

## **Nepalese In Denmark: How Their International Education Aspirations Transformed Into A Quest For ‘Greener Pasture’**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This paper attempts to reflect on how international education has come to be imagined as a quest for ‘greener pastures’ by many young Nepalese who are on the move in what is increasingly described as a ‘globalized world’. Networking and engaging deeply in social, cultural and sporting rituals with the Nepalese students in Copenhagen, first as an Erasmus Mundus fellow from 2006 to 2008 and then as a doctoral student from 2011 to 2015 accompanied by a fieldwork in Nepal, this paper examines how international education has come to serve this diasporic desire for many young Nepalese.*

**Keywords:** international education, development, Nepal, Denmark, greener pastures

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Denmark has finally thrown off its small-state mentality...openheartedness, creativity, humor and diversity shine through Danish smile...in the age of globalization the relationship with the “other” has become more fundamental than ever (Madsen, 2011, p. 35).

The expanding international education market, which has turned international education into a global mass phenomenon, holds out promises for young people from the emerging middle-classes in countries of the global South, both as a means of enhancing one’s social standing and as a pathway to personal growth and transformation (Valentin, 2015, p. 318).

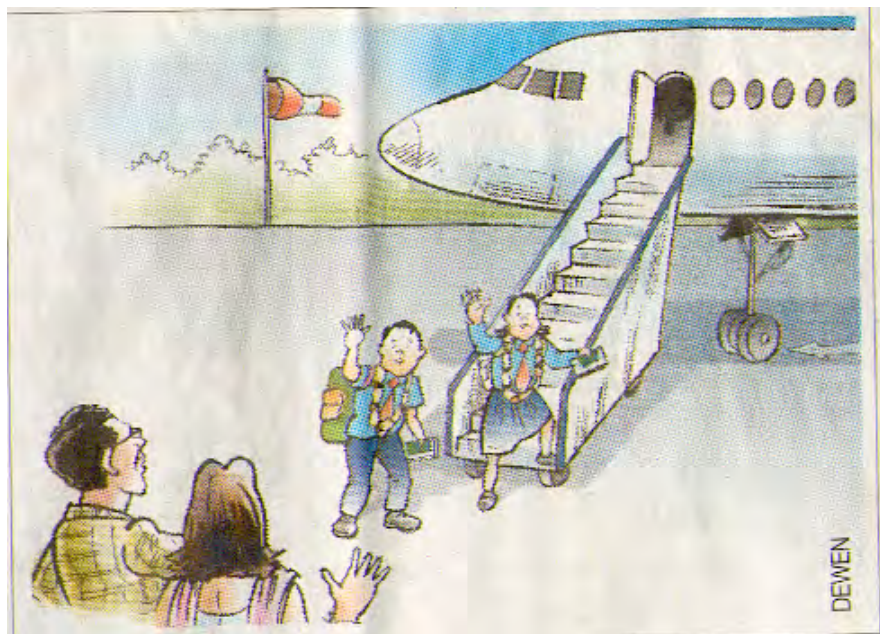
The setting for this story takes place in Copenhagen, Denmark, a fast-growing destination of choice for Nepalese students (see Valentin, 2015, n.d.). Given the growing number of Nepalese students

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in Denmark, the aim of the study is to shed light on the problems that accompany the ‘modern’ dream of students who approach international education with a ‘greener pasture’ mindset.

Before embarking on my own international educational journey to Denmark in 2006, I was working as a journalist for The Kathmandu Post (TKP), Nepal’s largest selling English daily, when I had the rare chance to report on Nepalese students going overseas. I was exposed to how mesmerized they were by their dreams of ‘greener pastures’. From a dozen or so interviews with the students, I remember one such episode while collecting the international aspirations of the Nepalese students (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1: ‘Students head outward for higher studies’ (TKP, Feb. 5, 2005)**



At that time, I remember chatting with a group of elated and proud Nepalese students dreaming high of their futures and leaving Nepal in the pursuit of international higher education. Additionally, as a doctoral student from Roskilde University, my field work in Nepal took me to a group of students who were packing off to what they described as ‘greener pastures’. Crowned in marigold flowers and their faces smeared in vermillion, they were headed to that imaginative space called ‘greener pastures’. Many of them said on record they would not like to return to Nepal but would instead prefer to settle down in Europe, America, Canada or Australia once they graduated. These exotic places outside of Nepal came to be understood as ‘greener pastures’. How to get ‘out there’ haunts many young Nepalese.

I remember that particular instance in Kathmandu when a score of parents, friends and relatives came to see off their sons and daughters at Nepal’s only international airport. Prior to that my own landlady’s son who had every comfort in Kathmandu proudly got into a taxi and headed to the airport after bidding goodbye with families, friends and relatives. Crowned in an enormous garland of marigold flowers, that proud and pomp figure slowly getting into taxi, boarding an aircraft propelled by jet engine, and headed to the United States with a sense of belonging to the developed and modern place, is a vision of ‘greener pastures’ that attracts most Nepalese. These new graduates of new Nepal have such appreciative understanding of the Western hemisphere as the places of abundance while their own country

Nepal is perceived as a place that lags behind in every respect. This paper shows that the international discourses of education and development imparted through national curriculum is the most important in this process in fostering this dichotomy, that is, to imagine Nepal as barren and industrialized countries as greener. However, the RU paper describes the difficulty that awaits the Nepalese international students as they seek ‘greener pastures’ in Denmark.

**Figure 2: RU paper**



One third of international students at RU are Nepalese students who hold at least a Bachelor’s degree from Niels Brock. Nepalese people have most often been appointed by agents who earn a lot of money from providing international students to Niels Brock, an institution which offers non-Danish accredited international education. The students must struggle hard to get an education in the West. We have met, among other things, a Nepalese student and her husband who work full time to scrape money together for the studies. Many others struggle with the special Danish study form at RU and the academic English level. At the same time, poorly paid jobs fill up so much of their time that they have difficulty following their studies (RU Paper is an independent newspaper of Roskilde University).

