campuses] the power [decentralization and autonomy] but instead of taking the risk of reforming their campuses... they started recruiting some people in order to provide them job opportunities”</p>

Table 9: Key interview categories of campus administrators

Actors/Campus Administrators	Key propositions
Administrator 3, Kathmandu, BBA <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BBA • Global context • Market • US • Credits transfer 	1. “BBA is the key effect and practice of reform” 2. The BBA model is a need in the <u>global context</u> 3. “Students are products, market generate demands for these products” 4. “Reform is about supply of capable professionals all over Nepal and abroad” 5. “More than 90 students from our campus are already in the US through credit transfer” (BBA Director)
Administrator 4, Kathmandu, IoE <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development 	“Reform is ‘vague’ but it has an aim: Nepal’s development.”
Administrator 5, CCT, Dharan <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Abroad 	“Our graduates are already working abroad.”
Administrator 6, CCT, Dharan <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • US, Canada, Australia 	“Nearly fifty percent of our graduates go abroad, mostly to United States, Canada and Australia.”
Administrator 7 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finance, WTO, globalization 	“Financial crises of the campus and demands of WTO, globalization induced reform.”
Administrator 8 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Democracy • Competition 	“When Nepal became democracy there came a feeling that education too should become competitive like competitive politics in democratic system.”

List of Figures

Figure 1: Nepal Contour Map

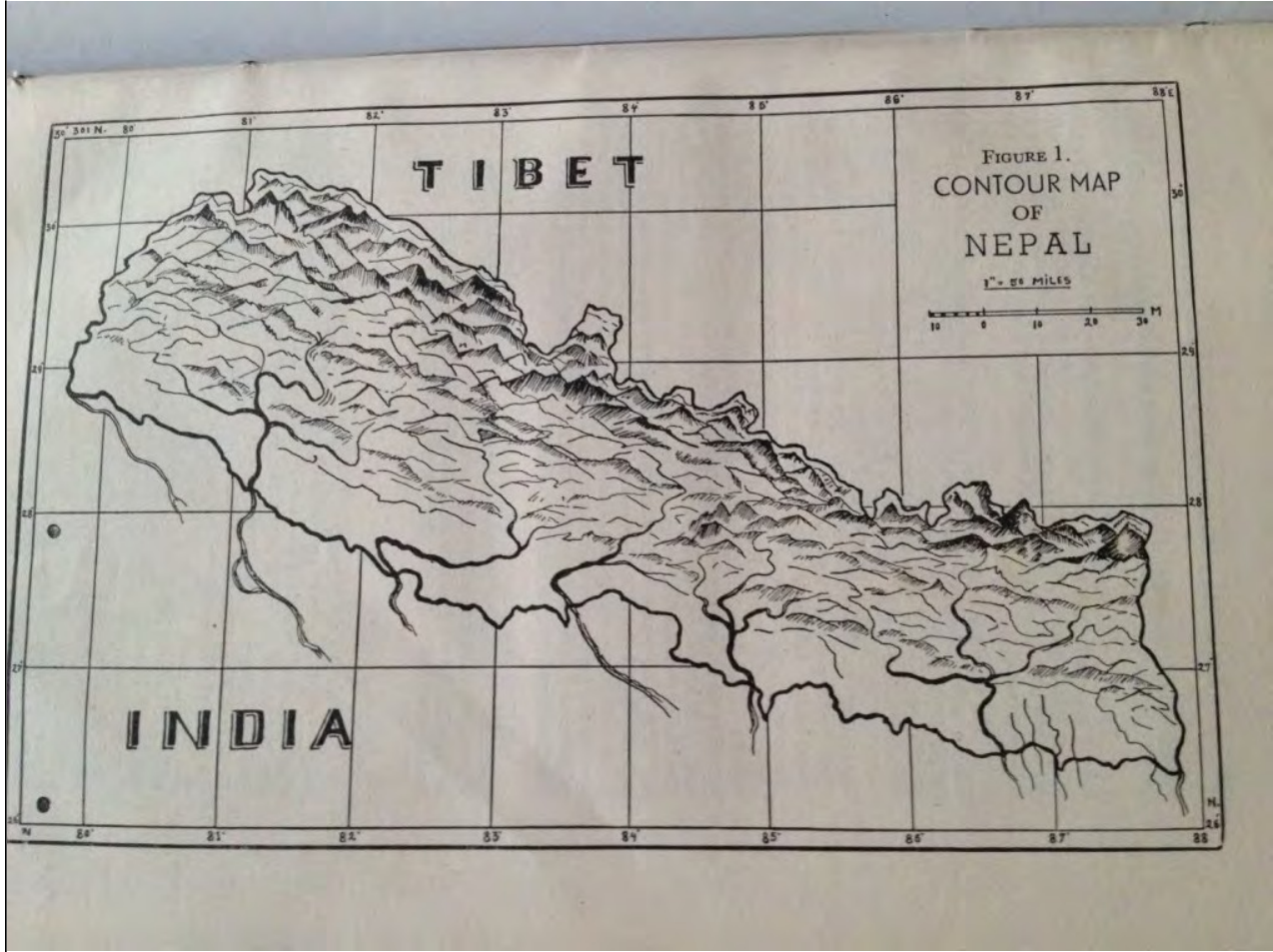


Figure 2: The November 25-26, 2009 Gadhimai animal sacrifice that took place in Bariyapur, southern Nepal (sources: Nepali media).

Buffalos taken to sacrifice ground



The sacrifice



Figure 3: April 2006 “revolution” in Nepal



Figure 4: Life is like a *karkalako pani* [a drop of water on a yam leaf] as viewed by locals in Nepal.



Figure 5: Abroad educational counselling centers in front of Shanker Dev Campus in Kathmandu (Jan 2013). The reform introduced BBA, BIM and BHM programs. For the overseas student recruitment agencies, these new study programs became a big business.



Figures 6, 7, 8: The past, present and the future of higher education reform as viewed by an ed administrator.

