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**Living the Neoliberal Global Schooling Project: An Ethnography of
Childhood and Everyday Choices in Nepal**

Katherine D. Baxter

**PhD, Sociology
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Signed Declaration

I declare that this thesis has been composed solely by myself and that it has not been submitted, in whole or in part, in any previous application for a degree.

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Katherine D. Baxter

Abstract

This research draws upon interdisciplinary studies of childhood and young people's agency to present an ethnographic account of one group of young people in Nepal's lived experience of 'the global schooling project', a term used to describe the series of policy initiatives and the complex landscape of actors and institutions furthering the aim of getting every child, everywhere into school. Based on five months of fieldwork in which I intimately embedded myself in the everyday lives and social, emotional worlds of a group of young people living on Mansawar Street in Pokhara, I show how the global schooling project and its values impact upon their childhoods and everyday choices, shaping their aspirations, daily routines and self-conceptions, and those of their families and communities. I bring attention to how these flattening policy initiatives can have the effect of marginalising many of these young people's unique talents, interest and competencies, not accounting for the diversity of their learning and their agencies in moving through and making sense of their everyday material and immaterial worlds. I emphasise how schooling can act as an ambiguous resource for these young people, not only providing opportunity, knowledge and pathways towards employment, but also drawing them into systems of inequality and exploitation, both inside and outside of school. This research, then, provides an account of the lived experience of schooling on Mansawar Street and the profound ways in which schooling shapes local economies and ecologies, transforming family and community relationships and young people's childhoods.

Lay Summary

The 'global schooling project', as I've termed it, was founded in 1990 by the World Bank and the United Nations with the intention of "getting every child, everywhere into school" (United Nations 2017). This aim, and the series of policy initiatives that have sought to achieve it, carry specific expectations of schooling experiences and the marketable skills they should provide, and, significantly, many assumptions about the place of schooling in young people's lives. But these global education initiatives are falling short of achieving their stated aims, according to the 2016/2017 Global Education Monitoring Report (UNESCO 2017), with significant consequences for young people, communities and ecologies.

The intention of this research was to address this gap between the aspirations of the global schooling project and the realities of the young people around the world it is intended to reach. Because policy-making spaces and bureaucracies can often be very flattening of the uniqueness of people's lives and experiences, and also very selective with regards to which ways of knowing and what kinds of knowledge are valued and legitimised, I sought to bring attention to the specific ways in which one group of young people lived and experienced the global schooling project and how it impacted their childhood. My research was guided by these questions: how does the 'global schooling project' impact upon and shape experiences of childhood? How are the values embedded within global schooling practices actually lived by young people in corners of the Global South? How can these schooling practices shape young people's and families' aspirations, and with what effects on childhoods, livelihoods and communities?

I explored these questions in a small corner of Nepal, which has been a part of the global schooling project through its participation in the United Nations *Education for All* initiative since 1990. My method was ethnography, which

entailed spending approximately five months living with and alongside a community of young people on one specific street in Pokhara, called Mansawar Street. Mostly my time was spent gaining their trust, participating in everyday life and attending school with them, all the while trying to understand the ways in which the global schooling project was impacting and shaping their everyday lives.

What I found was that the promises and ideals contained within the global schooling project and its *Education for All* initiatives, and some of the values global schooling carries about how children should spend their time and what is worthwhile for them to become, often leave a lot of children out and leave many others feeling like failures who don't have a place in this world. My ethnography of the stories and lives on Mansawar Street suggests, firstly, that instead of creating opportunities, equality and stability, as schooling and development practices aspire to do, they are instead creating unrealistic hopes and expectations to which not all families have access and that often lead to dead ends for those that do. My fieldwork also suggests that the drive for—and expectations attached to—private, English schooling has the effect of squeezing out and undermining other ways that young people learn, spend their time and make sense of themselves in relation to the world around them, and in that way it devalues and makes seem worthless the many unique talents, virtues, interests and skills that these young people possess.

Finally, my research sheds light on how, despite all the ways in which these young people's everyday lives and choices are shaped and transformed by forces seemingly outside of their control, they still find creative, agential ways to negotiate these constraints, to take control over their learning experiences and to discover small spaces of joy, meaning and resistance within their small community.

These findings are significant because the global schooling project makes some kinds of childhoods, and therefore some children, seem wrong, out of step and without a place in this world, while others seem normal, esteemed and aspired toward. This impacts upon how millions of young people perceive of themselves and their lives, thereby significantly shaping their innermost feelings of self-worth.

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Chapter 1
Introduction



(Photo: Santosh, Sangam and Mahesh walking to school down Mansawar Street, with Lucky the dog leading the way)

Central Kathmandu is in a frenzy, brimming with young Nepalis searching the streets for possibilities, biding their time in this difficult place until they are able to find a way out. Many have left their home villages in rural areas to discover a world outside of theirs, and they somehow ended up here. Lining the streets you see billboards and signs for study and work abroad opportunities in Australia, Japan, Malaysia, Dubai, etc., mixed with signs advertising English Boarding Schools or University Business and Management degrees. It's hard to go one block without seeing at least a handful of each. I get into a taxi and the driver starts telling me about the schooling of his two children. His daughter is in grade six and his son is in grade ten. He hopes they will be able to leave this place someday, telling me "that's why I work so hard, to make sure they can have a better life than I have. Education is the only way."

The 'global schooling project', as I've termed it, was founded in 1990 by the World Bank and the United Nations and set into motion a series of global policy initiatives and a complex landscape of actors, institutions and practices with the intention of "getting every child, everywhere into school" (United Nations 2017). These global education initiatives, specifically the UN's *Global Education First Initiative 2012-2016*, the World Bank's *Global Partnership for Education* (World Bank 2017a) and the *Incheon Declaration for Education 2030* (UNESCO 2016), carry within them particular expectations of schooling experiences and the marketable skills they should provide, as well as universal, normative conceptions of the place of schooling in childhood. These global education initiatives, collectively what I have termed and will refer to throughout this thesis as 'the global schooling project', also embody a set of values that were present in shaping the lives of the young people involved in my research: standardisation, linearity, competition, growth and individualism.

Significantly, these initiatives do not appear to be reaching their stated goals, according to the 2016/2017 Global Education Monitoring Report (UNESCO 2017). On the contrary, there appears to be a severe disjuncture between many of the ideals, aspirations and promises of these global education initiatives and the actual, lived realities of the young people around the world they reach, as they do not account for the complexity and diversity of young people's lives, interests, talents and agencies.

With the intention of addressing this disjuncture by providing policy-relevant insights into often flattened, homogenised spaces, I sought to bring attention to the particular, lived complexities and diversities of children and childhood, and of the ways in which young people *themselves* experience and make sense of global schooling (Thomson, Berriman & Bragg 2018; Dyson 2014; Alderson 2013; Montgomery 2009; James 2007; Scheper-Hughes & Sargent 1998; Stephens 1995). My research was therefore guided by these questions: how is the global schooling project instantiated and experienced in young people's everyday lives? How does it impact upon and shape their experiences of childhood? How are the values contained within global schooling practices actually lived by young people in corners of the Global South? How can these schooling practices be internalised in the form of aspirations, and with what effects on childhoods and livelihoods? How do these universalising and flattening values shape unique childrens' and families' everyday decision-making spaces?

I explored these questions in a small corner of Nepal, which has been a part of the UN *Education for All* initiative since 1990 and a *Global Partnership for Education* partner country since 2009, receiving an estimated \$332,674,306 million USD in funding since 2010 from UNICEF (World Bank 2017b). The

instantiation of Nepal's formal schooling system coincided with a discursive emphasis on democracy, modernity and interconnection, whereby education, schooling and the village primary school became symbolic of a new vision of what and who young people in Nepal should aspire to become. With this as my point of departure, my research offers an ethnographic account of a small group of young people living on Mansawar Street in Pokhara and the ways in which the values embedded in these schooling initiatives transform and impact upon their everyday lives. I spent approximately five months living with and alongside the young people and families of Mansawar Street, gaining their trust, participating in their everyday life, attending school with them, and becoming embedded in—and included as a part of—the intimacies of their emotional and social worlds.

Through this intimate ethnography, then, I provide insights that might help create a more textured picture of these global schooling initiatives in their everyday, lived complexity. By focusing on just one neighborhood and the young people and families whose everyday lives and routines take shape in this space, my research reveals how global schooling and its accompanying big, structural processes are subtly and intimately embodied in this one small street in myriad, rippling ways. My ethnography shows how some of the universalising values and normative conceptions of 'childhood' contained within these global schooling initiatives are instantiated in real, young lives, and with what consequences. Therefore, rather than offering an abstract analysis of these policies as such, I hope instead to bring attention and significance to the interiorities of how global schooling policies and practices are actually understood, lived and experienced.

The thesis begins with a conceptual framing chapter in which I introduce and contextualise some of the central conversations occurring within interdisciplinary studies of childhood, as they relate to my research, specifically: (1) children's agency, (2) the political lives of young people and the politics of 'childhood'; and (3) the impacts of normative, universal conceptions of 'childhood' on diverse young people around the world. This section concludes with an overview of what is meant by the 'global schooling project' and how it takes shape specifically in the context of Nepal and the Global South.

Chapter 3 is a methodological chapter in which I describe my ethnography of Mansawar Street and theorise my use of an embodied, phenomenological lens and a deeply emotional embeddedness to understand the lived experience of the global schooling project. I discuss some of the ethical challenges of researching with young people, and reflect on some of the strengths and limitations of my research approach and its findings.

Chapter 4, 'Histories and Horizons', then introduces some of the ways in which landscapes of 'scarcity', 'sufficiency' and 'abundance' have been created and how they have been lived across generations by the Pun family. I trace this genealogy experientially, highlighting how their experiences have historically been deeply woven into the entangled projects of global schooling and global capitalism in Nepal more widely. I bring attention to how the histories of aid and schooling practices in Nepal, viewed through the Pun family, first imposed and transformed what were previously understood as experiences of 'sufficiency' into different experiences of 'scarcity', and then created aspirational horizons towards 'abundance'.

Chapters 5 and 6, 'Aspirational Landscapes' and 'Saturdays', together show how the global schooling project and its values are instrumentally transforming childhoods and livelihoods. 'Aspirational Landscapes' argues that the global schooling project shapes the aspirations of young people and their families in Nepal in significant, linear ways, and that their labour and livelihood strategies are intertwined with the pursuit of education and schooling opportunities with an eye towards the future; a pursuit which often does not lead to the universalist promises of abundance that schooling aspirations contain, and instead furthers existing structures of inequality and leaves young people and families open to new forms of exploitation. 'Saturdays,' then, draws attention to the everyday ecologies and ties the young people living on Mansawar Street have with both the human and non-human members of their community. It shows how the pressures imposed by the drive for formal, English schooling transform their childhoods in meaningful ways; ways they devalue presence and non-linear, non-quantifiable learning and experiences, while at the same time undermining many of the diverse talents, knowledges and ways of being human that these young people possess and cultivate in their own unique ways on Saturdays, their only day of the week not in school.

Chapter 7, 'Intensities and Agencies', first describes my own experience of the earthquake that struck Nepal on April 25th, 2015, reflecting on how it altered the shape and duration of my ethnography. I was neither permitted nor able to return to Pokhara after the event, so I share conversations I had with the Pun family from a distance and speak to how Mansawar Street's shared fragilities and vulnerabilities were thrown into focus and intensified with this disruption—fragilities that global schooling was arguably perpetuating—while also emphasising Mansawar Street's resiliencies and agencies in coping with the cracks in the structural foundations of their everyday lives and livelihoods. I

show how young people on Mansawar Street, despite *even more difficult* circumstances, continued to find creative, agential ways of taking a leading role in their learning and exposures outside of school, cultivating their political voices and pursuing self-teaching and learning opportunities in a way that transcended—or at least mediated—their frustrations with their schooling experiences and the demands placed upon them from elsewhere.

Finally, this thesis concludes with a chapter reflecting on the ambiguous role schooling plays in these young people's lives and how they navigate those ambiguities. I emphasise how schooling acts and is experienced as a contradictory resource (Jeffrey et al. 2008) on Mansawar Street, as something that creates feelings of both hope and fear, and that may provide possibility and opportunity, but that can also have the effect of pulling young people further and further into systems of inequality and alienation, both inside and outside of the classroom.

My research therefore argues that the promises, ideals and values expressed by the global schooling project are often experienced as contradictory, exclusionary and illusively aspirational. My ethnography of the stories and lives on Mansawar Street suggests, firstly, that those universalist aspirations contained within schooling and development practices transform childhoods and reconfigure everyday hopes and horizons in ways that can be exploitative and hegemonic, and that can deepen existing inequalities. My fieldwork also suggests that the drive for—and expectations attached to—private, English schooling can undermine and devalue other ways of knowing, being and spending time, and thereby have the effect of marginalising many of the unique talents, virtues, interests and skills that young people possess. Finally, my research sheds light on how, despite all the ways in which these young people's

everyday lives and choices are shaped and transformed by forces seemingly outside of their control, they find creative, agential ways to negotiate these structural constraints, take control over their learning experiences and discover small spaces of joy, meaning and resistance.

My findings are significant for two reasons. Most immediately, because the global schooling project profoundly reshapes millions of young people and family's lives, informing what they aspire towards and the kinds of choices parents and guardians make on behalf of their children, which is important for both scholarly understandings and policy practice. Secondly, global schooling policies enact universal, normative conceptions of 'childhood' and what that should entail, but these are often reductive and flattening of individual and collective lived complexities. This has consequences as the conceptualisation of childhood that informs global education policy renders some kinds of 'childhoods', and therefore some children, deficient and others normal and aspirational. The imposition of a particular 'global' standard of 'childhood', then, impacts upon how young people perceive of themselves and their lives, and it is therefore important to understand the experienced weight of these reductions.

Chapter 2

Universal 'Childhoods': The Real and the Ideal



Childhood and Its Visitors

By Winthrop Mackworth Praed

Once on a time, when sunny May
Was kissing up the April showers,
I saw fair Childhood hard at play
Upon a bank of blushing flowers;
Happy,-- he knew not whence or how;
And smiling,-- who could choose but love him?
For not more glad than Childhood's brow,
Was the blue heaven that beamed above him.

Old time, in most appalling wrath,
That valley's green repose invaded;
The brooks grew dry upon his path,
The birds were mute, the lilies faded;
But Time so swiftly winged his flight,
In haste a Grecian tomb to batter,
That Childhood watched his paper kite,
And knew just nothing of the matter.

With curling lip, and glancing eye,
Guilt gazed upon the scene a minute,
But Childhood's glance of purity
Had such a spell within it,
That the dark demon to the air
Spread forth again his baffled pinion,
And hid his envy and despair,
Self-tortured, is his own dominion.

Then stepped a gloomy phantom up,
Pale, cypress-crowned, Night's daughter,
And proffered him a fearful cup,
Full to the brim of bitter water:
Poor Childhood bade her tell her name,
And when the beldame muttered 'Sorrow',
He said, -- 'don't interrupt my game,
I'll taste it, if i must, tomorrow.'

The Muse of Pindus thither came,
And wooed him with the softest numbers

That ever scattered wealth and fame
Upon a youthful poet's slumbers;
Though sweet the music of the lay,
To Childhood it was all a riddle,
And 'Oh,' he cried, 'do send away
That noisy woman with the fiddle.'

Then Wisdom stole his bat and ball,
And taught him, with most sage endeavor,
Why bubbles rise, and acorns fall,
And why no toy may last forever:
She talked of all the wondrous laws
Which Nature's open book discloses,
And Childhood, ere she made a pause,
Was fast asleep among the roses.

Sleep on, sleep on!-- Oh Manhood's dreams
Are all of earthly pain, or pleasure
Of Glory's toils, Ambition's schemes,
Of cherished love, or hoarded treasure:
But to the couch where Childhood lies
A more delicious trance is given,
Lit up by rays from Seraph eyes
And glimpses of remembered heaven.

What does childhood mean and why is it being universalised? How does the normative conception of 'childhood', as contained in global development policies and the United Nations (1989) *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (UNCRC), align with the actual, lived experiences of diverse young people around the world? How do global schooling and its universal aspirations transform and shape 'children' and 'childhood'? How do children themselves perceive of the role of schooling in their lives? Should children's political voices and imaginations be heard, heeded and included in decision-making spaces, and if so, how can we ensure their unique voices and perspectives are understood? How can our theorisations and our policies account for both

children's agencies and their vulnerabilities, and the overlap among them?

These are some of the central questions underpinning this project's engagement with interdisciplinary studies of childhood, whether in the sociology of childhood, childhood studies, developmental psychology, early education studies, or anthropological studies of childhood. The findings and issues raised in my ethnography of the global schooling project and its lived realities for actual children and 'childhoods' considers some of the complexities underpinning these questions, and of those inquiries that seek to understand and bring attention to young people's lives. At the same time, I use this discussion to consider how research also inevitably constructs 'the child' in specific ways, and therefore how it is necessary to explicitly reflect on how my research does this (Thomson, Berriman & Bragg 2018).

To this end, this discussion will address the conversations surrounding (1) young people's agency; (2) the political lives of young people and the politics of 'childhood'; and (3) the impacts of normative, universal conceptions of 'childhood' on diverse young people around the world. This chapter will conclude with a discussion of what is meant by the term 'the global schooling project' and how it takes shape in young people's lives specifically in the context of Nepal and the Global South.

'Children' as 'Agents'

A central topic within childhood studies and the sociology of childhood is young people's agency (Corsaro 2005): how and in what ways do they exercise this agency? What are the implications of adult-centric ways of understanding and

crediting young people with agency (Alderson 2013)? What are the dynamics between young people's agencies and their protection (James 2007)? Are young people's agencies being limited and removed from them, and with what consequences? How might participation in formal schooling impact upon young people's experience of agency (Huf 2013)? What my research adds to this conversation is an in-depth look into how young people exercise and experience their agency in the ways they navigate and make sense of the presence of the global schooling project in their childhood.

Discussions of children's agency within the sociology of childhood and the more interdisciplinary field of childhood studies have often centered around an understanding of children as either 'beings' or 'becomings' (James et al. 1998). Oswell (2012) in his book *The Agency of Children: From Family to Global Human Rights*, complicates some of the perpetual dichotomies and dualities that childhood and its categorisations can often rely on: child vs. adult, being vs. becoming, knowledge vs. innocence, work vs. school, structure vs. agency, participation vs. protection. He urges those trying to understand and conceptualise children's agency to ask questions which are not necessarily focused on how agency might be paired with social structure, but rather that revolve around how we might be better able to think about young people's abilities to make a difference, in their own lives and in others', and "to think through the different ways in which children and young people have been and are actively involved in emergent, innovative, experimental and substantive forms of solidarity and coexistence" (Oswell 2012: 7). This entails a way of researching and exploring young people's agencies that is not reductive of agency to a "self-present consciousness or reflexive subjectivity of the unitary child, but which considers agency in all its mobilisation, networking and experimentation" (ibid).

This understanding of agency offered by Oswell also allows it to be understood as shared across both human and non-human arrangements, institutions and infrastructures. He draws upon the historian Philippe Ariès' book *Centuries of Childhood* (1962), a foundational text in the sociology of childhood, to add a historical perspective, or "a sense of children as imbued with a historicity" (Oswell 2012: 9), rather than conceptualising agency with a sole focus on the child as in the here and now. The main ideas that have been taken from Ariès and brought to bear on the sociology of childhood are: (1) childhood exists as a historical invention (2) childhood is a social construction and institution, rather than a biologically determined category, and (3) childhood is separate from adulthood. More contemporary research, however, is critical of some of these basic premises and argues that these reductions have been significant in the sociology of childhood insofar as they have delimited questions about children's agency (Hacket, Proctor, & Seymour 2015; Tisdall & Punch 2012; Robson, Bell & Klockner 2007;). These critiques centre around the idea that children and their lives cannot be reduced to the conceptualisations and categories they are often packaged into, nor is 'childhood' merely a social invention or construction.

Allison James and Adrian James (2004: 14) have asserted that childhood is the structural space occupied by children in their collective form, and on that basis they argue that it is within the space of 'childhood' as a member of the category 'children', that any single 'child' is able to exercise their agency. Critiques of this principally revolve around the notion that the container used to classify and categorise children has a structure and rules of membership that do not align with—nor accommodate—the particularities of actual, individual young people, and will therefore inevitably be exclusionary and flattening of these particularities and experienced complexities (Jeffrey & Dyson 2008; Hall &

Montgomery 2000). Furthermore, this conceptualisation positions agency as something that is experienced and acted upon individually, and implies that every individual child possesses this agency, across all historical, cultural and social arrangements. The sociology of childhood usually reinforces this conception of individual agency, and in this way the idea of 'child-as-agent' as a central tenet of how agency is understood and ascribed within the sociology of childhood in many ways resembles a social universal (Oswell 2012: 15).

Oswell (2012: 62) points out that the sociology of childhood has been too ready to fuse experience with agency and too keen to dismiss more recent theoretical approaches, such as postmodernism and post-structuralism, which deny young people experiential agency. But he argues that "it is precisely in such approaches that we find a sense of agency which is both dispersed, or distributed, but also fractured, or disarticulated," not necessarily confined to a single subjectivity (ibid). The materialist turn brings attention to the non-human, and to how the ways the human and the non-human are entangled transforms our understanding of agency.

With these post-structuralist and materialist points in mind, and a critique of the extent to which 'childhood' as a categorisation to contain and conceptualise the lived experiences of 'children' is useful and accurate, children's agency becomes problematised, both methodologically and conceptually (Oswell 2012: 62). For the basis of this research, I seek to take these conceptual insights and anchor my engagement with young people and their agencies empirically in a more embodied understanding of how agency might operate and exist phenomenologically, in how young people interact with and make sense of their everyday, lived realities and spaces (Lefebvre 2002; Soja 1996). We don't really know how each unique young person experiences and acts

upon their agency with regards to social structure, individually or collectively, nor the extent to which subjective experience is defined and limited to the confines of historically inscribed and patterned social structures. My engagement with agency, then, looks at it as it emerges and is present or absent in moments and decision-making spaces (Gabb & Fink 2015), in how young people hope, dream, fear, care, make choices and interact with the material and immaterial world around them in their everyday lives.

Spatialities, Embodiment and the Everyday

In alignment with this orientation, those exploring children's agency, often in geography or other interdisciplinary fields concerned with childhood studies, bring into the conversation the question of how young people's spatialities impact upon their ordinary, everyday experiences, and therefore their agencies (Hackett, Procter & Seymour 2015; Massey 1994), arguing in this way for an appreciation of "how children's practices and trajectories are situated within more-than-social contexts" (Hackett, Procter & Seymour 2015: 1). They bring attention to the intermingling of children and the spaces in which their lives happen, where their embodied bodies actually live.

Soja (1996) recommends making space the primary and central focus for a critical interpretation perspective. This approach draws on Lefebvre's (1991, 2002) notion that this 'critical thirding' (Soja 1996: 5) has the potential to disrupt dominant understandings of agency, leading to new ways of understanding society and human experience. Those who emphasise the importance of spatialities argue that this is crucial to rethinking the role of space in supporting childhood diversity and difference, where the multiplicity of childhood experiences and perspectives can be valued. As put by Hackett, Procter and

Seymour (2015: 1) this understanding “challenges an established policy context which positions children as ‘becomings’ rather than ‘beings’ and thus prioritises interventions intended to direct how they develop and what they will become as adults.” From a spatial perspective, in contrast, the non-linearity of young people’s lives is foregrounded with an emphasis on the complex dynamics and meaning-making of young people in dialogue with their physical, social and emotional worlds. This helps to establish *situated* understandings of children’s material and immaterial worlds and life courses, which raises questions relevant to policy and practice similar to the ones raised by my aim to provide a situated, particular perspective on how young people exercise and experience agency in the context of the global schooling project.

This approach resembles Sirriyeh’s (2013: ch 3) work that emphasises the importance of what she calls the “cartographies of age” and the notion that life courses take shape around social, spatial and temporal terrains, and are constructed based on specific social and historical arrangements. She argues that “age based identities become mapped out across terrains through relationships, encounters, and experiences in the world” (ibid: 58), emphasising the role of place and the social relations that construct and constitute it (Massey 1994).

Similarly, Thomson, Berriman and Bragg (2018: 5) in researching young people’s digital practices sought to ground their methodological approach in the “everyday contexts of children’s lives,” hoping to add nuanced, particular insights to the conversation on young people’s digital practices and the ways in which young people are being impacted by—and are interacting with—digital technologies. They draw upon a variety of resources to inform their focus on the everyday, and speak to how the “rediscovery of the ‘everyday’” asserts and

brings to the fore the material, empirical world as the place in which theory should begin (Neal & Murji 2015). This emphasis on the empirical world and the 'everyday' as the starting point for theoretical leaps and bounds is characterised by an emphasis on specificity (Back 2012), 'moments' (Gabb & Fink 2015), and objects (Rinikken et al. 2015), with many insights taken from interactionist and anthropological work (Pink 2012; Scott 2009) that "focus on the material and the phenomenal as the 'stuff' through which sociality and structure are enacted" (Thomson, Berriman & Bragg 2018: 5).

Thomson, Berriman & Bragg (2018: 7) go on to embrace what they call "the queering of childhood studies and the disentangling of notions of development and growth from ideas of becoming and experimentation." They recognise how our very vocabularies can "pathologise, objectify, or depoliticise" (ibid) and that the figure of the 'child,' used in public spaces and dominant cultural narratives can, knowingly or not, impact and shape young people's aspirations and feelings of worthiness around the world by positioning them in contrast to what is idealised and normative. They also argue that our understandings and conceptualisations of children's culture are tangled in Oswell's (2012) notion of a double paradigm. This implies that we are both compelled to engage with young people in ways that acknowledge their agency, but we are also forced to acknowledge that young people's lives—and their agencies—are entangled in deep, structural, material relations and vulnerabilities (Thomson, Berriman & Bragg 2018: 7). They therefore advocate an approach that works within what they label a "post-empirical but materialist orientation" (ibid) that recognises action occurring within and between bodies, identities, and materialities (Barad 2007), and that brings attention to the interactions between young people and their material cultural resources, "showing what young people do with these

resources and what these materials might do to them, without slipping into a moralising register” (Thomson, Berriman & Bragg 2018: 7).

Others research how young people are shaped by, and are agents in shaping, their experiences of schooling (Huf 2013; Fisher 2008; Brostrom 2007; Fabian & Dunlop 2007; Dunlop & Fabian 2002; Levinson, Foley & Holland 1996). For instance, Huf (2013) brings a slightly different perspective to the question of young people’s agency through her ethnographic insights into how the transition into formal schooling impacts upon young people’s agency. Her research and references suggest the possibility that the transition to formal school may actually lead to a reduction rather than an enhancement of children’s agency, as young people who were once motivated and driven, upon entering formal schooling became quiet, disillusioned and discouraged (Huf 2013; Brostrom 2007; Dunlop & Fabian 2002). This finding is in alignment with Fisher’s (2008) research which indicated that in addition to children becoming disillusioned upon joining formal schooling, they also began to feel confused and disoriented, when previously they had been confidently forming and performing their own way of understanding and interacting with the world, and children who had previously asked many questions and who were very vocal in their learning suddenly went silent (Huf 2013: 62).

Fisher (2008) argues that formal education can in some ways inhibit many of the dominant features, talents, and characteristics of young learners by positioning young people as lacking knowledge and competence. This failure to acknowledge young people’s competency and knowledge is explained by Dahlberg (2009: 230) as a perception of students “as passive recipients of pre-constituted and unquestionable knowledge transmitted by teachers with a privileged voice of authority and a privileged relation to the meaning of

knowledge.” This has consequences because, as Brooker (2008: 32) points out, if young people’s knowledge and unique self-conceptions are not given space, in new settings, “they may lose their feelings of competence and withdraw from activities.”

On this basis, and with these conceptual orientations in mind, my research aims to show young people’s agencies in making sense of the global schooling project and its presence in their childhood with an emphasis on providing situated understandings of how these young people interact with and make sense of their schooling as they move through their everyday material and immaterial worlds.

Young Lives and the Politics of ‘Childhood’

The presence, absence and experience of young people’s agency is related to the way in which young people are often framed as vulnerable, apolitical ‘becomings’ without the competencies, capacities or agencies to meaningfully shape and impact upon social and political realities (Alderson 2013; Scheper-Hughes 1998), including their own schooling. As Alderson points out:

“Reasons for researching the broader politics of childhood include the overwhelming effects that adult-centric systems can have on children. Children’s ‘diminished culpability’, which is related to diminished responsibility and power, makes them more vulnerable, and yet their experiences and needs may be hardly noticed. They may be dismissed and denigrated in adult system as if they are irrelevant and should not be there. Childhood is the most vulnerable, impressionable and formative age group, the most susceptible to lasting and possibly lifelong effects of benefits and harms. Yet children and young people are often least able to speak for themselves, or to be listened to seriously, or to have powerful advocates” (Alderson 2013: 7).

The inclusion or exclusion of young people, and the variations of their social status and thus their participation in social and civic life, has been tied to the social, political, and economic structures that have dictated their status, leading Aries (1962) and others to emphasise the significance of childhood as a social construction. However, it is clear that childhood is both in part a biological state, but also a chronological space whose meanings, expectations, perceptions, and aspirations vary greatly depending on the social and cultural contexts in which it occurs (Cockburn 2013). As Alderson (2013: 5) states, “the ontology-being of real children and young people can greatly differ from the epistemology and beliefs that overload the word ‘child.’”

Research on how the notion of ‘the child’ is engaged with and invoked by politicians and in cultural narratives argues that including children in social and political inquiry is fundamental and essential for understanding any wider society or group, and also for meaningfully researching and thinking about processes and mechanisms of social change (Montgomery 2009; Scheper-Hughes & Sargent 1998; Stephens 1995). This literature advocates the importance of grappling with how, on the one hand, political and social structures undeniably construct, shape and confine childhood, and on the other, how young people actually live, experience and make sense of their childhoods and categorisation as ‘children’ (Ennew & Morrow 2002). This orientation emphasises the importance of taking young people’s voices seriously in our account and conceptualisations of ‘children’ and ‘childhood.’ After all, young people act as bridges between the here and now and contested, imaginary futures, into which new paths might be taken or old ones might become further engrained.

To this end, the isolation of children into what are deemed 'child-appropriate' areas of concern, excluding them from issues such as politics, law, ecology or economics is problematised, as it can give a false understanding of how these so-called 'children' actually experience their 'childhood' and the political moment they find themselves in. At the same time, this exclusion limits our abilities to meaningfully engage with how these people who make up nearly a third of the world's population might change it. Regardless of to what extent young people are or might want to be politically engaged and aware, so-called 'politics' will affect their everyday lives, and it is argued that their unilateral exclusion from such matters without any consultation should be given much more thought and investigation (Montgomery 2009; Scheper-Hughes & Sargent 1998). The global schooling project and young people's educational experiences profoundly impact upon their everyday lives, and one of the questions raised by my research is to what extent young people themselves should have a hand and a voice in shaping their schooling experiences?

Alderson (2013) brings an intersectional lens to this question and argues that to exclude young people from the right and ability to be concerned with matters of political significance, or to voice and act upon those concerns, as women and people of color have been similarly categorically excluded, is unfair and discrediting to the creative and agential ways young people, too, should have a hand and a voice in shaping this world we all share. She argues that asking the question of how politics, economics, or ecology are relevant to children resembles the logic present in more institutionally exclusionary moments in history, in which public and political matters were seen as irrelevant and off limits to women and people of colour (ibid). These marginalised groups had to justify, and fight for, their inclusion in such matters; being human and having thoughts and opinions on these issues wasn't enough.

They had to make others understand why their participation in social and civic life was necessary, and significant. As Alderson (2013: 5) points out, previously “the generic ‘Man’ was claimed to refer to everyone, and women’s concerns were best managed by men,” and she argues that it is hard not to notice the similarity between this scene and how more contemporarily, children’s concerns are commonly perceived to be best managed by adults.

At issue here for me as a researcher is how young people can be researched in a way that facilitates their ability to voice their opinions, thoughts and ideas, while also recognising their vulnerabilities and distinctiveness. Do they have a say in their own schooling and in how schooling impacts on their everyday lives? Should they or could they help to co-shape and co-produce their educational experiences? Does the global schooling project and its values and practices make space for how the young people on Mansawar Street feel about their childhood, their daily routines and their social, emotional and physical world? How can our research and policy more sensitively acknowledge young people’s competencies and agencies in their own learning experiences?

Childhood is a time of change, growth and transition, and though there is a lot of diversity in how childhood is understood and explained, most cultures somehow acknowledge that young people differ from adults: they tend to have different needs, different roles and different expectations placed on them than adults (Montgomery 2009: 9). Often on that basis it is assumed that social, political or any public concerns ought not relate to children primarily because (1) since children cannot understand politics, including children in such matters might infantise policy-making (2) including children’s voices and opinions without sufficiently ensuring their positions are understood risks inaccurate speculation about young people’s views; (3) children are not in fact citizens, rather they are

pre-citizens, under the supervision and authority of their parents, so they should not act as citizens; (4) adult-centred politics adequately address and represent children; and (5) including children in politics might create tensions or divides between children and adults, disrupting family, school and civic life (Alderson 2013: 6).

But each of these reasons seems to contain the very problem that advocates for the inclusion of young people's are trying to address (Scheper-Hughes & Sargent 1998). They assume the incompetency of young people, rather than a different and perhaps novel perspective, at the same time that they view including young people's voices, and having to take the time to understand and accurately represent those voices, as an inconvenience or as something that would trivialise the decision-making process. Alderson (2013: 7) argues that these justifications should be problematised as they bear a stark resemblance to ones used to justify the exclusion of women and people of color from such considerations only several decades ago.

Just as feminism has attempted to expand and enrich dominant definitions and possibilities of being human from the dominant 'Man' centric conceptions, perhaps its also worth considering age as an exclusionary category and children as a marginalised, often unheard group, one which might also have the potential to enrich our understandings of what it might mean to be human, just as feminism has (Stephens 1995). This seems important because in my research, I found that the young people on Mansawar Street had a secret political life that they felt unable to share with the adult world around them, and that this impacted upon their experience of agency with regards to their schooling experiences.

Diverse Children, Universal Childhoods?

“Much research describes how children and adults act and react within rigidly constraining contexts of locally imposed childhoods. ‘Childhood’ and ‘youth’ are partly uncertain and contradictory terms, and children and young people live within the political uncertainties and contradictions between real and imagined childhoods” (Alderson 2013: 5)

The United Nations’ (1989) *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (UNCRC) has been ratified by every country except the United States, and it has been instrumental in enacting normative conceptions of childhood and what it should entail. The idea of ‘the child’ as enshrined in this policy is that which is also embodied in the global schooling project and its values, and it is one that can flatten and homogenise millions of diverse, complex children and childhoods. This idea of the ‘child’ positions some children as deviant and deficient and others as normal and aspirational. It frames children as vulnerable and in need of protection, and in doing so it simultaneously furthers the depoliticisation of young people’s voices while also intensely politicising young people’s lives. More specifically, it emphasises that the right, normal, healthy place for children is at home or at school, and that all children are entitled and have a right to go to school (Alderson 2013). But it doesn’t mention anything about giving them the choice not to, thereby furthering the supposed centrality of the school in childhood, regardless of where this childhood is occurring and the unique interests, features and challenges of each child’s life. As Montgomery (2009: 6) points out, “The idea of childhood reflected in the Convention privileges education over work, family over street life, and consumerism over productivity.