When asked to reflect upon, many share their frustrations that their international education does not translate into ‘greener pasture’ or relevant career in Denmark. Yet, without being relevant to their work practices, for many, international education has become simply the ticket out of Nepal. For many Nepalese students who come to Denmark, they have no option but to choose the non-Danish institution of last resort, popularly known as Niels Brock, a thriving private business college in the heart of the Danish welfare state, which charge exorbitant fees and provide neither recognition for degrees nor prospects of a future employment. Unrecognised and poor, many Nepalese international students perform menial labour in Denmark or move further to Portugal after graduating in Denmark as their last vestige of hope and comfort. Navigating their space in Europe is seldom easy when a disproportionate number of its inhabitants hate them just because they look different from the ideal of sameness. This is made further complicated by the UK divorcing from the European Union sending shock waves across the European

capitals. It has increased the uncertainty and fears for the future of European research and questioned the qualities and reputation of European Universities at large (see Courtois 2018). Beyond any doubt, the far-right anti-immigration movement has dealt one of the deadliest blows to the ideas of globalization and European education cooperation. But this is not the concern here. Rather, this paper is interested in the chatters of global education, its stable order and coherent meaning, which as united by globalization's common ideal of being in the world, has thrown man into the narrow and rigid world of becoming. It is this chatter about international education I set out to examine in this paper with the Nepalese in Denmark as the focus.

My interest in rapidly increasing international student diaspora in Denmark actually grew when in its special June 2018 edition, *RU Paper*, in collaboration with the local Danish *Dagbladet*, focused on students from Nepal. At that time, there were only a handful of Nepalese students. Two years later, the *RU paper* (see Dragsdahl & Stærmosse 2020) reported that the Nepalese comprise third of international students on campus but unlike their European counterparts who receive grants to go to colleges, they are charged exorbitant tuition fee and subjected to a condition of having to work very hard to meet their financial needs. How widespread are the Nepalese and how is this situation reflected elsewhere will be the focus next?

### **The Global Nepalese Diaspora**

As of July 2019, the global network of international Nepalese diaspora, popularly known as 'Non-Resident Nepalese Association' (NRNA), listed on its website, 'the Nepalese are now scattered in 78 countries around the world.' This trend intensified in 1990, 'when scores of villagers had left for salaried employment in Nepal and beyond, to India, Malaysia, Hong Kong, the Gulf states, South Korea and even farther' (Holmberg, 2017). In 2005, the Migration Policy Institute reported that 'one of Nepal's major exports is labour'. By the end of 2007, an estimated half a million Nepalese were headed to major Indian cities, the Middle East, and South East Asia; and another half to the 'developed' north sending home a remittance worth one billion dollars each year (see Gellner 2007). Here, the international discourse of education and migration is silent on the sufferings, death and destruction it creates and circulates only positivity. As noted by Nepalese journalists Ngamindra Dahal and Bhagirath Yogi (2019), 'nearly 7,000 Nepali migrant workers have died over the last decade while working abroad...'. In 2016 alone, at least fifteen Nepalese 'contractors' were killed in Afghanistan (see Coburn, 2018). Many returned with 'serious physical and psychological damage' but there has been no let-up in the flows (21). It was at this point that Kabi Adhikari (2017), a Nepalese student at Tribhuvan University, Nepal's national flagship of higher education, noted that 'There are many factors that have led to this situation. The most prominent one is the policies of the state that have made all youths see greener pastures outside' and their own country as poor and barren. Like most Nepalese students and youth, Adhikari places the blame at the feet of the 'state policy', which connects international education to the ideal of progress and vision of development in North Western Europe, US and Australia. A vast majority of Nepalese students and youth dream of going to these English destinations. Where they fail to secure these English destinations via tough nationwide contest and rigorous English language tests, Niels Brock in Denmark then offers the last vestige of hope. It accepts all and sundry just based on financial proof.

Notwithstanding geographical distance and climatic contrast, according to NRNA, the number of Nepalese in Denmark reached an estimated 6000 in 2019 and at least 3,000 are students. In contrast, in 2006, the number of Nepalese International students was very low. Their teachers in Denmark had

initially assumed that these students will play influential roles in their home countries once they return. Instead, a huge majority of the students who graduated ended up in EU doing menial jobs, which mostly include cooking and cleaning.

Globally, an estimated 49,500 Nepalese students are studying overseas, and this number has risen from 24,000 in 2010 (Bista, Sharma and Raby, 2019). Denmark has seen a similar trend (see Pradhan, Shrestha and Valentin, 2019). This rising number of Nepalese students in the West is largely a result of globalization and the process of internationalization of higher education. What have however not figured out in the research till date is how in the specific historical context of Nepal, international education has come to be thought in terms of ‘greener pastures’. The most important force that shapes this perspective that this paper will show is the international discourse of ‘development’ which facilitates this one directional South-North flow of students and youth in the name of international education.

Once the Nepalese students land here, many of them dream of fulfilling their cosmopolitan dreams unfulfilled in Nepal in terms of getting an equal ground with the ‘developed’ people [Nepali term is *bikasi*] (Shrestha, 1995). The ‘development’, which creates this dichotomy, comes to Nepal from elsewhere; it is not produced locally (Pigg, 1992). The Nepali political elites have since 1950 been so mesmerised by that developmental vision of education and social change as influenced by a Nehruvian dream of freedom in neighbouring India: ‘to keep our feet, a head held high, and a place among the equals’ (Desai 2006, p. 120). The reason for and need to overthrow the Rana regime in 1951 and Hindu monarchy in Nepal in 2007 came partly from that inspirations and partly from scholarly advocacy (see, e.g. Gellner 2007; Gellner *et al* 1997). The discourses of international development circulated by Nepal’s International Development Partners (IDP) played its most decisive part. It promised to bring in places like Nepal what Zygmunt Bauman (2005) would call, ‘universally shared and lasting happiness’ (p. 68). When such promises fail, a sense of urgency to escape from Nepal in the hope of finding something ‘out there’ haunts the young Nepalese and which negotiates their international education aspirations in terms of the ‘greener pastures’. It is this ubiquitous desire for modernity instead of the genuine needs to complete an international education program which brings them to Denmark. As I show from my private conversation which will be described as chits-chats and daily encounter, many Nepalese feel grudgingly contended in Denmark even as their degrees and diplomas have absolutely no connection with their work practices.

### THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS

This paper employs Foucault’s poststructuralism as a theoretical lens to understand the emergence of the ‘greener pastures’ subjectivity among the Nepalese students which negotiates their international education dream in Denmark. It does so by placing the discourse of international development in the historical context of Nepal which has made it impossible to imagine education and social reality in terms other than ‘development’ (see Fujikura 2013; Pigg 1992; Shrestha 1995). Accordingly, the paper approaches the ‘greener pastures’ as a typical Nepali linguistic ritual and a subjectivity as fostered by international discourse of development, which provides the wings for the Nepalese imagination to fly to meet that imagined world of abundance. The ‘development’, in sum, is couched in this paper as the system of power/knowledge, with its unique origin in Nepal in 1951, as the system of reason fostering the ‘greener pastures’ subjectivity. The year 1951 is important to trace the conditions of emergence for this thinking when the Nepalese political elites exiled in India began to look for changes described similarly for India and elsewhere and synonymously used as ‘development’ or

‘bikas’ (see Shrestha 1995; Pigg 1992). Since that time, a ‘revolutionary rising expectations’ has come to grip the Nepalese (e.g., Mihaly 2009). As I show, when Nepalese students talk ‘greener pastures’, which negotiates their international education dreams, they refer to that rising revolutionary expectations. As a methodology used to capture their subjectivity ‘greener pastures’, I applied a particular format and style of gathering data via what I prefer informal ‘chit-chats’ (Nepali equivalent is *kurākānī* or *guf-gaf*). This is a different type of ethnography.

Discourse as a social text is concerned with talk; it required this format and style of interviewing (Alvesson & Skold-Berg, 2000). The ‘chit-chats’ hinge between informal interview, talks, group discussions, *tête-à-tête*, common gossips, or an extempore speech. I sum up them as a ‘chit-chat’. This was required in a non-Western, non-science, context. This approach was important because this research was concerned with ‘a micro-practice of our lived experiences in Denmark (paraphrasing Olssen 2003, p. 192). One must be wary of a systematic qualitative interview in a non-Western context. A chit-chat is an open, informal, and lively talk which suits the Nepalese context which requires alternative voices and practices repressed by the dominant discourses of modernity to capture the *self*. To paraphrase Denzin & Lincoln (2005), those chits-chats were unique and limited to ‘interactional moments’ (709). This paper brings out this unique and different international education experience in Denmark outside the global hegemonic order of discourse. It does so by ‘making an independent inquiry about our own lives and worlds’ (Appadurai 2006, p. 173). Foucault’s poststructuralism was important in this regard because this approach looks for alternative voices and practices repressed by the dominant discourses of modernity. Accordingly, the fieldwork takes the form of ‘an exercise of ethnographic imagination’ (Willis 2000, p. 112). If an ethnography is a way of seeing or a way of looking (Wolcott, 1999), then it requires a technique to do so. That is, the chits-chats involve not simply going to the field as an outsider but involving oneself in the micro-practice of lived experience. I submerged myself in the rituals such as ‘rice feeding’, birthday bashes, fishing and sporting events of the Nepalese in Copenhagen as a way to learn and reflect collectively in what I understand as ‘ethnography’. In sum, my take on ethnography is *chit-chats* from where I capture the subjected selves and marginalised voices as repressed by larger discourses of globalization by submerging myself deeply with the actors. I do so not remotely as anthropologists do from their tenured position in universities, but live with them and their rituals. Ethnography is not just about ‘listening carefully to the lives of others’ or being imaginative and creative to ‘infuse lived experience’; it requires us to invent a special technique (Elliott & Culhane 2016, p. 3). Accordingly, I took my role as a poststructuralist ethnographer so as to learn to (re)imagine and reflect. As an exercise of thinking, this type of ethnography enhances our capacity to imagine and retrospect of those things that we claim to know but we do not know yet (Appadurai, 2006). In so doing, more important than a bunch of people physically moving or migrating as most others describe of globalization, my take on globalization is a ‘flight of imagination’ (original emphasis). It is this flight of imagination which nurtures the ‘greener pastures’ thinking in Nepal when many young people talk about international education in the western hemisphere. The international discourse of development, which subsumes education and globalization, is the most powerful regime of truth and order through which the Nepalese emulate their heroes in the ‘greener pastures’.

Orientalism [‘development’] can be discussed and analysed as the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient [Nepal/ese]—dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it (Said, 1977, p. 3).

Like Edward Said's (1977, 2000) use of the concept 'orientalism' as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient, this paper deploys the concept 'development' as a discourse constituted in the system of power/knowledge (see Escobar 1995) and which fosters the subjectivity 'greener pastures'. The other way of approaching the 'greener pastures' subjectivity is via agency-structure to locate its meaning in objective term. Instead, I argue that this imagination is fostered by the discursive practice of development in Nepal.

In sum, this paper is inspired by the works on postmodern knowledge. Very few works in Nepal are driven by the postmodern knowledge (see, e.g. Robinson-Pant 2001; Madsen and Carney 2011; Carney and Rappleye 2011). Thin on the ground though their works are valuable in thinking about education research beyond the economic paradigm to include political events and development discourses in Nepal.

### **Chit-chat with the Nepalese in Denmark**

In a chit-chat, I asked my Nepali friend Krishna (some of the other names are changed to maintain anonymity) – who himself came to Denmark as an international student and eventually applied for Green Card to settle down permanently – to reflect on the above cited paradox of international education in Denmark.