Figure 6: Central Campus of Technology (CCT), Dharan, 50 years ago (the past)



Figure 7: CCT TODAY (The present)



Figure 8: CCT TOMORROW (The future)



Figure 9: Academic books come with anonymous foreign students on cover

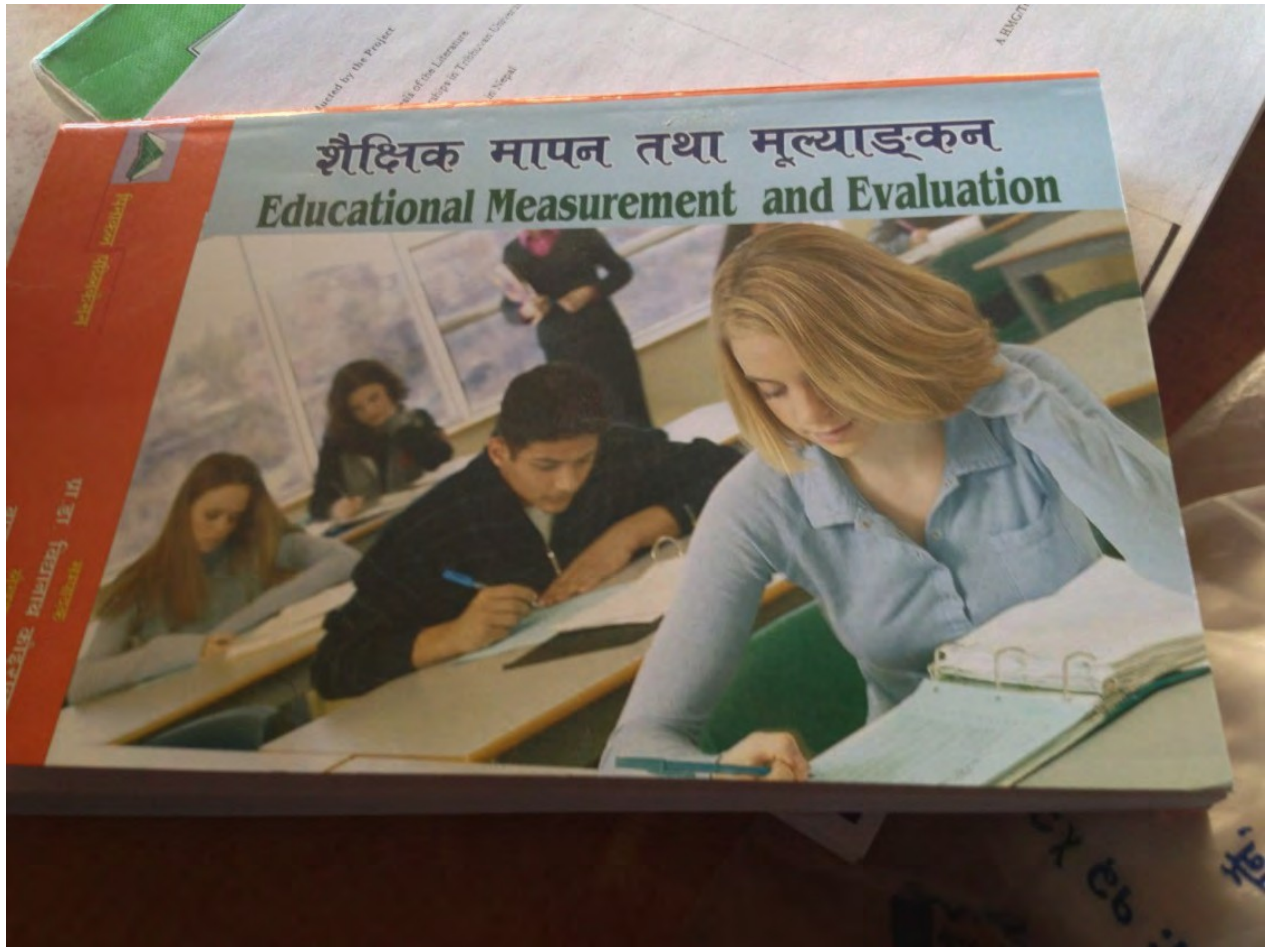


Figure 10: A local imagery of “reform” or “development”: A school bus races past two bullock carts in Itahari, Jan 16, 2013



Figure 11: Modern Nepali graduates learn Western meat technology, at CCT, Dharan, Eastern Nepal, January 2015.



Appendixes

Appendix 1: Lists of actors interviewed

Policymakers

1. Shiba Kumar Rai, member, National Planning Commission
2. Mahashram Sharma, Joint-Secretary, Ministry of Education
3. Hridayaratna Bajracharya, Technical Advisor, University Grants Commission (UGC)
4. Kanaiya Ram Bhakta Mathema, Quality Assurance and Accreditation, UGC

Administrators

1. Guna Nidhi Neupane, Rector, Tribhuvan University
2. Chandra Mani Paudel, Registrar, Tribhuvan University
3. Prakash Singh Pradhan, Campus Chief, Shanker Dev Campus (SD), Kathmandu.
4. Bharat Raj Pahari, Dean, Institute of Engineering, Kathmandu.
5. Pashupati Mishra, Assistant Dean, Dharan, Central Campus of Technology (CCT), Dharan.
6. Shyam Kumar Mishra, Assistant Campus Chief, CCT, Dharan.
7. JB Lungeli, former campus chief, Mahendra Ratna Multiple Campus, Ilam.
8. Kedar Bhakta Mathema, former vice-chancellor, Tribhuvan University
9. Surya Lal Amatya, former Rector, Tribhuvan University
10. Krishna Raj Adhikari, campus chief, Engineering Campus, Pokhara
11. Rajendra Kunwar, Campus Chief, Mahendra Ratna Multiple Campus, Ilam.
12. Bishnu Prasad Panta, Campus Chief, Pashupati Multiple Campus, Kathmandu.
13. Timila Yami, Assistant Dean, Institute of Engineering (IOE), Lalitpur.
14. Dharani Prasad Gautam, former campus chief, Mahendra Ratna Multiple Campus, Ilam.

Teachers

1. Govinda Ram Agrawal, SD, Kathmandu
2. Rajan KC, lecturer, SD, Kathmandu
3. Prof. Surendra Bahadur Katawal, CCT, Dharan
4. Devendra Prasad Guragain, Mahendra Ratna Multiple Campus (MRMC), Ilam.
5. Manoj Basnet, Teacher and Head of Department, HFM, MRMC, Ilam
6. Shyam Prasad Phunyal, Assistant Professor, MRMC, Ilam
7. Prem Luintel, Contract Teacher, MRMC, Ilam
8. Taranath Parajuli, MRMC, Ilam
9. Rom Nath Acharya, MRMC, Ilam
10. Bhim Rijal. MRMC, Ilam

11. Jivan Dulal, MRMC, Ilam
12. Dipendra Prasad Dulal [assistant campus chief], Ilam
13. Yogendra Narayan Badabariya [president], Tribhuvan University Teachers' Association (TUTA)