The child envisaged by the Convention is an individual, autonomous being, an inheritor of the liberal, humanist ideals of the Enlightenment, a view which has caused problems for universal interpretation and implementation.”

Yet the governments that have enacted this policy rarely consider or investigate qualitatively the actual impacts of the imposition of this conception of childhood on diverse young people around the world (Alderson 2013: 7), particularly on children in non-western contexts, who significantly outnumber their counterparts in the west, and whose lives and experiences of being ‘children’ might not fit into this liberalism-inflected conceptualisation of ‘childhood’ and the assumptions embedded in it. Within development settings, there is a growing conversation examining youth from a comparative perspective (Jeffrey & McDowell 2004) challenging this misapplication of the so-called ‘global child’ to Majority World settings (Aitken et al. 2008), with the emphasis on the taken-for-granted presence of parents and governments to protect children, and with globalising norms of school and play that exclude the experiences of some and make deviant the everyday livelihood activities of others (Tisdall & Punch 2012; Valentin & Meinhert 2009; Panter-Brick & Smith 2000; Jeffrey et al. 2008).

This begs the question: what about all those children who do not have a home, nor go to school, who live and make their living on the street (Panter-Brick & Smith 2000; Hecht 1998; Van Blerk 2012)? Or what about forcibly displaced and refugee children, existing in spaces of uncertainty and transition, perhaps without a home, without a family, and without the ability to attend school (Chatty 2007; Chatty et al. 2005; Chatty 2005)? What about children who make their living as sex-workers (Montgomery 2001), or children who have become soldiers (Rosen 2007; De Berry 2001)? Where do these experiences and these children fit in? Traditional arguments for the ‘rescuing of children’ that are

homeless, labourers, child soldiers or unaccompanied migrant and refugee children are increasingly being contested, as the emotional complexities of how young people experience and make sense of each of these roles and realities comes to the fore (Wells 2015; Hashim & Thorsen 2011; Punch 2009; Ansell 2005; Panter-brick & Smith 2000; Ennew 1995). Furthermore, the expectation of innocence the UNCRC deploys as a prerequisite for young people to be able to call upon or draw on the support, protection and nurturance of adults, or to be able to participate in development and its schooling initiatives is increasingly being recognised as dangerous and alienating (Montgomery 2009: 237). As Scheper-Hughes and Stein (1987: 346) have argued for many years: “It is the ‘bad’ (i.e. impulsive, lazy, aggressive, sexual) children who are being disciplined and purged (to a great extent representing the young members of already stigmatised and therefore suspect and vulnerable ethnic, racial and class minorities), and it is the ‘good’ (i.e. the innocent, a-sexual) children who are understood as being rescued.”

This globalisation of a particular expectation of childhood finds a counterpart in the assumption of some kind of universal experience for all children. So in an increasingly globalised world, a focus on national or particular contexts has to also be supplemented by an understanding of how ‘local’ practices are impacted on by ‘global’ processes, and that where people live affects how they live. It becomes important to explore how the location of childhood impacts upon what kinds of childhoods are had and to explore how global flows and structures, the policies and activities of global aid agencies and NGOs, as well as the structures and practices of international law are reshaping everyday experiences of childhood (Wells 2015). This is precisely what my ethnography of the lived experience of the global schooling project does.

A closer look at all the young lives who do not fit into the universal, normative notions of what it *should* mean to be a child that the UNCRC contains has significantly and meaningfully complicated any understanding or conceptualisation of children and childhood, and of the place of schooling in childhood (Montgomery 2009: 6). As more and more researchers and advocates begin to question and resist adult-centric ways of understanding young people's lives, bringing attention to the diversity and multiplicity of childhoods and children, including their voices, accounting for their agencies and nuancing our ideas and expectations of what childhood can and should be, will be essential. To that end, this project, provides a glimpse into one particular experience of the global schooling project for one group of young people living on one street in Nepal, bringing attention to all the ways it is shaping their everyday lives.

In providing this glimpse into these young lives, my aim is to meaningfully center them in my ethnographic inquiry, while taking their views and voices on the issues affecting their lives seriously. As outlined by (Montgomery 2009: 236) I recognise centering young people in inquiry as a political act, one that aims to reconfigure the dominant relationships between adults and children and reconsiders ideas of childhood sponsored in the West. I maintain that there is nothing 'natural' in how children grow up and move through this part of their life, nor in what they know and what kinds of knowledge and considerations they should be protected from. So my ethnography of these young people's lived experience of 'the global schooling project' shows the nuances and complexities of the cultural politics of their childhoods, and of how the values contained in the global schooling project impact upon actual children's perceptions of themselves and their lives. My project hopes to both substantively and empirically provide a richer and more textured exploration of

how we might take seriously the entwined relationship between 'childhood' in its actually existing diversities and localities, and in its hegemonic conception in the global schooling project.

'The Global Schooling Project'

The content, form, actors and practices involved in 'global schooling' are ambiguous and diverse. It is a phenomenon disseminated by and achieved through various actors and institutions, some public some private, some for profit and some non-profit, and it interacts with and is negotiated differently within diverse national contexts (Robertson & Verger 2012). However, the values that efforts towards global schooling carry about the central role of schooling in childhood, that schooling should provide a standardised education with a linear learning model that will lead young people towards employment, and the notion that participation in school will necessarily improve young people's lives, are arguably a consistent justification across its diverse manifestations (Klee et al. 2012; World Bank 2017a).

Specifically in the Global South and among 'developing' countries, it is well evidenced that schooling and education practices are highly dependent on external, foreign expertise and financing (Rose 2007). It is often the case in these contexts that external actors, specifically international NGOs, international organisations and large donor agencies have more of a presence in setting the schooling agenda and priorities than the state (Verger et al 2012; Srivastava & Oh 2010). This is in contrast to what is commonly the case in western, industrialised countries, such as the UK, wherein the state is usually

the central funder and facilitator of broad-scale schooling, education and training for its citizens (Grek et al. 2009; Hendrick 1997).

Verger et al. (2012: 6) argue that “globalisation revitalises the role of international agencies in the making of educational policy,” pointing to specific international governmental organisations, including the World Bank, the OECD and UNESCO that carry an education mandate. This mandate has given rise to a series of global education policy initiatives that these IGOs have sponsored since 1990, most recently: the UN’s *Global Education First Initiative* 2012-2016, the World Bank’s *Global Partnership for Education* (World Bank 2017a) and the *Incheon Declaration for Education 2030* (UNESCO 2016) designed to further the mandate to get “every child, everywhere into school” (ibid). These are some of the primary institutions and initiatives, or “merchants” as Verger (2009) calls them, that have set the global schooling project in motion, pushing this mandate and the funding to reach it through various global policy initiatives that are then filtered in their implementation through local NGOs and national entities, both public and private. Robertson et al. (2002) argues that in this way, these global schooling mandates create a transnational private market of education provision, and that this private provision of education often either supplements or is in direct competition with national education providers.

In Nepal, national expenditure on education is 3.7% of GDP (UNESCO 2017), an amount which does not come close to the estimated \$41, 813, 316 million USD being invested by IGOs (World Bank 2018). The public, government sponsored schools are taught in Nepali and charge a minimal attendance fee in comparison to private schools, the exact amount of which varies across the country but that is on average five times the cost, according to those I spoke to

Pokhara. On Mansawar Street these public schools are widely conceived of as inferior to the more competitive English private schools because it is thought that only those who can't afford to attend private school would attend these schools. In this way, the private schooling industry on this street has had the effect of trivialising the national effort to bring about quality public schooling and elevating the status of private schools, while stigmatising and further marginalising the Nepalis who may not be able to afford to send their children to private school. It has also paved the way for IGOs and the various actors through which these IGOs filter their initiatives to impose the values underpinning their education mandate and capitalise on the perceived failure of the state to provide a quality education or schooling experience, without much oversight or intervention (Thapa 2015).

Behind the scenes there is a complicated network of organisations and institutions driving the educational landscape in Pokhara that the young people of Mansawar Street and their families can't necessarily see, yet are trying to navigate. Apart from understanding that the government runs the public schools, there is a lot of uncertainty surrounding which national, supranational or business entity is sponsoring which private school and how the curriculum of each school is dictated by outside sources. There is the impression that it's a bit of a free for all, and that most schools are not beholden to state oversight or monitoring. Yet according to teachers and principals in Pokhara, the values private schools put into practice--standardisation, competition and linearity--are in part due to the need for these schools to be able to demonstrate to their IGO/NGO funders the merit of the education they are providing.

While most of the literature on global schooling focuses on conceptually examining global schooling and the institutions which sponsor it (Ball 2012), there is some research that has begun to map out the complex nexus of supranational actors shaping the form global schooling takes in specific national contexts (Verger et al. 2012). However, this work has not been done extensively in Nepal. To sketch the messy and often undocumented context and landscape of schooling in Nepal and its interrelations remains an important undertaking, but this is not a project of a scale to be completed here. I instead gesture to the complexity and ambiguity of the global schooling project and its actors in Nepal, while alluding to the international governmental institutions, namely the World Bank and the United Nations, whose education mandates and global policy initiatives shape the landscape of private and public schooling in Pokhara on the street where my research took place by filtering their values and resources into the local actors responsible for helping them reach their policy mandates. This complexity of actors and the indiscernibility of who is connected to whom and who receives funding from where in Nepal is why instead of referring to one single policy initiative or institution I use 'the global schooling project' to account for and be inclusive of the multiplicity and complexity of actors, interests and forms this global project to provide education to every child entails. This research, therefore, aims to show how the global schooling project and the values it carries about the role of schooling in childhood shapes and transforms the childhoods of one particular group of young people I got to know on one small street in Nepal.

Chapter 3

Methodology and Methods: Ethnographically Unfolding Social Worlds



*“On the long journey doubts were often my companions. I’ve always admired those reporters who can descend on an area, talk to key people, ask key questions, take samplings of opinions, and then set down an orderly report very like a road map. I envy this technique and at the same time do not trust it as a mirror of reality. I feel that there are too many realities. What I set down here is true until someone else passes that way and rearranges the world in his own style. In literary criticism the critic has no choice but to make over the victim of his attention into something the size and shape of himself. And in this report I do not fool myself into thinking I am dealing with constants. A long time ago I was in the ancient city of Prague and at the same time Joseph Alsop, the justly famous critic of places and events, was there. He talked to informed people, officials, ambassadors; he read the reports, even the fine print and figures, while I in my slipshod manner roved about with actors, gypsies, vagabonds. Joe and I flew home to America in the same plane, and on the way he told me about Prague. And his Prague had no relation to the city I had seen and heard. It just wasn’t the same place, and yet each of us was honest, neither one a liar, both pretty good observers by any standard, and we brought home two cities, two truths. For this reason I cannot commend this account as an America you will find. So much there is to see, but our morning eyes describe a different world than do our afternoon eyes, and surely our wearied evening eyes can report only a weary evening world.” -John Steinbeck, *Travels with Charley*, p.60*

Intention and Orientation

At the heart of this project is a disjuncture between the promises of education and development practices, and the realities and lived experiences of the individuals and contexts these practices supposedly serve. This research began with the intention of trying to better understand that gap by empirically engaging with how the 'global schooling project' impacts the holistic, everyday lives and choices of young people and their families in Nepal. Because the transmission of knowledge—and the value assumptions implicit in that process—can transform everyday horizons and 'childhood' aspirations in significant ways, the ways in which global development practices approach 'educating' societies of people and proliferating development aspirations, as well as the intended and unintended consequences of such initiatives, should be, I believe, given significant weight, consideration and critique.

The primary goal of this research, therefore, is to paint a more textured picture of how the 'global schooling project' is lived by young people and families in Nepal in the everyday, engaging with the rich complexity and dimensionality of these people's lives and decision-making spaces, while investigating how the compulsion towards a particular vision of schooling may have impacted those lives and childhoods in intricate, intimate ways. On this basis, I seek to provide ethnographic insights that can add to the discussion being had surrounding global education practices and how they impact the everyday lives of young people and families around the world, both in academic and policy spheres.

This chapter will describe: (1) the intention and orientation of myself as a researcher and the phenomenological lens of this research; (2) my approach to doing ethnography and to gaining access to social worlds that would allow me

to bear witness to and participate in the intimacies and interiorities of young people's everyday lives; (3) what actually happened in my ethnography, where and with whom; and (4) some of the challenges and limitations of this research.

Motives and Knowledge

It's worth identifying my intention and orientation as a researcher and the questions that drove this project forward. Alongside embarking on this journey to learn from and research other people's lives, one of my priorities was also to reflexively engage with my subjectivity and intentions throughout the process. Therefore, the motives, intentions and convictions animating this research should be made clear, as they can have an impact on how research is conducted and therefore on how knowledge is produced. I have always believed in the transformative potential of education practices, both in their best and worst forms. My background is in education and child development, and with early influence from Paulo Freire (1996), I have witnessed firsthand both the struggles and the possibilities that emerge as educators and students try to create meaningful, sustainable and liberating educational experiences in dialogue with one another. I have also seen how alienating, marginalising and destructive the imposition of particular standards of worth and intelligence can be when forced upon unique, creative young people who may not fit into the boxes dominant schooling practices or normative conceptions of 'childhood' try to package them into. I believe that this denial of the expression and actualisation of young people's unique, creative ways of making sense of themselves in relation to the world around them has far-reaching and damaging consequences, at an individual, institutional and ecological level. So this broad

concern has been a driving motivation animating much of my academic, personal and professional endeavors.

To this end, I do not pretend to bring a lens of disembodied scientific objectivity to this research, nor do I wish to be value neutral as a researcher on a topic that I feel strongly and care deeply about. Rather, I follow along the logic of Donna Haraway (1988: 576) and, as she puts it, try not to get “trapped by two poles of a tempting dichotomy on the question of objectivity,” while also recognising knowledges as situated in their production. That said, given the phenomenological lens of this research, I place a lot of weight on lived experience and intentionality, thus positioning the research as attaching a great deal of epistemological significance to subjectivities and the affective, interpersonal dimensions of human experience.

I also embrace the “public, critical sociology” advocated by Burawoy (2005: 321). From this perspective, sociology, and knowledge production more generally, should be increasingly concerned with producing and disseminating knowledge in ways that are public facing and relevant, in which sociologists and academics challenge the hierarchical, exclusionary and often exploitative structures involved in the production and dissemination of academic knowledge, acknowledging their positioning within these structures, and continually addressing and accounting for this in their roles and positions as facilitators and educators. As Marcus (1995) states in Coleman & von Hellerman (2012: 26) “dissertation fieldwork and ethnography are where the shape of research gets collectively and normatively defined in the shadow of its tradition. If basic change is to come it would be in this context.”

Phenomenology and Practice

*If I were to tell you where my greatest feeling, my universal feeling,
the bliss of my earthly existence has been,
I would have to confess: It has always, here and there,
been in this kind of in-seeing, in the indescribably swift, deep,
timeless moments of this divine seeing into the heart of things.*
-(Rainer Maria Rilke, 1987)

The conceptual and methodological approach of this research is phenomenological. Phenomenology asks the question: what is constitutive of experience? It is often defined as the study of structures of experience, or what some call 'consciousness' from the subjective or first person point of view. But as a methodology, phenomenology extends from its restrictions of describing sensory qualities of experience, such as seeing, tasting, smelling, etc., to explore the meanings we attach to those things that are constitutive of our lived experiences. As van Manen (2014: 12) puts it, "Phenomenology is a project of sober reflection on the lived experience of human existence— sober, in the sense that reflecting on experience must be thoughtful, and as much as possible, free from theoretical, prejudicial and suppositional intoxications."

Phenomenology, therefore, studies the structures of many kinds of experience, including memory, emotion, desire, action, perception and all other experiences that we perceive as arising from our conscious subjectivity, while avoiding over-entanglement in theoretical predispositions. The method I employ within this broader phenomenological orientation is hermeneutic, along the lines of the Heideggerian (2002) approach, in which I interpret an experience by relating it to those features that are relevant of the social context. This approach is taken with an understanding of intentionality as the central structure of experience and an emphasis on how this intentionality manifests in people's decision-making

spaces. I view this as the approach most apt and able to understand how something as big and structural as the ‘global schooling project’ is actually instantiated and experienced in people’s material and emotional lives, and significantly, the meanings they attach to it.

Ethnography and Interiorities

The Everyday in Dialogue with the Abstract

“Ethnographies are portraits of diversity in an increasingly homogenous world. They display the intricate ways individuals and groups understand, accommodate and resist a presumably shared order” (Van Maanen 2011: xviii).

One of my supervisors, Dr. Liliana Riga, once told me that to do ethnography “is to exist deeply and meaningfully in a place.” I couldn’t agree more. From my view, it is to immerse oneself in the inner and outer impulses and heartbeats of a space; to begin to understand the surges and the lulls, the peace and the chaos, the excitement and the disappointment, and then to begin to link the physical manifestations you bear witness to with the inner triggers and emotional worlds propelling them forwards in each moment.

From Kathleen Stewart (2007) I learned—or at least gained an appreciation for—how it’s possible to write a deeply embedded, existentially-oriented ethnography that gives weight to the perpetual conversation happening between the small things and the big things of life; to draw attention to the

granular interactions and moment to moment unfolding of consequential outcomes. From John Van Maanen (2011) I found the courage to bring an honesty and authenticity to the articulation and representation of my ethnography, not pretending it's neat and tidy when in actuality it's messy, chaotic, spontaneous and rarely ever goes as planned.

From Anna Tsing's (2005) *Friction* I began to think about how to cultivate a mode of attention and articulation that is also a consistent conceptual orientation to how things happen and come about, both in people's concrete everyday lives and in the global patterns, consequences and trajectories those everyday lives assemble. I began to think about how one could ethnographically go about seeing, understanding and writing a dialogue between the empirical and the theoretical, the everyday and the abstract, through a phenomenological lens. Where does one end and the other begin? It's a tricky line to walk in practice: not to counter-pose these as binaries, not to overly abstract or theorise the everyday lives and experiences you share in and bear witness to, but yet to make the theoretical leaps between the two when necessary; to weave that very delicate, almost undetectable thread between the two to paint an accurate yet substantive portrait of a shared reality, based on only a partial knowledge of others' experiences. But in a way, that is essentially what I was attempting to do: to bear witness to and find a way to communicate the dialogue going on between these young people's everyday worlds and all the unseen forces being exerted on them by global development and schooling aspirations.

In doing so I was continually encouraged by Sara-Lawrence Lightfoot's (1997) work to think differently about the boundaries of my inquiry and the relationship between knowledge and experience, to bring together aesthetics and empiricism when trying to convey the subtleties and rich complexity of human

experience. Her convictions to this end resonate the convictions and orientations of one of my favorite thinkers and theorists, John Dewey. As she puts,

“John Dewey echoed an admiration of boundary crossing and improvisation, the desire to push beyond the narrow cannons and abstractions of science in order to represent reality... Dewey’s classic Art as Experience (1935/1958) underscored the need not only to capture the cognitive, social and affective dimensions of educational encounters, but also to find frameworks and strategies for representing the aesthetic of teaching and learning. If we wanted education to be artful—beautiful not merely pretty, creative not merely competent, discovery not merely mimicry—then, Dewey suggested, we would have to find ways of envisioning and recording experience that would not distort its texture and richness. This would require joining aesthetic and empirical approaches, merging rigor and improvisations, and appreciating both the details and the gestalt” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis 1997: 6).

This orientation has been present both in my approach to fieldwork and in the way I have written this ethnography. You will see this, for instance, in Chapter 5, ‘Aspirational Landscapes’, in my descriptions of how young people experienced the rhythms of the street around which much of their everyday life revolved, and in Chapter 6, ‘Saturdays’, in how I illustrate the ways young people moved through and made sense of their everyday ecologies. In places I also include poems to help reinforce certain points of my ethnography subtly and with a degree of opacity.

Witnessing Becoming: Epistemologies in Practice

When trying to understand the impacts of the global schooling project and its enactment in the everyday, it found it useful to think about how “bigger structures and underlying causes obscure the ways in which a reeling present is composed out of heterogeneous and non-coherent singularities,” as Stewart (2007: 4) puts it. It's important to engage with how exactly one can and should go about seeing this and making it visible for others. To this end, it's necessary to bring some kind of epistemological and philosophical engagement to the relationship(s) among knowledge, structures and agency. We are all confined by the epistemological and bureaucratic structures that inundate us on a daily basis, but we also have degrees of choice in how we make sense of the knowledge and universalist forces and structures surrounding us and in how far we internalise the assumptions and values they carry. But what about when individuals become so deeply embedded into certain knowledge systems—or that those systems become so all encompassing—that this belonging perpetuates the neglect of or inability to imagine other possible ways of knowing, being and interacting with ourselves and the world around us? I argue that the global schooling project enacts many assumptions about what it means to be a ‘successful’, worthy and complete human being in relationship to those around you, and that the imposition of these convictions has wide-ranging consequences on people's ways of knowing and understanding their inner and outer worlds and daily lives. I would argue that the most profound and yet invisible place these global schooling values work is not in shaping livelihoods and career choices, but in re-shaping and changing who young people are as interior beings. This research is therefore about making visible the interiorities of the global schooling project.

But how can this be done empirically? The epistemologies and associated knowledges governing the enactment of the global schooling project and its implicit value assumptions can be seen through engaging with the everyday practices and decision-making spaces of those involved in assembling these realities. As Montesquieu alluded to in his *Persian Letters*, epistemologies are fragile, momentary, malleable and reducible to the cooperation of the agency and subjectivities that enact them. They are subject and subordinate to the subjective understandings, affective choices and coordinated doings of those whose understandings and habits they command. It is therefore in these mundane, momentary practices and decisions that epistemologies can be seen. It is in discovering and occupying ways of perception that make the familiar strange that we can see the epistemological weight and phenomenological relevance of the moments, compulsions, decisions, desires, connections and habits that saturate and animate our lives. This is both a theoretical and practical grounding point of my inquiry. As Stewart (2007: 6) articulates, “forms of power and meaning become circuits lodged in singularities. They have to be followed through disparate scenes. They can gather themselves into what we think of as stories and selves, but they can also remain, or become again, dispersed, floating, recombining—regardless of what whole or what relay of rushing signs they might find themselves in for a while.” Though admittedly in practice I found that I had to continually work to ground such grandiose conceptual points of departure in the actual, everyday experience of roaming around the Himalayas getting to know the intimate lives of young people, always oscillating between being lost in the moments I was sharing them and thinking abstractly about their conceptual significance.

Decision-Making Spaces and the Intimate Everyday

In my observations, I made an effort to “approach the intensities of the ordinary through a close ethnographic attention to *pressure points* and forms of attention and attachment” (Stewart 2007: 5). My research turned out to be ethnography of the everyday, with a focus on the intimacies, livelihoods and decision-making spaces of the young people I got to know. This really came down to just being present and spending a lot of time with them and the members of their social and emotional worlds. It meant trying to understand why Santosh worked so hard on his homework everyday. It meant observing how the young children of the neighborhood formed friendships and emotional attachments with the stray dogs in the community. It meant discovering what excited them. What did their daily routines consist of? How much control did they have over this? What did they wish they could do but felt they couldn't? How did school make them feel about themselves? How did their friends make them feel? What did they do in their free time? How did work, school, friendships and other expectations placed on them impact upon their daily routines? Where did these responsibilities come from? It meant trying to engage with their lives in all their overlapping yet component parts to better understand the hopes, fears, desires, and connections that informed their choices, animated their actions and sustained them in their everyday lives, and to understand the role of their schooling experiences in each of these.

Positionality and Perspective

My ethnography was Geertzian in that thick description was what informed my method of attention and articulation (Geertz 1983, 1975). Geertz spoke of his will to understand why people acted as they did, and to do that his approach consisted of describing “his way of seeing their way of seeing, or even in

reading over their shoulder. He understood, with a phenomenological orientation, that the gaze of the eagle and the gaze of the horse over the prairie are not the same” (Jennan 2000 in Slyomovics 2010: 4). So acknowledging social positioning and how that impacted my experience and perspective as a researcher is important. There were certain opportunities afforded to me given my positioning as a white, western woman, but there were certainly other limitations that resulted from the same status. I wonder if I had been a more threatening character or if I were a man would I have been folded into these young people’s lives and social worlds to the extent that I was? I wonder if the male teachers at the school would have shown me more respect if I were a man? I wonder if I wasn’t from the mountains and didn’t grow up with animals whether I could have endured some of the tough fieldwork situations in which I ended up? The bottom line is that the shape, form and substance of this ethnography is in many ways the product of who I am and how I engage with the world, for better or worse. There’s no way around it. I simply hope to be very transparent about acknowledging and accounting for this, and mindful of the way it may have impacted the ethnography at every stage of the research process: in conducting fieldwork, analysing data and, perhaps most importantly, in thinking through any conclusions or claims to knowledge.

Methodological Limitations

“By pressing for solution but always resisting it, the problem of context continues to polarize thinkers. The choice of context depends on one’s aim, which is never simply neutral. Its use to deny or affirm likeness is therefore a subjective act with its own context and consequences, which are anything but trivial” (Scharfstein 1989: 185).

Ethnography also has its limitations. Although there has been a turn away from the pursuit of “sheer objectivity” among social scientists (Haraway 1988) and a move towards embracing the inevitable subjectivity that informs and is present in any kind of inquiry in which human perception and experience is involved, ethnography is certainly accepting of subjective, emotional, interpersonal experiences as a valid basis upon which to make qualitative knowledge claims (Van Maanen 2011: ch1). Though I maintain that ethnography is the method best apt and able to pick up on the granular textures, intimacies and complexities that I was seeking to understand, some may see it as an insufficient and unreliable way of trying to uncover such things. There are no doubt a lot of variables and contingencies involved in ethnography. There are certainly a lot of things left to chance, personal taste, attitude and approach. But I also think that there is some merit in a method that is necessarily in alignment with and contingent upon the way the researcher moves through the world. I acknowledge that my experience of the world is not the same as anyone else’s, and that therefore the relationships and experiences I made in each place are my own and thus not generalisable. I acknowledge that, as Steinbeck eloquently put, my morning eyes may have described a different world than my afternoon eyes, and that perhaps my wearied evening eyes could report only a weary evening world. And that a troubled heart and mind might be more inclined to report a troubled, burdensome world, just as a light and joy-filled heart might be more able to see and report a bright and joyful world. But that does not mean that my unique experiences—informed and influenced by all the moving bits and pieces of the place and people around me—are not still valid and worth reflecting upon.

What Happened

Holding the Uncertain

“Fieldworkers, it seems, learn to move among strangers while holding themselves in readiness for episodes of embarrassment, affection, misfortune, partial or vague revelation, deceit, confusion, isolation, warmth, adventure, fear, concealment, pleasure, surprise, insult and always possible deportation. Accident and happenstance shapes fieldworkers’ studies as much as planning or foresight; numbing routine as much as living theatre; impulse as much as rational choice; mistaken judgments as much as accurate ones. This may not be the way fieldwork is reported, but it is the way it is done” (Van Maanen 2011: 2)

Before arriving in Nepal I had a very elaborate, detailed plan for how things were supposed to go. It was based on detached knowledge, virtual correspondence and remote understandings of a place that I hadn’t actually been, reliant upon the cooperation of people I had never actually met in person, informed by the quite naïve assumption that having a plan provides you with some semblance of control over what happens and how it happens.

That didn’t hold for long. Plans changed, access didn’t go as anticipated, and I hit the ground running while learning the important lessons of adaptability, flexibility and persistence in ethnographic research. Terrible things will happen that will get you down, like getting a stomach bug from contaminated water and being bed-ridden and dehydrated to the extent that I had to ask the young boy working at the guesthouse I was staying at in Kathmandu (KTM) to check on me every night to make sure I didn’t need to go to the hospital. But then amazing things will also happen that will invigorate you and your research, like the chance meeting and quick friendship with a young boy passing down the street,

who would eventually become like family and significantly shape the entire research project. You have to be prepared to make the most of each; to pay attention and discern between moments of opportunity and moments of distraction; to know when to hold onto the plan and when to let it go to make room for something different and perhaps more meaningful. Since ethnography requires you to be fully present in a place, it seems that if you're paying attention you would inevitably stray from the plan to account for the actual, real, materiality of the place and the people you encounter, because rarely can the dynamism, richness and unpredictability of social life and human beings be planned, predicted, or fit into neat, pre-determined theoretical frameworks. So I went, I saw, I felt, I shared moments, I learned, I adjusted, and this is how it happened and some of the people who made it was it was.

Chance, Encounters and Intimacies

Ethnography rests on the peculiar practice of representing the social reality of others through the analysis of one's own experience in the world of these others. Ethnography is therefore highly particular and hauntingly personal, yet it serves as the basis for grand comparison and understanding within and across a society" (Van Maanen 2011: xiii).

There were a lot of reasons and contributing factors to why I chose to conduct my ethnography the way I did and where I did. There were practical reasons. Certainly chance and intuition were reasons. But I was allowed this flexibility in my research process because I designed the research problem in a way that made the most important aspect of the ethnography finding places, people and communities with whom I felt I could develop some kind of meaningful, emotional connection. Since I wanted to gain insights into the everyday lives,

livelihoods and social and emotional worlds of young people in Nepal in order to better understand the holistic impacts of the global schooling project, I was fortunate in that the only sure thing that needed to be present was the potential and willingness to form some kind of close, meaningful relationship. So my fieldwork took shape around the people I encountered, and around their willingness to fold me into their social and emotional worlds.

Compassion as Access

Many of the most meaningful connections I made in Nepal, particularly with young people, were altogether spontaneous and unplanned. A significant part of my gaining access to these social and emotional worlds in the first place was me immersing myself in—and showing respect for—the ecologies of Mansawar Street, a small tucked away street I was living on in Pokhara that came to be the epicenter of my research.

Nepal is predominantly a mixture of Buddhist and Hindu communities. At a very basic level, one of the core principles of these religions is to show compassion and love for all sentient beings. Most of the prayers engraved onto stones and written on the prayer flags you see hanging from Buddhist households and Stupas across Nepal and Tibet are prayers for precisely this: the wellbeing of all sentient beings.

This corresponds with the reality that in much of Nepal, many people's livelihoods and daily routines continue to revolve around the animals that they rely on for company and subsistence and with whom they share their physical environment. Their everyday is explicitly, intimately connected to the non-

human life systems surrounding them. There is no such thing as 'nature' as some exotic, remote concept separate from their livelihoods and lived experiences; instead, these are one, integrated, coexisting and reliant upon each other, and this interdependence both of well being and of suffering is, in most places, not taken for granted or ignored (urban Kathmandu as a possible exception). While conducting my fieldwork, I found that showing respect, compassion and care for the non-human members of the communities where I was doing research went a long way to build trust and points of connection between myself as an outside researcher and the people and social worlds that I was trying to get to know.

The first trust I gained on my fieldwork in Nepal was that of the stray dog communities living among the young people and families with whom I was there to do research. When I arrived in Pokhara and began settling into my new home on Mansawar Street, one of the first things I noticed and tended to was the large stray dog population. One in particular caught my attention: a little pup that had a hurt hind leg that appeared to have either been run over or bitten by another dog. He couldn't put any weight on it, and the wound looked as though it was infected. He must have been less than six months old and looked as though he had some German Shepherd in him, with black and golden coloring, big ears and a long, straight tail. Despite his injury, he was very playful and energetic, though obviously in a lot of pain. I got him to start following me around by giving him treats and water, and eventually lured him a few km away to a small animal hospital someone had told me about. He was resistant at first, but eventually we got him all mended up. After this I started calling him Babu, and he wouldn't leave my side. Everyone seemed to notice this and the fact that Babu's leg was healed, and I suddenly started getting smiles and waves from residents and shopkeepers as I'd walk down the street.

The Gang

This all happened just before I met Santosh passing me on the street on his skateboard. I was with Babu at the time that Santosh and I met each other. Santosh bent down to say hello to Babu, and then the next day when I met the rest of his friends we all went for a walk around the neighborhood, with other stray dogs and friends of Santosh joining us as we went. After this Santosh invited me to come play football with him and his friends, and from that point on Babu and I became part of the gang. Sometimes I wonder whether Santosh would have had the courage or curiosity to speak to me if I hadn't been hanging around with this little pup so much of the time. Santosh tells me that he still would have said hello to me, but I have little doubt that the fact that I cared about the well being of these dogs they shared the street with—that they also helped looked after—facilitated the establishment of trust between myself and the residents of the street, initially.

When I first began getting to know Santosh and his close group of friends, I was surprised at their warmth and the ease with which they welcomed me into their homes and networks. After a few weeks, several afternoons playing football together, and a lot of shared encounters with the stray dog community, the kids began folding me into—and actively including me in—their social and emotional worlds. I somehow became part of the gang, alongside these ten to twelve year old Nepali kids. I was genuinely interested in them, and I think for some reason they were interested in me and thought I had something to offer them with my company. It also didn't hurt that I was a decent football player. But they were very interested in my research from the start, which I described to them as, "I want to understand your everyday life: what you find challenging, what you love,

what you hope for, what comforts you, what you do for fun, what you dream of in the future. I also want to understand how your experiences at school make you feel, and how school fits into all of these other aspects of your everyday life.” After they understood that I just wanted to get to know them in this way, they seemed to be spilling over with things they wanted to share with me about their experiences of school, their parents, their teachers, their friends, their home, and their hopes for the future. They seemed overwhelmingly glad to have someone *listen to them*, and to have their side of things heard. For a number of reasons, we quickly became inseparable. We’d go swimming; we’d play board games; we’d sit on the curb and talk and do nothing; we’d read the newspaper together; we’d go wandering around in the nearby forest; we’d eat our meals together; we’d do our homework together; we’d go to the lake; and of course I also would go to school with them three days a week.

The following chart is designed with the intention of providing a little bit more information about those key people the research took form around:

Name:	Age:	Location:	Occupation/livelihood:
Santosh	11	Pokhara (Mansawar St)	Student/barista
Sangam	11	Pokhara (Mansawar St)	Student
Anita	11	Tandi	Student/carer
Shining Star Class 6A (21 students)	11-12	Pokhara	Students
Mahesh	12	Pokhara	Student

		(Mansawar St)	
Sugam	12	Pokhara (Mansawar St)	Student
Sudeep	11	Pokhara (Mansawar St)	Student
Sabeena	11	Pokhara	Student
Sujal	11	Pokhara	Student
Babu the dog (and his stray gang on Mansawar street)	2	Pokhara	Companions
Suresh Pun	25	Pokhara (Mansawar St)	Café manager
Bohm Pun	19	Pokhara (Mansawar St)	Student/teacher/volunteer
Laku	18	Kathmandu	Guest house employee
Kamali	17	Kathmandu	Student
Sukabir	35	Kathmandu/Tandi	Business owner; painter
Tirtha	40	Kathmandu	Aid worker
Basanta	35	Astam	Eco-village cook/gardener
Vilip	55	Pokhara	Paper shop owner
Naranyan Padme	40	Pokhara	Principal, Shining Star School
Mrs. Pun (Moti Sara	45	Pokhara	Owner, All In One Cafe

Pun)			
Mr. Pun (Dil Bahadur Pun)	50	Pokhara	Owner, All In One Cafe

It's also worth reflecting on the relative absence of young girls in my ethnography. Though the Shining Star class 6a had an exactly equal number of girls and boys, which was significant in allowing my engagement with how these young people experienced their time in school to be generalised across genders, the young people who I got to know most intimately on Mansawar Street were mostly young boys. Occasionally Mahesh's younger sister, Sabeena, or Sangam's older sister, Dalia, would join us on our outings and would hang around with us at the café, but the majority of my time spent with young people outside of the school was with Santosh, Sangam, Mahesh, Sugam and Sudeep, all boys. Part of this was simply because this was their friend group, and it would have been artificial and awkward to try to include and impose girls' presence into their group just for the sake of it. However, I realise that part of this was also due to the fact that these young boys and girls perceived themselves as different from one another, and consequently they would often cluster together according to their gender; a tendency not specific to this particular group of young people or this part of the world, as young people's close friendships with opposite-sexed children are also rare in modern societies (Jamieson 1998: 94-95; Thorne 1993). Unfortunately there was little I could do to encourage a less binary arrangement in this setting. Though this focus on young boys' experiences outside of school surely shaped my ethnography, I do

not think it calls into question any of my findings surrounding this group of young people's lived experiences of the global schooling project.