I don't believe that the plight of diligent Nepalese youths to abroad/Denmark is only to pursue higher education. I think, it is very deficient to describe our international education journey like this. However, the extreme foreign euphoria, a well settled socioeconomic status and the catastrophic socio-political turmoil back in Nepal provokes youth's mind to cross the boundary by means of education (Krishna, Nepali Green Card holder in Denmark).

Sunday, 23 December 2018 to be precise, I was attending one of my Nepali friend's daughter's 'rice-feeding' event in Copenhagen when I had a lively face-to-face chit-chat with Krishna. The 'rice-feeding' is a Hindu ritual or a 'Brahmanical tradition' informed by a different reason and morality (Parry, 1985). The practice continues despite the removal of the Hindu state in Nepal. On the occasion, the family introduce solid food for the first time when their child turns six months old. About 80 Nepalese, many of them who have completed their master and bachelor degrees in Denmark, had gathered for the ritual in a party hall in Copenhagen. Loud music including English, Hindi and Nepali was played. Many danced as well. Male members sat around one side drinking Irish whisky, Jack Daniel and Tuborg; their wives sat at the other end drinking mojito. I took the seat next to Krishna, who had just returned from a short visit to Nepal. He appeared cheerful after his Green Card permit got extended for two more years. Next to him sat Rajesh, who was sharing his holiday in Phuket, Thailand. During those banal conversations or what I prefer 'chit-chats', most of my Nepali friends shared their future aspirations. One of my PhD colleagues who had just completed his PhD in nutrition sciences was in a great dilemma whether to return to Nepal or apply for a permanent residency in Denmark. Another colleague completed his PhD in biomedicine from Copenhagen University and his wife completed her post doctorate in a similar field. They migrated to Canada instead of returning to Nepal. Nishant, who graduated from Nepal's iconic Institute of Engineering, came to Denmark under the Green Card scheme but due to language barriers left to live permanently in the United Kingdom. Rajen spent a lot of money for processing his application that included English language test for a permanent residency in Australia. Very few, almost no one showed interest in returning to Nepal after obtaining their international degrees in Denmark. A fairly large number of them wanted to return to Nepal only for holidays and short business trips. When they had accumulated



enough money, they would invest in real estate businesses, hotels and restaurants in Nepal. Quite a few would like to return as business entrepreneurs when their children turn 18 in Denmark to qualify for living independently from parents. On that occasion, I asked Rajesh, a Nepali permanent resident in Denmark, who came here in 2007 as an international student, to reflect on the concept of ‘greener pastures’.

Of all the chit-chats, Rajesh’s chit-chat is worthy of mention here. He lives a stone throw away from my quarter in Denmark. We often go jogging, fishing, meet on social occasions and play badminton with a group of other Nepalese in Copenhagen, many of them students and their dependent wives or husbands. He reflects on what has happened to his international education aspirations in Denmark.

Rajesh completed a two-year course on multimedia and then a bachelor in international business. While his friend Samir continued with his advance degree in information technology at the University of Southern Denmark, Rajesh quit in favour of a work permit that allowed him a fast-track permanent settlement in Denmark. Samir ended up with a handsomely paid white-collar job in UNICEF, while Rajesh ended up being a head cook in downtown Copenhagen. Both of them now live nearly on same type of villa house and ride same brand cars and enjoy nearly the same quality of life as made possible by the distributive social policies of the Danish welfare state. Many young people emulate Rajesh’s success in remitting money to Nepal than emulate Samir’s path to social change. What is more, Rajesh went on a summer holiday in exotic places like Thailand’s island of Phuket and built a four-storey concrete tower in Nepal. Many in Nepal feel a sense of being left behind in the race when they see Rajesh’s achievements in Denmark and his vacations in Phuket on social media. How to reach ‘out there’ or how to travel forward in time haunts them. International education is the only way to reach there and is part of that long list of dreams, which include among others, the desire to belong to the cosmopolitan center of the White civilization, where the world’s most beautiful and secular people live—all of which come to foster the subjectivity ‘greener pastures’. International education then takes the shape of a ‘greener pastures’ serving as a bridge to connect with such real and authentic peoples and places. For many, their immediate thoughts would be a work-study environment in Copenhagen where they dream of working with the pure whites singing and humming Bryan Adams’ biggest hit *Hotel California* or *Michel Learns to Rock*. All of those abstract sounds and material images fill their sense of international education as some sort of an object ‘greener pastures’. In sum, the discourse of international development circulated in Nepal by international aid agencies provides the wings for such abstract thoughts to fly to meet that imagined world of abundance.

Rajesh’s future plans after securing his place in the global Nepalese diaspora (NRN) are clear: To his hometown in Chitwan, popularly known for its biodiversity, dense green forest, home to the world’s rare one-horned rhinos and Bengal tigers, and the country’s oldest and famous national park’, he would briefly return to spend his winter vacation in that four-storey concrete house he had built from the remittance last year. Whilst some of his international education dreams transformed into that concrete tower in his home town, he had to navigate a different path to obtain it. Instead of his degrees and diplomas earned in Denmark providing him an upward social mobility, he had to resort to a job as cook to reach there. After having secured his permanent residency and bought a villa home in Denmark and having accomplished the task of building a tower in Nepal, Rajesh is thinking to invest in real estate, stocks and shares.



### **Denmark is not an international education destination but a gateway to Europe and a good place to earn remittance**

Like Rajesh and Krishna, there are many other Nepalese who are not convinced that Denmark is an exotic destination to realize their international education aspirations but a place of 'greener pastures' or a good source of remittance. International education simply offers a route or a ticket in this process without being relevant to degrees and diplomas earned in Denmark or Europe. How can we understand international education in the light of this paradox?