Students

1. Sunil Chaudhary, Pashupati Multiple Campus (PMC)
2. Bijay Lamichane, PMC
3. Anamika Ghale, PMC
4. Tek Raj Subedi, Institute of Engineering (IOE)
5. Pradhumna Adhikari, IOE
6. Ramesh Acharya, IOE
7. Sanjiv KC, IOE
8. Kabita Sharma, B.Tech, IOE
9. Kishore Rana, BA second year, (Sociology and Optional English), MRMC
10. Sandip Timsina, BA second year, (Mathematics and RD), MRMC,
11. Bhuwani Guragain, BA (RD and Sociology), MRMC
12. Ramesh Acharya, BA second year (RD and Sociology), MRMC.
13. Shuva Ram Basnet, President, Free Students' Union (FSU) [Nepali Congress affiliated], Shanker Dev Campus.
14. Sharad Rasaili, President, All Nepal National Independent Student Union (Revolutionary, Maoist-affiliated).
15. Tulasi Ram Mainali, President, FSU (United Marxist Leninist affiliated), Nepal Commerce Campus.
16. Rasha Nemwang, newcomer, B.Ed., MRMC, Ilam
17. Menaka Nemwang, newcomer, B.Ed., MRMC, Ilam
18. Shyam Dhungel, BBA, SD, Kathmandu
19. Prasikshya Simkhada, BBA, SD, Kathmandu
20. Sanchita Kafle, BBA, SD, Kathmandu
21. Suman Rimal, BBA, SD, Kathmandu
22. Pratigya Paudel, BBA, SD, Kathmandu
23. Raju, BBS, SD, Kathmandu
24. Srijana Rai, B.Tech (Food)., CCT, Dharan
25. Ramesh Maharjan, B.Tech, CCT, Dharan
26. Nirad Katwal, B.Tech, CCT, Dharan
27. Sanju Rani Mandal, M.Tech, Dharan

Local political leaders

1. Lal Bahadur Khatriwada Chhetri, Secretary, Ward. No 14, Dharan Municipality.

2. Pankaj Ghimire, UCPN (Maoist) Ward chairman, Dharan Municipality.
3. Bhoj Raj Khatiwada, acting mayor, Dharan Municipality.
4. Agni Prasad Adhikari, Acting Mayor, Ilam Municipality
5. Dambar Lorinden, President, Federal Limbuwan State Council, Ilam.
6. Keshav Thapa, Nepali Congress party, Ilam District president.
7. Hom Dulal, member, Nepali Congress District Committee, Ilam.
8. Minsu Chabegu, General Secretary, Federal Limbuwan Council, Ilam.
9. Mani Kumar Limbu, President, CPN-UML, Ilam district committee.
10. Ganesh Parajuli, UML Ilam District Secretary.
11. Badri Khadka, CPN-UML ward chairman, Ilam.
12. Bishnu Dahal (Limbu), social worker/senior citizen/member of campus management committee, MRMC, Ilam.

Appendix 2: Key interview categories/themes

- Theme 1: Political changes and higher education reform
- Theme 2: Financial crisis and higher education reform
- Theme 3: Economic development and higher education reform
- Theme 4: Globalization and higher education reform
- Theme 5: Quality education and higher education reform
- Theme 6: Centralization and higher education reform
- Theme 7: Decentralization and higher education reform
- Theme 8: Good governance and higher education reform
- Theme 9: Power-sharing and higher education reform
- Theme 10: Resourcefulness and higher education reform
- Theme 11: Reform and *kebi kbukulopan* [some degree of liberty]
- Theme 12: Big and unmanageable TU and higher education reform
- Theme 13: Reform and *shakti-sangharsha* (power struggle)
- Theme 14: Reform and competent leadership
- Theme 15: Reform and resistance
- Theme 16: Reform and de-politicization of higher education institutes
- Theme 17: Reform and indigenous knowledge promotion
- Theme 18: Decentralized campus as providing some *chut* (concessions)
- Theme 19: Autonomous campus as reform
- Theme 20: Autonomous campus is like a son separated from parents
- Theme 22: Autonomous campus and political interference
- Theme 23: Full autonomy is impossible
- Theme 24: Autonomy [reform] is invisible
- Theme 25: Autonomy is a *afai-gari-khao* (do-it-yourself) concept.
- Theme 26: Autonomy is devolution of power
- Theme 27: Autonomy created resistance
- Theme 28: Autonomy and the graduates' overseas employment
- Theme 29: Autonomy & code of conduct
- Theme 30: Autonomy necessary to replicate EU/American education system
- Theme 31: Reform is vague

Theme 1: Political changes and higher education reform

Proposition 1: The university moves along with the national political system. When the political system fails, other sub-systems also fail (Administrator 1).

Proposition 2: As the political changes came about, the university couldn't run its 60 constituent

campuses spread across the country through a unified leadership as per the old rules and regulations (Administrator 2).

Proposition 3: Political changes brought new changes to education system (Policy maker 2).

Theme 2: Financial crisis and higher education reform

Proposition 1: The state doesn't give money, the students don't pay fees. How can I run the university? I was the one who first approached the World Bank for US\$20 million. My idea was also to rent the campus buildings to businesses to earn money. Campus should do business. Business means not just business. From the money generated, they should invest in research and development (Administrator 8).

Proposition 2: The TU doesn't give money, the students don't pay fees. Teachers don't stay in job. How can I run the campus? I told you how partly the World Bank played its roles and partly how the financial problems gripped the TU campuses that paved the way for autonomy (Administrator 7).

Theme 3: Economic development and higher education reform

Proposition 1: Actually reform of the institution is a vague matter ... We discuss and assist the government in making policies in the field of economic development (Administrator 4).

Proposition 2: *Samriddha* or *samunat Nepal* (prosperous Nepal) is the aim of education. New Nepal is that prosperous Nepal we are talking about (Policymaker 1).

Theme 4: Globalization and higher education reform

Proposition 1: Globalization means liberal market. Such a market is an open market, open to all. There is then greater mobility. This means you have to be competent and capable. This means where the opportunity knocks on you, you must go there. This means mobility. You must prove yourself competent and deliver better (Administrator 4).

Proposition 2: Reform means change. The impetus for change and reform comes from forces like globalization and knowledge economy. We talk about these concepts everyday nowadays (Administrator 13).

Proposition 3: It must be around 1997 that the World Bank offered grants for decentralization. A time was ripe to think about opportunities and challenges presented by globalization and the WTO. I thought that our graduates must be competent in a globalized world... (Administrator 7).

Proposition 4: Due to globalization, our graduates are already working abroad. Globalization means that our curriculum is so designed to meet international manpower needs not just the national needs (Administrator 5).

Themes 6, 7: Centralization, decentralization and autonomy

Proposition 1: Centralization of education created a situation of *mathibata ankuśh laune kam* [a tendency to put a “hook” from above]. [Administrators 3]

Administrators 3, 5, 6, 7, 11 repeated the words *mathi* and *mathibata* [referring to the TU central authority in Kathmandu] as obstructing the campus managers under the centralization program to exercise power. During the interviews, they repeated:

- *Control from above (the center)*
- *mathibata darbandi* (recruitment from above)
- *mathibata nirnaya* (decision from above)
- *mathibata samako cha* (the center has chained us).
- *mathi parkhinu parne* (have to wait for above).

Theme 11: Decentralization and *kehi khukulopan*

Proposition: By *khukulopan*, I mean some degree of liberty we enjoy under decentralization which was not possible under the central university control. By *khukulopan*, I mean some degree of liberty in financial matters the campus management enjoys (Administrator 3).

Theme 12: Big and unmanageable TU and higher education reform

Proposition 1: TU is so big and complex and problems are so many that the World Bank wanted to support the reform through decentralization and autonomy (Administrator 2).