Where

My fieldwork was conducted in two phases, with two trips about six months apart each lasting around two and a half months. I was there once in the summer and once in the late spring. Before embarking on these trips, I had some hope of contextualising or at least contrasting the experience and challenges of young people in urban spaces compared to those in more rural spaces. I ended up unevenly split between three locations and groups of young people and families. I spent the majority of my time in Pokhara, specifically on Mansawar Street, with a few extended stays in Kathmandu, Tandi and the Astam eco-village.

Pokhara is the third most populous city in Nepal, located approximately 200km outside of Kathmandu. It is also one of the most popular tourist attractions in the country, serving as a base for many trekkers visiting the country, and it is the headquarters of the Western Development Region. It is located at the base of the Himalayas, residing on an important historical trade route between China and India. Pokhara is also home to four Tibetan refugee camps (Jampaling, Paljorling, Tashi Ling, and Tashi Palkhiel), whose presence is significant in the city and in my ethnography.

I also spent a chunk of time in rural Tandi, in Kavre district, about a fourteen-hour bus ride from Kathmandu, staying with a family I became quite close friends with who were based in Bodhanath. I met this family during my initial two week stay in Kathmandu, during which time I was conducting interviews with

UNESCO and UNICEF aid practitioners, trying to better understand the educational aid landscape in Nepal. During this time I also attended a few international academic conferences in Kathmandu hosted by local universities, and I also spent a few days in Bodhanath (a district of Kathmandu) visiting the Stupa and exploring that area. This was when I became close friends with Sukabir and the Lama family, who then welcomed me to their family's village, called Tandi, and insisted I stay with them each time I was in Kathmandu, which I did.

Given the fact that I did not have as much time as I had hoped to conduct my ethnography and therefore less time to spend in rural Tandi, I feel I am unable to make any strong claims about this comparison outside of the sheer, plain diversity of the experiences and livelihoods of those with whom I encountered and shared time. I can speak to the different routines, tasks and responsibilities that animated these young people's everyday lives. I can speak to the different ways they were impacted by family members leaving. But regardless, the experiences that resulted from my time spent in each of these places helped me to create a more complete picture of the cultural and national landscapes I was trying to understand, and also helped to contextualise the experiences I had in each distinctive place. I don't feel that this resulted in some kind of sacrifice of depth for breadth; rather I think that it helped me have a more nuanced and textured understanding of how the global schooling project impacted people differently depending on how they were situated within Nepali society. There is also a conceptual point to make here in that as the ethnography progressed, the comparison of rural and urban seemed to make less sense once I began to realise that in exploring the global schooling project and its impacts on these young people I was also tracing movements, connections, departures and

longings. But I admittedly do wish I had been able to spend more time in each of these locations, which was made impossible by the April 2015 earthquake.

Approach

I conducted my ethnographic fieldwork through various layers of observation, interpretation and translation, all the while bouncing between insider and outsider roles. I embrace Geertz's understanding of agency as central to questions of power and meaning as central to questions of intent, in alignment with my phenomenological lens. In keeping field notes I kept in mind that "doing ethnography is like trying to read (in a sense 'construct a reading of') a manuscript—foreign, fades, full of ellipses, incoherencies, suspicions, emendations, and no tendentious commentaries, but written not in conventionalized graphs of sound but in transient examples of shaped behaviors" (Geertz 1973b: 10 in Slyomovics 2010: 102).

I took extensive handwritten notes, which I tried to type up at least once a week. These handwritten notes were supplemented by extensive audio recordings that I would take whenever I had a moment, on the walk to and from the school, in the morning or before bed, in an effort to capture the most significant bits of the day. This approach allowed me to capture reflections and thoughts as they emerged spontaneously when I did not have access to a computer. Also, one of my aims was to minimise the amount of time spent in front of a computer screen in an effort to be as present as possible. Reflections and field notes were thus written up late in the evenings before bed so as not to take away from meaningful time that could be spent with young people during the day, or else across the table from Santosh in the morning over breakfast as he finished his homework for the day.

On my second trip I also brought a small video recorder along with me and began making short videos with the young people involved in my research. This was mostly for my own purposes to use and be able to look back on as a source of data. Primarily, this entailed recording some of the longer conversations I had with young people, both individually and in groups, which often took the form of informal, reflexive interviews (Roulston 2010). However, given their interest and enthusiasm in using the video recorder, I occasionally handed the video recorder over and encouraged them to film and narrate significant aspects of their daily lives. I decided to leave the content and form of the videos they made up to them. I simply asked them to wander around their environment and narrate as they went, trying to understand how young people themselves move through and make sense of their lived environments. This revealed some insights, though I did end up having to sift through quite a lot of non-substantive, meandering footage. I was also very careful to negotiate the ethical issues that arise with the use of video with those who participated in this activity (Tisdall, Davis & Gallagher 2009: ch 1). I came to an agreement with the young people, parents and families involved that the footage would solely be used for research purposes and would not be posted on any public, online platform.

Furthermore, throughout the thesis I have included photos that are illustrative of key points in my ethnography. It was not part of my research plan to include nor rely upon these visuals, but as I was doing fieldwork and taking photos I began to see them as worth including as they often act as a visual reinforcement and representation of some of the central moments and interactions I had with the young people on Mansawar Street. However, I am not doing visual analysis of these photos, as such.



(Photo: Santosh, Sangam, Mahesh and Babu (in the background) wandering around in the nearby hills making videos)

Interviews and Aid Landscapes

Before getting into my ethnography and firmly deciding upon a location, I spent approximately two weeks in Kathmandu conducting interviews with UNESCO and UNICEF staff members to try to better understand the aid landscapes with which I was engaging. I conducted interviews with three members of UNESCO staff, including the Climate Change Education for Sustainable Development (CCESD) program coordinator and the National Program Director of UNESCO in Kathmandu. The other people I interviewed were members of staff working

on the implementation of UNESCO projects around Nepal, and these conversations were less formal, often over lunch or a coffee.

Most of the staff I spoke to were Nepali, apart from the CCESD program coordinator, who was a Finnish woman. The director of UNESCO in Kathmandu was an older, upper caste Nepali man. From the interviews I conducted with him and his staff members, it became very apparent that caste and gender-based discrimination were very present in the interactions amongst staff and in the enactment and preservation of hierarchies within the organisation. For example, one of the female staff members who was of a lower caste told me that the director would not come to her birthday celebration because of her caste status. Another staff member more directly involved in overseeing the implementation of projects told me, "it's hard to be a woman in this office." This sentiment was confirmed by the CCESD program coordinator, who was assigned to the Kathmandu office by UNESCO headquarters in France. She had been there for nearly 6 months, and told me how she really struggled to negotiate and have her ideas heard by some of the Nepali men at upper level positions within the UNESCO Kathmandu bureaucracy. She told me this over lunch outside of the office, where she could not be overheard. It is hard to imagine how the ideals purportedly embraced and disseminated by UNESCO policies and programmes, including equality, justice, and tolerance, wouldn't be affected by the evident disregard for them in the workplace.

In addition to conducting these interviews, I also attended two conferences by invitation of one of the senior staff members of UNESCO that I interviewed. The Ministry of Education, UNESCO and UNICEF put on the conferences jointly, and the topic was "Education for Sustainable Development." Though not all of

the conference was in English, most of the materials and lecture slides were translated, so I was able to follow what was going on.

At the time of the conference, approximately two weeks after I had arrived in Nepal, many realisations hadn't yet sunk in, but what became clear after spending a lot of time at both public and private schools across Nepal and upon reflecting on the tone and materials of this conference, was the disjuncture between the way schooling practices and education more generally were being spoken about and framed within these policy circles, and the ways they were being lived by young people and families. Most of the language used at these conferences and in the interviews I conducted was abstracted and detached from concrete experiences. The conversation was very much metric driven, meaning that individual stories, nuances and complexities were often flattened and brushed over. They seemed to be missing many of the crucial ripples emanating out from the policies they were imposing, unaware of how profoundly this mad-dash for schooling was transforming everyday lives and feelings of worthiness. So in this way, the disjuncture between policy and actuality that I had identified as a driving feature of my research was very much real and embodied in nearly all of my encounters with these aid institutions and practitioners. Though this engagement with the policy spaces that enact educational aid practices did not end up becoming a central part of my ethnography, it was nevertheless useful to have some knowledge and experience with the institutions and people most directly involved in enacting the 'global schooling project' in Nepal to contextualise my inquiry and validate, at least generally, some of the basic assumptions driving this research.

Ethics and Challenges of Researching with Young People

Ethical challenges emerged throughout the research that are worth addressing. Participant ethnography can be an invasive form of research (Blaikie 2009: ch1; Bryman 2004; Atkinson & Hammersley 1994: 245-250), particularly when researching with young people (Melton et al. 2014) in a culturally unfamiliar location, and many steps were taken to ensure that no ethical boundaries were violated (Tisdall, Davis & Gallagher 2009: ch 1).

Ethics and consent when working with children are particularly sensitive and complicated issues (Alderson & Morrow 2011; Christensen & James 2008). With regards to consent, parental approval was a necessary step taken wherever possible, but this was only a small part of the consent process. Of greater importance was being conscientious and constantly mindful of potential differences between how the young people involved in my research perceived and understood what was happening in contrast to how an adult might, and from there, doing everything possible to ensure coherent and appropriate communication of the implications and purposes of the child's involvement in the research. It was also important to ensure that my intentions as a researcher and the expectations of those individuals involved in my research were always in alignment with one another. Most importantly for me from an ethical standpoint was to avoid any framing or positioning of these children that might have exploited or objectified their lived experiences and subjectivities in a way that had any potential to cause harm (Tisdall, Davis & Gallagher 2009: ch 2).

Though this was and continues to be a very significant challenge, I have a significant amount of experience conducting research involving child participants under the age of consent in a variety of settings and circumstances, and an awareness of the delicate, complex nature of this task accompanied me at every stage of this research (Fraser 2004).

Consent

Consent forms were prepared in advance of fieldwork that all key participants and parents agreed to verbally. The forms were translated into Nepali, but also explained verbally to young people and parents. In most cases, consent was obtained verbally due to a concern for not highlighting anyone's discomfort with their level of literacy. I went to great lengths to ensure that all those individuals involved in my research were fully aware of any risks and that they felt comfortable and free to remove themselves from the research whenever they felt it was necessary to do so. I also took steps to ensure that there was full transparency surrounding my aims, objectives and reasons for interacting with them in this way. But in addition to the more formal process of getting consent described above, it is worth describing the much more subtle way this consent and participation manifested everyday, in actual interactions, in the collective space I became embedded in. Ultimately ethics are not intentions, so it is important to illustrate what actually happened and what I actually did to uphold these abstract statements of ethics.

Consent on Mansawar Street was more of an ongoing conversation with young people and their families, rather than a one-off transaction where they signed a form and ticked some boxes. Consent was rather something that I felt needed to be checked and maintained regularly, on a near everyday basis, given the evolving nature of my relationships and friendships with these young people and their families. This involved regular conversations with young people about how they were feeling about things, making it clear to them that they were free to set their own boundaries around their involvement. It involved getting waves, nods and smiles of amusement and approval from all the parents on the street

before we would head off on one of our adventures to the lake or up the mountain. It meant being very explicit with all the residents of Mansawar Street why I was there and what I was trying to understand. It meant making myself available, publicly and by being present on the street, for people to ask me questions and get to know me and my intentions. It meant being a friend and a member of the community, at the same time as it meant being clear that this wasn't my sole purpose and reason for my being there and becoming a part of their lives.

This is related to how in many ways, consent was obtained through the establishment of what arguably became intimate relationships with my research participants. Though there is an extensive body of work on intimacy in personal relationships (Jamieson 1998), rarely is 'intimacy' invoked as a part of research relationships or as an ethnographic approach. This relates to my use of the word "friend" to describe my relationship with many of my research participants. While I realise there is work on critical friendship, highlighting how 'friends' and 'friendship' isn't all good, given the fact that I conducted an intimate ethnography, largely based on the establishment of close relationships with the young people of Mansawar Street and their families, referring to them as "friends" seemed more appropriate than referring to them as "research participants."

There were also many instances in which I feel the need to highlight how the young people involved in my research negotiated consent in their own, creative ways. Santosh, for example, would often use a plastic, velcro Spiderman mask to negotiate his consent and feelings of self-consciousness when we would make videos. He did this in a way that demonstrated that he understood what was happening, and he was finding a clever way of negotiating this situation in

a way that would place his involvement on his own terms. He had an awareness of what was happening, and he was thinking things through and deciding what he was comfortable with as we went along. However, at the same time that I want to stress what and how much the young people involved in my research knew about their involvement, it's also important to emphasise that their ability to control things and situations—despite and because of this knowledge—was still limited. Santosh was still an eleven-year-old young person that I was responsible for. I dropped in on his world, not the other way around.



(Photo: Santosh in his Spiderman mask during one of our video interviews)

It's also important to note that at no point did I give the impression that anything I was going to do would materially or otherwise change their life circumstances. I tried to be as blunt about this as I could be, which was difficult at times given the financial situation of many of the young people and families involved. There

were moments in which I would express my gratitude to them by bringing small gifts or by being a loyal customer at their café. But I really made an effort to not create false expectations around my ability to change or improve the situations of any of the people involved in my research. I felt that this in some ways would have contaminated my relationships and changed the way I was seen by the community and thus alter the research.

Anonymity

Whether to name or not is an ethical question that too often isn't thought through. Anonymisation shouldn't just be assumed to be good practice, when this is largely in order to protect researchers and the institutions those researchers represent (Moore 2012). There is a feminist perspective on this issue that suggests that putting people's names into history and not removing them or their identities from their own stories is in fact the more 'ethical' thing to do (ibid).

Given the fact that, since my research involves young people, I can't necessarily know how they will feel about being named or anonymised in the future, even if they give their consent to being named in the present moment. I do not make the assumption that anonymity provides protection, nor do I think that I am the best-placed person to make this decision. There are no easy answers or solutions. But given the broader orientation of this research and the convictions I hold about giving credit to the knowledge and agency young people have in directing their lives, I decided to go with whatever they preferred. After several conversations about this over skype with Santosh and the young people involved in my research, at different stages of the research process, they decided that they wanted to be named, not anonymised.

Emotional, Relationship-based Research

There are further ethical considerations to be had when doing research with young people that involves the establishment of relationships, friendships and emotional dependencies—all part of my approach to researching with young people that aimed to prioritise their rights (Ennew et al. 2009) and “recognise children’s agency, citizenship as human beings, now and not just in the future, and involve children as (the central) research participants” (Tisdall, Davis & Gallagher 2009: 3). Since ethnography relies upon the establishment of such connections to people and place, yet it is also necessarily temporary, this raises questions about what boundaries should be established at the onset and how they can be maintained to protect and minimise any potential harm to the participants that may result from the coming and going of such intimacies. Furthermore, given the disclosure of potentially sensitive and personal information, steps were continually taken with all participants to ensure that any and all sensitive material was handled with utmost care and protected from any form of dissemination not agreed upon between the researcher and the participants. Conversations were had up front and periodically throughout the research process via skype to ensure that the participants were comfortable with what was being shared.

The most challenging ethical dilemma I encountered was by far how to react to the use of physical punishment in schools, which is endemic throughout schooling practices in Nepal (UNICEF 2004). There were several episodes where I clashed with senior male teachers over their treatment of students, and not only did this create tensions between myself as a researcher and the teachers at the school, it also confronted me with how, as a white, young,

female researcher, I was not considered to be on equal footing with the male, upper caste teachers. Some teachers more subtly expressed their discrimination towards me on this basis, but some were quite outright about it. More significantly, though, was how this positioned me in relation to the young students in my research, who after witnessing my obvious disapproval of this kind of treatment began turning to me one by one for support to help them stop the physical abuse. I discuss this dilemma and the steps I took to address this challenge in detail in chapter five titled 'Aspirational Landscapes.'

Reflexivity and Limitations: An Inevitably Incomplete Picture

A guiding question I asked myself during my fieldwork and in the months since was: how can I write voices and experiences that are not mine with empathy, with insight, with honesty and with compassion? Leading on from that, one worry that I find continually blocks me from writing is the concern for how my portrayals of these incredible human beings and the time we shared together will always inevitably be partial and incomplete, always feeling not quite sufficient. No matter how many drafts I write or how many times I rework a sentence or phrase, there are so many things that happened which I feel fall outside of my ability to communicate in writing, particularly PhD writing. The vividness, the richness, the consistencies of character, the humor, the endearments, the smell after an afternoon storm in monsoon season, the sound of Santosh's big leather shoes clapping down the street signaling his return home from school. These are complete, complex beautiful worlds that I'm trying to communicate from my limited vantage point, and no articulation ever seems to capture the subtleties of it to the extent that I would like: so this is

simultaneously my biggest challenge and my greatest source of motivation as I go about writing this ethnography.

Growing up: Worlds in Motion

One of the most emotionally challenging aspects of my research was engaging with how quickly things would be changing in the lives and bodies of my young research participants. In all stages of life, but particularly during adolescence, a lot can change in six months—voices deepen, feelings of self-consciousness rise, gender identities become entrenched, and suddenly things that were once normal and not of any concern are slightly uncomfortable. A young, white, female researcher going swimming in the lake with a group of young boys, for example, suddenly seems less innocent, for no particular reason aside from the passing of time. My gender identity in relationship to theirs became more of what they saw of me. Where before I was just another human, a teacher, I quickly became a woman. This didn't alter things significantly in the second trip, but it has become more and more present in the months since I left and as voices deepen and levels self consciousness rise via Skype.

Furthermore, as a researcher writing up research and realities that have long since passed, ruminating about emotional worlds and intimate lives that have likely evolved to include young teenage romance and all the angst that can bring, the process of articulating my research and ethnography can sometimes seem a bit detached and delayed. It throws into question the very premise and form through which this kind of knowledge is generated, and the temporality of ethnographic fieldwork, so to speak (Cerwonka & Malkki 2007: ch 4), as this process is never dynamic enough to keep up with what's actually happening in people's lives. It is static, trying to describe worlds that are constantly in motion

and desires that do not stay still. So this seems to be a glaring problematic worth acknowledging. I obviously do still think that these stories are worth telling, even if they have since changed, because they were the ways in which these young people experienced and made sense of a particular place at a particular time, as I understood it. The worlds of meaning that existed then are not removed from or unrelated to the worlds of meaning they have since become. But it is at least important to acknowledge that they are not the same.

Language and Being an 'Outsider'

The greatest practical challenge this project faced was the language barrier. Though I took many steps to mitigate this (including: taking Nepali language lessons from a friend/colleague called Tirtha Poudel every morning for two hours for the first month, encouraging the kids involved in the research to teach me Nepali at every opportunity I could find, studying Nepali/English language translation books in my spare time and in the months between fieldwork), there was only so far my language skills could progress in this limited period of time. The fact that many of the young people involved in my research spoke English very well helped significantly, and the more I began to realise the importance of this, the more I took steps to tailor the research design according to these limitations; a focus which obviously impacted upon the overall situatedness of the ethnography and my exposures as a researcher. For example, I deliberately selected schools that had at least some English instruction to be the predominant focus of my research in the hope that I would be able to communicate remedially with both students and teachers, and this turned out to be quite feasible. Outside of school, Santosh assisted me with any translating necessary between the rest of the gang and myself, though most of them were able to communicate quite effectively with me in English. Santosh's older

brother, Suresh, also spoke perfect English and aided me when speaking with older generations and with community members who I couldn't communicate with sufficiently in Nepali.

The family of my primary contact in Tandi, (the more rural phase of my fieldwork), Laxu Lama, agreed to host me throughout my time in the village, and his cousin, Sukabir Lama, facilitated all of this for me and acted as my translator in Tandi with extreme generosity and kindness. Sukabir and the entire Lama family were incredibly warm and accommodating hosts to me. I stayed with them in Kathmandu in a neighborhood called Bodhanath whenever I would arrive, and then Sukabir and I would journey the fourteen hour bus ride from Kathmandu to his home village, Tandi, to stay with his mother, aunt, uncle and Anita. Occasionally some of the younger cousins would accompany us to pay a visit to those still in the village who never came to Kathmandu.

However, I am aware that even with this generous support and with supplementary translators, there is the inevitability that some things of significance were lost in the process of communicating and converting meanings and understandings into another language (Watson 2004: 59-60), and furthermore that the shape, substance and conclusions of the research may have been significantly shaped by my inclination towards those young people and families with whom I could most effectively communicate.

Duration, Depth and Disruptions

My hope and intention was that conducting fieldwork in layers would allow me to reaffirm my presence and interest in each of the places I was spending time in, building trust and relationships through fulfilling the promise of my return. Since

one of my primary objectives was to avoid subjectifying and distancing myself from those involved in my research, the only thing I could do at the time was try to uphold this conviction and be as transparent about my limitations and as inclusive in the research process as possible. This involved and continues to involve sharing and including the individuals who made my ethnography what it was in each stage of the production and articulation of data wherever possible—something I remain firmly committed to. To this end, I am in regular skype contact with Santosh and his family, and I speak to Sukabir and his family regularly through viber. It is difficult because I have no way of saying if and when I will be able to return, something Santosh asks me about every time we speak. But I at least feel some satisfaction and acceptance of the situation in knowing that they are well, staying updated on their lives and making sure they know that I haven't forgotten them.

One incident that significantly shaped my ethnography was the April 2015 earthquake that hit Nepal. The earthquake and all that followed is significant not just because of the fact that it brought my fieldwork to an abrupt and incomplete end, without any say from me, but also because of the disruptive impact this had on my relationships with all my research participants. Some relationships were deepened and intensified as the result of sharing such a traumatic and difficult experience (with Sukabir, Kamali and the Lama family in Bodhanath). Yet others were fragmented and negatively impacted. As I was just planning to visit Kathmandu for a few days to conduct a few interviews and say goodbye to a friend, Santosh and all the young people back in Pokhara were expecting my quick return. We had already made plans for the following week. I had left many of my things and a big bag of books in my small room. I hadn't even gotten to say goodbye to Santosh the morning I left because the bus departed before he woke up, so I just slipped a note for him under the café door. The fact that this

was the last time I physically saw him, and the reality that I wrote this entire PhD without having said goodbye or provided any kind of closure to the very intimate and dependent relationships I had cultivated with the young people on Mansawar Street is still a source of sadness. I've been able to keep in touch with many of them via occasional skype sessions, and Santosh and I message and skype very regularly. However, many of them don't have access to sufficient technology to allow for this, and I also do not have the time or emotional resources to maintain close, supportive long-distance relationships with all the children involved in my research, as there were over thirty of them. So this is a constant source of preoccupation and worry, and touches back upon some of the concerns I expressed regarding the ethical challenges of research that is necessarily temporary, but which also necessarily involves emotional exchanges, relationships and dependencies.

Academic Institutional Confines

“It is difficult not to notice a curious unrest in the philosophic atmosphere of the time, a loosening of old landmarks, a softening of oppositions, a mutual borrowing from one another on the part of systems anciently closed, and an interest in new suggestions, however vague, as if the one thing sure were the inadequacy of the extant school-solutions. The dissatisfaction with these seems due for the most part to feeling that they are too abstract and academic. Life is confused and superabundant and what the younger generation appears to crave is more of the temperament of life in its philosophy, even tho it were at some cost of logical rigor or formal purity (William James 1904: 52 in Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis 1997: 6).

Finally, it's worth noting that the same educational frameworks and epistemological boundaries I am seeking to explore in my research run parallel in many respects to the constraints and issues I find myself encountering in my own educational experiences as a graduate student in the process of formulating and articulating my research project (Goldblatt 2004). Smith's (2005) understanding of 'institutional capture' is useful in describing this experience. I sometimes feel significantly constrained by the institutional parameters dictating both my ontological and epistemic approach to research, to discourse, to knowledge, to how it can be articulated, to which types of knowledge are recognised and which are discredited, and to my lived experience of navigating the process of distinguishing these boundaries endemic to the social organisation of knowledge. It is easy to become habituated into a particular way of seeing, being and interacting that makes it challenging to remember or imagine alternatives, the point here being that the indirect isolation of epistemic structures and academic communities is significant to engage with—both individually and institutionally—and that the layers of coordination involved in putting together graduate student experiences and research projects are arguably not conducive to allowing students to be critical of the social organisation of knowledge and, relatedly, of problematic social and political structures endemic to modern, bureaucratised education. It is therefore necessary to be aware of the multiplicity of pressures being exerted on students by the educational institutions they are necessarily embedded in, particularly when trying to somehow resist and get outside of these epistemic structures through modes of inquiry and representation. As Kathleen Stewart (2007: 15) points out, "Ideologies happen. Power snaps into place. Structures grow entrenched. Identities take place. Ways of knowing become habitual at the drop of a hat."

Despite all the limitations I have acknowledged that are contained within this small research project, it's also worth stating that those limitations are also in some ways the strengths of this ethnography and what makes it unique. The "I" of this ethnography is what has created its substance and what has enabled the conversations, connections, vulnerabilities and friendships that opened up social worlds of meaning on this intimate street. So despite all the problems inherent to academia; to ethnography, to subjectivity, to epistemology and to how we can know anything about anything, I still feel that the stories shared here, the ways those stories were discovered and understood and the conclusions reached on that basis, are worthwhile, valid and remarkable, and perhaps could not have been found out or heard in any other way. My hope and intention is that in the chapters that follow, the stories and lives of this remarkable community on Mansawar Street will become vivified and brought to light in a way that is honest, intimate and does them justice.



(Photos: Top left: Santosh, Sangam, Mahesh and Babu on Mansawar Street; Top right: Santosh, Sangam, Sudeep, Sugam, Sujal and me; Bottom: Santosh and I, back to back, in a small field near Mansawar Street).

Chapter 4
Histories and Horizons



(Photo: The local primary school in Santosh's grandmother's village)

Scarcity, Sufficiency and Abundance

Many young people and families in Nepal and throughout the Global South experience themselves as being in a position of scarcity: as not having or being sufficient, and of living their life in pursuit of the promises of abundance implicit in capitalist and development aspirations. Throughout my research I show that the global schooling project is one way in which global capitalism does its work, the subtext being that 'underdeveloped' countries are in a position of relative scarcity compared to the rest of the world with regards to schooling and education. Global capitalism can have the effect of generating feelings of incompleteness, through offering opportunities for 'betterment', in the process becoming deeply entangled with experiences of worthiness. The schooling project appears to offer the promise of abundance as an answer to an implied scarcity and unworthiness: certain places and people are insufficient, and what these knowledge and schooling practices will do is bring them abundance. But this is a false binary; because of course the opposite of scarcity is sufficiency, not abundance. Yet the promise of abundance has too often been presented as the remedy to the diagnosis of scarcity.

In this way, global schooling and global capitalism are two sides of the same coin, with many lives gambling on this coin as it's tossed into the air, hoping it will land in their favor. My research shows that global schooling isn't necessarily a way out of scarcities, sufferings and exploitations of capitalism; that rather it can be an instrument and mechanism of it, perpetuating the feelings of scarcity it presumes to be providing a pathway out of. So the global schooling project instantiates, in subtle and intimate ways, young people and families' experiences and internal landscapes of scarcity, sufficiency and their relative distance to a life of abundance.

This chapter introduces some of the ways in which these landscapes of scarcity, sufficiency and abundance have been created and lived across generations by the Pun family, and how these experiences have historically been deeply woven into the entangled projects of global schooling and global capitalism in Nepal. I show how these landscapes have been lived across generations, emphasising how the histories of a place and the experiences contained within it continue to inform what it is and what it might become through the everyday choices those histories inform. I trace this genealogically across generations of the Pun family, maintaining a commitment to understanding how this impacts and transforms everyday, interior choices, small and large. I bring attention to how the histories of aid and schooling practices in Nepal often imposed and transformed experiences of sufficiency into experiences of scarcity. This is the story of how global aid and schooling policies in Nepal impacted upon—and are negotiated within—the everyday lives, choices and horizons of the Pun family.

The Pun Family

Santosh Pun was eleven years old when I met him. My first encounter with Santosh came as I was walking down the street in urban Pokhara. I had just arrived after spending a couple weeks in Kathmandu acclimating to Nepal and conducting interviews with UNESCO and UNICEF aid workers. I didn't really know anyone; I had just arrived in this place hoping that the access I had previously negotiated with two schools in the area via email would go as planned. I was staying on a street called Mansawar Street.

One day I was walking home down Mansawar Street after roaming around the dirt paths circling the lake and getting to know some stray dogs, one of whom had become a close companion and followed me home. I looked to my left and saw a young, bright-eyed boy wearing a “what’s up amigo” t-shirt out of the corner of my eye coming towards me on a small, red plastic skateboard. As he passed me he yelled “Namaste!” and gave my stray dog friend and me a big smile. We were heading in the same direction, and as he skated beside me down the street I started asking him a few questions about himself. He was very open and receptive to me, with as many questions for me as I had for him. He had a warmth and a kindness about him that was welcoming and disarming. We talked for about fifteen minutes, exchanging questions and showing curiosity in each other. He told me about some of the other families who lived on this street and who his best friends were on the street. He told me about his family and his older brothers, and before I knew it he was telling me to come visit him and meet his family at their café down the street the following day. “It’s called All in One. You can’t miss it!” he said to me. I agreed to meet him, and made my way home for the night, looking forward to getting to know this captivating young person the following day, without any idea how much this encounter would come to shape the substance and approach of my ethnography and how much I’d grow to care for Santosh and his family.

The next morning I make my way down the dirt road to All in One Café to have some breakfast. As I approach, I see Santosh sitting on the curb throwing rocks into a small jar across the street with three other boys close to him in age. Santosh gets up and gives me a big wave and smile, and gestures for me to come over to meet his friends. It was then that I met Sangam, Mahesh and Sugam, three of Santosh’s closest friends. They were all about his age and in the same grade at school, though Mahesh seemed older than the others in stature. Sugam was the most delicate and reserved, but very polite and quick to

laugh and smile. Sangam was a bottle rocket of energy and enthusiasm right from the start. I was immediately struck by how vivid of a character they each were, and also by how kind they were to me, both individually and as a group. I wanted to get to know them.

After briefly meeting these three, we walk into the café where Santosh introduces me to his older brother Suresh, who seems to be in charge of the café. I could see the resemblance between him and Santosh. He welcomed me heartily, with a smile similar to his younger brother's. There are four small tables in the cafe and it's an open-air space, as most places are in Nepal. There are only three walls, with a kind of garage door to pull down during the night to keep people out. There are bright purple morning glory flowers blooming along the front of the café. Across the street there's a very large guesthouse being built that's five stories tall. There are two stray dogs lying in the street in front of the café that I notice Santosh bringing leftover food to. There are a few people inside having breakfast, both of whom appear to be tourists, as they pour over a Lonely Planet Nepal guidebook. There's also an older Nepali man wearing a floppy hat sitting at a table reading the Nepali newspaper (*The Himalayan Times*), with a very concerned, thoughtful expression on his face. In the back of the café there is a small TV hung up on the wall, and it's blaring the day's news, according to CNN. The TV is in English without any Nepali subtitles, though Santosh's parents, the owners of the café, do not speak fluent English.

From this day on, Santosh began folding me into his social and emotional world and we became very close friends. I explained to him what I was doing there and what my research was about, and he was very interested and enthusiastic about being involved. He wanted to introduce me to all his friends, his family, his teachers, his peers, the principal, and everyone involved in his life. I thought

for a moment about sticking to my original plan with two schools in which I didn't know any of the students, then quickly abandoned that to embrace the potential of what was right in front of me on this one particular street in Nepal.

Throughout my time getting to know Santosh, I was also privileged to a lot of insights into the life of his siblings, parents and grandparents. Though apart from Santosh I became closest with Suresh and Bohm, his two older brothers, I saw his parents daily and Santosh would translate as we had conversations about their life before Pokhara, back in a village high in the Himalayas. I was also fortunate enough to meet his grandparents on several occasions and to travel to their village with them and Santosh's eldest brother, Suresh. So in trying to contextualise and situate my research in this chapter by relaying some of the key moments in the history of aid and schooling in Nepal, I will also try to ground the broader policy shifts in education practice in the actualities of Santosh's brothers', parents' and grandparents' memories and lived experiences.

Rulers and Restrictions

Nepal has a very interesting history of schooling and education practices. In part because it was never colonised, Nepal did not have formal schooling practices put in place until 1951. The first so-called "academic school" in Nepal was the Durbar school in Kathmandu, which was established in 1854. Up until this point, religious institutions such as Buddhist temple schools and Sanskrit-medium schools were the main actors involved in delivering formal education, which were typically only made available to the most privileged, elite members of society. The literacy rate at this time was approximately 5% among men and 1% among women, with an overall rate of approximately 2% (see Ragsdale

1989; Upraity 1982; Wood 1973, 1959). From 1854 until 1950 Nepal was under control of the Rana regime, which kept education as the exclusive privilege of the ruling elite and opposed any kind of public schooling for the rest of the populace. There was therefore little expectation of education during this time, and the majority of families' livelihoods were thus not reliant upon it and the opportunities it might bring them (Wood 1973). The National Education System Plan was then introduced in the early 1950s under the *Panchayat* system (Onta 1996). The *Panchayat* system is a political arrangement resembling a kind of "guided democracy," in which people could elect representatives while actual power and decision-making remained with the Monarch. However, due to the heavy donor involvement in the education sector that began in the early 1950s, the construction of a national education system was also strongly influenced by external visions and representations of 'Nepal' and the wider development and aid agenda of agencies involved in the reform process, most notably USAID (Caddell 2002: 49; Caplan 1970).

The ways Nepal, as a state entity, oriented itself to external relations during the Rana era from 1846 through to the restoration of the monarchy in 1950 were largely characterised by a tendency to focus inwards and to limit relations with other states. This was partly a consequence of geographical factors as well as the result of the political restrictions imposed by the Treaty of Sagauli signed with the East India Company in 1815. Eventually, a somewhat paradoxical relationship to how Nepal oriented itself to the outside world emerged, as they attempted to "both limit the dangers inherent in foreignness, and at the same time harness its powers" (Liechty 1997: 9). This became especially manifest in how education was provided under the Ranas (Aryal 1977). Though it was acknowledged that the ruling class needed to engage with Western educational models to be an active member in the international community, there was also

considerable fear of the “idea of giving education to the common people lest they should be awakened and be conscious of their rights” (Shakya 1977: 19). The Ranas thus treated formal, public education with suspicion. Consequently, schooling opportunities were severely restricted, and popular education was almost non-existent.