Shyam, who completed his master degree from RU contests the view that his international education degree from Denmark is equipping him with academic and social skills necessary to improve his livelihoods. He is rather relying on his cleaning job for his livelihoods whilst his socially privileged white mates had their unbroken academic mobility and career progression. He lives with three more friends in a single bedroom and a shared kitchen and toilet with his renter. Each four line-up with their own pressure cookers to cook their meal in turn. Shyam paid 32,600 Danish kroner as tuition fee to RU each semester all by himself working in downtown Hard Rock cafe. In two years, he spent five million Nepalese rupees to RU as tuition fee to obtain his international master degree. When RU teachers compare the Nepalese students with their European counterparts who receive grants to go to university in terms of their 'professional level' to score in exams or ability to pass the exam, they do not know how Nepalese students have to work and study in Denmark on unequal terms.

Radhika became pregnant in her second semester but was not entitled to receive any financial support in Denmark that includes maternity pay on par with her Danish and European counterparts. Rukmini and her newlywed husband arrived next in a row. They married at the age of 21, just before embarking on their international education journey, so that Rukmini could work full-time to support her husband's tuition fee. As a relative, Rajesh who had already belonged to Denmark, was obliged to give them a place to sleep and kitchen to eat. He and his two sons and wife hosted the couple in their 55-square meter one bedroom apartment where they met for their honeymoon. Gauri couldn't find a place to register her address. As a last resort, a Pakistani offered her the address in return for a monthly payment of 1000 kroner but not the place to sleep; it took her almost a year to find a comfortable place to sleep and her own address to rely on, let alone a congenial atmosphere to study. She registered her address with the Pakistani and slept elsewhere with a Nepali family who charged her another 2,500 kroner for rent. She had to work extra hours to meet her monthly expenses on food and tuition. Shyam's roommate Rupak slept a couple of times at the train station after he had no time left to commute between work and study. Despite such hardships, the flow of Nepalese students is unlikely to lose its momentum. Consider this most recent chat on Nepali social media:

Subedi A.: Can anyone provide me information about Niels Brock plz... I have only this option as my score is only 6.0.

Bishal: Only route to Europe (original Nepali language: *Europe aaune bato ho yo*).

Bijay: Niels Brock now only offers 3-year bachelor degree. It makes no meaning why study here. But if you are only finding a way to enter Europe, it can be best option.

AroOn: Only a way to enter Europe is not a professional decision bro.

Manoj: After completing masters from Niels Brock [in Copenhagen], is there any possibilities to get PR in Denmark? Or, should we return to home country?

Raut: Niels Brock may be ok to begin with, bro. There are plentiful options. After completing masters, you can apply in another Danish university again for master degree. If accepted, it will be best for you; if not Portugal. A PR in Denmark is not that easy... But why worry? There are 23-24 other countries in EU; you do not have to just return to Nepal.

From their hometown in Nepal, Ajit and Manoj posts open Facebook message to *Nepalese Living in Denmark* on July 23, 2020. Bishal, Bijay and Raut are among the 50 Nepalese at a class of 60 international students at Niels Brock often criticized for charging exorbitant fees. They reply to Ajit and Manoj that Denmark is only a gateway to enter Europe and not a real education destination. Nirmala couldn't qualify to come to Europe on a student visa. The easiest route the 'brokers' in Kathmandu showed her was 'paper marriage' with a student. Nirmala would otherwise live dirt poor in Nepal. Here, conventional anthropologists or ethnographers would miss the story of Nirmala by relying on systematic or rigorous interviews which would not capture her route to and routines in Europe. The other option more common to Philipinos and Thais is to tie the knot with singles or divorced Danish often half their age but the Nepalese wouldn't prefer that route to 'greener pastures'. Upon her arrival, Nirmala found a housekeeping job through her Nepali networks. A week later, she phoned her dad in Nepal and said, 'I will be coming home; it is so difficult to work here.' She then added, 'Baba (dad) Europe is not exactly what we talked and thought about in Nepal.' For a sex-hungry single European, she would have become a hot bride and an easy path to settlement. Even as her one and the only concern is how to belong to the EU she wouldn't choose that route to greener pastures. Priti came a month after her wedding in Nepal. She found no accommodation. A sex-hungry man living single for many years, offered her his luxury apartment, but she preferred to sleep with a Nepali family in their kitchen and go through a cumbersome process of qualifying for settlement in the 'greener pastures'. For the sex-hungry, nothing would have been more pleasurable than to sleep with someone else's hot bride but neither Priti nor Nirmala would agree. Here, the discourses of modernity or development have created a conceptual space to think of our body as devoid of souls, 'the product of our ['his'] own making' (paraphrasing Cohen 2008, p. 506). However, not everybody is dictated by its materialistic and functionalist terms contrary to recent claims that a global consumer culture has come to suddenly dissolve the past traditional Nepalese history and culture (see Liechty, 2003).

Typically, [these] anthropologists spend time in one place [Nepal], doing participant observation research by attempting to become part of the community and writing ethnographies, holistic accounts of the local culture, explaining phenomena from the ground up' (Coburn, 2018, pp. 17-18).

In these encounters, as Madsen and Carney (2011) have commented, it was futile to find tropes like 'global' or 'globalization' except as through these local enactments (p. 117). The only Nepali girl who broke the Hindu structure or Nepalese social arrangement to fit the European description of the 'middle-class' was Rinku. She was caught up in an extramarital affair with a white European. She eventually left her Nepalese husband for the Whiteman. Her Nepal-bred brown husband was unable to give her time and sexual satisfaction shuttling between college and his workplace. By a happenchance, Rinku found the European man who fulfilled her sexual desires in the daylight while her husband was at college. She eventually eloped with him and settled down. Nirmala and Priti, however, rejected the pervasive views about globalization and 'modernity' as a unified practice and a common experience of time and space. This paper takes into account this diversity or hybrid form of reality in the world.