Proposition 2: TU is the largest university in the country with 60 constituent campuses administered directly by the university. In addition, there are 826 affiliated campuses. TU handles examinations of all these campuses. It is a giant university (Administrator 8).

Proposition 3: British ambassador always used to call me ‘comrade vice-chancellor’. He used to ask me how is the university now? I used to reply him ‘it is like the empire of Queen Victoria’. TU is such a vast, like the former British empire. It is too big to be a university. It is too big to manage. My idea was giving autonomy. Self-autonomous campuses were my proposal. I tabled this proposal at the TU senate. But the *bampathi* [leftists] opposed me. But when the same *bampathi* came to power, they accepted it. I came with cluster system, that is, to make the PN campus as the central campus, Butwal, Bhairahawa and other satellites to be made cluster campus and to delegate power. In five years, I wanted to make those campuses deemed universities. But my plans failed due to my resignation. Basically TU has grown to be too big; it has to be

split into many universities. My idea was that Tri-Chandra College be made a university, Patan and Padmakanya should become universities on their own. TU should be made elite university (Administrator 8).

Proposition 4: Our institute is so big like the university itself. Altogether 15,000 students are studying here. We have 14 colleges, four of them are government colleges we call constituent colleges, and 10 affiliated colleges (private). We have 4,000 students in four government colleges and around 9,000 in affiliated colleges (Administrator 4).

Theme 13: Decentralization and *shakti-sangharsha* (power struggle)

Proposition 1: When king was in power under centralization program, there was no such political influence; he exercised a unified leadership. Now, it is not possible to imagine a unified leadership. From 2006 onwards, after the democratic movement, the Prime Minister took over the ceremonial chief of the TU from the king. At the center, we cannot take action against the local actors who deviate from norms. For example, Ilam Campus Chief was appointed from the UML political quota. We couldn't intervene because the executive council was composed under *bhagbanda* comprising UML, NC, Maoists, etc, who then appointed their own men. There were protests against the decisions of the campus management (Administrator 2).

Proposition 2: *Bhagbanda bhaneke ke bhane TU ma ramra lai bhanda hamra lai matra samatne kam bhai rabeke cha. Ramro bhanda hamro lai prathamikta deko le swayattatata thik chaina ahile* [What we mean by *bhagbanda* is that in TU there is a new trend whereby instead of recruiting 'good people', they are accepting 'our own people'. Since they began promoting 'our own people' instead of 'good people', autonomy is not a right thing now]... The most important problems with TU are three: one, a mentality that recognizes not *ramra manche* [good people] but *hamra manche* [our people]; two, *bhagbanda* [power/portfolio-sharing]; and finally *rajnitikaran* [politicization]... By "bhagbanda" we refer to political appointments by new generation of politicians to important TU positions. Autonomy is not suitable in such a context but may be useful in future [President, TUTA].

Proposition 3: Bhagbanda and interferences "from above" [mathibata]

The Prime Minister has repeatedly put pressure on the TU to decentralize all its 61 constituent campuses. The chancellor (Prime Minister) had recently issued a written directive to the TU VC in this regard. Also the PM directed that the programs and properties of those campuses also be handed over to the respective universities. But the TU declined it. Thus, the conflict (ibid).

Proposition 4: Decentralization proved defective. Initially, everyone hoped that decentralization would usher in some changes. But by the beginning of 2062 BS, it was coupled with many problems. We saw some defects in the decentralization and autonomy regulations. The original aim of the project was to make the campuses financially autonomous. Under that, the local people had

the exclusive responsibility of managing resources for their campuses. This became impossible and we amended those controversial clauses from the regulation (Administrator 2).

Proposition 5: Decentralization is not enough. I already told you we got some degree of liberty in financial matters. But as I said earlier, decentralization is not enough. We are now thinking to apply for autonomy to enjoy full degree of liberty (Administrator 3).

Proposition 6: Decentralization is not the right direction. I mean autonomy is the right direction. After going through all these years and having experienced decentralization system we have felt many lapses. These lapses are within the decentralization regulation itself, within the acts and bylaws of the university; and there are many legal contradictions between decentralization regulation and central regulation. So, they need to be clearly spelled out (Administrator 4).

Proposition 7: Decentralization manifested in politicization. The reflection of social behaviors is manifested in the university in the form of politics. Political unrest in society is taking place. Different political groups, and their roles, became contradictory to each other and created problems within the university (ibid).

Proposition 8: The money was given for the reform of the entire campus, not for partitioning or for division of the campuses into two kinds. To reform only BBA is a very wrong concept. We wanted them to reform the whole campus, including the BBS. These campuses made some cosmetic decorations with the money they received. They have not yet spent the entire money (Administrator 2).

Proposition 9: Decentralization ended just like that...Decentralization dates back to 1992 when the World Bank first launched its HEP-I. Under it, 27 TU campuses agreed to become decentralized but you must have noticed there, the TU appeared to have given some powers under decentralization but in reality it didn't. Only thing that happened was the formation of campus management committees under the chairmanship of the campus chief and a US\$100,000 incentive grant each campus received. The first HEP ended just like that. No evaluation was made of the project.

Proposition 10: World Bank's project didn't help reform the whole system. Recently, we have developed our own mechanism to reform the whole system and we are taking the lead in the reform. The reform is now being executed by TU. Currently, we are working out a more comprehensive plan of action for TU. We have identified the following key areas for reform: Curriculum update, disciplining the teachers and staff, and fixing student enrolment and the class size. We have biggest pressure from students pursuing general education. This will be discouraged and

instead open and distance learning will be encouraged. We have already begun this exercise. We will fix class size to increase quality. Affiliation of the campuses will be based on monitoring and mapping. We have 931 affiliated (private and public campuses across the country. We will merge those campuses where necessary. We also aim to limit student intake, reform exams and curricula, and introduce good governance. We have begun the EMIS to start with. We have passed a regulation on this. We want to reform the whole TU, not just a few campuses here and there. We will decentralize examinations at the regional level. We will issue the transcripts then and there, not from Kathmandu. We have chosen Biratnagar, Nepalganj, Pokhara and Kathmandu as four regional exam centers. But so long as the center is not fully satisfied, we cannot give them the authority to conduct exams. Finally, we have begun the financial reform through treasury single account system. Under this there will not be hidden money, all the money, all the expenses and transactions will be open and transparent. We want the local campus to keep the money in their own account but they need our permission to transfer. In so doing, we aim to eliminate possible corruption and tendency to hide resources (Administrator 2).

Proposition 11: The Campus Chiefs of decentralized and autonomous campuses are young swimmers. They are like amateur swimmers just learning to swim. If they learn quickly, they will swim to the shore, if not they may be drowned. They have obtained the swimming pool but they do not know the techniques and tools of swimming (Administrator 14).

Proposition 12: TU leader should be like goddess Durga. A leader who has many hands like the goddess Durga can only steer the TU. Our VC, Rector and Registrar currently lack these hands because they come through political appointment (Chief librarian, TU).