For most of the Nepali population up until the 1950s, any notion of formal or public education was unfamiliar. This was certainly the case in the Pun family. Santosh’s grandparents, who grew up in the 1940s, never attended formal school. They did not have this possibility and told me that learning anything other than to take care of themselves and each other had never occurred to them. At the time there was no local public school in their village, which is about a fifteen-hour bus ride from Kathmandu, followed by a five-hour hike straight up the side of a mountain. Crisp, snow-capped Himalayan peaks encircle the village on its quiet mountainside, but the winters are hard and long. When they were growing up and raising their children, their attention was focused on matters of subsistence: making sure there was enough food to eat, enough water collected, that the animals were all cared for and the crops all cultivated. It was a different kind of knowledge they cultivated as they grew up: a kind of complex ecological knowledge of how to survive and sustain themselves and their family in this particular place, under particular conditions. They speak to Santosh about how this life was hard for them. Their hands are hardened and their skin thick with wind and sun scars. They make jokes about how few teeth they have left. Their bodies have paid the price for their hard work. When we all traveled to the village they grew up in for a short visit, you could tell that the luxury of the bus and other comforts we had brought along to ease the journey were atypical—they were used to the less expensive, much less comfortable route. I wondered about all the things these two were capable of. I wondered

about all the days they had spent doing things quite different from myself, animated by thoughts, hopes, worries and aspirations perhaps quite different to those of their grandsons. I wondered how their experiences of this hard life shaped what they've come to hope for their children and grandchildren, and how this might explain why they encouraged them to attend school with the hope that maybe this would allow them to have a different and perhaps better life than they had.

New Horizons of Choice

While Santosh's grandparents were living quietly on their mountainside there was a lot of political unrest in Kathmandu. The contradictions in the Rana's position towards foreignness and external relations ultimately resulted in significant fractures throughout Nepal. However, since Santosh's grandparents were located very remotely, they were somewhat isolated from this political turmoil, as were most Nepalis at the time that resided in hard to reach rural villages with little to no access to news. Meanwhile, the Ranas were making efforts to dampen the emergence of social dissent and pushes for basic education in urban spaces (Sharma 1990: 4).

People's angst in urban spaces eventually found expression in the incremental expansion of educational opportunities that came about largely due to increased flows of knowledge and political expertise coming from individuals who had left Nepal seeking new opportunities and less oppressive environments, who had then returned. This was also due to the ongoing dispersal of people and political discourse across the Indo-Nepali border (Wood 1965: 22). The more political consciousness rose, the more dissent grew, and the Ranas found themselves in an uncomfortable and challenging spot after the end of WWII. The impacts of

this unease on the stance the regime took towards education policy were significant.

Preceding Prime Minister Juddha Shumshere's resignation in 1945, he played a role in initiating significant educational reforms through a public initiative that sought to open new schools and provide grants-in-aid to schools (Wood 1965: 126-128). However, the resources provided to support this initiative were inadequate and there did not appear to be genuine interest in pursuing this by the ruling class in Nepal (Caddell 2002: 41), as the Rana monarchy came up with a plan to control Juddha Shumshere's attempt to expand public schooling and raise political consciousness in the form of the *Siksha Isithar*, or Education Ordinance of 1939 (Sharma 1990: 5). This permitted the Rana government to control the finances and the administration of these schools, rendering these efforts to expand access and participation in such institutions ineffective (ibid). Despite this lack of support for schooling initiatives, the increase in the dissemination of knowledge and political ideas across borders, particularly after India achieved Independence in 1947, made it significantly more difficult for the regime to maintain control and ultimately contributed to the overthrow of the Rana oligarchy in 1951 (Wood 1965: 22).

Santosh's grandparents speak to Santosh and I about the overthrow of the Rana oligarchy as though it didn't much concern them at the time. They didn't perceive this as changing anything in their everyday lives. They received no support from the government before and did not really expect anything to change. At the time, they were not interested in—nor did they have the infrastructure to allow them to be informed—about these political matters. They left this to the more 'educated' people in urban spaces, they told me.

After the overthrow of 1951 came a period of more permeable boundaries between Nepal and the outside world. This also impacted upon the way development agencies interacted with Nepal as a state and this formed the basis for the justification of aid intervention (Fujikura 1996). After the 1951 overthrow of the Ranas, “democracy, modernity, and interconnection” became the discourse of the new leadership, hoping to gain the approval and support of its newly established ‘citizens’. “Education, and the village primary school in particular, became a symbol of the new vision of Nepal” (Caddell 2002: 42-43).

Consequently, following the 1951 revolution, Nepal experienced a significant increase in the number of educational institutions, with those individuals and communities of higher income taking the initiative to establish schools and make efforts towards making education more visible and attainable. At this point, education practices were not formalised or monitored by the government. As Caddell (2002: 43) explains, “though the Ministry of Education was established in 1951, it wasn’t until 1953, with the assistance of the United States Overseas Mission (USOM), that a more systematic approach to planning the educational development in the country was introduced and the new vision of Nepal gradually became more forcefully presented.” The proponents of the Nepal National Education Plan (NEPC) therefore advocated that a more systematic approach to schooling be taken that would unite Nepal towards a common vision of development and national identity.

Looking more specifically at the education practices that resulted from this increase in foreign financial aid, it’s important to note that the establishment of Nepal’s education system was developed with a profound amount of external influence. “The NEPC, and all major education policy documents prepared through the 1950s and 60s were devised with the financial and technical

assistance of USOM/USAID. Many of the decisions relating to schooling policy were made in light of the experiences of the US, with help from USAID advisor Hugh B. Wood” (Caddell 2002: 49-50).

So schools began plopping into communities where they had previously not existed, imposing curricula, knowledge and notions of value designed by a white man from the United States, and this ‘new vision of Nepal’ was experienced in intimate lives and spaces. Suddenly people began making choices *around* these schools and the promises and opportunities they seemed to contain for their children. The presence of these schools transformed everyday horizons, decision-making spaces and childhoods. For Santosh’s grandparents, they transformed lived experiences of sufficiency, or perceptions of having enough, into lived experiences of scarcity. The impacts of this shift, brought on by the new presence of and promises of schooling, rippled into many parts of social life. Suddenly Santosh’s grandparents were confronted with the choice of whether or not to send their children to the village primary school, and if so, what kind of changes would they have to make to their everyday livelihood routines to be able to do so? So though they were still not concerned much with national ‘political’ matters, through aid and the instantiation of the local public school, these changes were able to reach and transform their family’s everyday choices and horizons. In this way, ‘modernity’ and ‘development’ were not just abstract ideologies, policies or practices; rather they were lived, refracted and embodied in the small, delicate spaces of Santosh’s grandparent’s intimate lives and the choices they were making on behalf of their children.



(Photo: A class of children between five and six years old at a public school in rural Tandi)

Knowledge, Value and 'Bikas'

*“Nepalis experience modernity through a development ideology that insists that they are not modern, indeed that they have a very long way to go to get there”
(Pigg qtd in Liechty 2003: 1).*

At this point, a willingness to engage with notions of modernity and scientific and technological advancement were utilised as markers of the changed attitude and vision of Nepal. The Five Year Plan for Education introduced in 1956, for instance, is based on the Nepal National Education Plan and conveys a concern that “the encrustation of the rusts of centuries of ritualism have made the conservative minds less receptive and responsive to science” (MoE 1956:

3). Discourses of modernity and associated universalist discourses of development quickly became the venue through which Nepal understood and articulated its relationship with global development agencies and other nation states. De Chene (1996) identifies this as the “Third Ekikaran” (unification) of Nepal, indicating its “unification with the rest of the world through the advent of modernity. Nepal was to be restored to its former glory, not through renewed territorial expansion, but by entering the modern age and achieving a ‘developed’ state” (ibid: 263-4).

This sudden shift, this jolt in orientation and ideology, rippled with consequence through everyday lives. Suddenly the ways in which Santosh’s grandparents had gone about living their lives and securing basic needs for their family was not enough. Not only was it not enough, this kind of subsistence livelihood with an emphasis on traditionalism and particularist knowledge and rituals came to be seen as ‘backwards’, or ‘underdeveloped.’ Their way of life was devalued, and they began to internalise this devaluation. One encounter that is still vivid in my memory is the morning I asked Santosh’s grandmother some questions about her cooking and all the different spices and ingredients she used. Suresh was translating for me. She turned to me and placed both of her hands in front of her face, so as to cover both of her eyes. She smiled widely as she did this and said a few sentences to Suresh for him to translate to me. Suresh told me that she said, “I don’t know anything. I never went to school. I am in the darkness.” I tried to contest this as best I could without being disrespectful. But she just continued cooking, and I sat there wondering how it was that she had come to see all the knowledge, skills and tasks required of her on a daily basis as not worthwhile, not even worth sharing with a stranger.

This prioritisation and valuation of modernity and associated universalist discourses of development continued as part of Nepali nation-building (Pfaff-Czarnecka 1998) and became more and more entrenched and intertwined with people's aspirations and feelings of worthiness. Nepal soon began a close relationship with the new international apparatus of foreign aid, accepting funding from India, China and the United States (Mihaly 1965: ch 1). While India and China both had geopolitical, strategic interests in Nepal, the United States regarded foreign assistance aimed to help alleviate poverty as a way in which it could proactively contain the spread of communism (ibid). Thus 'development' (*bikas*) and foreign financial aid increasingly became the medium through which Nepal negotiated its position in relation to the rest of the world.

Nepal still receives a significant amount of foreign aid. According to the World Bank country finance report summary for Nepal, it is currently receiving an estimated \$41, 813, 316 million USD for "development projects" affiliated with the World Bank (World Bank 2018). As described by Mihaly (1965: 4), "thrust into prominence by its strategic position in the Himalayan vastness separating India and China, Nepal has attracted unusual attention from aid donors. If Nepal differs significantly from other recipients it is in the fact that it has received aid from so many sources." The main inflow of this foreign aid began in 1951 in the form of the American Point Four Plan, the Swiss Technical Aid Plan, and the Colombo Plan, with formal USAID presence in Nepal beginning in 1952 with a man named Paul W. Rose (ibid: 27-30). This aid presence was significant. As Pigg (1992: 497) highlights, "Development—rather than the residue scars of imperialism—is the overt link between it and the West. *Bikas* is the term through which Nepalis understand their relationship to other parts of the world."

This understanding and entrenchment of development aspirations in Nepal's identity is visible throughout the country today: Coca-Cola advertisements with thin, white women holding bottles to their mouths; advertisements for English boarding schools and business or management degree programs on every billboard; businesses offering opportunities to go work abroad in Gulf countries on every corner. There's a pervasive sense that no one is what he or she should be, or all that they could be; nothing is quite complete. Nothing is enough. There seems to be an internalised sense of inferiority and scarcity among Nepalis, as though the world and its different countries and peoples all lined up at the same starting line with the same loud noise triggering them to move forwards, and Nepal is somehow losing that race and falling behind the rest of the world. There is little sympathy or consideration of the various structural, historical circumstances contributing to these perceived discrepancies, nor much thought about the fact that perhaps linear trajectories and comparisons are not useful and are ultimately self-destructive on a planet of finite resources. Yet somehow this illusory landscape of '*bikas*' and capitalist abundance persists and creates individual and collective worlds of feeling, worthiness and hope in the hearts and minds of those who imagine 'it' and their relative distance from 'it'. There is an elevation of distant, disembodied truths over personal, lived, experiential truths, and an endless undermining of wherever you are, whatever you may be, and whatever you may possess as insufficient. This, from my point of view, is the lived experience of development capitalism: turning experiences of sufficiency into experiences of scarcity and unworthiness, and then living each day in the pursuit of a distant abundance and completion. This has and continues to profoundly shape young people and their childhoods.

Bridges and Possibilities

“We have become part of the world, whether we like it or not. We can no longer remain isolated; the world has come to us. How can we meet this world without education? Must we—who once were the crossroads of civilisation—bow our heads in shame to our worldly visitors? How can we evaluate the ‘gifts’ that are offered us—ideologies, new customs, inventions, and the ways of a new strange world? We can do none of these without education to give us understanding and strength to lead us” (MOE 1956: 2).

At this point it's the 1960s, and Santosh's parents enter the picture. With encouragement from their parents, Santosh's mother and father both attended the local public school in each of their villages, which had been established just a few years before they were of age to attend. Their villages were located just across the river from each other. Many of the education policies at this time stemming from the National Education Planning Commission Report of 1955 made explicit, discursive reference to the “emerging from darkness” that could be achieved through opening up venues through which Nepal and Nepali citizens could connect with the rest of the world. Education is framed as a mechanism through which the pressures and potentials of opening up to foreignness could be reconciled, both as individuals and as a collective (Caddell 2002: 46). Schooling became seen as a tool to promote democracy and development through unifying Nepal. An unfortunate consequence of this was that diversity and traditional customs and practices were often marginalised. For instance, local language use was largely regarded as detrimental to the project of strengthening the unity of Nepali citizens. “A policy explicitly advocating the elimination of the different ethnic languages spoken within the state was introduced” alongside what was called the “mania for English language

instruction” (Caddell 2002: 48). Pigg (1992) speaks to how the implicit value placed on all that was ‘external’ over all that was ‘local’ alongside Nepal’s opening up to the global community was reinforced by the school curriculum throughout the post 1951 era.

Santosh’s parents said that they remembered this happening. They remembered being taught a different version of Nepali in school than they had learned from their parents, and they were discouraged from speaking their local dialect. But neither of Santosh’s parents can speak English very well because they were in school before the “mania for English language instruction.” Since living in Pokhara they have learned how to carry on a basic conversation, but they appear self-conscious when speaking English. Though they attended the local public school in their village, this school did not offer English instruction.

On our way out to the village where Santosh’s mother is from, Suresh tells me the story of how their parents came to Pokhara. Their parents grew up in different villages, just across the river from each other. The bridge between the two villages was not built until they were late teenagers with technical assistance and financial support from Swiss Aid. Once it was built, people started interacting more frequently with those on the other side of the river. “My parents just fell in love,” Suresh told me with pride and a smile on his face. He told me that this was very uncommon at the time, as was the case throughout much of Nepal (Ahearn 2001), and so they had to elope and take their chances in Pokhara, the nearest city. It was hard for them at first. They had very little money and few ways to generate an income, which was suddenly required. Previously, the only thing they needed money for was if they wanted to improve their situation by buying a goat or nicer clothing; otherwise, income and extra cash weren’t really necessary. They had a place to live, they grew most of their

food and their water came from the river. But suddenly in Pokhara they had to pay for all of these things, even water. So Suresh's father decided to do what many other men from rural villages were doing to cope with this, and he went to work in Iraq as a construction worker. He was away for six years, and Suresh says that his father doesn't like to speak about this time of his life. He only says that he was grateful to be able to come home to Nepal. He earned enough money abroad to pay for his sons' school fees, and once Suresh finished school and could help out, they were able to rent a small room lakeside Pokhara to start a café, which they named "All in One Café."

Santosh's parents, after falling in love and running away to Pokhara, told me that during this time they made many very difficult decisions largely motivated by their feeling that they needed to be able to put their sons through school, specifically English school. English instruction is commonly only offered by private schools, which are much more costly than public schools and usually only found in urban or semi-urban areas. Proficiency in English language is seen to be one of the most valuable assets a private school education can give to your children, and Pokhara is filled with English boarding schools offering parents the opportunity to give this skill to their children, for a price. Many parents in urban parts of Nepal report that this was a key factor in their decision to move from their rural villages.

I know that it's acknowledged that Santosh's mother really struggled while his father was in Iraq to look after everyone and remain healthy, but they don't like to speak about this time in detail. Santosh seems to be very happy about the fact that his parents married out of love, but he and I both know that their decision to run away to the city wasn't easy. They each had to make sacrifices, many of which were certainly shaped and constrained by their gender, caste

and class status. I wonder what hopes and aspirations Santosh's mother had and has that she was not able to chase for a complex web of reasons. One day she was speaking to me about how she loved to make jewelry. I wonder likewise about his father. I doubt he ever dreamed of having to spend six years in Iraq working in the conditions that he did. His being able to return and the family being able to start their small café was a huge step for them. Though they still struggle to meet basic needs and there are a lot of fragilities built into their livelihood, there is a sense of relief that at least now their livelihood allows them to all live together in the same place.

Education for All and Insurgency

“Literacy/Education is not simply the possession of the skills of readings and writing, nor a transformed state of individuals and societies. By considering literacy as a set of practices, we can ask what constitutes these practices, who engages in them and how, and who determines which practices are worthwhile and which texts authoritative” (Slyomovics 2010: 100).

Now we get to the part of the story where Suresh and Bohm's schooling practices enter into the picture, in parallel to the emergence of the *Education for All* initiative. This is the first of a series of global policy initiatives that began in 1990 that constitute the 'global schooling project' ([United Nations 2017](#)).

Though education was recognised and imposed as a fundamental human right for the first time in 1948 in the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, and many international policies have stemmed from this recognition since 1948, the pivotal step towards achieving this empirically around the world occurred in

1990 at a meeting in Jomtien, Thailand at which a number of international agencies embarked on a mission called “Education for All,” producing the World Declaration on *Education For All*, a global initiative of the World Bank in partnership with UNESCO. This began with the explicit intention of “bringing the benefits of education to every citizen in every society...” (World Bank 2017). In order to realise this aim, a broad coalition of national governments, civil society groups and development agencies, including UNESCO and the World Bank, committed to achieving six specific education goals determined by the UN Millennium Development Goals. These goals were to be achieved through extensive, collaborative policies demanding heavy investments into education. This policy laid the groundwork from which many subsequent international educational policies would be built and implemented by international aid institutions, including the Dakar Framework for Action in 2000 (Valentin 2005: 138) the Global Education First Initiative 2012-2016, the World Bank’s Global Partnership for Education and most recently, the Incheon Declaration for Education 2030 (UNESCO 2016).

Suresh and Bohm are Santosh’s older brothers. They are quite a bit older than him, though, because “I was a surprise,” Santosh tells me. Suresh is now twenty-six and Bohm is twenty-one. They were three years younger when we first met. They each seem to have internalised many of the promises of *Education for All*, if not for themselves then for their younger brother. They went to school when the EFA initiative had just reached Nepal, just as the necessity of schooling and the opportunities it could provide for those who wanted to ‘get out’ started to become ubiquitously embraced.

Suresh very much takes on the big brother role in the family, looking out for Santosh and making most of his decisions on behalf of his family and two

younger brothers. His dream is to go the United States to study music, but he says that his responsibility is to look after the café and make sure it earns enough to finish paying Santosh's school fees. The whole family seems to be counting on Santosh as the one who might be able to go study abroad after he passes his NEPC exams. Santosh wants to go to Melbourne to study cinematography or astronomy. Suresh seems to feel like it's his duty to ensure that Santosh stays focused on school and has everything he needs to succeed. He sees himself as the one holding the family together in a way. His sacrifices and his sense of obligation keep things running, quietly making sure everyone and everything is looked after. Bohm is kind of the free-spirited, slacker of the family, according to Suresh. But they each seem to have affection for their differences and don't overtly pass judgment. Bohm studied to become a teacher, but the only work he can find as a teacher is in remote villages at public government schools where the pay is very low, and he doesn't want to live there. He most of all wants to find a way to get out of Nepal. He speaks of how he tires of everyone coming and going and him always being stuck there, left behind.

One thing that featured prominently in Suresh and Bohm's schooling and youth experiences was the Maoist Insurgency, which began in 1996 and lasted until 2006. This was essentially an armed conflict and civil war between the Communist Party of Nepal-Maoists (CPN-M) and the ruling government, in which the CPN-M were trying to establish a People's Republic in replace of what they saw as an autocratic Monarchy. General estimates say that this conflict killed nearly 20,000 Nepalis and internally displaced approximately 150,000.

The rural-urban dynamic in this conflict was significant, with the Maoists dominating and taking control over predominantly rural areas and the government maintaining control over urban areas. Many scholars attribute some of the rural to urban migration during this time to the strong and often disruptive presence of the Maoists in rural areas, and it is often argued that the Maoist conflict emerged as a result of poverty and “failed development” (Gurung 2003). It is also thought that some of the infrastructure that facilitated the flows of migrant workers to Gulf countries began during this time, as families struggled to make ends meet amidst disruptions to the tourist industry and the political instability (Murshed & Gates 2004). Suresh told me that the conflict influenced his father’s decision to go abroad to work in Iraq. They had already moved to Pokhara several years prior to the insurgency, but once the conflict began he couldn’t make enough money in Nepal so felt he had no choice but to find work elsewhere. Suresh and Bohm tell me that they remember this time as one of unrest, fear and sadness. Suresh says that it was difficult having his father away for so many years of his childhood. He felt a lot of responsibility to take care of his mother and brother in his father’s absence. Bohm was quite young at this point, but says he remembers things feeling very tense. “There was a curfew at night, and the kids weren’t able to roam around as freely as they do now,” he told me. Speaking about this retroactively, Suresh says that he thinks that the Maoist conflict is partly responsible for how politically disengaged and apathetic many Nepalis are. “Everyone is just trying to keep the peace now. No one wants to risk more conflict by trying to change things. We are just trying to get on with our lives and do the best we can with what we have, despite our corrupt political system. Many people see going to school and then going abroad as the best option now,” he says.

The weight and expectation attached to the potentials of formal schooling to change one's fate seems to have increased significantly from generation to generation in Nepal; or at least the belief that it could do so has not subsided from one generation to the next. This might in part be because since the early 2000s, the ethos and orientation of schooling in Nepal, particularly private schooling, has shifted away from that of cultivating a Nepali national identity to that of training young people to become members of the 'global economy' (Valentin 2005), and to embrace all that may entail. This could also be due to the end of a long period of political instability and civil war, giving people the opportunity and emotional space to be occupied by different everyday concerns and aspirations.

Either way, with the ongoing privatisation movement and with the marketisation of English-medium schooling becoming more and more pervasive in Nepal and much of the Global South, the EFA initiative in its actuality seemed to result in the emergence of a global schooling industry, perpetuating many of the same injustices, inequalities and exploitations it had diagnosed global education as a remedy for. In some kind of apparent recognition of this dilemma, global development agencies then embarked on the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development.

Education for Sustainable Development

Alongside the global EFA movement, the shift towards 'sustainable education' occurred after the close of the Millennium Development Goals. In 2002 an international commitment to a "Decade of Sustainable Development" was reached at the Johannesburg World Summit on Sustainable Development (UNESCO 2011: 12). This initiative called upon member states, governments,

and stakeholders from various international society sectors to commit to transforming education and to embed 'sustainable development' into all education systems, plans and strategies.

The United Nation's "Decade of Education for Sustainable Development" (DESD) began in 2005 and drew to a close in 2015. The overarching aim of this initiative was to "reorient education policy, practice and investment to address sustainability" (UNESCO 2011: 4) with the ultimate goal of the DESD being "to engage people and communities in meaningful lifelong learning processes which examine how societies can live in more sustainable ways (UNESCO 2011)." UNESCO has been at the head of organising and implementing this new educational agenda in concert with national Ministries of Education (ibid: 8). This is the first time UNESCO has explicitly and systematically incorporated notions of 'sustainability' and 'sustainable development' into educational policy frameworks. Up until this point, the rhetoric and orientation of educational efforts were predominantly skills and subject-based with an emphasis on "training young people to become active members in the global economy" (ibid: 9).

Nepal is currently one of the countries considered to be falling furthest behind in achieving the *Education For All* goals for 2015 (UNESCO 2014), however, the UNESCO office in Kathmandu is at the forefront of advocating and taking steps to implement sustainable education programs with an emphasis on environmental conservation, climate change adaptation and resource use (UNDP 2013), with good reason:

As one of the most vulnerable countries in South Asia to climate change with a highly variable climate and fragile ecosystems, Nepal is vastly exposed to natural hazards with devastating floods and

landslides, especially during the monsoon season. Despite little arable land, almost 38 per cent of the population makes a living from agriculture, which is also the foundation of the Nepalese economy and contributes to 82 per cent of its export (UNESCO 2014: 9).

But this shift to 'sustainable education' in 2005 seems like a rather strange and ungrounded shift to make when many paths of formal schooling, particularly in the Global South, were still leading to participation in an exploitative global labour market (Munch 2010; Valentin & Meinhert 2009). This rhetorical shift in policy focus towards sustainability by those development agencies tasked with solving some of the intertwining crises of the day, chiefly the UN, UNESCO and the World Bank, has received significant criticism for being more of a distraction than a difference-making orientation (Mula & Tilbury 2009; Jickling 2006). The schooling landscape in Nepal still propagates a linear, global economy-oriented agenda that seeps into the deep corners of people's decision-making spaces, leaving little room for consideration of the ecological consequences of the pursuit of the many remote, distant promises and opportunities contained within *Education for All*.

In the Pun family, Suresh and Bohm seem to have an awareness of issues related to sustainability, but these concerns are secondary to questions of livelihood and earning income. They seem to feel constrained to care about this as a primary issue due to the many other, more immediate challenges they and their close friends are facing on a daily basis. They speak about this as a rather luxurious concern, more appropriate for westerners than for Nepalis.

Abstract Ideals and Everyday Realities

Though these *Education For All* efforts have been underway for nearly twenty-five years, and the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development has come to an end, these initiatives have not achieved their sought after results, according to the 2016/2017 Global Education Monitoring Report (UNESCO 2017). The *Education for All Global Monitoring Report* (UNESCO 2017) revealed the existence of a “global learning crisis,” costing governments around the world over \$130 billion a year. Furthermore, this report reveals that more than ten per cent of global funds being spent on primary education are going to waste by being invested into poor quality education that is failing to provide basic skills and a quality learning experience for children, especially those children that belong to minority populations (ibid).

Many young people I encountered across Nepal seemed to be confronting what they had come to see as their personal failures to make the most of the opportunities they had been given—or the opportunities that were supposed to run alongside—their prioritisation of schooling and their ability to speak English. They couldn’t understand why, after having paid to go to that fancy English boarding school their parents had worked so hard to send them to, they were still stuck in urban Kathmandu or Pokhara working as a guest house receptionist or a waiter, instead of off roaming around the world, studying at universities abroad like they had anticipated, living a life of abundance and opportunity. Furthermore, many of those who did make it abroad did not do so under the pretense of broadening their minds and accessing long-awaited opportunities for wealth, success and creative expression. Rather, these opportunities were afforded to them only in exchange for the exploitation of their labour and a pile of debt, many ending up working over fifteen hours a day in

the brutal heat of Gulf countries in an effort to save up money to send home or to allow them to travel and pursue their dreams.

Both Suresh and Bohm seemed to be in this predicament, though instead of finding themselves working abroad in exploitative global labour chains like many of the other young men their age, they find themselves firmly anchored to the same place in Nepal where they have always lived. They are stuck there in what they see as a position of insufficiency, maintaining their family's small café, saving up money for Santosh to be able to go to school, passing the time, getting to know the world through the stories of passing by travelers and strangers whose privilege and passport allows them to come and go in and out of their lives as they please.

Chapter 5
Aspirational Landscapes



(Photo: A young boy walking to school on the far end of Mansawar Street)

Paths of Global Schooling

The educational landscapes I encountered on Mansawar Street are complex and intricately intertwined with labour and livelihood practices and, relatedly, people's experiences of scarcity, sufficiency and abundance. One feature of the global schooling project which I will speak to ethnographically in this chapter is how education and schooling practices shape the aspirational landscapes of young people and their families on Mansawar Street, transforming experiences of sufficiency into experiences of scarcity, and how this in turn shapes their everyday choices and livelihood strategies. I explore the heavy burden and enormous amount of pressure that the push for formal, English schooling places on children to achieve academically, in pursuit of the abundance embodied by many modern aspirations, while also balancing work and livelihood responsibilities. I also highlight the pressure this places on families and carers to be able to secure the financial means to send their children to a 'good' school, which is often costly. I show how this fuels many family members' decisions to move and find work opportunities in the city or abroad, and speak to how this movement creates absences and changes in the structure of intimate, everyday life that significantly impacts these young people and their childhoods.

Furthermore, these schooling opportunities more often than not lead to a dead-end for young people in Pokhara, promising luring opportunities and far off possibilities that very few students have the chance of reaching. So as young people and families on Mansawar Street internalise and begin to believe in the promises of plenty made by the global schooling project and opportunities associated with *Education For All*, they are simultaneously participating in the pursuit of something that was designed to exclude them, to position them in a

state of relative deprivation and scarcity, creating hierarchies of ability, access and opportunity based upon criteria they had no hand in designing.

In addition, although the provision of education in the form of schooling is often seen positively and thought to provide greater opportunities to succeed in the future by young people, parents and elders, the scene is not that simple. I found that the expansion of formal, institutionalised schooling practices also gave rise to new forms of inequality and exploitation, as there were still many children kept out of school due to lack of family income (inability to pay fees and purchase school books and uniforms) and who were therefore further marginalised, trapped in a perceived and actual position of scarcity that others who could access schooling opportunities had the chance to move out of.

Finally, this chapter highlights the need to give credit to the many ways that children balance and bring together work, school and play in their everyday lives and routines. I found that children took on work responsibilities outside of school to help their families make ends meet while covering their schooling costs, while also seamlessly interweaving those responsibilities with moments of play and finishing up the day's homework. In Pokhara, many children, even very young children, wake up around six in the morning to help their parents open the café, take orders, restock and clean the shop, fold the napkins, all while intermittently finishing up yesterday's homework assignment, yelling across the street to friends for the answer to question six of today's homework, while taking customer's' breakfast orders; then running to change into their school uniforms before heading down the street to start their school day from 10:00am-4:00pm. They balance their family's dependence on their extra hands with their school responsibilities, and many of them seem aware that they are

working to help their families be able to cover all their school expenses each month.

Work, School and Play

The young people whose daily lives and routines revolve around Mansawar Street and its many inhabitants construct this space in their own ways, often creatively turning mundane or banal objects or structures into an opportunity for play or fun. The street is their playground, but also where they meet their friends, where their families run their businesses, and where they oscillate between helping out at the café, doing homework and playing. Though they are constantly being nagged by their elders and honked at by passing traffic to keep off the road, they are relentless in their ability to imaginatively transform this narrow stretch of pavement into a world of intimate, intricate relationships with both the living and non-living features of this space. Sticks are turned into hurdles measuring how far one can jump; rocks are dice; the curb is a launching pad; the stray dogs are constant companions; the leaves are instruments. They create their own rhythms of life on this street—the purpose of things is never taken for granted and the potential uses of objects are continually reinvented to fill the needs of each passing moment. They mediate the demands placed upon them and what they want to do with sophistication, in dialogue with the space around them and all the many things pulling at their attention.



(Photo: Santosh, Sudip, Mahesh and Manesh playing on Mansawar Street after dark, by the light of back up generators and passing car headlights)

Folding Napkins and 'Child Labour'

"If we are to further enhance our knowledge about children's lives, we have to emphasise more than ever the social context, complexity and sophistication of those young lives. This means sustained critiques of dominant theories that are condescending or too adult-centric in their understandings of children and childhood, and it means building new theories that attend greatly to the social, cultural, and interactive contexts of young children's lives (Van Ausdale & Feagin 2001: 213).

One evening as I'm sitting in the back of the café with Santosh folding pink paper napkins to put on each of the tables, I prompt a conversation about his

responsibilities at the café and how he feels about that. I ask him if he wished he could be out with his friends in the street playing rather than here doing this. “I don’t mind; this is actually my favorite task at the café. You don’t have to think about anything. You just fold, and it looks pretty afterwards.” He meticulously shows me exactly how to go about this process of folding the napkins, correcting my form on more than one occasion. Santosh’s attention to detail never ceases to amaze me. At one point his friends come in to encourage him to join them skateboarding on the street, but he tells them he can’t until he finishes. I ask him if he sometimes wishes he didn’t have to help out at the café. He replies, “No, the café is very important to my family. I know that my parents work really hard to pay for all my things, so I don’t mind helping.” He then gets up to take a few menus over to the customers who just walked in and sat down. They asked him for some masala tea, and as he heads towards the kitchen he asks me if I want some too while we fold.

If this is ‘child labour’ it could just as easily be construed as household chores. The lines between what are considered appropriate and inappropriate forms of work for children and young people to engage in are not so clear in the actuality of lived experiences and in the midst of complex family, labour and livelihood dynamics, and rarely do the boundaries around what kinds of activities are considered acceptable or unacceptable for young people to participate in account for their agencies, understandings and the meanings they themselves attach to these activities.



(Santosh in the kitchen at All in One, about to cut open a package of milk to make some masala tea).

It's Thursday March 26th, and the first day of SLC (School Learning Certificate) exams here in Pokhara. All the young people seem to have an anxious spring in their step—their hair is a bit neater, clothes are a bit cleaner, spines a bit straighter. You see a lot of them walking down the street with open books, trying to cram some last bits of information in their heads before arriving at school. Santosh was studying hard at the café this morning amidst taking people's breakfast orders, trying to memorise a few final facts and phrases before it's time to leave. I walk the boys to school to try to provide some encouragement. They take these exams very seriously and all seem a bit nervous, as though their future depends on how well they perform.

The literature on children's work in the global south has raised the important issue of the extent to which and ways in which children navigate school and

work (Nieuwenhuys 1994; Gold & Gujar 2002; Orkin 2012). Generally, three arguments seem to emerge on this topic. The first argument most commonly made by commentators within development studies and policy worlds is that any form of work is harmful to children because it necessarily negatively impacts their education (Weiner 1991). Those making this argument tend to emphasise the most dangerous and exploitative forms of work. This argument turns to evidence found in some parts of South Asia and Africa where the pressure to engage in household and other forms of labour to earn money actively inhibits children from obtaining basic literacy and numeracy skills in school and may have negative impacts on children's overall health and well being. This concern among academics, policy makers and activists therefore seems justified in certain cases (Nieuwenhuys 1996, 2007; Swaninathan 1998).

A second group of studies have challenged the first group by bringing a critical perspective to what is considered formal education, as Dyson (2014) points out. This body of research has brought attention to the notable irrelevance and disconnect between the school curricula found in countries of the Global South to the future lives of the children enrolled in it (Heissler 2011). Rather than providing skills with local relevance to job and employment opportunities available, schools often provide detached knowledge tailored primarily towards the expectations of elite, urban children. For example, research conducted by Peggy Froeter (2011) in central India demonstrated that a significant number of parents and young people saw formal education as something that was actually de-skilling and counterproductive because it inhibited the space for children to learn through other, more applied avenues, such as apprenticeships, work and friendship networks. Similar findings by Gareth Jones and Sylvia Chant (2009) have been made in urban West Africa. In Santosh's case, despite the many examples of people his family knew for whom formal education had not been

helpful, they still seemed to cling on to the belief that for Santosh it would be different. He was a very bright kid, and they seemed to think that if he worked hard enough and that if he could get into good schools that eventually he would be able to go work and study abroad, to then eventually return and help the family achieve a better life. To his family, Santosh's knowledge of elite subjects, such as chemistry and astronomy, was not necessarily important in its own right, but rather instrumentally as something that would gain him access to more elite knowledge institutions down the road. But for Santosh, he loved Chemistry and Astronomy; they were his favorite subjects.