### Tracing ‘Greener Pastures’ Subjectivity via Genealogy

Following Foucault, every discourse has its own history which requires a little remote historical sense of awareness to understand (see, Saar 2002). Accordingly, I employ genealogy as a tool to trace the discourses of development and education in Nepal to the year 1951. It is the year when international development intervention began in Nepal. Nepal is a ‘country of villages’ where a vast majority of Nepalese lived as subsistence farmers (Pigg 1992, p. 491). The International Development Partners (IDP) have been in Nepal since 1951 to change that *panaroma of village life* (Desai 2006, p. 34) into a brick, mortar and money economy or what is known as ‘developed’ or ‘modern’ (Shrestha 1995; Pigg 1992). History of Nepal since 1950 is in fact a long-drawn struggle for political power than one of a smooth and certain futures (see Joshi & Rose, 1966; Rose, 1971). As Eugene Bramer Mihaly (2009) reflects back, ‘Nepal from under the grey London skies looked to be what it, in fact, it proved to be—a marvelous laboratory of foreign aid at its best and at its worst’. In the field of education, Dr Hugh Wood, the first Westerner to fly over Nepal sky in 1954 in the capacity of education advisor, describes the exotic culture and romantic landscape in which the Nepalese were living without the phantoms of ambition for or need for the ‘greener pastures’ or development in Nepal (Wood, 1987). Rather than rely on the state for welfare, help and protection, Dr Wood discovered that they lived by helping each other in *marda-parda* under a folk conception of village (Shah, 2008). When injured or sick, they rarely came to the hospital. Even if they did, they did so only after the last local remedies had failed (Pitt, 1971). The reason why international version of education was required in Nepal, as Dr Wood comments, is to bring about scientific consciousness in Nepal. The development or modernisation of Nepal was the thought of the time. Dr. Wood came to Nepal as part of that larger international development mission. He served as the special education advisor to then His Majesty’s Government of Nepal. Since that time, a ‘friendly invasion’ (Mihaly, 2009) come to construct the images of education in terms of the ‘greener pastures’ — all in the name of ‘development’ (Shrestha, 1995). Since that time, international development ‘experts’ who were European in origin, middleclass by definition, urban in outlook, tall in stature, white in complexion, and ability to bend the nature to their will through the use of science, came to exert a considerable influence in the way Nepalese imagined their education and life. Some ‘experts’ came from the United States as Public Health Service special mission to heal the illness with the use of Western science and medicine (Shrestha, 1995), others came from Britain to train and recruit strong-bodied men in the art of war to defend the British Crown and its colonial interests, still others came from the United Nations to distribute condoms and family planning education. Soon they gathered around many motley followers in Kathmandu who began to emulate their ideas and institutions. Of the motley group of tourists, hunters, and rock-climbers who arrived, the most important ones were the ‘development’ brokers who allegedly discovered a primitive Nepal, one which looked very different from the European horizon of progress. Their aim was to ‘develop’ Nepal. To make that dream possible, according to Mihaly (2009), the year 1989 marked the ‘pinnacle’ of foreign intervention which contributed to 80 percent of Nepal’s development expenditures (xxxii). Total foreign aid disbursed in the past 50 years totalled USD 2.3 trillion (Shrestha, 2006). But despite this increase, Nepal sunk to the bottom of the global economic development hierarchy, enjoying the unenvied status of a ‘least developed nation’ (Mihaly, 2009). What is more, Nepal figures in the scholarly writings as a ‘fragile state’, one which is characterised by low income, prone to conflict, weak governance structures, difficult to live and work (Berry, 2010). As a consequence, many young people desire to experience ‘development’ denied by their own country.

International education serves as the only route in this process. It is this discourse which fosters their sense of ‘greener pastures’ when many young people imagine international education. It tells them that they are far from being ‘modern’ or ‘they have a long way to go to get there’ (Pigg 1992, p. 163). As imparted through international curriculum, how to ‘get there’ haunts many Nepalese.

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 Nepalese. 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... excellent scholarship can be found nowadays in democracies of North America and North Western Europe (*Moti Nissani, USA, [1947, 73–78]*), a lesson included at bachelor’s level in Nepal).

The above lesson was enshrined in the national curriculum of Nepal and enacted in the classroom setting where students and their teachers hotly debated the question, *why go to university?* This was the very first sight that struck me during a fieldwork in Nepal in the winter of 2012 sponsored by Roskilde University as part of my doctoral training. The students I observed were in their first semester bachelor degree in business administration, isolated in new college block. Teacher Binod first took their attendance. He was greeted ‘good morning’. He called out the roll numbers. No student was absent. After taking the attendance, he asked two students to present the story: *Why go to university?* The students read the story aloud in turn. The lecture was entirely conducted in English. The class was interactive. As the students finished reading the story, teacher Binod finally summed up the moral of the story from Plato’s *Allegory of Cave*:

Going to university liberates one from blind faith in religion and orthodoxy. Education frees oneself from political indoctrination. Had our political leaders been to university things would not have taken such a nasty turn. Education helps to eliminate inequality. Inequality is not biological; it is a social construct. What we call our religion is usually little more than a direct consequence of our accidental birth in a given social context...education shatters some of the invisible prison walls of our minds.

Hardly had teacher Binod finished the lecture and the class was opened to question-answer session, when Student ‘E’ asked, ‘Sir, why everybody nowadays wants to go to America’? Before even Binod sir replied, Student ‘D’ added, ‘Sir, why are Europe and America better than Nepal’? These questions took all my attention not because they were told for the first time in Nepal but because these are the places most youth and students nowadays want to go. These places fuel the imagery of social change or ‘greener pastures’ in Nepal. Teacher Binod replied, ‘There is money and wealth in Europe and America but there is also freedom — a perfect freedom, out there.’ He added that such a freedom comes only with discipline which is lacking in Nepal and education is an integral part of that process.