Proposition 13: TU leader should be like that 15th century Mughal emperor Akbar surrounded by wise men. When I was the VC, I didn't get such support so I resigned. All my plans to reform fell apart (Administrator 8, former VC).

Proposition 14: Introduction of decentralization and autonomy rules led to teachers' resistance... these rules made the community, not government, as supporters and managers of TU campuses. It made the people once again the donors of education. But this gave rise to new problem: teachers protest. They remain largely unhappy; they feel insecure since their allegiance to bureaucracy broke down and their accountability that so far rested on bureaucracy shifted to local communities. These teachers began to affiliate themselves to one or more political party organizations to secure their interest and bargaining positions. They feel insecure as their sources of salary was transferred from the state to the community. That is why there is resistance from the teachers against decentralization. At the school level too, community concept of schools is

not able to move forward smoothly. The same holds true to TU. The current political turmoil has affected the smooth implementation of decentralization (Policymaker 2).

Theme 19: Autonomous campus

Proposition 1: In autonomy, it becomes a collective responsibility of all to manage and run an academic institution (Administrator 4).

Proposition 2: Autonomy was necessary to promote indigenous knowledge. For example, CCT was located far away from the center [TU]. It was shadowed; we couldn't provide resources to the campus. So was the case with Ilam and Ayurved. The Ayurved Campus was overshadowed by the allopathic medicines. So we wanted to promote local indigenous knowledge by decentralizing these campuses in matters of financial resource generation and new curriculum development. We have recently allocated Rs. 120 million to this campus (Administrator 2).

Proposition 3: In autonomy, university plays the role of a guardian. TU will pay its campuses a lump sum money. They [local campuses] can then conduct their own affairs independently. They can introduce new study programs and conduct the exams independently. Ours is a very large university, so the autonomy was felt important (Administrator 1).

Proposition 4: Under autonomy, we aim to achieve financial sustainability. There are three kinds of reforms introduced by TU accordingly: financial, administrative, and academic under the concepts decentralization and autonomy. By autonomy, we want to mainly achieve financial sustainability of our campuses but we know these campuses cannot become fully autonomous financially. So we cannot rule out the role of state as a reliable guarantor of finances (Administrator 2).

Proposition 5: In autonomy, we get some chut [concessions]. We give them [local university campuses] some chut to become financially sustainable. They can mobilize financial resources locally. Generating own finances is the main focus of autonomy (ibid).

Proposition 6: An autonomous campus is like a son separated from his parents [Chutiyeko chora le garna sakyō bhaney dherai ni gharna sakcha tara sakena bhaney gumanu parcha. Yo yesto do-dhar ho] [An autonomous campus is like a son who is separated from his parents to live independently. He may swim or sink. Nobody knows where the autonomy will lead these campuses to, there is a dilemma]. The government wants to make education competitive, like the competitive multiparty politics but the people are worried, and the opinions are divided. Ilam is not a place of academic excellence. Challenges are huge to garner support from the local community (Administrator 14).

Proposition 7: Full autonomy [mainly financial and administration] is impossible in the current climate. Worldwide, the trend is such in education sector that some form of government grant is necessary for autonomy. We have kept the door open for the center (state) to channel funds should the campus cannot generate its own resources. State is the rescuer, the last resort. (Administrator 2).

Proposition 8: Autonomy is a *afai-gari-khao* (do-it-yourself) concept introduced recently. This campus [MRMC, Ilam] was centralized during the period of monarchy and decentralized after the advent of democracy. But what is autonomy, how autonomy can be implemented, what can it achieve are unknown. Competitiveness appears to have driven the reform. The government had approached the World Bank for financial support. Decentralization and autonomy came out of that approach. The local communities believe that the state should take lead role in education but this campus broke the trend; it wanted to become autonomous [before becoming decentralized]. As soon as the World Bank project ends, this campus will be in an embarrassing situation. The TU will have to come to rescue it. This reform will give a good lesson to Nepal (Admin 14).

Proposition 9: We exercised our power to:

- Establish our own faculty board. We have 45 teaching staffs. Before autonomy, faculty board was located in the center alone, but now the campus has its own faculty board.
- We have requested Rs. 210 million under the procurement plan to construct new classrooms, buildings, lab facilities, and boys' and girls' hostels.
- A two-story girls' hostel is being finalized.
- A 40-bed hostel is finalized. It will cost an estimated Rs. 20 million. We are also thinking about a boys' hostel.

Proposition 10: After autonomy, we got *bhayankar, bhayankar dherai* power (so much so much power). The power TU is exercising is now slowly being exercised by our campus. After autonomy, we got the power to hire teachers, develop new curriculum and implement the programs. In autonomy, there is no one person who holds power; each committee shares it. One effect of the autonomy reform is the opening of the Central Department of Horticulture and Floriculture in this far-flung district-something impossible under centralization. The role of the center is reduced to ceremonial function. For example, TU academic council no longer makes the curriculum, but its approval is necessary. We could have easily launched the new study program but for its international validity, the center remains important for approval (*ibid*). MRMC believes that autonomy provides option, choice, power, opportunity, and rights. All these things empower an institution. We utilized our power to make possible the following things:

- Hired 27 teachers
- Organized 20 mini-researches for teachers. UGC Experts from Kathmandu invited.

- Research methodology training conducted by experts of international repute.
- Purchased office furniture, projectors and white boards. We no longer use chalk board.
- E-library started. A 24-hour Wi-Fi service provided in the campus.
- Built new library and purchased new land at the cost of around Rs. 150 million.
- Developed new curriculum (Horticulture and Floriculture Management).
- We are soon buying vehicles, one bus and one pick-up van [tells proudly in higher tone, excited mood].
- Provided interest-free loans to all 150 teachers and staff to purchase lap-tops.
- Provided computer training free of cost to all the teachers and staff.
- Offered opportunities for teachers to attend seminars/conferences.
- Sent two students in international chess competition [tells proudly].
- Developed academic calendar and prospectus.
- Cleared the salary backlog [over 2 million rupees]. (Admin 11).

Appendix 3: Sample interview of a senior teacher who construct “BBA as reform”

Date: 27 November, 2012. Venue: BBA block, staff room, Shanker Dev Campus, Kathmandu.

Interview excerpts:

Question: As a person who has worked in various capacities—teacher, professor, member of the education task force, and recently teaching the newly introduced BBA course that everybody tells is ‘reform’, can you comment on ‘reform’ underway in your campus?

What is ‘reform’?

Answer: Reform means to bring change in status quo – to bring up-to-date change with the changing educational environment. Knowledge expands, so change is needed. New knowledge is created speedily, so we have to reform our curriculum, pedagogy and teaching. For example, in BBA study program, after completing eight semesters, we review the program and incorporate new development in the discipline. This was made possible by decentralization of our institute.

What is decentralization?

In decentralization, you provide power to make decisions regarding the campus management. For example, we started BBA program, a new program, a market-oriented program.

Who decides in Nepal what is ‘reform’?