Furthermore, some argue that teaching and basic facilities and infrastructure in schools in much of the Global South are often of low quality (Lloyd 2005). Teacher absenteeism is a significant issue in North India and throughout much of the Himalayan region, and in addition to teachers not showing up, many public (government) schools do not even have the most rudimentary learning and teaching equipment and facilities (Jeffrey 2010). This resembles my experience at Santosh's school, on which I elaborate in the following section. This problem is much worse in public schools than in private schools in Pokhara and the nearby hills. Many of the public schools I visited in rural villages several hours outside of Pokhara seemed to not be able to run or function properly due to a lack of or unreliable teachers. This is especially problematic given that many children attending these rural schools have to make long, difficult treks from their homes through the mountains to reach the school, only to find that their teacher didn't show up that day.

Other researchers have drawn attention to the pattern of formal education bringing about detrimental social ideas and unrealistic, often disappointing, expectations and ambitions among young people (Chopra 2005), which can

often lead to them feeling frustrated, disheartened and as though they have failed when they finish school and are unable to find jobs or opportunities.

As Dyson (2014: 54) points out, the main issue with laying out the argument in this way is that it oversimplifies the lived experience of work and education by juxtaposing these as alternative or competing routes which families and children are forced to choose between. But research demonstrates that children and young people very often carefully interweave school and work in their everyday routines. One such study is Swanson's (2009) ethnography of young beggars in urban Ecuador. Her study focuses on a group of child beggars who creatively earn money on the street to help pay for their education, thereby agentially balancing the need to make cash and study each day. Similarly, Nieuwenhuys (1994) explores the ways that young people and parents in India are able to combine work and school. She shows that parents and children tend to have a more pragmatic view of schooling than is commonly thought, seeing education as something that might be important for their children's futures, but not as something that will solve all their problems and provide them with a secure livelihood.

My experience on Mansawar Street runs most closely in parallel with this third line of argument which gives credit to the many ways that children balance and bring together work and school in their everyday lives and routines. I found that children both in urban and rural areas took on work responsibilities outside of school to help their families make ends meet while covering their schooling costs. In Pokhara, many children, even very young children, balance their family's dependence on their extra hands with their school responsibilities, and many of them seem aware that they are working to help their families be able to cover all their school expenses each month.

In rural areas the scene is not too dissimilar. After fetching water, cutting grass, preparing food and washing the dishes, children get to work on their homework, change quickly for school, then head down the trail to start the day, though often with a considerably longer and more difficult walk to school. In the afternoons once school has finished there are usually many chores to be done, from grazing the animals to cutting grass, and time for homework is usually made just before bed after a big meal of Dhal Bhat.



(Photos: Left: Santosh finishing up the day's homework at the café, amidst cleaning up and taking customer's orders; Right: Anita finishing up her homework after cutting grass and taking care of the animals)

However, running in parallel to children's balancing act between school and work is a nearly unanimous reverence for the individual, familial and social

value of school and for children getting a formal education that departs from some of the literature (Nieuwenhuis 1994). I found that getting a 'good education' was seen as a way to transform marginal circumstances and gain access to opportunities that would provide for a better future. Consequently, I found that parents, both in rural and urban areas, would sacrifice any and everything they could in order to secure a good education for their children, often selling their homes, livestock or going to work abroad in order to finance this education. In this regard, my experience was more in alignment with what Valentin (2005) found with urban squatters in Nepal, where education was in many ways seen as a way out of hardship and into a better future by parents and families. That said, I found that this optimism and expectation attached to formal schooling by young people and families was not straightforward or always well founded. Navigating the educational landscape in Pokhara was exceedingly tricky, often contributing to various forms of exploitation, commonly in the form of excessive fees being charged for poor quality schools masked as elite institutions.

Before Santosh left for school in the morning and after finishing his homework across the table from me at the café, we'd sit and plan the rest of the afternoon. On the days that I didn't also attend the school I met him and his friends on the corner at a small shop where they'd usually buy some small sweet thing as a treat for making it through the day. I'd look up and see them all clonking towards me down the dirt, gravel street in their fancy, polished black shoes required as part of their school uniform, tearing off the ties harnessed around their necks and unbuttoning the top button of their collared shirts with big smiles on their faces. No more restriction, no more constriction; they could relax, be comfortable and be themselves, until tomorrow. So on the one hand, work, school and play are interwoven as they are embodied in each of these young

people, but there is also a sense of duality between the selves they have to present while at school and the selves they are allowed to be when working or playing. One is certainly more instrumental, more disembodied and thus more aspirational, despite how well these young people managed to balance and negotiate this duality.

At the School

Naranyan Padme is the principal of the Shining Star Private School. Shining Star is a moderately priced private school offering English instruction, and the best school the Pun family can afford to send Santosh to on the income brought in from their small cafe. The school day is from 10:00am-4:00pm six days a week, everyday but Saturday. Naranyan Padme has been at Shining Star since 1998, working as VP from 1998 to 2003, and then as principal since then. He says the purpose of school is “social welfare,” so he is very happy to facilitate my project and assist me in any way he can. After we finish tea and talking about each of our backgrounds, our age, our experiences, our families, where we’re from, and what we both hope to achieve from the project, he gives me a tour of the school and all the classrooms.

He introduces me to all the teachers, all of whom he presented by first stating the level of education they have achieved or are working towards (BSc/MSc in...). The school is a rectangular, cement complex with a large courtyard hollowing out the center. It is very clean with almost no trash on the ground. It is about a ten-minute walk from the main street in Pokhara, located on a small back road against the hill. Each classroom has windows on both sides of the room. There are approximately twenty to thirty students in each class, and about five hundred students at the entire school. The children range from age

six to sixteen. The teachers are predominantly male at the school at the time when I was introduced, though it was probably a sixty/forty split. I also notice that there is a nearly even split between male and female students, a trend that is increasing in Nepal, particularly in Pokhara (UNESCO 2014). There is a security guard at the entrance keeping track of all those who come and go, which I found rather surprising. I asked what the purpose of this was, and the principal said that it was standard for private schools. They wanted to have a record of those entering their school and to ensure that no one wandered in that might cause a disturbance. The principal then hands me a “social and population studies book” for grade six (age ten) and shows me the lesson for the next day on the “duties of a citizen.” He says this will be a very good lesson to watch.

It was my first proper day at the school. I arrived at ten, the same time the school day starts for the students. I go to see the principal and it becomes apparent that he and I had somewhat different expectations about what my time in the classroom would look like. He wanted me to take over and teach as many fifty-minute class periods as I wanted, no questions asked. Occasionally there are classes of about twenty-five students who do not have a teacher for one period out of the day. So I follow him to the classroom still expecting the teacher to be there and to merely sit in as an observer.

We arrive and are greeted by thirty sixth grade students all rising at the same time with hands joined together in front of their bodies echoing “good morning sir, good morning ma’am,” in sync. They are all smiling widely and seemingly with expectation. It is a rectangular room with rows of hard wooden benches all facing the front of the room with a small aisle down the center splitting the rows into two columns. The boys sit on the left side of the rows and the girls sit on the

right, always. There is a black board and makeshift podium at the front of the room where the teacher is supposed to be. The principal introduces me, “This is Ms. Katherine Baxter. She is a PhD Candidate—do you know what is a PhD candidate? She is studying in the UK—do you know where is the UK? How many of you want to become a PhD candidate? How many of you would like to study in the UK?” Almost all of the students raised their hands.

He continues this type of talk for another minute, and then instructs them all to listen and learn from me in any way that they can. Obedience is emphasised. They all seem like they have been trained to obey any commands given by their teachers or principals. All the students are wearing matching uniforms—boys in ironed dark blue pants, a short sleeve blue collared shirt with a striped tie, and nice black shoes. Girls are wearing a blue and black plaid skirt about knee length and the same short sleeve blue collared shirt with the same striped tie. The girls’ hair is braided and tied back with blue ribbons. Later when I ask the students whether or not they like to wear uniforms they all tell me no and comment on how expensive they are.

As soon as the principal leaves I quickly remove myself from the front of the room as a figure of dominance and authority and go and sit beside the students on the wooden benches. I explained to the principal that I had no interest in acting as a teacher or a figure of authority at the school, and he kindly agreed to let me simply have a conversation with the students, rather than conduct a formal lesson. Once the students realised that I had no interest in teaching, ordering them around, or scrutinising their homework, they started asking me questions and circling me curiously. They asked me about where I came from and what my home looked like. I told them I was from a place called Colorado in the United States and that my home also had mountains, like in Nepal. They

asked me how old I was and what I was doing at their school. I told them my age and that I wanted to learn about their experiences of school and how it impacted their lives. I told them that I was not going to be their teacher, and asked if it would be ok if I sat next to them on the wooden benches during class. They agreed and showed me to my seat. It was a very friendly, relaxed conversation, in which I answered their questions and they welcomed me to their classroom. My intention was to try to better understand their experience by getting as close to it as possible, thus why I wanted to sit beside them in the classroom.



(Photo: The classroom of class 6A at Shining Star, and my empty seat in the second row)

Classroom Walls

Inside the classroom, whenever the teacher was present there was a very formal and strict environment. There were Nepali flags and symbols hanging on all the walls, and there were pictures of the national trees and flowers. All the students were required to recite the Nepali national anthem every morning while facing the flag. There was a map of the world over the black board, and there were quotes about the future written on every classroom wall, each containing a different aspiration and ethic. The one directly over the blackboard read, “Practice Makes a Man Perfect” and the one at the back of the classroom stated “Work Hard Today for a Better Tomorrow.”

I positioned myself as a student in this school, rather than as an instructor or as someone in a position of authority. I sat in on a variety of different classes and subjects—science, health, maths, english, social studies, history. One of the things that struck me was how much of the class revolved around the textbook, which was always in English. All classroom activities and all the content covered were taken directly from the textbook: the homework, the assignments, the discussion questions. And when I did a little bit of digging, I found out that most of their textbooks either come from India or the United States. Typically, the teacher would instruct the students to open the textbook to page XX and then they would take turns reading the lesson out loud. Then they would answer a few of the discussion questions and begin working on the homework assignment that followed each lesson. The procedures for expression or asking questions were very formal and almost authoritarian.

On one occasion I witnessed an assembly in which there was an intellectual competition among the top students in each grade. Everyone in the school, students and teachers, gathered in the large open-air courtyard at the center of

the school. At the front of the school was the principal, vice principal, the English language teacher and the top three students in each class, who were selected based on their grades. Then began a kind of battle of wits facilitated by the English teacher, where the three top students from each grade competed with each other to gain the title of the best student in the class. All of the questions were in English, and everyone in the crowd was silent and attentive. It was a big deal to become the top student in your class. I was sitting next to two young students in my class, Sujal and Oban, and they were saying how they wished they were “good enough” to make it into the assembly. It was what most of the students aspired to. The fact that this competition was made so public, with the entire school as an audience, fascinated me. These students’ relative success or failure according to the school’s metrics was broadcast to all of their friends and peers as a symbol of their worth.



(Photo: sitting next to Sujal at the assembly being held in the school courtyard)

Inside the classroom, those students who couldn't speak English well or weren't able to answer the teacher's questions were often publicly humiliated in front of their peers. I witnessed this on multiple occasions, and would often take these students aside after class to speak to them about how it made them feel. On several occasions I witnessed students start crying after being bullied and made fun of by their teachers. Whenever I spent time with the students outside of school and we would pass one of the teachers on the street or see them from afar, they would go out of their way to avoid them and almost seemed fearful about crossing their path in public.

Abuse, Shame and Worthiness

Throughout my time spent at the school, I found that the fearful, strict environment created by teachers in the classroom was linked to the use of both emotional and physical abuse and forms of punishment, and this was the most challenging ethical dilemma I encountered, and a feature of these young people's schooling that they identified to me as the most hurtful and alienating. There were several episodes where I clashed with senior male teachers over their treatment of students, and this created tensions between myself as a researcher and some of the teachers at the school. On one occasion I witnessed a young girl sitting in front of me in the class, who had obvious learning disabilities and had not finished her homework assignment for the day, get slapped across the face by the male, Indian, upper caste English teacher. Without a moment to think through my reaction I immediately rose up out of my seat and positioned myself between the teacher and the young female student. I spoke to her softly for a few minutes to make sure she was ok as the teacher returned to the front of the class. He laughed to himself for a moment and then

came back and offered the girl a piece of candy, which she did not accept. He seemed amused by my reaction, as though he was testing me.

Not only was this incident abusive to this student, I also felt that this was an act in which the teacher was trying to intimidate me and make it known that he did not approve of my presence there or the authority that I had at the school. This situation, among others, confronted me with how, as a white, young, female researcher, I was not considered to be on equal footing with the male, upper caste teachers. Some teachers more subtly expressed their discrimination towards me on this basis, but some were quite outright about it.

This also positioned me uniquely to the young students in my research, who after witnessing my obvious disapproval of this kind of treatment began turning to me one by one for support to help them stop the beatings and various forms of abuse they were experiencing at school. One of the students I was especially close with, Sujal, spoke to me privately about his own feelings of fear and anxiety about going to school. He told me a story of one of his closest friends who would come to him after school on days when he had been hit or abused and “just cry and cry. He was hurting in his heart,” Sujal told me.

Whenever I would ask Santosh about this issue and about how his teachers treated him, he became noticeably uncomfortable and said that he didn't like to talk about it very much. He told me a story of how once a teacher hit him over the knuckles with a ruler several times because he was talking in class. He tried to explain to the teacher that he was answering a question another student had asked him, but the teacher wouldn't listen to him and punished him anyway. “They don't listen to us; they just punish us” he told me. This feeling that the teachers wouldn't listen and would unfairly punish them without reason or

explanation was a sentiment expressed by nearly all the students I spoke to in class 6A.

Abuse is common practice in schools throughout Nepal. Highlighted in a UNICEF (2004: 8) special report on the use of violence against children in schools across Nepal, “Corporal punishment and other acts that humiliate children (including verbal humiliation) are accepted practice in Nepal in both schools and in homes and are used as a means to modify the behavior of children.” In a recent 2017 Himalayan Times article it’s stated that, “Caning, slapping, punching, and other means of physical abuse used to ‘discipline’ children are extremely common in the country.” This article goes on to state that, “according to a report published recently by the Central Child Welfare Board under Ministry of Women Children and Social Welfare, corporal punishment is more common in private schools and higher secondary schools than in other schools.”

It’s clear that the type of punishment used at many private schools in Nepal is designed to *shame* the students, to make them feel unworthy and disconnected from their peers and from all those whose opinions they value (Scheff 2000: 88). It went beyond humiliation, to try to make them feel as though there was something inherently wrong with them or inferior about them compared to the other students. It meant to devalue their sense of self and undermine their worth in a way that was both inwardly and outwardly isolating. This kind of punishment that’s prolific in private schools is yet another example of how experiences of formal schooling were entangled with young people’s feelings of worthiness, and in many instances undermined this in deep and resonating ways through the common practice of public shaming, humiliation and abuse of students at Shining Star private school.

In situations like this, it's difficult to know to what degree it's responsible to bring about a rejection of abuse, exploitation, maltreatment or oppression amongst those dependent on the perpetrators without at least thinking through or providing concrete pathways for action that won't cause harm or create additional problems for the victims. This is especially true in situations of abuse where immediate family members or friends are involved and therefore the victims cannot be easily extricated from the situation. This is also true for these young people who have to turn up to school everyday, under a lot of pressure to succeed, at the mercy of the good will and opinions of their teachers. Because of the differential power dynamics at play, the children are put in a very vulnerable position should they try to raise this issue to their teachers. Likewise, given that part of my research was contingent upon the cooperation of the teachers and principals, I was also in a difficult position. For these young people, however, their success in school, and whether or not they would be deemed a 'good student' was often entangled with their acceptance and ability to withstand their own abuse and follow the rules imposed upon them by the adults in charge of their schooling. This is a situation in which no young person should ever have to find themselves.

I also had to consider my own normative ethics and to what extent it was appropriate to impose my expectations of how children should be treated onto those who have different standards and expectations of this rooted in different cultural norms. As stated in a UNICEF (2004:1) special report on the use of violence against children in Nepal, "challenging adults' "right" to hit children often provokes emotional reactions. Corporal punishment is still a deeply embedded traditional practice, a habit passed down from one generation to the next as part of child-rearing culture." That acknowledged, though the CRC (convention on the rights of a child) has its problems and limitations, it does

make a compelling argument against the use of violence and physical punishment on children, indicating empirically the profound physical and psychological toll this inflicts on the victims (UNICEF 2004: 2). A study conducted by the Centre for Victims of Torture in Nepal (CVICT) reached similar conclusions, emphasising the “deleterious consequences of physical and emotional abuse when used as means of discipline” (UNICEF 2004: 6).

So with these considerations in mind, rather than stir things up in a way that had the potential to cause further harm, the students and I instead decided to confront this challenge by collectively rejecting the shame and feelings of ridicule and unworthiness that the teachers were trying to impose upon them. In all the time I spent with these students outside of school, discussions of abuse and what could be done about it came up regularly. One strategy I thought might be useful, given the delicacies of the situation and the vulnerable position of these young people, was to simply help ‘empower’ them, collectively, to reject the negative emotions and shame associated with their teacher’s use of physical punishment and emotional abuse. If they were all in on it, and they all were supportive of whichever student was getting abused, rather than stigmatising them and being complicit in their shaming and isolation, that took a great deal of power away from the abuser. It turned the table and made the teacher look like the person who was misbehaving and deserving of ridicule, rather than the student. Of course, this in no way removed the physical pain and consequences of this abuse, but it at least allowed these young people to feel supported, connected and valued, rather than ashamed, isolated and ridiculed. During my time spent there, this seemed to be an effective solution, even if all it did was merely make these young people feel like they weren’t alone—that others saw what was happening to them and thought it was wrong, and that they didn't *deserve* to be treated that way. We had all decided that they were

not worthy of that kind of treatment, and they turned that decision and that conviction into action, regardless of their parents and teachers' inability or unwillingness to act on their behalf.



(Photo: Class 6A at Shining Star Secondary School)

Hopes and Dreams

Portraits of a Child

By Louis Untermeyer

*Unconscious of amused and tolerant eyes
He sits among his scattered dreams, and plays,*

*True to no one thing long; running for praise
With something less than half begun. He tries
To build his blocks up against the furthest skies.
They fall; his soldiers tumble; but he stays
And plans and struts and laughs at fresh dismays,
Too confident and busy to be wise.*

*His toys are towns and temples; his commands
Bring forth vast armies trembling at his nod.
He shapes and shatters with impartial hands.
And, in his crude and tireless play, I see
The savage, the creator and the god:
All that man was and all he hopes to be.*

One day twelve-year-old Santosh told me about the time he went to stay in a small guesthouse in the tourist part of Pokhara with his aunt and uncle. He said that what he remembered most was being excited when he found out that when he turned on the water in the bathroom, it would become warm. Warm running water is a luxury that most Nepali people do not have. "At first it was cold, but I'm used to cold water, so it was ok. I don't usually expect it to be warm. But this time it was different because I knew that it would become warm soon. So I waited with my hands running underneath the faucet for the warm water to come." Suddenly there was a hope and an expectation of a possibility that had not been there before.

The Schooling Industry

The more time I spent on Mansawar Street trying to understand young people's everyday lives, the more it became clear the ways in which the private schooling industry is exploiting the hopes, aspirations, and in some cases, desperation, of families and young people in Pokhara who are trying to create a better life for themselves and their families. Significantly, the global schooling project has led to the proliferation of private, for-profit English boarding schools across Nepal, a number which has increased from less than five hundred in 1990 to nearly two thousand in 2013 (Open Nepal 2014), most of which claim to be able to help them reach this end (Valentin 2005).

However, at the same time, there is also a case to be made that private schools are filling a social void left by insufficient public and government school services (Thapa 2015). Private schools outnumber public schools four to one in Pokhara, and yet every school is over capacity. This raises questions about the government's failure to provide basic educational services, or any kind of opportunity that allows people to escape from their feelings of stagnation and apathy, for that matter, as well as questions about where these children would turn for schooling opportunities, or what would they do and aspire towards, if it weren't for private schools and the opportunities they seem to contain.

There is also the matter of these young people's curiosity and interests and the simple fact that, regardless of how less-than-optimal their schooling situation may be, many young people yearn to learn about certain subjects of particular interest to them, which these private schools allow them to do. Santosh, for example, really loves science, specifically chemistry and astronomy. He would race home and tell me all about some of the things they learned in class that day; recalling details about the composition of stars or a certain chemical experiment they had performed. Sangam really loved physical education;

Sudeep really loved English; and Mahesh said he enjoyed math the most. So though there was a sense that school required a certain performance of them, simultaneously they were carving out special, unique worlds of meaning within themselves as they absorbed content. Seeds of interest and curiosity were being planted in their hearts and minds that they nurtured internally, alongside the shortcomings of their formal education. Santosh, for example took any chance he could to borrow his brother's phone and search the Internet to learn more about the solar system (while intermittently watching skateboarding videos), and Sudeep never missed an opportunity to practice his English with the tourists of the day.



(Photo: Sudeep, Mahesh, Santosh, Sugam and Sangam playing with Suresh's iPhone at All in One)

Something of particular interest was that they all seemed to really like this class called "Positive Living." In this class they learned general life lessons and lessons about "how to be a happy, successful person," Santosh told me. He also told me that one of reasons they liked this class was because they didn't feel afraid of the teacher who taught it. I found this interesting and asked to look through Santosh's textbook for this class. The book was filled with stories and examples of famous, wealthy people from the West and their tales of determination, persistence and hard work. There were also a few lessons on meditation and physical exercise. I asked Santosh to tell me a few of the things he had learned in this class, and he told me about the lesson they had just done about Mark Zuckerberg. The previous lesson was about Michael Jordan. Santosh spoke about what he had learned from their life stories as though he was totally in awe of them and of their ability to overcome difficult circumstances. "Everyone just needs to keep trying and not give up," he told me. This was yet another example of schools cultivating unrealistic aspirations and setting young people up for failure; a failure which they have been taught is their own fault for not being determined or not working hard enough.

Yet the principals and teachers of private schools with whom I conducted interviews in Pokhara genuinely felt that they were providing a public service and social need, thereby compensating for the failures of the government. The government is a sore subject in Nepal, more known for its corrupt, ineffectiveness than anything else. Throughout my time conducting fieldwork the Nepali government was in the process of formulating and putting into effect

a legitimate constitution, a process that had been ongoing since 2007. From 1951-2007, Nepal had gone through five different constitutions, and the constitution that had been put in place in 2007 was only an interim constitution that was put into effect after the Maoist insurgency. It wasn't until after I left in September 2015 that Nepal adopted a formal constitution.

This chaos and instability in the government, and the related issues with public schooling, are attributed as part of the reason why private schooling is so pervasive in Pokhara, according to the teachers and principals at Shining Star. In Pokhara, private schooling is a booming industry, each school a business and for-profit institution that charges high fees in order to operate. There are questions about the quality and standards of teaching and there is very little oversight to ensure that this industry is not exploiting children and parents by making false promises and claims to quality that they don't have the resources to interrogate. Furthermore, as discussed previously, physical punishment is a significant issue in private schools, as many of the young people involved in my research would tell me that they were afraid to go to school for fear of getting beaten by teachers. This was reportedly not as serious of an issue in public schools, according to most community members I spoke to.

There's an older man called Vilip who I got to know while browsing through his handmade paper shop. He is around sixty years old and used to be involved in school administration. I got into a routine of going by to visit and chat with Vilip at least once a week. He would make me tea and we would chat about many things: schooling, hope, migration, happiness. One day he explained to me his understanding of the three "levels" of education in Nepal:

Public: this is the least regarded, the least expensive, and the only kind of school that uses Nepali textbooks. Funded primarily through the government. Nepali is the primary language of instruction, and English is taught as a secondary subject. Costs approximately 200rps per month per child, generally associated with lower class and caste (he notes that this is the school he went to as a child. He comments that thirty years ago it only cost 20-40rps per month).

Private: this is middle of the road education, uses primarily Indian textbooks, English instruction, more extracurricular activities, nicer facilities, and thought to be more “progressive.” Funded privately, mostly through the fees it charges young people and families to attend, but also receives funding from international NGOs. Middle class and caste, costs approximately 1000-1500rps per child per month (this is what Shining Star, Santosh’s school, would be classified as).

Higher Private: this is the most highly regarded education you can buy, and only the very wealthy can afford this. It is thought to provide an “international” education. It uses textbooks from Europe and the US and is taught in English, but other languages are taught in addition to English as compulsory subjects. Here higher emphasis is placed on math, science and technical skills. Very nice uniforms and facilities. A certain amount of prestige attached to going to this kind of school. This costs something around 5000-7000rps per child per month.

To put these costs into context, the minimum monthly salary in Nepal in 2015 was approximately 6,000rps. Vilip wasn’t the only community member who seemed familiar and comfortable with the different tiers of schooling in Pokhara.

There is a significant discrepancy in the performance of public vs. private schools (Thapa 2015). According to national statistics and SLC (school learning certificate) results, private schools have average exam pass rates around 90% compared to 20% among public schools (ibid). Public schools are often located in rural, remote areas where issues of teacher absenteeism, poor facilities and demanding subsistence responsibilities interfere with school attendance and performance. Gendered dimensions and differences in experiences of schooling become very visible here, and differences in the quality of the textbooks being used between public and private schools are well known (Thapa 2015).

All of this brings attention to the sense of need for formal schooling for young people, as though these children and their childhood would somehow not be complete without it. Almost every adult I encountered in Pokhara embraced this understanding of the school and its necessary presence in their children's lives. What are the tangible, lived consequences of the pursuit of this idea, and how has it become so entrenched? In many ways, education in Pokhara has become an industry that is exploitive of current trends sweeping people's hopes and aspirations.

Gravity and the Migrant Story

“The knowledge that makes a difference in changing the world is knowledge that travels and mobilises, shifting and creating new forces and agents of history in its path” (Tsing 2005: 8).

Tsing's (2005) metaphor of friction used to describe the messy encounters which animate global connections is also useful when thinking about the lived experience of the global schooling project in describing the hopes, desires,

dreams and aspirations that push and pull young people and families in certain directions; pushes and pulls that compel and are present in emotional lives and decision-making spaces, and that subsequently give direction and intentionality to the frictional encounters that animate young lives. These young people balance and reconcile different pushes and pulls all tugging them in different directions in every moment—individual, familial, social, cultural, structural. How these are brought to life, what stands in their way, and how young people navigate—and perceive of—their own ambitions and limitations, is significant when thinking about what gives momentum to the global schooling project. Relatedly, the processes of internalisation and the structure-agency dynamic that accompanies these pushes and pulls is crucial: (1) What is it that is pulling these young people and families towards a particular vision of education? (2) How do they create this vision? (3) How do young people and families on Mansawar Street invoke agency in resisting or complying with these pushes and pulls? (4) What are the consequences of this for them?

At one point Santosh's family had to make a decision about whether or not Santosh could change schools. Santosh worked tirelessly to study for the entrance exam to two schools that are supposedly of higher quality than his current school, and he remarkably passed them both. The issue was that these schools were significantly more expensive than his current school, Shining Star. At this point I was very close with Santosh and his family, so they included me in the discussion about whether or not Santosh should change schools. Santosh obviously had his heart set on changing schools, not only because of the supposed better quality, but also because he said the teachers in the new school treated the students better. In his mind, switching schools was very important in order for him to be able to secure access to further academic

opportunities in the future, for example going to university. When I asked him why he thought this, he told me that it was because “that’s what everyone says.”

I did some research into whether or not students from the school he wanted to change to had higher performance rates on the Annual Nepali exams, and I found that the results were nearly equal. However, the difference in these two schools was predominantly income and the class and caste status of the families of the students, which did make a difference in terms of who was able to attend university. So though this school did not necessarily perform better than Santosh’s current school, the higher fees and consequently higher income levels of the families of the children who went there had created the illusion that it was a more prestigious school, and this was a reality that Santosh had internalised in the form of an aspiration. For Santosh’s parents, however, the aspiration was simply to get him into a decent private school where he could learn English and get good grades, not necessarily to send him to the best private school. The main reason Suresh and his parents did not think it was a good idea for Santosh to change schools was that they couldn’t afford it, but it also seemed as though they did not think that it was worth all the extra money. “I went to Shining Star and I am well-educated enough, so you can do the same. Besides, the school doesn’t make the difference—it’s you and how hard you study that makes the difference in the end,” Suresh tells Santosh sternly. In some ways, I think Suresh resented Santosh’s dissatisfaction with his school because it was the same school that Suresh had attended. Perhaps he was also feeling frustrated, alongside his parents, that they could not afford to enable Santosh to change schools. Santosh is very respectful and understands his family’s situation and limitations, so he doesn’t say another word. Though later on in the day when we speak about this privately, he tells me, “I just

thought that since I passed the exam I should have the same chance as anyone else. ”

Marginalisation, Exclusion and Universalisms

“The idea of the universal suggests abstractions, which turn them away from the practical successes and failures of universal claims. Neither those who place their ideas inside the universal nor those who discredit it as false pause to consider how universals work in a practical sense. To move beyond this it is important to see generalisation to the universal as an aspiration, an always unfinished achievement, rather than the confirmation of a pre-formed law” (Tsing 2005: 7).

In the context of global development practices and aid paradigms, universalism became the framework that expressed most convincingly a conviction for the power and potential of reason across disparate locales. Reason was the only thing capable of turning bits of knowledge and custom from different parts of the world into something coherent that could further the goals of the time: science, progress, and democracy. But how was reason formulated and articulated and by whom? Certainly not by the particularistic, traditional cultures whose practices were being subsumed by the universal promises of reason. So universalism was framed as this vast horizon, capable of furthering and improving truths and leading to a more prosperous, abundant life for all, if embraced fully. As Tsing (2005: 8) points out, these contrasts and this power dynamic “continue to structure global asymmetries.”

The discourse of rights and reason underpinned by notions of universalism continue to inform post-colonial theory, while they also provide the justification to impose internationally sanctioned notions of progress and standards that are at the center of neocolonial interventions. This brings to light an important contradiction that is applicable to the global schooling project, which is simply that “universalism is implicated in both imperial schemes to control the world and liberatory mobilisations for justice and empowerment” (Tsing 2005: 9). As described previously, the promises and pretenses of universalism compel expansion, no matter who you are or where you are. Yet it is impossible to protest in any meaningful way one’s exclusion as a result of geopolitical positioning without appealing to the same universalist, rights-based discourses that are exclusionary. Bohm, Santosh’s older brother, was one who I saw to be experiencing this tension quite evidently. He felt excluded by the western, developed world and wanted to resist many of its bad habits, at the same time that he aspired towards the promises and potentials to change his circumstances that it seemed to hold sole ownership of.

There is a parallel to be drawn between resistance struggles that appeal to the promises of universalisms while also resisting its exclusionary features, and young people’s participation in the global schooling project. The global schooling project is predicated on a universal claim to the value of ‘education’, whatever that may entail, with many layers of assumptions implied in this, all of which take shape in particular ways in different localities. However, these particular manifestations cannot escape from the universal claims underpinning and driving them. At the same time that the knowledge and motivations surrounding this universal claim to the value of schooling and education have been mobilised across multiple locales and internalised by millions of unique

individuals by making claims to the promises these universals offers for a better life for all humanity, the hopes and dreams this knowledge has evoked will inevitably exclude the majority of those who seek it, no matter what age.

Underpinning this there is a contradiction: On the one hand there is neoliberal capitalism as an economic, social and political reality, quite straightforwardly based upon principles of competition, growth and exclusion in which there will always be those who come out on top and those whose exploitation others' success is built upon, and on the other hand there is the explicit global pursuit of "Education for All", chasing an illusive equality, abundance and universality that rests on the basis of *everyone* successfully, equally reaping the benefits of this global education. These promises and frameworks do not go hand in hand. In fact, they contradict one another. In their everyday manifestations on Mansawar Street, I found that the global schooling project can act more as a mechanism of global capitalism than as something that reduces the inequalities and exploitations inherent within it.

This same contradiction can be seen in global and regional trade agreements. If we imagine young people as the 'commodities' or 'products' that are being created as the result of the global schooling project with the explicit goal of integrating them into the global economy, we see how this was inevitably going to create exclusionary hardships and troubles for those children for whom this particular vision of 'education', this model of production, as well as this notion of human utility, are unfamiliar and disenfranchising. This was the case for Santosh and many of the students at Shining Star school. Just as free trade agreements have collapsed local economies by flooding them with international trade currents that they couldn't possibly withstand (Stiglitz 2002, 2006), under the guise of economic opportunities they should have had the ability to harness

and make sense of, so too has the global schooling project seeped into nearly every corner of the world and created impossible aspirational landscapes that very few are able to successfully navigate. In both cases, the expectation to succeed is placed on the *individual* and the fault and guilt of failure is likewise imposed on the individual. No matter how the odds were stacked against them, designed to be against them, it's still the individuals who are to blame. This is perhaps the most irresponsible and devastating aspect of these projects: how deeply they are able to undermine young people's feelings of self-worth.

This was something my ethnography allowed me to catch glimpses of, as the young people of Mansawar Street experienced it. It was present in how ashamed they would feel if they did poorly on a homework assignment, or how Sudeep felt humiliated when he found out he would have to repeat a year in school. It was present in all the moments in which school would make Santosh second-guess and question himself in pursuit of the right answer, of which he had been taught there could only be one. The school was therefore structuring and dictating what characteristics were seen as worthwhile about these young people, and thus what their future prospects could be, regardless of whether they possessed those characteristics or not; and if they failed, it was because of their flaws and shortcomings. So as the young people of Mansawar Street internalised and began to believe in their right to education, its role in their lives, and in all that it might lead to, they were simultaneously participating in something that was designed to exclude and alienate them while creating hierarchies of ability, access and opportunity based upon criteria they had no hand or voice in designing. This is where the adult-centric decision-making surrounding young people's participation in the global schooling project is determinative.



(Photo: In Santosh's grandmother's village, about twelve hours outside of Pokhara, young girls of low caste (left) whose parents cannot afford to send them to school watch as the other children in the village who do attend school (right) receive gifts from a Canadian aid organisation)

Presence and Absence

Mansawar Street

Mansawar Street runs perpendicular to Fewa Lake towards the end of lakeside district, just before the road turns from pavement back to dirt. The street doesn't only serve as a street, but as a collective space for people to gather—particularly young people. Stray dogs lay around in the middle of the street, sleeping more than normal, constantly drawing honks from the small scooters and vehicles running up and down the road, forcing them to wake up and

relocate themselves to some place where they don't get in the way of people going about their business. Many older men sit along the street on steps in front of the small shops selling bottled water, candy, beer and other snacks, often times with Nepali newspapers outstretched, just hanging around passing time. Women sit behind the counters of these shops waiting for customers. Everyone seems to be waiting, passing the time, living.

There's a small fresh squeezed juice shop run by two young girls who can't be more than fifteen. They serve many kinds of juice: pineapple, mango, orange. I notice the younger sister sitting in the corner working on her schoolwork while the older sister takes care of the customers, occasionally asking the younger one to go fetch more fruit. I ask them about whether or not they are in school, and the older sister says she was, but not anymore. The younger sister nods and smiles and says that she really likes school. They tell me that they are in charge of running the shop while their mother is away working in Kathmandu.

There are three travel agency and consultant shops along the street advertising all sorts of outdoor and mountain adventures. These shops, among many others throughout the city, are in fierce competition with each other to attract the business of whatever small number of tourists trickle up and down the road. They know that one or two customers can make the difference between a secure or insecure livelihood. There's at least four small shops on the street all selling the exact same goods—mostly junk food, beer, bottled water, etc. One of them also offers a clothes-washing service. There's a tiny hole in the wall space where a young man stands trying to sell video games and DVDs, but he says he's struggling to sell anything anymore because people can get things off the Internet for free, even though electricity is unreliable. He says that he's worried

he'll have to move to Kathmandu to find work if things don't pick up. He'd prefer to stay in Pokhara where all his friends and family are.