Soon, the next lesson began. Binod sir asked two more students to present the story: ‘Marriage is a private affair’. Two students read the story in turn. It was about why love and intercultural marriage was better than the arrange marriage their ancestors followed in Nepal. One of the students couldn’t pronounce the word ‘cosmopolitanism’. The teacher helped him out. This lesson projected the Euro-US

zone as cosmopolitan space and Nepal as oppositional other in the global hierarchy of nations. The morale of the story ran: ‘Sons shall rise against their fathers’ in modern times and they must be free to choose their own partners. The first thing that got me struck was how have their fathers fallen into such a disrepute that the sons will now correct them? That lesson was included in the bachelor’s degree curriculum and its aim was to subjectively discipline the Nepalese students towards certain ends, mainly to dream of the ‘greener pastures’.

This was made clearer by the next lesson: *Plato’s Allegory of Cave*. At the outset, the moral of the lesson *Why go to university* enshrined in the national curriculum and imparted to the students nationwide reinforced Durkheim’s idea of a university as ‘centers of international civilization’ (Durkheim, in Collins 1977, 75-87) which seeks to provide all the people all over the world a common experience of being human. This resonates in Kant’s philosophy ‘what we are, what we think, what we do today is determined by an event called Enlightenment’ (Foucault 1984, in Rabinow, ed., p. 32)—an idea that all humans on earth are destined to one journey of life – how to live in the world – by a common pursuit of happiness or freedom. The state discourses in Nepal on modernizing education have inscribed this version of modernity. Implemented by the national government through the pedagogical intervention, how to ‘get there’ [to that imaginary ‘greener pasture’] instead of how to complete a relevant education program come to negotiate international education aspirations for many young Nepalese.

As I closely observed, the entire 50-minute-long class was devoted to the stories of modern progress and places and personalities outside of Nepal. They included Plato’s *Republic*, *Allegory of Caves* and Aristotle’s *Democracy*. At the outset, the young Nepalese found themselves suddenly dictated in a radically different way from that which dictated their parents: ‘Thou shalt share the same mode of being with the Europeans and Americans!’ (emphasis in original). The ‘greener pasture’ arouses the intelligibility of that shared world in which they are to live differently from now on by partying ways with their immediate parents. The idea that the old must crumble down was explicit in the lesson. The aim of the western education in Nepal is concerned with the production of the new human person - *ramro manche* (English translation is ‘good person’), a biological man, Darwin’s ‘higher animal’ (see Richards 2009). Education is key to this process which has redefined Nepal’s future.

Nepal’s national goal is to become a ‘middle-income’ country by 2030 and ‘higher income’ country by 2050. The role of education in this process is to create wealth or income as described for the wealthier nations. Central to education planning and policy in Nepal is this global politics of knowledge and power contaminated with wealth creation with reference to US, UK and Scandinavian ‘originals’ (see Madsen and Carney 2011, p. 119). In sum, modern education is concerned with not the production of ‘educated person’ but what Friedrich Nietzsche (2020) would refer to ‘money-earning creatures’ (p. 29). Many young Nepalese who do not qualify to go to English destinations find themselves contended in Danish or European higher education not because it provides them upward social mobility by way of relevant career progression but a good opportunity to earn money or remittance in the name of ‘international education’.

The modern generation of Nepalese are not learning to grow in the historical social structure where their parents grew up but an external one which requires them to earn money which is becoming the global barometer of life. What is called ‘knowledge’, what Kant might call ‘faculties of imagination and understanding’, or the ‘key to the critique of taste’ or ‘reason’ (see Guyer 2013, p. 330) is referred to everything ‘European’ or ‘western’ and those detached and disconnected is to be understood as ‘poor’,

‘other’, ‘far away’, ‘uneducated’ and so on. The idea that both the beautiful and the sublime of life resides in the Western hemisphere is another claim to truth and knowledge which negotiates the global education discourse. Within this Western semantic of reason, the whole of Nepal and the Nepalese are to be understood as void and empty of meaning. It is this lens through which most Danes and Europeans make the judgment about Nepalese.

Here, the discourse of ‘development’ as imparted through pedagogic practices increases the self-awareness ‘of the semiotic and material goods of the global rich’ (Ferguson 2006, quoted in Madsen and Carney 2011, p.119). I asked Rajesh to reflect upon this self-awareness which negotiated his international education journey when he nostalgically recalled that lesson imparted in college which filled in him a sense of urgency to *travel forward in time* (Desai 2006). Consequently, he arrived in Copenhagen as an international student after being unable to secure his way to English destinations due to poor English language.

Tied to a particular system of power/knowledge which produced it, the modern discourses of education and development began to alter the meanings of village in Nepalese social imagination when this predominantly rural nation came under an international intervention regarded as ‘inevitable and self-evident’ (Pigg 1992). After 1990, the Nepali political mainstream in Kathmandu with the support of its IDP began to link education reform processes to international labour markets and mobility (Carney & Rappleye, 2011). For instance, how close a student lives to the city or village, bus stop or factory site began to determine his/her social status and eligibility for scholarship/financial assistance. Farther one lives from the city or the bus stop, one gets a new social identity ‘disadvantaged’ or ‘backward’ in time. The opposite is true if one lives closer to the city or to the bus stop. The ‘greener pastures’ evokes a sense of living in the centre of the city. Note that this wasn’t the rationale social and political order prior to 1951 in Nepal. The earliest in memory was the ‘caste’ social order that divided the Nepalese in terms of births and beliefs. The geography now takes over the caste as more rational or secular way of understanding what counts as ‘equality’, ‘access’ and ‘equity’ in education. As an effect, a sense of living unequal in the village or being deprived of a rightful place to belong in the world negotiated Rajesh’s international education dream. Consequently, he happened to come to Denmark. Unable to find a quick recipe to become equal with others in Denmark in terms of cash and comforts, he quit his international master’s in business in favour of a work permit in a downtown restaurant. Pursuing a higher education programme was one option but it didn’t provide a quick fix; he had to wait longer and possibly live poorer than his peers who had already purchased villas and autos in Copenhagen from their cleaning and cooking jobs. A restlessness haunted Rajesh to opt for a quick fix when he ended up in a downtown restaurant as a head cook.