TU Council decides. It is the highest decision-making body in the university headed by the Prime Minister. Funding for the university is decided by the University Grants Commission.

Who decides in your institute?

This Campus runs under decentralization mode. It has a management committee comprising a representative of parents, teachers, campus chief, and a representative of the local government which decides for the campus. However, it follows the direction of the central university administration. There is decentralization only in financial matters. The university gives a lump sum budget to the Campus which is barely enough to pay salary of the employees. The Campus generates its own money to run the new programs-BBA.

There is now a nationwide euphoria about BBA. Everybody I met shares with me this is the most important study program, the most relevant for the nation and for the employability of graduates and their future wellbeing. What is so special about this BBA?

It is Bachelor of Business Administration, a self-sustaining new study program launched recently under the decentralization mode. Our Campus is the first to introduce this. It is a number one program in our Campus and in the nation. We get very bright students in the program. BBA is a job-oriented, market-driven, professional program. It is relevant to rapidly increasing financial and banking sectors in Nepal. The Campus generates its own resources to fund this program. The university doesn’t give any money. Student fee is higher than normal study programs like BBS. Demand is very high for this program. We take only 10 percent of students who want to get in. BBA is run under a semester system.

What is so special about this program that many students and academics now talk about in Nepal?

BBA students learn more practical thing unlike other normal study programs. Students are offered internships in industries. Moreover, the program has a credit-transfer to US universities. Out of 120 credits, 40 is transferable (to the American universities).

Why only US universities and not others?

We are following American semester system. We are influenced by American education model. The semester system is becoming popular because it is adaptive to changing times, that is, we orient the courses of study according to the changes in the job markets, the demands the markets generate. I think this is [the American model, the semester system] a right step in right direction.

What is so new about this program from other normal programs like BBS (Bachelor of Business Studies) whose contents and aims are very similar?

BBA is run by the Office of the Dean, BBS by the university. BBA's exams are conducted by the Office of the Dean, Faculty of Management; its results are published by the Office of the Controller of Examinations (OCE) centrally. BBS exams are conducted by the Office of the Controller of Examinations and the results are published by the same.

You told me that it is the Dean's Office, not your campus which administers the BBA exam, if so, how can you call your campus a decentralized campus when you have no power to conduct the exams? You also told me that the BBA exams are published by the OCE centrally, not by the Dean's Office or your campus. How can you call this "decentralization"?

I already told you that we only have financial decentralization, that is, the power to generate our own money to run the study programs. The university has no touch in financial matters. If there is no money to pay salary of the teachers, the Campus pays from its own savings. This is possible in decentralization. For example, BBA is a program run by the money the Campus generates without relying on the university or state grants. The Campus also gives incentives to teachers.

What do you think will happen in the future in Nepal with those traditional programs?

BBS and MBS are in the decline. They will be phased-out gradually. They will both die and BBA and MBA will stay. This is because we are following American model of education now. There is now a strong and resilient market in Nepal for BBA and MBA. Financial sector, mercantile, insurance, manufacturing and banks in Nepal are generating enormous employment opportunities for BBA and MBA.

Thank you

Appendix 4: Sample interview of a university administrator

Former vice-chancellor of Tribhuvan University tells the story of bhagbanda

Question: Can you tell a little history about yourself ?

Answer: They call me grandfather of higher education (laughs). I was not born in Nepal. I was born in India because my family was exiled there after the Rana regime hanged my two uncles. They were revolutionaries and were tried by a military tribunal of the autocratic Ranas in 1941. They were charged for carrying out anti-government agitation against the hundred year old Rana autocracy. I moved from Banaras to Bombay; and from Calcutta to Kalimpong. I was born in Kalimpong. After 1951, with the end of the Rana regime, we returned to Nepal and settled here. I didn't even complete my school education. People call me educationist. They put me in grade 8, 9 and 10. That was my real education. I went to Tri-Chandra College, I did pretty well; I was not a bad student at all. I completed my bachelor and then master. I taught at Tri Chandra College. I went for a one year diploma in Edinburg. When I returned, I was made the head of the campus, the campus chief at Kirtipur, for a year but had to resign due to trouble. It was a Panchayat regime then. I had to resign. I ended up working for the World Bank for 15 years.

When was this?

From 1975 to 1991 I suppose.

What did you look after at the World Bank?

I basically looked after education project and many other things.

When did you become the vice chancellor?

It was August 1991. Then the new government, the government led by GP Koirala, appointed me as the vice chancellor of the Tribhuvan University. It was a challenge, I took up the job. It was a mission. We worked very hard, strictly hard, and brought about lot of reforms at the university during my three years in office. But then the government changed. The UML party came to power. Before I could complete my term, the UML government asked me to resign. They asked me "Could we have your resignation?" Had they let me work for two terms, I would have done something to the university.

Can I ask you why they asked you to resign?

They looked at me as a Nepali Congress man but I was not. And they wanted afnoo manche. This is the crux of the matter in Nepal. This is where the problem lies in Nepal. They wanted to have their own man as vice-chancellor. If the government in power is leftist, they want leftist vice-chancellor. It was Modnath Prashit, the UML education minister. Man Mohan Adhikari was then the Prime Minister. I was never a communist but had a lot of respect for him. He came here frequently and asked for my advice. I now feel it was Madhav Kumar Nepal, not Modnath, who pressed for my resignation. I couldn't even complete my terms then. My experience with the TU is tragic.

Why did you resign as campus chief ?

I got in trouble with police. I resigned from the university; it was accepted after 30 years.

When was it?

In 1975

What made you resign, can you elaborate?

The year was 1975. The police were hunting for Kamal Thapa; he was then a student leader affiliated to pro-Panchayat regime. Two trucks of police personnel came to arrest him. I stopped the police and handed him over. I opposed police entering the university in an intimidating way. If I had allowed the police to enter the campus, it would have led to a bloodbath. The police even pushed me but I didn't budge. We condemned the police action. This incident led to my expulsion from the campus. I then returned to the World Bank. Panchayat regime was dictatorial then.

How common were student protests or student activism then?

They were very common.

How long did you teach at the university?

For nine years, I taught at the university. One year I was the campus chief.

What did you teach at the university?

I taught drama. For example, George Bernard Shaw's "brave new world", "animal farm" and in my later years I taught teaching methods, phonetics. In particular, I taught "reading". I used to enjoy teaching. I fell in love with TU three times, but all three times turned out to be tragic.

Were you disappointed at your expulsion from TU?

I cannot describe in words how much it had hurt me. But I never gave up. Even now, I am engaged in TU dialogue and I am very much concerned. Being a TU VC was a big thing; it was the only university, and 250,000 students.

Who was the VC before you?

Professor BC Malla.

Who was Kamal Prakash Malla? Do you know him?

He was my teacher and was a rector.

I read his book "Kathmandu your Kathmandu"

I will read out a line here what he remarked of me then: "It was however Mr. Kedar Bhakta Mathema who was at that time still working in resident mission of the World Bank. He was one of the few vice chancellors of Tribhuvan University I had the privilege of working with him who knew what he wanted to do and did it." We both were equally concerned about the state of the TU and interested in the long-term development of the university. We wanted to do something. If only the leaders were good, we could have turned things differently.