Each shop and space on the road also represents a distinctive family space, quasi public, and quasi private. Santosh's family is responsible for the All in One café; Sangam's family is responsible for the small bakery on the corner; Mahesh's family is responsible for the tiny restaurant stuck in between two shops that sells local Nepali food; Sugam's family is in charge of the tall guesthouse called Hotel Kukuri. All of these spaces are situated either next to or across from each other. Shop owners walk to and from their own space to another's, having casual conversations and passing the time. Women sit in the shop behind the counter watching small, makeshift televisions blaring the day's news or a Nepali or Bollywood drama series. Young boys and girls are constantly running and bouncing around, never walking. The flow of people walking up and down the street is a bizarre mix of dread-locked twenty-something year olds wearing yogi pants and young Nepalis with US or UK flags on their shirts, hair slicked back, and speaking in English. There's an older Nepali man who walks up and down the street each day with his arms clasped behind his back, and he visits each of the shops and socialises with each family. It's obvious that he is an elder and expects the respect of the younger generations.

Many of the livelihoods of the people inhabiting this street are contingent in one way or another upon the presence of tourists and external sources to provide the income they need to meet their daily needs. There is lot of fragility in people's livelihoods and a highly centralised distribution model in place, with many people having sold any spare bit of land they previously used to grow fruit and vegetables to developers and contractors trying to capitalise on the growing

tourism industry. The only water that's safe to drink is bottled water, which is not cheap. There is a lot of vulnerability in how people go about securing such basic daily necessities as food and water in Pokhara, at the same time that there is a great deal of fragility in the livelihoods they rely upon to secure the income to buy these necessities. Yet, despite this known vulnerability, the entire city seems to be continuing this problematic, centralised trajectory and development towards the primary purpose of accommodating tourists, with very few resources being devoted to community programs or long-term planning. Everywhere you look in Pokhara, gigantic, new guesthouses and luxurious cafes are being built, mostly by investors from Kathmandu or abroad. Just across the street from Santosh family's small cafe there is a five-story guesthouse being built (with the labour of young men who have either migrated from rural areas or dropped out of school) by a big investor from Kathmandu.

Speaking to Suresh, Santosh's older brother, about this, he says it's becoming more and more difficult to keep up. Costs keep rising, there's more and more competition, and yet the number of people coming to Pokhara seems to be decreasing. Many people say that business has been bad and getting worse. Suresh tells me how he and his family feel very vulnerable since they are so reliant upon the business of tourists. He worries about not being able to pay for Santosh's school fees if things don't pick up. This is not unique. Many people's livelihoods in Pokhara revolve around the tourism industry, not only in the form of cafes and guesthouses, but also the Tibetan refugees selling jewelry along the lake, young women knitting and selling scarves and yak wool products along the street, men carrying huge baskets of fresh fruit on their backs to sell to those passing by, the guides and porters for Himalayan trekking expeditions and so on. Everything seems to be intertwined in this vulnerability, yet the momentum continues on this unstable trajectory. As Suresh and I look over at

the huge guesthouse being built, I say half-joking, "I hope the tourists don't all decide to stop coming." He starts laughing and says, "Yes, that would be very bad."

To Escape or Stay Put?

One common theme that kept appearing throughout my time in Nepal was how desperately young people wanted to "escape" Nepal, how confined and trapped they felt in their schooling and by life there, and how free, abundant and open prospects elsewhere appeared to be. There was the perception that Nepal is not free and an almost tangible desire filling the streets to go elsewhere to seek this freedom and opportunity for the expression and realisation of talents and ambitions. But these horizons seemed confined somehow for the older generation, who seemed to have accepted that they are unlikely to significantly change their circumstances, and therefore deemed it best to turn their attention and energies towards furthering the chances of their children.

Kamali is eighteen years old and the youngest of six siblings. She lives with her family in Bodhanath, just outside of Kathmandu. She is very petite, gentle and always carefully put together in her appearance. She spends a lot of time in her room watching sitcoms from the United States. Two of her older sisters, who she says are her closest friends, are away working or studying abroad: one is working as a nurse in London and one is studying in Minnesota. She tells me about how nothing has been the same for her since they left, how she feels as though she has been left behind. The only two of her five siblings still present are her brother closest to her in age who has stayed in Nepal with the hope of taking over their father's construction business, and her eldest sister who has two small children to look after. They all live under the same roof alongside her

parents and grandparents. Her other brother is away studying art in Japan, though he is expected to return soon.

One day I begin speaking with Kamali about how she feels the main reason people so desperately want to leave Nepal after finishing school and receiving their SLC's (School Learning Certificate) is to have some semblance of freedom. She spoke of how strict and controlled most schools are, with an almost tangible sense of confinement around self-expression and dissident opinions. She tells me about her schooling experiences and how she feels very out of place in Nepal. She feels like Nepal is "backwards" and that no one understands her. She tells me about how she's not really interested in any of the subjects being taught at school, but that she just has to learn them to be able to go abroad and join her sisters. She skips class often and tells me that she hates her school because whenever she or any of her friends ask questions or challenge the teachers they get physically punished, usually in the form of being hit with a ruler over their hands. "I just feel bored here. Bored and trapped," she says.

On another afternoon I'm speaking with Bohm, Santosh's second eldest brother, about how he feels very bored and stagnant here. He tells me how he feels sad that everyone leaves yet he stays stuck in Pokhara, with no visa or money to go anywhere else. He's been writing a book of poems and wants to get them published someday. He reads me a few of them, and they seem to convey this feeling of entrapment—of craving new places and experiences and a yearning to explore the different parts of himself. "I don't know why I feel stuck and frustrated. Sometimes I wonder if it would be this way anywhere I go. Maybe feelings are the same everywhere," he says.

Nabin (Laku, as I call him) is a seventeen-year-old Nepali boy who works and lives in a guesthouse run by his uncle in Paknajol, near Thamel. He sleeps on the floor every night in the reception area with a small pillow and one blanket. He's there to make whatever money he can to send home to his family, who live in the Gorkha district about a twelve-hour bus ride away. He is also studying Japanese and taking cooking lessons on the side because he wants to go work abroad in Japan if he can save enough money. But studies are expensive, and he's already in some debt. "I'll go anywhere to get away from here, but I hope for Japan the most. I just feel bored here. But I guess most days I am happy. My friends are here and I have what I need. But I need to make money eventually, so I think I need to leave," he tells me, "All my friends are doing the same. We are here for now, but we know we cannot stay like this. It's like we are stuck between our home villages where there is nothing for us to do, and the outside world that we can only dream about. But Nepal is not a good place to stay because the government is so bad. There is nothing we can do." Laku speaks very good English and has done well in school compared to his peers back in the village, most of whom he says will also leave to find income once they are able. He tells me how much he misses his friends and family back in his home village.

A young man I visited each day to buy water from his small shop next to my guesthouse would complain to me of extreme boredom and discontentment with his daily routine of sitting around all day everyday "just waiting for someone to come into the shop, taking their money, then waiting again. It's hard to pass the time. Sometimes I feel like I'm going crazy. Everyday the same thing. I hope something will change soon." He had just finished school, and many others on the street who were close to him in age echoed similar sentiments. There was a feeling of stagnation among many young people in their late teens that had

finished school to find none of the job opportunities they had been promised amidst widespread unemployment in Nepal. There was a sense of dependency on things beyond their control, mixed with traces of contentment and resignation. Many people said that they enjoy the leisure time and that this allowed them the space to relax, talk to each other, read the news and think about things. Yet that feeling didn't seem to last long, and the appetite to go abroad and change their circumstances would return. Suresh, for example, used much of his down time to learn guitar and study for a university entrance exam he had coming up. The guitar was a gift to Suresh from a Belgian man who was staying in Pokhara learning to teach yoga. Suresh said that he was doing these things and trying to take this course in economics to pass the time and to have a chance at going abroad to study or work. Despite what might be identified as contentment with the current moment, this could also be perceived as their resignation towards their situation in Nepal. Meanwhile, possibilities for a better life still seemed to be conceived of as being located somewhere on the horizon for many young people on Mansawar Street, and they didn't seem quite sure how best to get there.

In each of these conversations I had with young people who were about to finish school or who had just recently finished school, there was the perception that Nepal is not free. Their lack of hope for the prospects of Nepal as a country was overwhelming. They spoke of the government being corrupt, of many people trying but no one actually being able to bring about significant change. They would tell tales of abuse at school, but talk about it as if it was normal. Since it was normal they didn't report it, because they didn't expect anyone to do anything about it. They would often reference the cartoons that would regularly appear on the front page of the *Himalayan Times* and the *Kathmandu Post*, the two major newspapers in the country, foolishly depicting the

government and its inability to pass a formal constitution. They did not seem to feel as though their interests or concerns were being heeded, represented or prioritised by the “corrupt men who are arguing with each other about silly differences rather than ruling the country,” as Bohm put it. They had given up on Nepal, and as such their main source of hope was the prospect of going elsewhere. Many young people on Mansawar Street seemed to have placed their hope for liberation and change in the presences coming from outside of Nepal, mostly in the international community and the help of foreigners, or in their ability to escape from Nepal themselves through studying or work opportunities, which were limited. In this way, from within what they perceived as a position with little opportunity or potential for change, the global schooling project and its marketed ability to increase their chances of being able to go study or work abroad was difficult to resist.

The People of Pokhara and ‘Modern’ Aspirations

“In the progress of the division of labour, the employment of the far greater part of those who live by labour...comes to be confined to a ‘very few’ simple operations; frequently to one or two...The man whose whole life is spent in performing a few simple operations, of which the effects too are, perhaps, always the same...has no occasion to exert his understanding, or to exercise his invention in finding out expedients for removing difficulties which never occur. He naturally loses the habit of such exertion, and generally becomes as stupid and ignorant as it is possible for a human creature to become. The torpor of his mind renders him... incapable of conceiving any generous, noble, or tender sentiment, and consequently of forming any just judgment ...on the interests of his country...[and]... is incapable of defending his country

in war....But in every improved and civilised society this is the state into which the labouring poor, that is, the great body of the people, must necessarily fall, unless government takes some pains to prevent it”.

-Smith, *Wealth of Nations*, Vol.2, Book V.i.f

What are these young people in Pokhara aspiring towards, and why do they perceive of schooling as the best way to reach these aspirations? What informs their aspirations? What constitutes a success story and what constitutes a failure? What does the actuality of getting out and escaping look like for those young people who make it? Which stories make it back and contradict this narrative, and which continue to feed it? Who are the people who reside on and pass through these young people’s lives on Mansawar Street, who seem to embody these aspirations and give a face to the globalisation of comparison?

I’ve borrowed the phrase “Dharma Bums” from the title of the famous Jack Kerouac novel, in which a bunch of young adults in Northern California go on a spiritual quest in search of Dharma, or truth, climbing mountains, hitchhiking from coast to coast, eating beans from cans, wearing secondhand flannels, sleeping fireside under the stars, rambling. In Pokhara I felt in the midst of many present-day Dharma Bums: young people in their late teens and early twenties who are disheartened and fed up by the spiritual impoverishment and creative imprisonment offered by many routes offered to them by the ‘modern, developed’ world who have come to Nepal in search of an alternative, who believe that another way is possible; a way which can be beautiful, fulfilling and sustainable for all life. They’re just hanging around, contemplating existence, searching for meaning, practicing yoga and meditation, strumming on ukuleles. Most are adorned in baggy hemp clothes, dreadlocked, barefooted, smiling at

each other as they pass in a silent understanding, and everyone seems to have the Buddhist symbol 'Om' (ॐ) tattooed somewhere on their body.

Of course, not all the westerners you come across in Pokhara are Dharma Bums who have arrived at the conclusion that capitalism isn't working and have denounced the modern world. There are also many tourists who are doing quite well in their modern, western lives, who are reaping many of the benefits of global capitalism. They are there on holiday, often to go trekking through the Himalayas. They stay in Pokhara for a few days en-route to the Annapurna circuit and are then on their way. They have nice things, are dressed well and presumably have normal, well paying jobs back home that facilitate their travels and adventures. They have reliable incomes, passports, good educations and luxuries. They embody these 'modern' aspirations many Nepalis seem to hold. These are also the people creating and funding the tourism industry that many residents in Pokhara are reliant upon in one way or another. Some tourists will stay a little longer than planned and form relationships and friendships with some of the Nepalis. One guy called Alex from Australia only planned to stay a week, but ended up staying for three. He became quite close friends with Suresh, and when he left he gave Suresh several framed photos of his favorite musicians: Bob Dylan, Miles Davis, Bob Marley. I later found out that the guitar Suresh was strumming on all the time was also a gift from a tourist from the UK with whom he had become friends.

There are also all the voluntourists, whose very presence in Pokhara implies that people there *should* be aspiring towards something they do not already possess, inwardly or outwardly. There are also the researchers, myself included, attempting to gain insights into these people's lives and this part of the world.

It's important to also give space to the Tibetan and Bhutanese refugee populations of Pokhara, who not only have no ability to leave Nepal to pursue hopes and opportunities elsewhere, but are marginalised groups within Nepal itself. Without any formal, legal status as citizens of the Nepali nation, they face many hardships. Much of their subsistence livelihoods revolve around the presence or absence of tourists. Without the luxury of distant horizons, they are occupied by having to get, find or beg for what they need to get through yet another day, another night. Their experience of time, space and place was necessarily different from the lives swirling around them that they intermingle with and are reliant upon, who possess the status, papers, income and certainties that allow them to move through the same space more freely and fluidly. The tourists are allowed to be there. They have the Visa in their passport. They have the luxury of not seeing every passing stranger as the difference between an empty stomach or a full one. These people passing through don't have the immediate demands of poverty and statelessness impacting their every experience and interaction with the world. These differences change the ways they are able to see themselves in relation to those around them, giving some the luxury to move through the world freely, seeing it as filled with realisable possibilities, while forcing others' eyes to the ground, unable to see beyond their next step. The same place can look quite differently depending on whether your horizon is the sky or the ground.

For these refugees, some Nepalis, even those on Mansawar Street, seem "privileged." The young people on Mansawar Street interacted with them differently than the other Nepalis and residents of the street. It seemed as though they felt sorry for them somehow, that they weren't quite sure what to think of them or how to interact with them in a way that would seem normal.

Once they described them as “the people who live by the lake,” and at one point Santosh commented on how they were always very nice to the dogs.

In these subtle ways, in each of these presences, the patterns and contours of global inequality—and the globalisation of comparison—were visible and manifest in the intimate, everyday spaces of life of Mansawar Street, and the young people who lived on this street were witness to these people and the dynamics among them, actively constructing their own understandings and appraisals of them, attaching their own meanings to this rich and varied social world.

The coexistence of the Dharma Bum crowd with the local Nepali community in Pokhara is fascinating when thinking about aspirational landscapes. The young people I was spending time with called the part of town where these Dharma Bums hang out, “hippie town”, on the far side of the lake where the road is no longer paved. Far from idolising this crowd as embodiments of the western, ‘developed’ world many of them seek to gain access to, they would tease them about their cheap, hemp clothing, their offensive odor and their obsession with eastern philosophy. All in one frame you’d see a crowd of tanned, dread-locked, young adults from Belgium boasting loudly in Nepali about not having phones nor having bathed in a week, walk past a crowd of the same-aged Nepalis wearing ironed uniforms, carrying iPhones and umbrellas to shield them from the sun, and speaking to each other in English. There is a lot of confusion. What was strange was how many young people in Pokhara were aspiring to become a part of the world that these people had fled. Even more fascinating was how young people on Mansawar Street would select which aspects and representations of the west and of the ‘modern world’ to pay attention to in a

way that reaffirmed their aspirations and confirmed the narrative they'd been told their whole life: the west was better.

One of the kids' favorite things to do was to go to the open-air cinema run by one of the local Dharma Bums called Fritz to watch old cartoons and children's films on the weekends. Fritz was a young Belgian man looking for "anyway to escape from the pressures and purposelessness of the modern world," he told me. He was now living in Pokhara running this tiny film venue, and he kindly showed cartoons and one children's film for free each Saturday. He had an old projector that he would project onto a big rock on the side of the hill. This became an exciting occasion for all of us each week. We saw Wallace and Gromet, Toy Story, Despicable Me and a few others. Santosh and the gang loved these films. The Wallace and Gromet film we watched was the one with the penguin thief, and as we were all sitting there laughing and watching Wallace get stuck in his trousers, it occurred to me how physical most of this humour was. They would laugh and laugh and be talking about their favourite clumsy moments of the film for days later, and I thought it was significant how the disillusionment of Fritz led to the exposure of these young people in Pokhara to ideas, characters and imaginary worlds they may not have otherwise encountered and felt connected to. These films were portraying and making reference to far-off worlds, often animated worlds but occasionally not, that these young people had not experienced themselves, and that they could only access through these exposures and through how those exposures set off their imaginations. The many images, stories and depictions carried in these films from the west and of the world that they were not apart of captivated them.

On all sides, in different ways, there seem to be a lot of young people in Pokhara who feel trapped or hopeless. Many of the young Nepali people I met

are frustrated about being trapped in the 'undeveloped east' with little access to opportunity and seemingly few chances to change their fate. The Dharma Bums are frustrated by a destructive and exploitative west, with everyone they know glued to televisions or computers, stuck in their lonely vehicles for hours commuting to their soulless jobs, disconnected from a sense of purpose or wonder. The western tourists are just passing through, bridging the divide between the two. Then there are the Tibetan and Bhutanese refugee communities of Pokhara, marginalised in layered ways, looking for security, possibility and the right to have a presence that they are being denied. Obviously within each of these broad depictions there are exceptions to the portrayals I've painted. I'm sure there are anti-capitalist tourists, Dharma Bums with \$200 shoes, Nepalis who think that all these westerners are crazy and Tibetan refugees studying at Harvard. What I'm speaking to is merely with reference to the majority of those I encountered, in no way wanting to flatten the complexities underpinning these portrayals or generalise more widely to the Nepal that I didn't see or experience. The aim is to paint a picture of those presences that are shaping and constitutive of the social world of the young people of Mansawar Street, and to bring attention to how each of these presences rippled into their imaginations and aspirations in subtle and intimate ways.

I also want to bring attention to how, on either side of the spectrum, the Dharma Bums and the resident Nepalis would speak of experiencing a kind of stagnation and entrapment. In many ways, it appeared as though they were each trying to escape the same thing. Many people in Pokhara seemed to be fleeing the experience of scarcity and proletarianisation, of the hardship and precarity of wage labour, yet found themselves in exploitative working conditions either in Nepal or abroad. The Dharma Bums in Pokhara were

fleeing the so-called abundance they had identified as the soulless, destructive endpoint of austere, neoliberal capitalism, which many young Nepalis seemed to be aspiring towards. Yet neither could necessarily put their finger on what it was they were looking for as an alternative, or concretely where they could find it.

Remittances and Dead Ends

“Modern forms of accumulation—the suppression of local forms of production and consumption; imperial appropriation of assets (including natural resources); the monetisation of exchange and taxation; national debt; and the credit system (Harvey 2003: 145)—lead people willingly, even desperately, into an illegal labor market that often rejects them, particularly in times of global recession” (Cross 2015: 312).”

The dynamics I witnessed in Pokhara and the reality that many people I encountered in Pokhara wanted to leave Nepal compels a broader discussion of the relationship(s) among migration and remittances, the global schooling project, and development (Bracking 2003; de Haas 2005, 2007). To be worthwhile, this discussion should move past “the benefits for the migrant’s beneficiaries and the finance industry, to assess the broader implications of remittances for poverty and inequality” (Cross 2015: 313), and I would add, should also bring to attention what was driving people’s decisions to go work abroad, often leaving behind their homes, families and children.

The fact that there is such optimism attached to migrant transfers and remittances is often thought to be the result of a shift from state-centric towards

a market-building approach to development, as was the case on Mansawar Street where very little support was provided by the government, where many people relied in one way or another on remittances to make ends meet and where development activities were largely market-driven. More generally in the Asian context, a USAID report (2013) has stated that remittances have untapped potential to go beyond financial transfers and to significantly impact the whole spectrum of human development (Global Issues 2012; Nwanze 2013). The International Fund for Agricultural Development, for example, argues that out of the \$260 billion USD of remittances to developing Asian countries, “the enormous potential of returns for society have not been realised” (Cross 2015: 313).

Other reports, however, prepared on behalf of the IMF and the African Development Bank have found that remittances have a significant impact on increasing inequality (Cross 2015: 315). Bracking (2003: 267) related this to incidents in which remittance-receiving households undermine the spending power of households that do not receive remittances, and there is a common consensus that it is emigrants who are able to ‘earn a living’, whereas those who stay will struggle with basic necessities and finding stable work (Stoll 2013). This is not specific to any particularly impoverished part of the world and was arguably the case on Mansawar Street, as those families that had an inflow of remittances were often able to subsidise their monthly incomes and therefore cope with periods of volatility and instability, where others without this extra income could not.

On Mansawar Street, there were also many families that had moved to Pokhara from rural villages and that had sold their homes and gone into debt in order to be able to secure an employment contract abroad. Stoll (2013: 8) explores this

Phenomenon as what he calls 'migration fever' in Guatemala, showing how many families' inability to subsist and get by on their farms is linked to heavy borrowing in which they put up houses as collateral. He states, "it shows how capitalism not only encourages people to take risks, but also pressures them to do so in the competitive scramble for a better future. When remittances drive further financialisation, the necessity for families to gamble assets, livelihoods and lives intensifies" (Stoll 2013: 192).

One man I met near Pokhara who had had this experience was Basanta. He's a thirty-five year old man with two small children. We became quite close friends, and on more than one occasion I joined him, his wife and their children for a meal at their home. He told me about how previously he had been working for six years as a migrant worker in Malaysia. He told me that he felt he had no other choice but to go abroad and work to be able to cover all the costs of his life, and that this was a common feeling among young Nepali men, particularly those in rural areas without access to any kind of wage labor. He described the slow process in which he began to realise how exploitative the working conditions were. He was working fourteen to sixteen hours a day in scorching forty degree Celsius heat, sleeping in a barrack with ten other men, and having to give most of what he earned back to the lending agency that arranged his working contract in the first place. "I can't understand why we all put ourselves through that kind of life when we aren't even making hardly any money. We suffer yet have nothing to show for it. I think they tricked us," he said.

He went on to tell me about how there were businesses and entire industries that had emerged across the country with the explicit goal of coaxing Nepali men and women to go work abroad, primarily in Gulf countries, arranging their contracts, loans and travel arrangements. These businesses made a

tremendous amount of money off of the interest they were charging the workers. Basanta told me about how he had very little money to begin with because he had lived in the village his whole life without paid work. “We didn’t need as much back then. But it seemed to become harder and harder to imagine how my family and I could get by without an income. We wanted some security, and I wanted my children to have chances that I didn’t.” They had a very small, modest home in Astam, just outside of Pokhara, but he felt that in order to be able to take care of his family, send his kids to a good school and give them a better life with some security, he needed to have some kind of income. To that end, he did what many other young men in the village were doing: he went into debt to go work abroad, hoping that eventually he would be able to pay back the loan and have a disposable income. He didn't realise at the time that the loan was designed to make it nearly impossible for him to get out from under it.

Asking questions about what was driving young men and women to go work abroad to earn money to send back to their families led me to the significant realisation that in many cases the desire to be able to pay for their children’s private English schooling was one of the key factors driving family’s decisions to splinter and have one or more member go work abroad. I had many similar conversations to the one I had with Basanta. In total I spoke to upwards of twenty families who had at one point or another had a family member leave to work abroad in Malaysia, Japan or Gulf countries, and in almost every conversation, being able to send their children to a good school played a role in their decision making to do so. It seemed that to these families, the clearest path they could see to give their children the chance at a better life was through English schooling. In this intimate way, the global schooling project and its

aspirations were creating the gravity that was pulling men and women out of their homes and into an exploitative global labour market.

Going Away and Making it Back

Rather than having a dialogue about similar experiences of disillusionment and fostering a sense of support and solidarity, I found that there was a sense of shame and reluctance among many people in Pokhara to speak about the many dead ends they were encountering, both among those who had gone to work abroad and those who had moved from rural to urban spaces looking for work and income. Santosh's father, for example, never liked to speak about his time in Iraq. Sujal in class 6A said that when his father returned, he didn't really tell him anything about his time away in Saudi Arabia. Sudeep's mother had been away in Malaysia for three years, and she also avoided speaking about the subject. Their stories of exploitation and alienation were not making it back to the rest of those on Mansawar Street and in Pokhara, and so the cycle of going to work abroad and experiencing these hardships was continuing for many families.

One of the most shocking aspects of this situation was how many suicides were reportedly occurring among those who had left Pokhara and nearby villages to work abroad. I spoke to over fifteen families who had lost a relative to suicide while working abroad, many of whom were away working in Gulf countries. The heartbreak this had brought for so many families was overwhelming. Though many of the families experiencing this loss were not families that I knew very well and I don't feel that I can fairly or fully represent their stories, the fact that this was affecting so many in the area, I feel, needs at least some attention and acknowledgement.

Though not as severe, similar heartbreak seemed to be present in many of the stories of those young people who went to Kathmandu or abroad to study and ended up working in guesthouses or at restaurants, rather than getting the good jobs they had hoped their study would allow for, and there was a similar reluctance to speak about these dead-ends. Many young people left Pokhara for university seeking the kind of knowledge that could be certified, stamped, measured, weighed, quantified and internationally recognized. This was the knowledge that had weight and credibility in the world; this was the kind of knowledge that could earn them money; this was the knowledge that they had been told to prioritise if they wanted to succeed. If they failed, rather than draw attention to themselves and to the exclusionary features of the global schooling project that were part of the reason for their failure, they internalised and experienced this failure alone, allowing this failure to devalue their sense of worth. This was the case of Nabin, working at his uncle's guesthouse; too ashamed to return home and hoping a better opportunity would come his way soon.

Yet for those young people back on Mansawar Street, amidst the hardships the global schooling project and its dead-ends were creating for their families and friends, they were carving out time on their one day a week not in school to do things where they weren't made to feel like failures; where they were in charge of how they spent their time, what knowledge was seen as worthwhile and what they might learn that day. Regardless of all the other pressures and expectations being placed on them during the week by their families and their school, they still had Saturdays.

Chapter 6

Saturdays



(Photo: Santosh, Sangam, Sudeep, Mahesh and Sujal skipping rocks in a small lake just outside of town on Saturday)

Saturday was the only day of week the young people of Mansawar Street were not expected to be in school, and on this day, they would explore the world around them in ways they weren't necessarily permitted to during the week. This chapter, therefore, brings attention to the intimate, everyday ecologies and ties of young people living on Mansawar Street with both the human and non-human members of their community. It describes how young people make sense of their ecologies on Mansawar Street and wider Pokhara, highlighting their experiential understandings and knowledge about the human and non-human systems around them: of the dogs, the caterpillars, the beehives, the rainfall patterns, the changing weather and each other.

I show how they use their one day a week not in school, Saturday, to explore, learn and create understandings of the world around them that are entirely their own and for their own purposes. I speak to the complex ways these young people navigate, adapt and makes sense of changes in their lived environment, and how this time they share on Saturdays, and the ways they arrive at understandings about themselves in relationship to the world around them, are in contrast to the ways they are encouraged to learn and absorb information in school. I contrast the emotional and epistemological space of Saturday: of free, experiential, independent learning, with that of the school week: formal, extractive, instrumental knowledge accumulation and regurgitation, while highlighting the consequential valuation of the latter over the former.

This is important when thinking about global schooling because it offers a different way of thinking about young people's learning and the spaces in which it occurs. Contrasting the ways these young people use and experience their 'free time' to how they use and experience their time in school shows how the disembodied and instrumentalising tendencies of formal schooling are

entangled with the notion that these young people should be future-oriented, in pursuit of a better and more abundant life that they do not currently possess. This corresponds with a framing of the present moment as being insufficient, of non-formal, experiential learning on Saturday as being of little value, and of the non-academic knowledge, virtues, talents and capabilities these young people possess and display on Saturday as being worthless. However, this is at odds with these young people's actual experiences, wherein they characterise Saturday and their free time spent doing the things they enjoy and exploring their world with friends as the time where they feel the most complete, whole and worthy, and the classroom as the place where they feel the most fearful, disconnected and fragmented.

Furthermore, I offer my impressions of how the friendships and connections young people forge in their spare time, with those who may be considered different from themselves, created cracks in existing social structures and norms and thus new, interpersonally driven possibilities for understanding, acceptance, tolerance and social change. The understandings they generated of themselves and others and the ways they navigated their differences on Mansawar Street often cut through divisive and exclusionary categories, such as caste, in meaningful ways—ways that I noticed were often discouraged in their formal schooling spaces, even if inadvertently. Part of my finding, then, is that these young people's lives are indeed political in that they navigate complex social, political and ethnic identities amongst themselves on a daily basis (Alderson 2013).

I also speak to the role of intimacies in everyday choices and decision-making. I found that feelings of obligation and responsibility towards each other on the basis of intimate connections often formed the glue that held together social

realities for young people and families in on Mansawar Street through the large role these feelings played in their decision-making. Santosh worked hard to do well in school out of a sense of obligation to his family and out of a concern for the esteem and respect of his friends and peers; Suresh worked hard to put him through school out of a sense of responsibility to him and his future, and also out of a concern for how their family was regarded by the wider community. So schooling—and the ability to pursue economic opportunity via schooling—was entangled with notions of respectability, status and the ability to have a ‘good life’. I show that this is the primary way in which the global schooling project functions in intimate spaces: it pulls on the hopes and aspirations of young people and the bodies and labour of their parents to be able to provide them with the education perceived as necessary to pursue these opportunities to achieve their dreams and live a good life.

Significantly, this valuation of formal, standardised and quantifiable knowledge over embodied, experiential, everyday knowledge is intrinsically exclusionary: institutional knowledge is necessarily hierarchical and tiered, for people to chase after and gain access to, whereas experiential knowledge is available to all, for free, everywhere. In this chapter I further my finding that global schooling is impacting the intimate, everyday lives of these young people by redefining the relationship(s) between different ways of knowing—and thus different ways of spending time—by valuing the pursuit of aspirations for abundance and taking space and credibility away from young people’s experiences of worthiness and sufficiency.

Enough

Everyday Ecologies

“We think researchers should concentrate more attention than they have on exploring continuities and similarities in child and adult abilities, skills, propensities, and understandings. In our research we have demonstrated that children’s understandings are often much more sophisticated and developed than most adults know or are willing to acknowledge” (Van Ausdale & Feagin 2001: 213).

Observing the way young people related to, made sense of and valued the broader ecologies they were embedded in took up a lot of my attention during fieldwork. Though many researchers who look at similar themes, including Dyson (2014), use the word ‘environment’ to refer broadly to young people’s natural surroundings, I find it problematic. In this framing, humans are ‘surrounded’ by an ‘environment’ that revolves around them (Gold & Gujar 2002). Furthermore, as Ingold (1992) points out, ‘environment’ tends to imply those aspects of one’s surrounding areas that have some kind of instrumental or utilitarian value. I instead chose to situate these young people’s experiences under the framing of their ‘everyday ecologies’, meant to connote all the many forms of life and features of their lived, physical environment existing among and alongside them in their everyday life, and their complex relationships with those.

As Dyson (2014: 8) points out, there are many studies that bring to light the significance and particularity of how communities obtain, share and store information and knowledge about the natural environment and their ecologies (Pandian 2009; Gidwani 2008). However, the specific knowledge of children and young people has not really been looked at very closely, with a few exceptions (Katz 2004). Furthermore, the way this knowledge is *valued* and

framed and the emotional, affective space of young people's experiences of learning about how they fit within their ecologies, thereby moving beyond conceptualising interactions with the environment from a merely utilitarian perspective, has not been explored in depth.

However, there is a great deal of research in geography, anthropology and sociology that challenges the notion that the 'environment' is only of interest because of its economic utility and that explores the social construction of nature through an engagement with subjective and affective dimensions (Agrawal & Sivaramakrishnan 2000; Descola & Palsson 1996). Some of this research looks at the ways in which bodies interact with their environments (McCormack 2008; Ingold 2007), and the complex dynamic between affect and emotion in lived environments (Lorimer 2012). This literature positions the 'environment' as intricately and intimately interwoven with human activity, not just as a passive backdrop.

Those who research urban youth have in some ways anticipated this emphasis on how environments intermesh with young people's social and emotional lives (Gagen 2000; Hart 1979). For example, literature on street children makes reference to young people's interactions and engagements with the materiality of the city, including their knowledge and understandings of 'the street' and of their place on it. This is clear in the work of Brad Weiss (2009) on urban youth practices in Tanzania, as well as in Swanson's (2009) research in Ecuador with young beggars. What emerges is how young people are simultaneously a product of their urban place, and agents that shape the urban world around them through their practices (Doron & Jeffrey 2012).

Similar to Dyson (2014), though in an urban environment, I place particular emphasis on how the young people I met develop ideas of themselves in dialogue and relationship to the world around them in the time they spend doing what Tim Ingold (2007) terms “‘wayfaring’: spontaneous movement through the landscape that entails meaning-filled, close and tactile engagement with the materials encountered there” (Dyson 2014: 9). Both the forest and the street provided a crucial space that facilitated social interaction, learning, and ‘fun’ among the young people involved in my research, something that Oskar Verkaaik (2004) has argued is also a key feature of the social and political lives of young people in urban Pakistan.

Over the past twenty years, research on young people and childhood has increasingly diverted itself from its emphasis on children in the west. A new cohort of research on children and youth in south Asia has in some ways informed my reflections on young people’s agency and everyday ecologies in Pokhara and the Himalayas. This cohort looks at how young people are experiencing and negotiating processes of accelerated social change (Jeffrey 2010; Rogers 2008; Lukose 2005) the new and evolving role of young people in the urban economy (Gooptu 2009; Fuller & Narasimhan 2007; Nisbett 2007) and young people’s changing experiences in rural and school settings (Benei 2008; Sarangapani 2003; Gold & Gujar 2002). In ways, these studies have helped illustrate the growing mismatch between what young people are set to aspire towards, what *they want* to do and the actual opportunities and outcomes they encounter.

My work complements the existing work on children and youth in contemporary south Asia by concentrating on a set of young people who have indeed been drawn into the global world and its universalist promises in a manner similar to

the young people studied by Caroline and Filippo Osella (2006) in Kerala. I build upon themes Dyson (2014: 11) identifies in the existing literature: “how young people’s lives are changing in light of the rise of formal education, the changing nature of childhood and youth, and the vibrant cultural practices and social imaginations of young people”, while at the same time adding novel sociological critiques and connections that emerge from my focus on the ways in which the global schooling project is transforming the everyday lives of young people and families in Nepal. This added layer of engagement with the development practices, aid paradigms and knowledge practices underpinning the expansion and valuation of formal education—and the ways that valuation ripples and transforms the horizons of entire communities—is significant when trying to make sense of how these changes are impacting and imposing upon everyday life and childhoods in Pokhara.