Rajesh’s father arrived in Copenhagen to meet his son when I had a lively chat with him. He now lives alone in Nepal without his children. One of his sons went to live in Japan and another in Denmark and yet another in Portugal. Until 1990, he remembers living in a joint family in cloistered village high in the mountains of central Nepal.

The discourse of development had then made him believe that to live in the mountainous terrain was being far backward in time from those in the city. His only concern was how to move to the city centre. At about the age of 20, Rajesh’s father had the rare chance to see a bulldozer followed by a jeep in the village when the vehicular traffic opened. Soon, the jeep replaced the foot and horses as modes of transport. That image was to be understood as a sign of ‘greener pastures’ or as ‘a promise of universally

shared and lasting happiness' (Bauman, 2005). Soon, schools and hospitals were constructed and fed by generators. The electric bulb was still a distant dream. Colgate, biscuits, Cadburys and jeans, however, flooded the local village but were very expensive. It was only when his father started working as a security guard in India that Rajesh got his first taste of Cadbury chocolate.

For the second time, when Rajesh's father came to Copenhagen, he completed the story why it was necessary for his sons to go overseas in the name of international education when he uttered the word *bikas* (English translation is 'development') as residing in the West and not in the village. He narrated how difficult life was in the village when compared with the town. The nearest town from his village was a two-day journey on foot on the other side of the rolling mountains where he always wanted to go. He also fondly remembers a journey to that town on foot. Of so many thoughts, the fear of being killed by tigers haunted him throughout the journey. A dense jungle and several rivers and streams had to be covered by foot to get any access to the nearest town or bazaar. Without any human settlement, that place was a natural habitat for animals and was later converted into a national park. When the Nepalese youth talk about 'greener pastures' they do not talk about their own jungles, national parks, flora and fauna in the village but of the brick and mortar economy, high-rise buildings, glass towers, electronic gadgets like MacBook, iPhones, Apple watches, automobiles, foreign brand clothes, electric or gas ovens, concrete homes, among others, which cannot be obtained inside Nepal via national education and ordinary employment. All of these goods and goodies negotiate their international education in terms of the 'greener pastures'.

### CONCLUSION

The discursive approach used in this paper rejected the objectivist and realist assumptions of international education as a social ladder to regain one's social standings but as an imaginary picture of the 'greener pastures' out there in the EU as fostered by the discourse of international development. It is this picture which negotiates the ongoing international education aspirations of the Nepalese in Denmark as shown in this paper. The end of education as a convergence, that is, everyone must find a universally shared experience, was unobtainable for the Nepalese in Denmark. This paper exposed quite a different paradox of being international students in Denmark outside the imagined global and collective doctrine of truth, and the shared intelligibility of the western culture. The greener pastures subjectivity landed the Nepalese in the basement, the lower ground, instead of the roof space they initially dreamt through Danish higher education. This journey of education moves them from one authentic anticipation of meaningful life as fostered by 'greener pasture' thinking to an inauthentic experience of being in Denmark outside the education's familiarity, generality and finality of being in the world.

This paper traced the 'greener pastures' as an 'incompatible symbols and signs' of international education (Madsen and Carney 2011) as fostered by the pervasive discourse of developmental modernity in Nepal. And, hence, it leaves the Nepalese to navigate their hope of a future via labour of the body detached from their educational degrees and credentials in Denmark. In other words, the intelligibility and sources of this notion of truth (that is, to imagine international education in terms of the materiality of 'greener pastures') are not the Nepalese themselves but the force called 'modernity'.

This paper showed that with the gregarious European man in the centre as the only kind of being allowable and useful to the herd, the focus of international education is about integrating the whole world through a coherent thinking space called 'globalisation' but the practice is deeply divisive. As talked by



the development specialists and written about by education sociologists and development anthropologists from their tenured position in universities, it provides the language for talking about what counts as ‘education’ within that metaphysics of progress in the Western hemisphere. Many experts or academics who claim to have long engagements in Nepal have attempted to address the issue of Nepal and the Nepalese on the move in a globalized world within this macro policy level and the Western semantic of progress. This paper exposed the historicity of this powerful metanarratives of international development responsible for transforming international education desire among the Nepalese into settlement in the ‘greener pastures’. It is this regime of truth and power that this paper showed which subjects the Nepalese in Denmark to perform labour in the name of ‘international education’. As Arjun Appadurai (2008) notes, this is because we have handed the future over to the economists who shall decide our fate in terms of how best to live and perish in the world and is to be understood as ‘freedom’. Education policy is tied to this global neoliberal ideology. As a system of reasoning, it originates in the economic theory of modern states (Popkewitz 2009; Peters et al 2000, 2003). As a form of power/knowledge, it must never be mistaken with 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 1982, p.790). In Foucault’s sense, international education is then a discursive space to think of what counts as ‘progress’. That space, as this paper showed in the historical context of Nepal, is mapped by the development encounter (see, e.g. Pigg 1992; Shrestha 1995). It trains and tortures the Nepalese to seek truth through the ontology of the crowd. The global assessment of international students (PISA) is a classic example of the crowd knowledge (see Komatsu & Rappleye, 2021 for detailed critique). The dominant view of reality most research practices rely upon today are depended on such crowd knowledge. It is this internationalizing and totalizing vision of education that had led the Nepalese to believe that the ‘greener pasture’ really exists ‘out there’ or that there is a perfect place to belong to and a permanent freedom to enjoy.

A sense of ‘thou shalt recognize their supreme authority in matters of ‘truth’ (Kierkegaard, quoted in Kaufmann 1956, p. 97) haunted me while thinking about the lesson *Why go to university* imparted in Nepal. As operationalized within a particular historical context of Europe in relation to human knowing, the international discourse of development makes this view of education necessary and inevitable in places like Nepal. In Denmark, as in rest of the Nordic countries, which rank high in the global happiness index, what is called ‘research’ must provide hard scientific evidence of this relationship between education and economic happiness. This paper showed an outright revolt against this facticity of education tasked to develop not the mental faculty but the production of the materiality.

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