Where is Malla now?

He is now in the US, may be in Georgia.

I had made him the chief of a study team of higher education task force then.

When the Prime Minister appointed you as the VC, were you happy to leave your good paid job at the World Bank?

When Prime Minister Koirala asked me to become the VC, I first asked myself why I should quit

my high-paid job and draw Rs. 7,000 as my salary? I was having a good job at the World Bank, which was high paid. Still, I decided to take the position at the university. One fine morning I was at my World Bank office. The PM called me. He said he wanted to see me, I moved immediately.

How long did you work at the World Bank?

For 15 years. I was the program officer. I briefed them on Nepal politics. It was an interesting job. But I had put three conditions when the Prime Minister asked me to become the VC. I got just Rs 6,000 as salary at the university which was insignificant when compared to the World Bank. Number one condition I put forward to the government was that I would never carry any party's flags; I would not tolerate political interference and need to work independently, and finally I needed full cooperation from the government. Koirala kept these promises and provided the government support.

How independent were you in exercising your power as vice chancellor?

Being a VC was next only to the prime minister. Such was the prestige attached to being a VC. We never had to bow down before a minister or top bureaucrats.

What reforms did you introduce at TU?

I presented three plans to the king and the Prime Minister then for the reform of TU. "Today, tomorrow and future" was the theme. I used to see 40 miles ahead. I had the vision. But the road to the development was not straight. Students' protests would come in, many problems came. But I never wavered, never left the road, I was determined to move forward with my plans. But soon I was asked to resign after the change in government. I don't think there was any VC who could make such a bold decision. The first thing I had to accomplish was to increase the tuition fee to improve the finances of the university. The grants from the government was limited, I wanted to raise fees and I did it by increasing it despite so much pressure from all quarters. I increased the student fee to hundred percent. It was not hiked since 18 years. The state grant was limited; it was not enough to drive the reform. Second, university was making unnecessary expenses; I wanted to cut it down. The university ran a cafeteria for students which cost the university Rs. 1.5 cores. Even Radhakrishna Mainali who was then underground came and ate food at this cafeteria. People from streets and elsewhere enjoyed a free food there. I wanted it to close down. The cafeteria was closed; a huge money was saved from this as a result. Once I attended the first senate meeting at BPKIHS. They were passing the budget. The officer at the lowest desk of the BPKIHS and a professor of TU draw the same salary. Can you believe this? For 18 years there have been no increments in fees. The state doesn't give money, the students don't pay fees. How can I run the university? I decided to hike the student fee.

Were you not scared of students?

I followed the advice lord Krishna gave to Arjun. I decided not to be afraid though students violently protested; DSP sustained serious head injuries, furniture were burnt, and stones were pelted.

What were your arguments in favor of student fee hike?

I conducted a series of meetings with the student leaders before hiking the fee. There were Nepali Congress and UML students. They protested violently but I went on with my decision. I had a strong argument. I had a strong conviction. I met the students face to face. I told them you belong to mere six percent of the total age group who go to university and are capable of paying fees because you belong to affluent parents. Look at the 95 percent of students in the country who never go to university due to poverty. Those students deserve free-ships, not you. At that time 80 percent of the state subsidy went to meet the expenses of those six percent students, the richest echelon of the society who went to university. Those poor outside the university were not getting the subsidy. So it was unjust. On that ground, I went with my decision to hike the student fee. But they burnt my effigy and protested violently. I was nearly manhandled. They threatened my wife at home through telephone. Life became a hell for me at TU; it became a battle, The Mahabharata.

Did you push with the decision singly or sought political backing to it?

I sought the support from the government and the party leaders before implementing my plans. Even the UML leaders agreed. But when the student protests soared up, they all retracted back leaving me alone to defend my plans.

What did you do with the money used for cafeteria?

I used it to open the girls' hostel.

What are the other reforms you brought to TU?

I next moved on to seek volunteer retirement of some 20 non-essential administrative positions. But after I retired, Nabin Jung Shah, then VC, revived those positions. My another idea was to raise the finances of the university through consultancy works by departments. Some departments did really well in this. Apart from this, my idea was that teachers who work outside the campus should contribute 10 percent of their incomes to the university. This was implemented. Another thing I attempted doing was stopping the mafia from selling duplicate certificates coming from India. It was the job of the government to stop this racketing. But nothing happened till now. Another thing I did along with Kamal Prakash Malla was to introduce three-year bachelor's programs. Before that, bachelor's degree was of two years. The three-year bachelor program was implemented during my tenure.

But now the three-year is declared 'outdated' and a four-year bachelor is introduced.

Education should be based on a bedrock of liberal education. Our education is still narrow. It lacks a broad-based knowledge of all areas. Our students lack broad understanding of our society and the Nepalese economy. What I wanted is an American education system. There is only one man in Nepal who can think on this system. He is Prof. Shreedhar Lohani.

Who is to be blamed for the downfall of public higher education in Nepal?

It is the leadership. They lack commitment. Teachers lack commitment. They work outside the university. Memory-seeking is another problem. My idea was to introduce study programs through which the students develop critical thinking.

Are there more problems facing TU?

British ambassador always used to call me “comrade vice-chancellor”. He used to ask me how is the university now? I used to reply him; “It is like the empire of queen Victoria” I used to reply him. TU is such a vast, like the former British empire. It is too big to be a university. It is too big to be manageable. My idea was giving autonomy. Self-autonomous was my proposal. I tabled this proposal at the TU senate. But the bampathi [Communists] opposed me. But when the same bampanthi came to power, they accepted it [autonomy]. I came with a cluster system, that is, to make the PN campus as the central campus, Butwal, Bhairahawa and other satellites to be made cluster campus and to delegate power. In five years’ time, I wanted to make those campuses deemed universities. But all my plans failed apart due to my resignation. It was a big loss to TU. TU is too big to be a university. It is too big to manage.

So, the problem is centralization?

Basically, TU has grown to be too big; it has to be split into many universities. TU’s big problem are students. No student unions should be housed inside the university. They should work from outside. My idea was that Tri-Chandra College be made a university, Patan and Padmakanya should become universities on their own. TU should be made elite university. The leadership lacks ownership, they lack the feeling that it is my campus, it is my university. How many do you think will think this way? Lack of ownership is the problem of Nepal. The key challenges of TU are three – how to attract best minds of the country to work, how to retain them when they are given better options outside. Another challenge is that academics cannot be paid more salary. How can you find better successor is another problem? Can we attract another KPMalla? Chaitanya Mishra? They will never come to such an environment. I told the students because of your protests, and political activism, you will never get these kinds of people. My vision of TU was to build it on the modal of a western university. I was the one who brought the US\$20 million from the World Bank in 1992. The present building is the result of this. But now, the leaders have killed all my dreams. If I had served two terms (8) years, I would have put TU on track.