Kids, Dogs and the Compulsion to Care

As mentioned, one of the primary ways I gained access and a sense of belonging in this community with these young people was through me immersing myself in—and showing respect for—the ecologies of Mansawar Street, particularly the stray dog community on the street. The way care was shown for the dogs that lived on the street was much different than where I come from, where people tend to want to own pets and claim sole, individual responsibility for their pets’ well being. However, the compulsion to own, as a prerequisite to care, didn’t seem to exist on Mansawar Street. The dogs that lived there would definitely be classified as stray dogs, not dogs that had owners or that specifically belonged to any individual family. But that was partly because there was a shared, collective responsibility for them. Everyone helped

out in whatever way they could. Santosh would feed them leftover meat and rice from his parent's small café. The man down the street would donate money to help get them vaccinated. The woman with the bakery on the corner would put out water for them. This is quite distinct from the ways in which these intimacies and affective relationships among people and pets are framed in much of the global north and west, with an emphasis on kinship and post-human families (Charles 2014; Arluke 2009).

One day as I made my way down the street to wait for Sangam and Santosh to finish school, a few of the dogs I was less familiar with tagged along with me. Santosh and Sangam turned the corner and the dogs started wagging their tails excitedly as they walked towards us, reaching down and scratching them behind the ear before we all turned and bounced down the street towards the lake. When we all went swimming the dogs would sometimes come and watch, and Mahesh would always notice when they would get thirsty. He would stop swimming and go get his bottled water that he had brought along, pour it into his cupped hands and feed it to the dogs one at a time until they seemed satisfied.



(Photo: Mahesh feeding water to Babu)

Every morning Santosh and I would save a bit of our breakfast and feed it to Babu and whoever was laying next to him in the street that day before he left for school. Sangam had a fondness for a small white dog that he called Lucky, and he'd often come sprinting down the street chasing and playing fetch with Lucky—the only one who seemed to be able to keep up with him. Sugam was more timid and less affectionate towards the dogs, but slowly he became more comfortable and seemed to really enjoy their company. Sabeena was fearless and played with the dogs that everyone else was a bit afraid of.

They showed a care and concern for these animals that was selfless and of their own choosing. No one was forcing this upon them. They did not own these animals and these animals did not belong to them. They were curious about the dogs and enjoyed the dogs' company. They learned about them and learned how to be responsive to their needs and moods. They felt a compulsion to look after them, to care for them, to be responsible for the well being of the other

creatures inhabiting their world, and to create their own meanings and ways of relating to them (Tipper 2011; Candea 2010; Arluke 2006; Knight 2005).



(Photo: Santosh and Sangam sitting with Babu on Mansawar Street)

Plants, Flowers, Butterflies and Bees

This care and concern for the dogs also extended into the broader ecologies they were a part of in Pokhara. One of the first things I did with Santosh and the gang was go walking around in the nearby forest up the mountainside. Santosh and Sangam spent the whole day showing me all the strange things the plants could do; showing me where the beehives were and where the caterpillars lived that would soon become butterflies. They talked about how important the bees are to everyone's life and livelihood and how the wasps are eating them. Babu the pup would always join us on these outings. Sangam would find flat rocks to

skip in the shallow puddles that gathered this time of year due to monsoon season, and Santosh would stroke the backs of the leaves and show me how they curl in on themselves when touched. Sudeep would pick a particular kind of leaf, then put it between his fingers and over his hand in a strange way that would make music whenever he hit it with a flat hand. They would show me which plants were edible, which were poisonous, which would make you itch, which smelled the best. I asked Santosh how he knew all of this, and he said “trial and error.”



(Photo: Sudeep, Mahesh, Santosh, Sugam and Sangam on one of our Saturday adventures in the forest)

They said they always felt very happy and relaxed when they would be up in the forest because it was quieter and no one bothered them there. They could just wander around exploring this natural environment and make their own sense of things. You could tell they felt affection and gratitude for these living things and for this space. They would roam around on Saturday, independently, without adult supervision, without any anticipated quiz about what they had learned that day. Their clothes were dirty, they had just rolled out of bed, and they didn't have to think about maintaining any appearance. They seemed genuinely curious, excited and relaxed. I contrasted this to the way they seemed to feel in the morning before going to school. Santosh would often be sitting across from me at a table at All in One, hurriedly scribbling down a few last lines of his homework, always second guessing himself and worried he'd written down the wrong answer. Then he'd race down the street to change into his uniform and tidy himself, then say quick goodbyes to his family and head down the street. He seemed stressed. There was a tension, a formality and an anxiety that I felt as all the young people walked in herds at 9:30am down the street to school in their uniforms.

Their affection and appreciation for their natural environment was also tempered with an impressive and detailed knowledge of how human activity was jeopardising and threatening their ecologies in Pokhara. They each had a very lived understanding of climate change, global warming, urbanisation, industrialisation and—what was even more impressive—how these were all linked and manifesting in changes in their everyday lives. “It floods all the time now because of global warming. There are more and more landslides in the nearby hills. They say we might not be able to swim in the lake anymore because of all the contaminations from human waste seeping into the water.

The water and the air and the sounds of the city are becoming more and more polluted,” Santosh tells me as we’re walking home one day from the forest. Again, they spoke about these things from an embodied understanding, as things they were experiencing and making sense of in their everyday lives, and my impression was that this is where their care and concern came from. These were not abstract concepts there were reading out of a textbook. These were things that would jeopardise what they loved most about their home, and they wanted to do something about it.

We started talking about consumption and overpopulation at one point and Santosh said to me, “I think that people can change, but the problem is that they don’t want to.” This happened as we were speaking at length over breakfast about how changes in the environment due to the actions of people far away could potentially impact his family’s livelihood and ability to make ends meet. We began discussing all the new guesthouses and cement structures that were being built, and Santosh commented on how this would take away from viable land and soil that could be used to grow food and crops and would make it more expensive for his parents to buy food for their cafe. He seemed to be concerned about he and his friend’s future, and their children’s future. At one point when thinking about what the world would look like when his children were adults he said, “We will probably destroy the earth. We’re in big trouble.” The blunt, straightforwardness in which Santosh spoke about issues related to climate change and overpopulation kind of startled me at first. Still somewhat torn between cynicism and optimism myself, it was confronting to hear the extent to which Santosh seemed to have accepted the worst-case scenario. At the same time, this didn’t seem to impact upon how he got on with his everyday life. The things that he lived for were still intact: he had his friends, his family, his skateboard, the dogs and the forest. These intimacies and ecologies were his

world, and they kept him going. But these 'childish' occupations didn't prevent him from taking the threat of climate change seriously and trying to do whatever he could to help.

Questioning Rituals

The care and concern the young people I spent time with expressed for the non-human members of their community also compelled them to question certain taken for granted rituals associated with dominant religious and ethnic identities. While I was living in Pokhara the Dashain festival was occurring. One morning I was sitting on the curb outside All in One café with Santosh, Sangam, Sugam, Sudeep, Mahesh and his younger sister, Sabeena, when Suresh brought over to us a recent *Nepali Times* newspaper. On the front page there was a picture of a small lamb being slaughtered. This was a sacrifice practice that was a part of Dashain. We all started talking about this and about the common religious practice of sacrificing animals. "Humans are so selfish. I could never do that," Santosh said without any hesitation. Sangam and Mahesh agreed and spoke of how it didn't make any sense to them. I asked Santosh why he thought people did that and he said, "In the name of God." Santosh's family is less strictly Hindu than the other boys. At the time, I noticed that his firm condemnation of this practice emboldened the others to question it as well.



(Photo: Sangam holding up the Nepali Times, prompting our discussion about religious rituals and animal sacrifice)

This wasn't the first occasion I noticed this happening. Because they were all from such diverse backgrounds, religions and ethnicities, often times one person in the group would have to go do something that the others wouldn't have to participate in. This would always spark a conversation around *why* they had to do it. Their friendships to each other and the ways they openly spoke about their differences facilitated a space in which they could question expectations of them and rituals they were forced to participate in that didn't have any meaning to them or that they disagreed with. Though I doubt they would have raised these questions to their parents or elders, because there was not an insulation of their identities among their friendships outside of school, they were able to have these very important conversations amongst themselves, without any guidance or assertions from adults. Again, they were creating a space of learning, understanding and compassion amongst

themselves in their spare time that I did not get the impression was facilitated—nor valued—at school. This supports the idea that friendships outside of the classroom have unique potential and encourage young people to think about and treat their friends in a different way than mere classmates (Matsumoto, Haan, Yabrove, Theodorou & Carney 1986).

Friendship and Social Change

“Racial and ethnic tensions and oppression are factors in the social worlds of children, as are the intriguing differences that compel children to explore and include dissimilar people in their worlds. The connections between racial-ethnic relationships and understanding and a general life orientation are not simple. They depend on the individuals involved, the contexts within which the relationships evolve, and the structure of the larger social world that provides the standards rules and opportunities for relationship formation” (Van Ausdale & Feagin 2001: 127).

Caste, Class and Kindness

As Van Ausdale and Feagin (2001: 126) point out, the peer relationships and friendships that young people form in their early years have the capacity to either reinforce stereotyping and intolerance on the basis of race or ethnicity, or they can facilitate friendship, support and mutual respect. I found this to be true on Mansawar Street, as young people creatively navigated and negotiated their experiences of perceived similarity and difference on a daily basis, thus moving through the world as political agents, not as apolitical ‘children.’

One day as I was walking down the street with Santosh and Sangam, on our way to clean up the field where they gather to play football, I asked the boys about why Sangam was wearing two gold hoop earrings and Santosh was not, trying to discover their understandings of the significance of this. They replied very casually, “It has something to do with caste. We are from different castes. Sangam is from a higher caste than me. But it doesn’t matter, we are friends first!” they exclaimed, as they threw their arms around each other’s shoulders and began walking in sync down the dirt path. This is an example of what Dunn & Dunn (1993) found, that children’s close friendships outside their family tend to be confined and understood differently than their relationships with family members.



(Photo: Santosh, Sangam and Bimal after cleaning up all the trash on this field where they play football on Mansawar Street)

Following this conversation, I tried to ground my abstract, theoretical understanding of caste in their particular experiences by letting them lead me and explain their experiences of this to me through their eyes. I did not understand all the layers of meaning and the many ethnic complexities of this in Nepal, and I did not pretend to. I simply asked them to explain it to me. It turned out that though they were each aware of which caste they belonged to, they did not enact this hierarchy in their interactions with one another. When asking Santosh about caste and religious discrimination and how he understood this, he told me “I think it was there for my parents, but lately here in Pokhara it has become less and less. I am all religions. I am Hindu religion. I am Buddhist religion. I am Christian religion. And most of all I am Skater religion,” he told me. They would sometimes make reference to caste on the rare occasion that they would start speaking about girls and the prospect of having to get married someday. They said they would want to marry for love and that it wouldn’t matter to them which caste the woman was from. To what extent they would be able to maintain this priority and conviction as they got older was unclear.

However, though caste seemed to be a kind of “old tradition” and part of these young people’s identity that they did not place much weight on, class was much more present in their interactions. Caste was in some ways linked to class, (for example the Brahmins in the community typically seemed to be well off and they would often own the guest houses), but not explicitly and certainly not without considerable exceptions. Though Santosh did not seem self-conscious about his caste status, he did seem self-conscious and sometimes embarrassed by the fact that his family was quite poor compared to the others. At one point we all watched the original Charlie and the Chocolate Factory movie together, and there were several themes out of the film that Santosh really picked up on and seemed to identify with. For one, in Willy Wonka and

The Chocolate Factory, the main character is Charlie Bucket, a very poor, kind little boy about Santosh's age who lives in a one-room home with his parents and two sets of grandparents. Santosh is in a similar kind of situation: he and his two brothers and his parents live in a very small two room building just down the street from the café. I think Santosh is embarrassed about this, as he went out of his way not to bring people back to his home, even some of his closest friends.

In these subtle, intimate ways, the stories we see, encounter and project ourselves into can have deep resonance. They carry within them cultural narratives that inform the frameworks of possibility that we live within, and often carry within them images, characters and universalisms that become aspired towards. In the film, Charlie was dreaming and hoping that he would somehow find the golden ticket hidden in a chocolate bar that would allow him the chance of a lifetime to tour the Wonka Chocolate Factory and change his circumstances, against all odds. The chances of Charlie actually finding this golden ticket were tiny—the whole world was hunting for this single, last ticket. But Charlie never lost hope, even though he was too poor to buy as many chocolate bars as everyone else to help his search. Then one lucky day Charlie saw a quarter gleaming up at him from the street below. He raced into the nearest candy shop and miraculously ended up finding the golden ticket in the single chocolate bar he was able to buy with the coin he found on the street.

After this, Charlie and the Chocolate Factory became a way that Santosh and I would talk about issues of class, caste, money, hope, opportunity, etc., but in an indirect way that allowed Santosh the space to say what he was feeling without being completely vulnerable and exposed, similarly to how he negotiated his presence and self-consciousness by wearing the Spiderman mask when we

would make videos. At one point Santosh asked me, “what would you do if you knew someone like Charlie and his family? Would you try to help them?” I told him that I would try to help in any way that I could, but that help is more complicated than it seems sometimes. He thought about this for a while and then said, “I think I understand.” I asked him what he liked most about the film, and he replied, “I like how Charlie never lost hope and was always kind to the other kids.”

Swimming in the Lake

Swimming also became a big part of how we would spend Saturday. However, there were dynamics of inclusion and exclusion at work here, too. Those young people who couldn't swim were often from families with parents who couldn't afford to have them taught or else couldn't spare the time off work to teach them themselves. So in this way, the kids who were or were not able to go to the lake to swim and jump off the dock was representative of certain class dynamics, and all the kids seemed to be aware of these dynamics. It always upset Santosh that he and several of his friends couldn't swim very well and were therefore not supposed to go swimming in the lake with the other kids. Santosh was the best swimmer out of the group, but Sangam, Sugam, Mahesh, Sabeena and Sudeep couldn't swim at all, and he refused to go swimming if they couldn't come too. Thus, given my background as a lifeguard and swimming teacher, my secondary role alongside researcher became the designated Mansawar Street swimming teacher, which I quite enjoyed. They all seemed more grateful for this than for anything else I ever gave them.



(Photo: Santosh and Sangam learning to swim in the lake, wearing life jackets)

At first, Sugam was very afraid of the water, and it took a lot of gentle support and coaxing from myself, Santosh and Sangam to get him to even put his head underwater. The others had an easier time of it, but seemed very sensitive and responsive to Sugam's fear and hesitancy towards the water. Once they had gotten the hang of something (a back float, for example), they all would do everything they could to encourage and teach Sugam before they went on to learn anything new. We created a kind of group-oriented learning process and progression, as opposed to an individual-oriented learning model. With less effort than I had expected, they were swimming breaststroke back and forth and treading water for almost five minutes. Then finally, after a lot of practice in shallow water and much anticipation, we were all able to go to the lake and jump off the dock into the deep water. This was a big moment for everyone, as

they had watched their peers do this for years and had never been able to because they weren't strong enough swimmers.



(Photo: Left: Sangam and Sudeep just after we jumped in Fewa Lake; Right: Sangam, Santosh and Mahesh about to jump off the dock)

I had gotten their parent's approval for this beforehand, and looking back this was a moment where I realised the amount of trust these young people's families had placed in me. They had to trust that I had taught them sufficiently, and that I would watch over them diligently when we went to the deeper water. They had to have 100% trust in me that I would look after the well being of their children and not let them drown. Yet they gave this trust quite readily, without

near as much as hesitation as I've gotten from many of the parents of young people I've taught in the United States.

These young people's knowledge of how to swim, of how to mitigate the constraints and feelings of inadequacy or self-consciousness amongst their friends, and of how to support each other's different learning processes and facilitate group teaching, are further examples of the valuable lessons these young people cultivated outside of school, autonomously of adult supervision and institutions.

The Skater Boys

"Because friendships and other peer relationships necessarily involve more than one individual, they should be investigated in terms of their social contexts. As we see it, research on children should move away from the assessment of individual attitudes and towards a study of interpersonal and intergroup relations if we are to gain a deep understanding of children's lives" (Van Ausdale & Feagin 2001: 127).

Occasionally Santosh and the Mansawar Street gang would encounter young people similar to them in age from the west. One of these occasions emerged from the small skateboard competition that was being held in Pokhara. There was one boy from the United States who was competing alongside all the other Nepali boys, and his name was Colin. His family had recently moved to Pokhara from California, and he had been very into skateboarding at home. It was interesting to watch the dynamics of these young boys competing with one another. Santosh is a very modest and humble competitor, though he is excellent at skateboarding. Colin was probably his toughest opponent in

winning the competition, and he approached the challenge much more intensely. Santosh and Sangam were both competing, but Sangam was just doing it because he couldn't sit still long enough to watch. He wants to be a part of everything. Santosh, on the other hand, had been looking forward to this competition for months and took it very seriously. It meant the world to him, so much so that he would wake up early before he had to go to work at the café around 6 to practice skateboarding in the street before the café opened and before school. Though Santosh cared very much about skateboarding, he wasn't a very competitive person by nature. The day of the competition I think he was a little taken aback by how intense Colin was and how fiercely he competed. He would become outwardly angry and upset each time he would make a mistake, whereas Santosh would just smile and do a goofy shrug of his shoulders. He would always encourage Colin when he looked upset and even picked his skateboard up for him a few times when it was rolling away from him. Colin's parents were American and sitting next to me watching. They were also very intense and seemed intent on Colin winning the competition.

Santosh ended up winning the competition! Later when speaking about it, Santosh said that he could understand that Colin just had a different way of competing than him and that he felt sorry that he felt so bad about losing. He went out of his way to invite Colin along back to All in One after the competition to celebrate and meet some of his friends. He told me that he imagined it would be very hard for him moving from California to a new place like Nepal that was so different. He worried that Colin didn't have any friends and felt lonely. He told me that if he ever moved somewhere far away he hoped that people there would be nice to him and include him in things. So he reached out to him, and they started practicing skateboarding together in front of the café from that point on.

On my second trip to Nepal Santosh had made a really close friend called Tihani. Tihani was twenty-three years old and an indigenous person from Australia who had been living in Nepal for several years. He was an excellent skateboarder, and Santosh really looked up to him. He was very kind and supportive of both Santosh and Colin, including them in all the skateboarding groups, practices and competitions and encouraging them to keep practicing. He was very tall with short black hair and a lot of tattoos. He was engaged to a Nepali woman who was also a skater. Santosh always remarked on how much he had learned from Tihani about skateboarding and how cool he was because he really made an effort to teach and include the younger kids in the skateboarding scene. At times, Santosh would tell me that he felt frustrated because he thought his teachers were judgmental of the fact that he skateboarded and critical of the “types of people” he was spending time with, suggesting that it was detracting from his studies. But Santosh didn't understand this because he thought Tihani and the skater boys were some of the kindest, coolest people he knew, and he loved to skateboard more than anything. He didn't think it was fair that his teachers were judging them on the basis of what they wore, if they had tattoos, or how they looked, and he thought it was important for him to make time for skateboarding. I agreed with him.

Same, Same but Different

Inclusion and kindness were a priority on Mansawar Street among these young people, and I witnessed incidents that evidenced this time and time again. There's one boy, Jeevan, in the group on the street who has downs syndrome, and he is the brother of Sudeep. The kids on the street went out of their way to include and accommodate him in everything they did. I only ever

witnessed kindness from the boys whenever they would speak about his difference. They would speak very openly about the fact that he has downs syndrome and goes to a different school, but they wouldn't say this in a way that was ever traced with cruelty or judgment. At times I would notice Jeevan watching the others play from a distance. Then without a pause, Santosh would wave a gesture for him to come over and join, and Jeevan would smile widely and go running down the street with all the others. I remember being astonished by the kindness, acceptance and inclusivity of these young people, and by the effort they put in to keeping it that way, despite the adults on the street and at school who would often discourage them from making time for these kinds of experiences and interactions.

The next afternoon as we were all walking home from a day of swimming at the lake, Santosh asked if we could stop at a small bakery on the side of the street so that he could buy treats for everyone. "I've been saving up for this," he told me. There were six of us, and he got everyone a little cake, costing a total of around 150rps (approximately \$1.50). Each of the boys seemed to be very grateful for this gesture from Santosh, saying, "thanks Shanti!" and putting their arms around his shoulders. Shanti is Santosh's nickname, and in Nepali it means "peace." Santosh looked back at me with a big grin on his face and we all headed back down the dirt path to All in One.



(Photo: Santosh picking out treats for everyone on our way back from swimming)

At times I found myself wondering if and to what extent Santosh and these young people might have been performing for me, and visa versa. I wondered if I wasn't there would they have been so kind and on such good behavior, and I questioned how their view of my research and my status as a PhD student might have also impacted upon their behavior. However, I never detected a hint of them being disingenuous. Occasionally I would sit from inside the All in One café and watch them playing on the street when they didn't know I was there, and their interactions with each other didn't appear to be any different, and I wasn't the only one on the street to have such a high opinion of them.

Though I realise I've painted quite an angelic picture of this group of young people, they were not perfect and could also be cruel and disrespectful to each

other and to their families. Sometimes there were quarrels within the group and among different friend groups that could be quite hurtful. This was uncommon, but it happened, particularly as they started getting older and feelings of insecurity and self-consciousness rose. One time, for example, Mahesh started calling Sangam “Guido,” which is basically a derogatory term insulting him for having such light skin. Sangam was the only one on the street who had noticeably lighter skin than all the others. Sangam just brushed it off most of the time, but I could tell that it bothered him and made him feel distant and disconnected from the rest of the group somehow.

Over the months and years of my being on Mansawar Street and keeping in touch with this group of young people, I also noticed them begin speaking about themselves and their life in Pokhara as being insufficient or “uncool.” They increasingly began orienting themselves elsewhere and spending less time roaming around in the woods, and more time in specialised, expensive tutoring. As they became teenagers and as their metrics for comparison increased, they started to be much more aware of their relative social position in the group and of their corresponding opportunities for ‘advancement’, whereas when they were younger this didn’t seem to have entered into the sphere of interaction as a defining feature. When they got into the higher grades at school they began comparing their report cards and joking around about how Sudeep would never leave Nepal because his grades were so bad. I noticed each of them at times, after asking me what they had done wrong, hiding the homework assignments and exams they had done poorly on from the others in the group and from their parents.

This section has shown some of the ways in which these young people independently learn and experience valuable lessons outside of school: lessons

in which they aren't made to feel ashamed, unworthy or insufficient. But unfortunately, this space of free, independent, experiential learning is being squeezed and becoming more and more scarce due to the tremendous space and weight formal schooling and good grades takes up in these young people's everyday lives and horizons. For a while, Santosh was going to tutoring at 6:00am for two hours before going to work at the café from 8-9:30am, then heading to school from 10:00am to 4:00pm. He also had tutoring for another subject in the evening from 5-6:30pm, then would often have a few hours of homework, leaving him hardly any time for socialising, play, skateboarding, or to do any of the things he claims to enjoy. This isn't unique to Santosh: many young people are enrolled in additional tutoring courses outside of their six day school week to accelerate them in certain key subjects. Despite the fact that there are subjects in school that Santosh really enjoys learning about, the way he is being forced to learn about them—and the pressure attached to his ability to quantifiably demonstrate his knowledge—may, from my view, be detracting from his ability to be his complete, confident self.

Since I left Pokhara, I skype with Santosh every Saturday at 5:00pm Nepali time. We talk about everything, just like we used to do across the table from each other in Pokhara. He tells me about his new best friend. His name is Sudip and he likes him because he's so supportive, kind and really funny. He is a friend from school, and Santosh says that that's why he doesn't mind so much going to school, "Because that's where I get to see my friends that don't live on the street." He tells me about how excited he is that one of his skateboarding icons replied to one of his twitter messages asking him to come to Nepal. He sends me pictures of all the flowers in bloom, of the dogs and of them wandering around in the forest. He always tells me whenever he passes one of his exams, and he often talks to me about how difficult his tutoring sessions are.

He'll tell me about how tired he is because of waking up so early for his math tutoring at 5:00am. He tells me about how, if he can't become a professional skateboarder, he wants to become a scientist and study astronomy, or maybe become a cinematographer. He likes to sit and wonder about "everything that's out there that we don't know about yet, that we can't even imagine."

Obligation and Vulnerability

"We all look out for each other around here. Everything is interconnected."—
Suresh Bohm

Underneath the ecologies and intimacies that gave meaning to the lives I encountered in Pokhara were the vulnerabilities and obligations that gave them substance and weight. To realise and account for the fact that your wellbeing is tied up in the wellbeing of others—both human and non-human—is to be vulnerable. To make decisions on the behalf of those you care about out of an emotionally driven sense of obligation was a feature of the everyday lives of most of the young people and families I encountered in Pokhara, and just as they shared a collective sense of resiliency in difficult times as a result of this obligation to one another, so too did they share a collective experience of vulnerability.

Decision-Making Spaces

There were few people I spoke to in Pokhara that didn't indicate that their loved ones factored into their decisions and compelled certain choices, especially

those regarding the future and their livelihood and subsistence strategies, and each person I spoke to was constrained and motivated in different ways when making these choices.

Bohm, Santosh's second eldest brother, and I spoke often about this. He felt very torn between, on the one hand, wanting to meet his family's expectations of him by contributing to the small business they ran, and on the other, chasing his dreams and pursuing the kinds of changes he thought needed to be made in Nepal. He knew that his family was perpetually in a tight financial situation, always reliant and at the mercy of the ebbs and flows of tourists that might pass through Pokhara and bring business to their small café. Any little bit he could contribute to help cover their expenses would take some of the pressure off of them each month. Yet Bohm was someone who didn't want that kind of life and responsibility. He spoke to me about how he wanted something more, something different. He did some volunteer teaching up in his parent's home village in a public school for a little while, and ever since then he decided that he wanted to get out and make some kind of a difference. He was a very curious, independent-minded person. He refused to do work that he thought was demeaning or furthering the kinds of problems he was trying to solve. He wrote poetry, dabbled in all kinds of experiences and never missed an opportunity to get to know one of the colorful characters passing through Pokhara. He floated around looking for meaning, and consequently his family never really seemed to know where he was.

There was a constant struggle between Suresh and Bohm on this issue. Suresh was the responsible one, the eldest brother, always sacrificing his personal needs and freedoms to maintain the family business. He kept track of the finances, made sure Santosh's school fees were paid, made sure they could

pay rent on the small room they rented for the café, and made many personal sacrifices to ensure their family would be able to make ends meet. He was the one waking up at 5:30am every day, cleaning all the tables, sweeping the floors, picking beautiful flowers and sitting them in dishes of water on each of the tables (though sometimes Santosh would wake up early and help with this). Santosh helped out whenever he could, and worked several hours a day on average at the café. It's where he would hang out when he wasn't at school, so it was easy for him to move between his homework, taking people's orders, and catching up with his friends who lived down the street and also hung around the café. Their mother would do most of the cooking and food preparation at the cafe. Bohm would kind of come and go, never a reliable presence or contributor to the maintenance of the café. By and large, the café was very much Suresh's responsibility, even though it provided for the entire family. Once he told me that if he could do anything he would go and study music at UC Berkeley and not worry about money. "But I know that is a crazy dream. I am needed here. Maybe when Santosh is finished with school and making money, I will think about doing something else," he told me.

In contrast, Bohm valued experiences in their own right, regardless of the instrumental value they might have for him later down the road. He did not believe in quantifiably comparing everyone and their abilities, and he didn't believe that he should sacrifice his passions and interests to instead revolve his life around something that might earn him a small amount of money. His family, on the other hand, saw this as quite a luxurious and irresponsible position since he wasn't the one concerned with paying the bills and making sure Santosh had food in his belly. Bohm thought Santosh needed to prioritise his creative and independent thinking and cultivate his interests, whereas Suresh wanted him to focus on his formal schooling. Santosh wanted to do both, I think, but felt torn

between his older brothers' hopes for him. He saw the value on both sides, but it was Suresh's expectations that he felt most heavily, as these could be measured.

Suresh was partly doing what he was doing out of an obligation to Santosh, on the basis of what he thought was most essential to him being able to have the kind of future he dreamed of. This was another instance in which the kinds of knowledge and experiences valued and refracted through the global schooling framework of opportunity and possibility made everything else seem like a waste of time somehow. In Suresh's decision-making process, schooling—and the ability for Santosh to pursue economic opportunities via schooling—was entangled with notions of worth and Santosh's ability to have a good life. Though Bohm disagreed, he was framed as the reckless, irresponsible one. “Santosh will never become a professional skateboarder,” Suresh told Bohm. Within this clash between two brothers is visible the primary way in which global schooling pulls on people: it pulls on the expectations and hopes young people feel are placed on them by the people responsible for them, who are making decisions and sacrifices on their behalf, and the sacrifices those caretakers are making are often labour and livelihood oriented, compelling them to place earning an income over all else. In these decision-making spaces, then, the value is placed on institutionalised, quantifiable knowledge, over non-exclusive, experiential knowledge. The fact that these knowledge values were so present in Santosh's family's decision making is indicative of how profoundly the global schooling project is impacting the intimate, everyday lives of young people, by redefining which ways of knowing and spending time are valued and allowed space for, and which are discredited and framed as irresponsible.

When resisting the undesirable, alienating or oppressive features of capitalism means not being able to give your child the education you feel they deserve, or

jeopardising your family's ability to put food on the table, or being seen as a failure or slacker in the eyes of your brother or parents; when people are forced to choose between saying no to exploitative livelihood and subsistence arrangements and having the financial means to take care of their family, this creates a very difficult emotional decision-making space.

Communal Everyday Lives

In Pokhara, on Mansawar Street in particular, there was a very tangible sense of communal life. You got the feeling that people were looking out for each other, partly because they had to. There was a shared understanding that their individual wellbeing was tied up in their collective wellbeing. Though there was a lot of precarity and vulnerability built into people's livelihoods on Mansawar Street, they often mitigated that fragility through a commitment to the collectivity. There were small details of the place that I thought illustrated this, for example the name of the Pun family's café: All in One; or the name of some of the guesthouses: Family Peace Guesthouse; Friendship and Harmony Guesthouse. This was also very present in young people's interactions with each other and in how they mitigated each other's experiences of presence and absence.

For example, many of Santosh's friends' fathers were not present because they were away working in Gulf countries, sending money back to their families. In their absence, Santosh's Dad, one of the few who was still living in Pokhara, seemed to assume this fatherly role to many of the young boys in the neighborhood. Both Sangam and Mahesh's fathers were away working abroad, one in Dubai and one in Malaysia. Sangam and Mahesh were two of Santosh's closest friends, and they all spent a lot of time together. Sangam and Mahesh would frequently be hanging around the café, and often I'd notice Suresh and

both of Santosh's parents being very affectionate towards them, serving them tea and occasionally food when they would be hungry. Sangam's mother would do the same for Santosh whenever he would pop into her bakery on the corner.

Santosh's father had also given jobs at All in One to two of his sister's sons from back in their home village to give them a chance to earn some income and practice their English. Though very modest jobs because All in One is a very modest place, to have this opportunity to live and make a small bit of money in Pokhara was a big deal for them. It made things more difficult financially for Santosh's family, but I think they saw it as the least they could do. Many people on Mansawar Street seemed to have very little to give, but were willing to give it nonetheless. Excess and greed were not indicators of success here.

The young people on the street appeared to have internalised this sense of collective responsibility, generosity and caretaking. On Mansawar Street there was a toddler who would run around aimlessly, freely up and down the busy street laced with stray dogs, and often it was up to Sangam, Santosh and Mahesh to look after this "little man" as we called him. Half the time he didn't have pants on; the other half he would be peeing spontaneously right in the middle of the street because diapers are nowhere to be found in Nepal. He was the son of a couple who owned one of the small shops just down the street from the All In One café, where the boys spent a lot of time. A common scene was that little man would come stumbling (he was just learning to walk) down the street rambling the incoherent beginnings of speech with a big smile on his face, to be greeted by Sangam, who would sweep him up on his skateboard and hold his hands as they both went careening down the busy street. About ten minutes later his mother would come walking down the street looking for him, though she never seemed concerned. She trusted that the boys would look

after him; they always did. There was no way of stopping this little man from roaming around at will, so his street became a site of collective caretaking, allowing this little person to move freely through this space, reassured that someone, or everyone, on the street was looking out for him. In this way, these so-called 'children', all between seven and twelve years old, were some of the principle carers of the very small children on Mansawar Street, demonstrating a very different approach to and conceptualisation of 'childcare' than what is often understood in the Global North.



(Photo: Sangam taking Little Man for a ride on his skateboard)



(Photo: Mahesh, Sangam, Sudeep, Jeevan and Little Man sitting on the curb on Mansawar Street)

There was also a sense that everyone's livelihood on Mansawar Street was intertwined somehow. Because there was such a reliance on tourists—whether you ran a café, a guesthouse, a trekking guide company, a juice stand, a jewelry shop or a bakery— everyone seemed aware that they were all collectively at the mercy of the trickles of these people coming and going. Whenever there was a change in the Nepali political situation everyone would become concerned that this would impact people coming to Nepal. Whenever there was any kind of incident up on one of the trekking routes, especially Everest, Annapurna or Langtang, everyone would worry that it would discourage people from coming to visit Nepal. When these occasions would occur, everyone seemed to help each other out. Those whose livelihoods weren't as severely impacted would help out those whose livelihoods were.

They'd cut them a break on the cost of laundry, or the cost of water, or maybe they'd lend them a small amount of money to get them through the rough patch. This collective mitigation of what everyone understood to be insecure livelihoods seemed to be common practice.

Those families with guesthouses and who worked in the tourist industry almost seemed to have fallen into this kind of precarious situation because it was the best way to make an income in Nepal without having to go far away and splinter their family into pieces. Even if there was a great deal of precarity and vulnerability, at least this way their family could stay in one place. Though there was an awareness among the community of the looming unsustainability built into livelihoods that were entirely dependent upon the presence or absence of tourists and external capital, it was somehow collectively sanctioned.

In this way, the communal ties that held things together and created a sense of presence and completion in people's lives on Mansawar Street were also partly responsible for maintaining and sanctioning an insecure way of securing everyday needs that could be severely disrupted at any moment, with devastating consequences. The glaring problematic, which was that the primary ways in which people went about securing their everyday needs, like food and water, in Pokhara was reliant upon unreliable sources, was widely acknowledged. Yet schooling and development practices in Nepal often perpetuated and encouraged the pursuit of livelihoods with a high degree of precarity and vulnerability built into them. Intimacies and obligations were often what held these fragilities in place by diminishing people's feelings of freedom to change or challenge these unsustainable livelihoods for fear of not pulling their weight, or simply due to a widespread feeling that there weren't any better options.

The intimacies, interdependencies and interpersonal webs woven among and between the occupants of Mansawar Street, then, underpinned both a communal sense of resiliency and a collective vulnerability, and the collective safety net, in some cases, was allowing for a neglect and postponement of addressing the underlying, structural vulnerability and precarity of their livelihoods. Until of course disaster struck, and the intensity with which it hit threw the fragilities and agencies of Mansawar Street into sharp focus.

Chapter 7
Intensities and Agencies



(Photo: Mahesh, Sangam, Santosh, Sugam and Sudeep walking in sync down main street in Pokhara)

Intensities can make visible the fragilities, resiliencies and agencies of a place and the people who live there. When something begins to shake with tremendous force, the pieces that were on the verge of coming apart suddenly dissemble, crumble and fall, leaving some people more exposed and vulnerable. Intensities deepen existing cracks in structures, forging them open in ways that leave a pit of collective and individual fragility. At the same time, they add a weight and awareness to the intimacies, presences and communal systems that are relied upon every day to allow people to exist around those cracks. They can bring to the surface individual and collective resiliencies and agencies that were not known before. They can throw into view the inadequacies and inabilities of local governance and institutions to support the needs of people and worlds, challenging communities to find new ways to meet the demands each day brings. They can ignite new fears and embolden preexisting hopes. They can highlight dependencies and vulnerabilities, and spur agencies and creativities into motion.