What does that mean?

To stop TU from derailing. Now, it has left its track.

What stopped you from doing that?

The political bhagbanda... Ishwor Pokhrel tells me I can be an asset still. But I tell him an old Italian proverb: poets and pigs are admired only after deaths. I am like that now. My idea was for example, make many buildings in front of campuses like PK and rent the buildings to businesses. This would have generated huge money to campuses. For example, American George Washington University rents its buildings to the World Bank and earns a lot of money. Campus should do business. Business means not just business. From the money generated, they should invest in research and development.

Can you talk little more on why TU administrative building is padlocked now?

The crux of the problem is politics. There is an issue of bhagbanda. Agitating teachers’ unions

want to fill the vacant positions by their members. The biggest problem is now that VC is appointed on political grounds. Rector from another political party, registrar from another. The Baidya faction of the Maoist party wants to fill the vacant positions now available taking advantage of the politically divided administration. These positions are not advertised. The present rector is appointed from TUTA- He was a TU general secretary. Academically serious professors are peripheralised and politically active professors fill these positions. So they become responsible to the parties, not to the university. Prime Minister's wife's sister is not a doctor but is now a professor. She got recruited as a dean politically. There were 400 people who were more capable than her but were not given the opportunity. She came through bhagbanda.

Who is a leader?

A leader is one who has moral credentials. For example, when I was the VC, telephone bills of TU exceeded 1 lakh a month. Some people came and phone indiscriminately; they made international calls to Australia and so many places. There were visitors who kept coming to my office as they do today. I paid the money from my own pocket. A leader should have moral authority. A vision can be borrowed but the moral character should belong to a leader. One should have guts. One can borrow wisdom and vision. Akbar was a great leader. But he had no wisdom. But he was surrounded by good people, wise people. TU leader needs these qualities. I was trying to depoliticize the university but was not supported by wise people. Do you know how the campus chiefs are selected nowadays?

No, can you tell me?

They come from political parties. They are politically appointed. Campus chiefs and deans are appointed politically. There is no question of merit here. Nepali Congress has its hold on Shaker Dev Campus, PK and TC. The UML has its hold on Pulchowk Campus and Institute of Medicine. Before I came to TU as a VC, there was this bhagbanda. It remains today even more visible. The VC was NC-backed, Rector and Registrar were UML-backed. My view was that in academic matter, there must not be political appointments...The flags the political parties possess in Nepal are all red; they signify change. But what an irony, they have become resistant to change?

Thank you

(This interview was conducted on December 23, 2012 at the interviewee's private residence in Kathmandu)

Appendix 5: Discourse of “autonomy” in a local English daily

Capable TU colleges may get autonomy

Nitya Nanda Timsina

KATHMANDU, OCT 06 - The process of granting autonomy to colleges under Tribhuvan University (TU) is likely to begin from January next year.

“Big campuses, capable and willing enough, will be granted autonomy, which includes academic, administrative and management autonomy,” said Prof Dr Hom Nath Bhattarai, member secretary of the University Grants Commission (UGC).

TU colleges have so far been centrally managed and administered. Once granted autonomy, colleges can freely choose and make their curriculum, appoint teachers, conduct examinations, raise fees and introduce courses and contents of learning, tailored to the present and future needs of society, said Prof Bhattarai.

To begin with, “big campuses”, about eight to ten will be granted autonomy and the number will be scaled up with more willing and capable campuses. TU has 61 constituent and about 270 affiliated colleges, including community and private colleges.

Experts said autonomous colleges could eventually detach from the parent university and develop into universities.

An understanding has been reached on granting autonomy to TU colleges, said Laba Prasad Tripathi, spokesperson for the Ministry of Education and Sports.

“Autonomy has been felt as essential to enhance the performance of TU colleges and reform the higher education system,” he said.

“A simple dichotomy is that autonomy makes institutions accountable and responsible,” said Dr Rajendra Dhoj Joshi, education specialist at the World Bank. The World Bank is providing \$ 60 million in grants over a period of five years under its higher education project-II to implement the program. Final agreement is likely in the beginning of next year, according to officials.

However, many students and teachers doubt the implementation of the project. They accuse the government of hastily bringing the project without adequate mechanism in place.

“It’s high sounding but we doubt the implementation,” said Iswor Raj Lohani, a teacher at Shanker Dev College.

(Posted on: 2005-10-05 07:25. Source: The Kathmandu Post, Nepal’s leading English daily).

Glossary

- Ama-mother (also referred generally to elderly women in Nepal, example grandmother).
- Bhagbanda – power-sharing
- Bigha-a measurement of land, approx. five-eighth of an acre
- Bikendrikaran- decentralization
- Biswabyapikaran – globalization
- Bramha, Bishnu and Shiva-one of the three god heads or trinity- the preserver, creator and destroyer, respectively.
- Dan- offerings
- Dharmashala-cottage for the pilgrims
- Didi – elder sister
- Farak farak dristikon –different different vision
- Ghera-bara-fences/boundary
- Goman-Cobra
- Hakim sahib-officer, office boss
- Hiti-dhara-a communal place to drink water or fetch water, usually in ancient days. A drinking water or a brook enclosed within a hedge or bushes.
- Kasai-people assigned as butchers under the previous social arrangement in Nepal. Not everyone could become butcher.
- Khukuri-the knife commonly used by the Nepali people
- Khula arthatantra – open economy
- Laddu-a type of Indian sweet eaten usually during festivals
- Maghe Sankranti-Hindu festival held on the month of Magh (January –February) throughout Nepal and Northern India
- Maila: Someone in between the older and younger siblings in a family.
- Mathibata – from above.
- Rajnitik bhagbanda-political power sharing
- Ramro manche – good person/man
- Ropani-an area of land equivalent to 5,625 sq. feet.
- Sammunati-prosperity
- Saraswati-Goddess of knowledge
- Sauji-landlord
- Sauni – landlady/restaurant/house/property owner
- Swasthani bratakatha-story of Hindu goddess Swasthani recited once a year accompanied by fasting, praying, and eating ‘pure’ food (without meat, egg, fish, or alcohol).
- Swayatta -Autonomous
- Tarai-the low-lying area south of Nepal which stretches from east to west bordering North

Indian states of Bengal, Bihar, and Uttar Pradesh. The word is also used interchangeably with Madhes, the southern flatland of Nepal.

Tarool-a root, yam eaten mainly during Hindu festivals.

The Mahabharata-One of the world's oldest epic stories in Sanskrit that describes the war between five princess and 100 princess.

Timbur-Local Nepali peeper (wild plant).

Udarbadiarthaniti-liberaleconomicpolicy

Vaidya-A traditional doctor who applies medicinal plants or other techniques to treatment of sick and injured.

Yamaraj-the lord/ruler of the hell.

Yogi/Sanyasi/Sadhu-a meditating or wandering ascetic who has abandoned worldly pleasures and material possessions, family and friends.