This chapter begins by describing the earthquake that struck Nepal on April 25th, 2015, which brought the intensities and fragilities of my own status in Nepal into sharp relief, altering the shape and duration of my ethnography. I was neither permitted nor able to return to Pokhara after the event. But I share conversations I had with the Pun family from a distance and speak to how Mansawar Street's shared fragilities and vulnerabilities were thrown into focus and intensified with this disruption—fragilities that neoliberal global schooling was arguably perpetuating—while also emphasising Mansawar Street's resiliencies and agencies in coping with the cracks in the structural foundations of their everyday lives and livelihoods.

I show how young people on Mansawar Street, despite *even more difficult* circumstances in the aftermath of the earthquake, continued to find creative, agential ways of taking control over their learning and exposures outside of school, pursuing self-teaching and learning opportunities in a way that transcended—or at least mediated—their frustrations with their schooling experiences and the demands placed upon them from elsewhere. I bring attention to the often hidden political life of young people, arguing that the unilateral depoliticisation of young people by adults and the subsequent exclusion and trivialisation of young people’s voices on the social and political matters shaping their world isn’t doing justice to their competency and concern for these issues. I further argue the need to complicate dichotomous conceptions of agency that tend to separate children from adults, knowledge from innocence, structure from agency, being from becoming etc. (Oswell 2012: ch 1). I assert that adult-centric notions of agency, and, relatedly, notions of children as becomings rather than beings, without the possession of agencies and competencies that can and should also impact upon the worlds of adults, are problematic (Alderson 2013) and do not align with the actual lived experiences of young people on Mansawar Street.

This chapter, most significantly sheds light on how, despite all the intricate ways in which these young people’s everyday lives and choices are shaped and transformed by forces seemingly outside of their control, they find creative ways to negotiate these structural constraints, take control over their learning experiences, cultivate their political voices and discover small spaces of joy, hope, meaning and resistance. In sum, I hope to share a slightly different account—and different stories—of the earthquake in Nepal and its impacts than what was dominantly portrayed, and a different understanding of young

people's agency and political lives than is often considered in academic and policy spaces.

The Earthquake

Farewell

It's April 23rd 2015, and I'm just preparing to journey from Pokhara to Kathmandu for a few days to say goodbye to several friends who are leaving Nepal and to conduct a few more interviews with UNESCO staff. I'm planning to return to Pokhara on April 26th to spend another month on Mansawar Street. The bus leaves at 6am, and I have to slip a note under the café door to say goodbye to Santosh because he was still sleeping. He had wanted to wake up and come with me to the bus station that morning before school. I catch Suresh walking down the street towards the café as I head to the bus station, and I was glad to at least be able to say goodbye to him, and to ask him to pass along my goodbyes to all the others. At the time I did not realise and couldn't have imagined that this would turn out to be such a long and incomplete farewell.

On the bumpy eight-hour bus journey, I began reflecting on all that had happened so far: on the small, remarkable community I had become a part of on Mansawar Street. I was already looking forward to returning and hearing about what everyone on the street had gotten up to while I was away. Santosh called me on the bus when he woke up and we had a nice brief chat before he went to school. He was worried about an exam he had that day in Math. He told me that he would look after Babu and all the dogs while I was away. We were planning on going swimming with all the others when I returned.

As I approach Kathmandu after the long journey, I see glimpses of the sun setting over Kathmandu Valley, with the white peaks of the Himalayas jutting out over top, as if floating in the sky. We are stopped in a traffic jam just outside of the city, and as I look out the window I am struck by the sight of a man sweeping up trash with a small wire broom. The wires of the broom are long, but the handle is short so that he has to bend over to use it. He's very thin with holes in his clothes and shoes and dirt on his face. He must be in his late twenties or early thirties. His gaze is very focused, with three deep wrinkles on his forehead, and one vertically between his eyes. I wonder about his life, his story, his family, his dreams, when was the last time he laughed, and how he ended up where he was in that moment. Few of the cars or people bustling around seemed to notice him or how they were interfering with what he was trying to do. He'd spend several minutes gathering a pile of trash and a car would come and destroy it in an instant.

As I write this final chapter, it's been over two years since the 7.8 magnitude earthquake that struck Nepal on April 25th, 2015. Each time I try to write this chapter my mind is still occupied by all the people I left behind; all the kids and dogs to whom I didn't get to say goodbye, and who didn't have the luxury of getting on an airplane with a passport to escape the destruction and find solid ground elsewhere. This difference between the residents of Mansawar Street and myself, which we were able to cast aside and not explicitly address for much of my ethnography, was also one of the things thrown into focus with the earthquake, disrupting and altering my relationships with these people and this place in meaningful ways.

This chapter has been a challenge to write because it is both connected and disconnected from my research experience in Nepal and the questions that I was trying to answer. It changed the way(s) in which I was able to engage with Mansawar Street, revealing my privilege and ability to leave and their inability to do the same. It also profoundly changed my methods by forcing this intimate ethnography to an abrupt end—at least experientially. But at the same time, the intensity of it all revealed, in even more stark contrast, the relative experiences of fragility, resiliency and privilege I had been witnessing all along. These became things I had to witness and try to understand from afar, through email, skype and other translocal ways of keeping in touch. So though certain insights and ways of sharing and communicating meaningful events and experiences were distilled and refined in being forced to communicate with the Pun family and Mansawar Street via email or skype after the earthquake, certain other experiential insights and ways of understanding the impacts and intensities of the earthquake were inevitably lost.

Kathmandu, April 25th 2015

It was April 25th, and I had just checked out of a guesthouse where I was staying in central Kathmandu. I was going to stay with a Nepali family I had become friends with in Bodhanath, the Lama family, who were kind enough to host me at their home, just on the outskirts of Kathmandu. I was up early that morning taking notes and reflecting on the previous day, and after having a cup of masala tea I decided to wander down to the Stupa, which was only a twenty minute walk from the Lama family's home. I was on the hunt for arts and crafts materials and marshmallows to bring back to Pokhara because I had promised Santosh and Sangam we would make smores. I was just wandering down the

street, completely alone, looking forward to heading back to Pokhara the following day.

But then suddenly the ground turned to water and it sounded as though thunder was coming from beneath me. At first I thought there was some kind of gas tank that was about to explode because I heard this unrecognisable, horrible sound, and then up in front of me on the street I saw a crowd of people all run out of a small, tin shop on the side of the road. But then I saw the street begin to tremble and the bricks started to burst loose from each other around their edges, as if they were trying to break free. The birds shot out from the trees and circled frantically overhead, and I began to process and understand what was happening.

Telephone poles and wires were crashing down and getting tangled in each other. People were darting out from inside unstable buildings and screaming, trying to gather anyone of concern to them as they ran. I looked up and saw a wall of bricks held together by mud with barbed wire jutting out of the top. One minute we were all walking down the street, carrying a feeling of stability and security, and the next we were being swept away in a current of chaos and panic, with nothing but a profound feeling of being completely trapped by the uncertainty of what might come next. I was wishing I to be back in my small community on Mansawar Street.

After the initial shaking subsided I rushed back to the home of the Lama family. They were gathered outside in a nearby grassy open-space with others from their neighborhood, and almost everyone was in tears. Fortunately no one in the family had been seriously injured, but no one really knew exactly what had happened, how bad it was, or whether everyone they knew was safe. The

phone and electricity lines were down, and it was very difficult to get any information about the severity of the situation. My thoughts were mostly occupied by concerns about how badly everyone back on Mansawar Street had been affected, whether Santosh was ok and how I was going to get back to them. I tried to call Santosh at the cafe, but the phones were not working.

That night, approximately fifty of us from the neighborhood slept outside on the grassy ground under tarps to shield us from the unfortunate rain that wouldn't stop falling. Smaller groups formed among those families who were close friends, and these groups would come together to collectively make tea, rice and a bit of dahl over a small fire to get everyone through the night. Those with extra hot water or rice would share with those who didn't have any; those with extra blankets would lay them over whoever looked the coldest. A radio blared crackled news and frantic updates in Nepali that I couldn't understand. I can't remember if it was placed in the center of the group or if people circled around it... But it was left on constantly, until the battery died. In the evenings the young adults and teenagers sat around under the tarp playing small wooden instruments and singing traditional Nepali songs, and within ten minutes nearly everyone had joined in, smiling and singing, despite the heavy rain seeping into our beds. This collective caretaking and space sharing continued on for five days.



(Photo: The field we all shared in Bodhanath after the earthquake)

I was struck by how children and young people somehow kept finding ways to transform this experience into an opportunity for play and fun. To my left there was a group of ten to fifteen year olds playing cards and laughing. To my right, there were two six-year old boys sword fighting with sticks quite dramatically, and in front of me, three little girls between the ages three and five twirling around in circles until they became so dizzy they'd fall to the ground giggling. I began to realise after speaking to some of these younger children that they saw this more as a big sleepover with everyone they knew than as a disaster. They had been shielded by the adults from knowledge of the seriousness of what had happened. But what seemed to matter most to these young people in these tense moments was that those people dearest to them were all present and well. Even though the physical structures in which they lived were cracked and

uninhabitable, these children were fortunate because their emotional care centers were still intact. Others in harder hit areas had not been so fortunate.

On the third night suddenly the phones began working again, and the first thing I did was contact Santosh and his family. I was extremely relieved to know that no one had been injured. Santosh seemed very shocked and shaken up by what had happened when I spoke to him on the phone. He described his experience of the earthquake: “When the earthquake happened I was walking back from the skate park with four of my relatives. Then people all started running towards us down the street and screaming. At first I thought maybe someone had been killed, but then I looked around and saw a window cracked and I felt the bumps under my feet. I was so scared. My hands were shaking; I couldn’t breath. I thought I wasn’t going to be ok. I thought I was going to die. We all ran down the street towards the café. When we got there the worst had gone. One of the scariest moments of my life,” he told me. He then went on to tell me how it taught him that you have to be ready for disasters because they can come anytime. “The power of mother nature. We have no control over it,” he said. He also told me that everyone we knew was safe. “The buildings are a little bit cracked and school is closed and many people have gone, but we are safe. The dogs, too,” he told me, in a quieter tone than I was used to hearing from him. He then asked me when I would be coming back. For the first time since knowing Santosh, I didn’t know what to say to him or how to explain why I was being encouraged to leave Nepal – a choice he did not have.

The day I was to leave Nepal, eight days after the earthquake, I called Santosh from the airport. I explained to him that because of how badly the roads had been damaged and ongoing concerns about continued aftershocks, I would not be able to return to Pokhara. He was quiet for a short time, and then said, “I

understand. So when will we see each other again?" I told him that I would come back as soon as I could, and that in the meantime we could communicate and keep in touch by skype and email. "I will still be around, just in a different way," I said. He said that he understood. He told me to come back as soon as I could and to stay safe, and that he would look after everyone on the street.

Fragilities and Constraints

People's lives and the inner and outer worlds that sustain them are fragile. Emotional worlds can be turned upside down in an instant when someone you love is caught in a tragic accident. Physical structures can come tumbling down in a moment as the constant pressure building beneath your feet suddenly demands expression. Your entire livelihood can get disassembled when the ground starts to tremble beneath your feet and the customers stop coming, or the rain won't stop falling, and suddenly the fields you cultivate, or your entire livelihood, disappears before your eyes. There are thresholds of control one has over circumstance. What does it mean to be in control? What does it mean to be made fragile? What does a sense of things being outside of one's control affect subjective experiences of being in the world? What does agency mean in a context where so many things feel over determined?

Cracks on Mansawar Street

During my time in Pokhara, development practices in the area were still materialising in the shadow of the logic of linear, market-based, growth-oriented programs requiring consumption, tourism and the ever increasing presence of—and dependence on—external capital and aspirations towards western

liberalism's "individual empowerment" (Hickel 2014: 1356). There was very little attention being paid by the residents of Mansawar Street to long-term community development, to the decentering of the provision of basic necessities, to disaster preparedness, or to the establishment of secure, sustainable livelihoods. Rather, whether it was "women's empowerment" initiatives, said to be based on Sen's (1999, 2005) *Development as Freedom* and capabilities approach, that facilitated young women making and selling cashmere scarves to tourists, or programs with an emphasis on market-building and microfinancing (Mader 2014; Stoll 2013), development aspirations were moving forward in Pokhara under the very precarious assumption that the foundational element of capital, brought by tourists, would remain a constant, and furthermore, under the impression that the onus was on the individual to bootstrap themselves out of poverty and underdevelopment. When the earthquake hit, the shortsightedness and exploitation inherent in this approach were brought to the surface on Mansawar Street.

For Santosh and his family, and many of the families I got to know on Mansawar Street, the intensity of the earthquake rippled even more profoundly through their livelihoods than it did through their homes, buildings or infrastructures. It brought to the surface a very deep crack in the structural foundations of how they went about meeting their everyday needs: the neoliberal values that were fundamentally structuring their everyday choices. After the earthquake, suddenly there were no more tourists walking up and down Mansawar Street, entering with intrigue into their small shops and cafés. There were no more couples from Australia on holiday needing a trekking guide, no more twenty year olds from Belgium on a mission to "find themselves," studying yoga and paying the bills of local people in Pokhara with their reliable

business and savings from banks abroad. Suddenly sources of income for local people disappeared.

Suresh told me that immediately following the earthquake people began flooding out of the city via the small airport located on the outskirts of the city. Despite the fact that it was thought that the worst was over, and the reality that Pokhara was one of the areas least impacted by the earthquake given its distance from the epicenter, nearly everyone who had a passport and had the option to leave did so. For those who were left behind, which included nearly all the local residents of Mansawar Street, apart from the continuous fear and insecurity of anticipating another severe aftershock, it was not the earthquake itself that was jeopardising their lives and livelihoods; rather it was all the ways in which the threat and perceived instability that came with it encouraged people to leave their city and discouraged many others from ever visiting. The presences they had come to rely upon, and on which they had built their livelihoods, suddenly vanished with no expectation of return. Their river had dried up. This was illustrated in an email Suresh sent me about two weeks after the earthquake, just after another severe aftershock had struck:

"Yeah, the second one came and scared everyone.

The things were slowly getting back to normal but after the second earthquake, people are in panic again and scared.

Thankfully that in Pokhara everyone is safe and no harm to us.

It was unexpected and so now we feel insecure.

Yeah, everything is down now, especially the business.

After earthquake there is no more people except volunteer friends,

I think it gonna be quite bad economic situation at least for 6 months to a year,

It is so scary now because aftershocks are keep coming back."

Tourism in development contexts means a dependency on ‘first world’ privilege, and all that surrounds that. As discussed in previous chapters, in urban Pokhara, many people’s livelihoods revolve around the constant trickle of tourists and various forms of external capital to make ends meet, and this trickle of income is needed to obtain basic essentials. Though those in rural areas certainly faced their own insecurities, in my experience, many people I spoke to were actually flooding out of urban Kathmandu and Pokhara to return to their home villages in rural areas simply to secure food, clean water and stable shelter. It was a kind of 180-degree shift from the patterns and priorities I had witnessed previously, where everyone seemed to be desperately trying to find a way to get into the city. Suddenly, in light of the earthquake, earning an income didn’t matter as much as having reliable, decentralised access to food and water, which was not available in urban spaces. Plans for betterment and the pursuit of abundance in the future were replaced with the immediate prioritisation of making sure you and the ones you love had enough to survive; that your basic needs were being met, and that you had a certain degree of control over how those needs were met.

Santosh later brought up a conversation we had had previously about all the green space and soil being covered up with guesthouses and pavement. “It seems like a silly thing to have done now, doesn’t it? Now that everyone is gone. Now we have nowhere to grow food, but lots of empty guesthouses.” The economic, material devastation of the earthquake was felt the most deeply in urban Kathmandu and Pokhara, where over the past few decades many resiliencies had been exchanged for fragilities in the name of ‘development’.

What further complicated this deep fragility on Mansawar Street was the Indian blockade that began on September 23rd 2015, five months after the earthquake. This was an unofficial blockade imposed by the Indian government in response to Nepal's adoption of a new constitution. It effectively barred the trade of fuel, food, medicine and other vital goods across the Nepal-India border and resulted in what was labeled a humanitarian crisis. This significantly impacted Mansawar Street. Not only did this community rely on the constant trickle of income from tourists, they also relied on affordable access to the goods they needed to maintain their businesses (gas, food, water). Suresh sent me an email describing the situation in Nepal as a result of the blockade:

*"Here it is difficult for people to be normal after that big shock.
Situation here is still the same even getting worse,
People are striking and now the blockade is on from India,
It seems like it gonna be like this for some more time,
Just hoping that this situation gets stable soon,
Many people are in trouble specially people from Terai region,
Innocent people who are being used by politicians for their benefit,
It is so sad to see all that is going on,
Students are also in problem because of this blockade and irregular classes,
Business is also in very critical situation,
Many people are leaving their business because of no business and hard to sustain,
It is expensive everywhere, price are doubled in every commodities.
I just hope it will get better soon.
I am hoping to continue with my studies in economics and music.
Hopefully then I can provide for the family."*

Instead of placing blame or critique on the international development programs that had been shaping lives and social worlds on neoliberal terms for the past two decades, in the interiorities of these failures and in Mansawar Street's perceptions of what was going wrong, blame was placed on individuals who did not have the proper "capabilities" to navigate these uncertainties and instabilities, or, that had not sufficiently "freed" themselves in accordance with the Western liberal tradition. But this blame wasn't being placed on them, as such; rather it was an emotional landscape of blame, shame and guilt that resulted as a byproduct of their internalisation of some of these western, liberal values that were shaping their world(s).

Hickel (2014: 1356) points out with reference to the "women's empowerment" shift in development discourse that "in the context of neoliberal globalisation, policies justified on the basis of women's empowerment – such as expanding access to the labour market and to credit – often end up placing women in new forms of subservience as workers, consumers and debtors." This does not apply only to women or women's empowerment initiatives, but could arguably be applied to schooling and its aspirations to "empower" all children as well, which in addition to providing hope and opportunity, often comes with its own shackles. When speaking to Suresh on the phone from the embassy he said, "everyone from the west has left. But where are we supposed to go?" With this, Suresh laid bare and stark the intimate experience of neoliberalism's globalisations, its structurally enforced asymmetries, and even those 'empowerment' initiatives that place the onus of so-called 'development' on the families on Mansawar Street; and with this I also understood the profound ways in which these asymmetries obscure how deeper, but often invisible, 'structures' do violence to everyday choices and agencies, masking the real and intimate effects of big processes of "structural adjustment, debt, tax evasion, labour

exploitation, financial crisis and corruption in the global governance system” (Hickel 2014: 1356).

Though much time has passed since the earthquake, many people on Mansawar Street still face the same outer precariousness and the same inner rejection. Neoliberalism’s intimate effects—on individuals, communities and ecologies— are difficult to escape or resist from within constrained horizons and everyday decision-making spaces. The café struggled in light of the blockade, and Suresh confessed to me that he feels like a failure for having to ask for financial help from his friends and distant family members. His father is again contemplating work abroad to be able to subsidise the family’s income. His mother has started doing the laundry of others on the street to make some extra money, and Santosh doesn't get that new backpack he has been wanting for his birthday, to begin the new school year.

Dreams, Schooling and the Migrant Story

Amidst feelings of entrapment, and in accordance with the western liberal emphasis on individual self-mastery, the global schooling project and its possibilities became all the more alluring, almost as the only reliable, immediate avenue those on Mansawar Street knew to embrace in the hope of improving their lives. On Mansawar Street, getting a good education and doing well enough to go study abroad was seen as the golden ticket. But this emphasis and reliance on individuals to solve problems and endure difficult circumstances coexisted within a very communal and supportive collectivity. Immediately after the earthquake, Mansawar Street came together to mitigate the hardships they each were individually facing. However, once things normalised the emphasis

was again placed on personal growth and individual betterment. The collective support network did not disappear, but it was not seen—nor drawn upon— as a source for solutions. In his emails, Suresh often spoke of his hope that the government would resolve the situation with resignation and helplessness. “We just hope the situation will be resolved soon. There is nothing we can do from here,” he wrote to me. This feeling that the situation was out of their hands wasn’t unique to Suresh. Even young people seemed to be aware of and disenchanted by the “corrupt and inefficient government,” as Sujal in class 6A described it.

It seemed as though there simply wasn’t space in people’s everyday lives— lives that were preoccupied with meeting everyday needs— to collectively protest the government, or find community ways to decentre the provision of basic goods, or to substantively reconfigure their livelihoods. But what they could do was send their children to a good school, find ways to earn extra money and make the most of the daily challenges they encountered. So though both collective and individual resiliencies were present and being drawn upon to confront the intensities and fragilities of the earthquake, the resiliencies being emphasised and turned to for solutions were individualised with an eye towards the horizon, rather than collective with an eye on the cracks beneath their feet on Mansawar Street.

This devotion to finding a way to succeed through schooling also seemed to have intensified after the earthquake, based on my conversations with Santosh. Because the situation was so unpredictable, and everyone had felt the instability beneath their feet, finding ways to escape had become an even more pressing priority, and because there was little faith in the government or any kind of civil society initiative to do anything of use or consequence, and

schooling opportunities with alluring opportunities were abundant and ubiquitous, this became one of the only seemingly sure-footed ways to go about trying to change or improve one's circumstances. The school was one of the only institutions tangibly present on Mansawar Street that its residents could turn to with the hope of meaningfully changing or shaping their circumstances. So these children and their families took the leap and did whatever it took to seize this perceived opportunity, despite how the odds may have been stacked against them. Suresh still dreamed of attending UC Berkeley and studying music, and he went to great effort to put together an application. Santosh dreamed of going to Melbourne to study cinematography, and if that didn't work out he wanted to study Astronomy, maybe in Switzerland. His cousins were trying to go abroad to work in Malaysia to earn some extra money, dreaming of moving to the United States. Bohm wanted to follow a girl he had fallen in love with to the UK, asking me regularly what he would have to do to get citizenship or a work Visa. Santosh's father was again contemplating going to work in the Middle East with the hope of being able to earn enough money to send Santosh to a good college when he finished school.

On Mansawar Street, the schooling project acted as a venue through which these young people could test what they were made of, how far they were willing to go, and what they were willing to endure to be able to prove something to themselves and to everyone else around them about their worth. There was the perception that if they could succeed in school, then somehow the world would open to them, where it had previously been closed. Bohm mentioned after the earthquake that, "if only I had done better in school, maybe I could get a scholarship to go to the UK." I had never heard him regret his resistance to the "education rat race" as he called it, before this point. Suddenly in the face of

the intensities and entrapment of the earthquake, he regretted his complacency and his rejection of the school and its values.

In some ways, the impetus underpinning people's participation in the global schooling project mirrors the impetus underpinning the migrant story. No matter how the odds were stacked against these young people, no matter how the system might have been rigged to ensure that they would not reach their destination, no matter how many people told them that they would not succeed, they made the leap anyway. From within the confines of Mansawar Street's horizons, these individuals were looking for any way to be able to improve their circumstances—or even just to have some semblance of *control* over their circumstances— and they were able to endure and justify almost anything in the pursuit of doing so, even if that meant leaving behind the one's they love the most in the meantime, or enduring horrible working conditions.

Santosh's father missed six years of Santosh's childhood and worked fourteen-hour days in Iraq to be able to earn enough money to give his family a better life and take control over their fate, and he was willing to do it again, no matter what the cost. "I will do whatever I have to do. We will be ok. Santosh is a bright student." Mr. Pun said to me over skype after the earthquake, with Santosh translating. He felt that their story, Santosh's story, would be the exception, not the rule. He believed in his son and his ability to succeed in the world, if given the proper opportunity, and this was a belief that both encouraged Santosh and placed a crushing weight on his shoulders.

Resiliencies and Creativities

“Nothing is so bitter that a calm mind cannot find comfort in it. Small tablets, because of the writer’s skill, have often served many purposes, and a clever arrangement has often made a very narrow piece of land habitable. Apply reason to difficulties; harsh circumstances can be softened, narrow limits can be widened, and burdensome things can be made to press less severely on those who bear them cleverly.”—
Seneca

The full impacts of the earthquake for those who didn't have the option of leaving Nepal wouldn't be fully realised until later, when things had somehow changed but also remained the same. After the earthquake it could be argued that there was an opportunity to facilitate a meaningful, systemic conversation about the failures of the neoliberal economic policies being perpetuated by aid and development practices in Nepal, global schooling practices foremost among them. But instead, residents on Mansawar Street continued moving forward, trying to get through each day, and existing cracks in the structural foundations of this fragile place were deepened, then patched over, then forgotten, and life moved on, fragilities and all.

However, that does not mean that this community of young people on Mansawar Street did not find their own, creative, diverse agencies and resiliencies to meet the challenges each day brought and to find the hope that kept them going. Despite all the intricate ways in which young people on Mansawar Street's everyday lives and choices are shaped and transformed by forces seemingly outside of their control, they found creative, agential ways to negotiate these structural constraints, take control over their learning

experiences, cultivate their (secret) political life and discover small spaces of joy, meaning and resistance, to which I now turn.

'Children' as (a) Political 'Agents'?

As the months rolled by after the earthquake, it seemed as though a kind of precarious stability had returned to Mansawar Street, and that life was carrying on, almost as it had before. Suresh described his assessment of the situation, as Autumn set in and trekking season began again, about eight months after the earthquake:

*"Slowly the situation has got quite normal than before,
The supplies are coming and we are able to get it,
Yeah, the weather is getting warm and clear,
Slowly it has been a week that few people has increased in town,
Which is a good news,
People are back to do trek and other adventure in Nepal,
We are all good and fine,
All we want is peace, stable and working environment,
I hope the government will take a proper actions to do better,
We all are positive and optimistic."*

With a self-control and fortitude resembling Seneca's Stoicism, and a remarkable containment of destructive emotions, Suresh and many on Mansawar Street proceeded to accept what they could not control, to make the most of an unpredictable and unreliable world. They worked to maintain the only control they saw possible: control over themselves and their responses. They proceeded to act only upon that which could be acted upon directly, and

prioritising schooling and education seemed to be in alignment with this form of resiliency. Yet amidst the Stoic carrying on in the many everydays on Mansawar Street, there were also corners of hope, creativity, curiosity and aspiration propelling those everydays forward. Just because they had accepted the situation and were committed to making the most of it, that did not mean they would not still hope to be able to find ways to change it, or to find space for their complete selves within it.

In the months following the earthquake, Santosh and I would skype almost every Saturday. He'd tell me about how he missed having so many interesting people around to talk to from around the world, but that he and his friends were doing okay and enjoying having more space on the streets to skateboard. He told me about all the fun things he did while school was closed and about how he finally had time to relax and catch up on sleep. He told me about a new friend that he had made. For Santosh, whose day mostly revolved around school, play and the café, things were still relatively intact. He still had to study hard, find time to play with his friends on the street and take people's orders at the café before school. Though he did confess to me that he felt a lot of pressure on his shoulders by his family after the earthquake, he seemed very eager to rise to the occasion. He seemed more aware than he had been previously of how much his family was investing their resources and hopes into him, and that his family was struggling with money more than before the earthquake. In response, he was working more hours at the café, voluntarily, to help support his family, despite them encouraging him to focus on school. In this way, these seemingly 'adult' considerations were very much present for him and occupying his everyday attention and energy after the earthquake, and he handled these concerns responsibly, with grace and dedication that many people twice his age would envy.

This is where adult-centric notions of agency, and, relatedly, notions of children as becomings rather than beings, without possession of an agency that should also impact upon the worlds of adults, become questionable. As Alderson (2013: 7) points out, “Children are frequently defined by supposedly non-adult qualities: ‘childish’, ‘immature’, irrational, unreliable, and irresponsible.” But these theorisations of young people’s agency give no credit to the diversity of what are classified as ‘adult’ vs ‘child’ virtues, actions, feelings, and characteristics these young people might draw upon and demonstrate in different moments, in light of hardships or periods of conflict, and how adults, too, certainly demonstrate just as many ‘child-like’ characteristics as young people in certain moments. They imply that a young person’s feelings of obligation and responsibility, and their ability to act on those feelings in a productive way, is somehow inappropriate or burdensome to them, rather than them exercising their ability to show care, compassion, love and responsibility for the members of their social and emotional worlds. The idea that young people should be protected from these hardships, excluded from any ability to mitigate them or contribute to solutions, trivialises their contributions and excludes their agencies in coping with and responding to difficulties—difficulties which will affect them whether they are a part of the solution or not.

Self-Learning and Small Spaces of Resistance and Solidarity

Young people’s ability to respond to the intensities of the earthquake with resiliency and responsibility corresponded with an increased general interest and engagement with the political situation in Nepal, specifically in the politics of their schooling and how they spent their time. This was an interest and

expression that they were often denied—by teachers, parents and most adults on the street. If they were to question their schooling, or the ends to which it might take them, they were scorned and seen as troublesome or unappreciative. But the young people of Mansawar Street show that this isolation of children's interest into what are deemed 'child-appropriate' concerns, of which political or civic matters are excluded, gives a false understanding of how these so-called 'children' actually experience their childhood and how they think about their social and political world. These young people engaged in politics to varying degrees, but there was no way to shield them from the wider social, political and economic forces shaping their lives (Alderson 2013: 7). The fact that they are not given a choice as to whether they are political or apolitical actors is again doing injustice to their ability to make sense of and respond to the world around them, and doing a particular injustice to their ability to make sense of, respond to, and critique, their experiences of schooling and what kinds of knowledge they are being encouraged to prioritise. At the same time, this imposes a value and expectation of subservience to teachers and adults. Surely since these young people are the only ones experiencing this schooling, apart from the adult teacher in the room, they should have the loudest voice when speaking about their experiences of schooling and how they manage its role and presence in their everyday lives.

Skyping with Santosh in the months following the earthquake, he said that he was feeling extra pressure since the earthquake to do well in school. He said his teachers were being extra strict and that many students were getting in trouble because they couldn't afford to pay their fees anymore. In light of the financial hardships the earthquake brought to many people on Mansawar Street, schooling and its expenses became even more demanding. As a result

Santosh and many other students worried more than they had previously about making the most of the schooling their parents were working hard to pay for, even if they were fearful of their teachers and often did not enjoy what they were learning in school.

When I gave Santosh the opportunity to speak about how school was going, he was very clear about how he was working hard in school because he knew it was instrumental to him and his future. He was also very explicit about how he and his friends did not see school as the only place in which they could learn. He was making the most of the position he found himself in and the pressures he was under, carefully mediating these demands in a way that was very 'mature' and responsible. Though many parents and teachers would often discourage the young people on Mansawar Street from spending their free time doing things not related to school, they resisted these demands and found ways to fulfill their schooling obligations, while also cultivating their curiosities and exercising their agency with regards to learning.

Several months after the earthquake, Santosh told me about how he had spent all Saturday trying to figure out a particular science experiment. He had found a tutorial on YouTube that one of his older friends had directed him to about how to make a rubix cube, and he wanted to see if he could figure out how to do it. At the end of the day he was not able to do it, but he said he enjoyed the challenge. "Scientists must fail so many times before they succeed," he said to me. We began talking about why he spends his free time working on projects like this. He simply said that it was because he's interested in these things but doesn't get to learn about them in school. Santosh's favorite thing to learn about has been astronomy ever since we first met. He told me how he never gets to learn about astronomy in school anymore, but he spends a lot of his free time

on the Internet (during the few hours of the day when the internet and electricity are working), looking at images of outer space and watching YouTube videos about physics, astronomy and space travel. His favorite planet is Jupiter, and he is remarkably knowledgeable about the composition of Jupiter's atmosphere. In this way and many other ways, he had taken control of his own learning. "You know that I don't like school...but that doesn't mean I don't still like to learn stuff," he told me over skype, an example not only of his agency in crafting and creating his own learning experiences, but also of his agency in utilising and interacting with 'media' (Thomson, Berriman & Bragg 2018).

Sabeena, Sangam and Mahesh were apparently doing similar things. Sabeena really liked drawing and spent most of her free time working on pieces of art. She would go to the lake and sketch people and the boats bobbing up and down in the still water. She told me that sometimes her teachers would yell at her for drawing in class, when she should have been doing the assignment. Mahesh was interested in comedy. He and Santosh were always running around practicing jokes, looking them up online and trying to memorise them to recite at an opportune moment. Mahesh mostly liked to learn jokes in Nepali, even though all of his schooling was in English. Sangam loved to play football, and was reprimanded by his parents regularly for playing football instead of completing his homework. He was not the best student, but he had been accepted to play on a very competitive youth Nepali team that he spent a lot of his time practicing for, and this eventually ended up taking him to Japan and several other places for international tournaments.

Santosh and I would often speak about what he wanted to do when he finished school. If he could choose anything, Santosh either wanted to be an astronaut or to become a cinematographer. He loved learning about outer space, and he

also really enjoyed taking photos and making videos with his friends. He proceeded to do some research in his own time about what kinds of training and qualifications he would need to be able to pursue these different career paths. He said that he had found some interesting programs in Melbourne, where his older friend Tihani had moved to, but that he wasn't sure if it was realistic for him to hope for something like this. Regardless, he was determined to try, and if it didn't work he said he would study hotel management in Kathmandu like his brother Suresh was suggesting.

Regardless of the extra pressure these young people were under to do well in school given the financial hardships the earthquake had brought to their families, and the mounting expenses of school, they still found ways to sneak out from underneath this pressure and these expectations to maintain their interests and cultivate their passions and curiosities, while also navigate the role and presence of school in their lives.

The (Secret) Political Lives of Young People

Not only did young people find ways to self-learn and teach in ways that mediated their frustrations with school and the demands being placed upon them from elsewhere, but they were also politically engaged and in solidarity with each other with regards to their schooling experiences and their concerns about the political situation in Nepal. I found this intensified after the earthquake. They had a great deal of knowledge and many strong opinions about what was going wrong in their country, and they seemed as though they wanted their voices to be heard, though most of their parents and teachers did not take their ideas seriously.

Robert Coles (1986) in *The Political Life of Children* argues that “national identities and political contexts, once thought to be out of the reach of children, in fact deeply permeate children’s consciousness, morality, sense of security, and ways of being and thinking about the world” (Scheper-Hughes & Sargent 1998: 2). The notion that young people have any kind of a political life or existence can often be quite surprising to the adults around them. When I brought up to their teachers some of the things young people on Mansawar Street were interested in and speaking about with each other and myself, they seemed shocked. We spoke regularly about climate change, corruption, industrialisation, religion, discrimination, food and water scarcity, the ‘refugee crisis’ and so on. Given the opportunity, I found that young people had remarkable insights to add to these discussions, and that they had formed these insights through exposures they had sought for themselves outside of school: online, in the newspaper, in conversations with tourists, etc. They were deeply interested in—and concerned about—these topics that were framed as off-limits to them by many of the adults they knew, and by what they were encouraged to think about and engage with in school.

One day before I left Nepal, Sudip, Oban, Sudeep, Sujal, Laxu and I were sitting in the field by the lake. They started talking about the government and how they make so much money from hydroelectric energy, but that the government never gives any of it back to the people. “Government is so corrupt. They just take take take, never give.” They then started telling me about how they wished the government would create jobs in Nepal so that their parents didn’t have to go work abroad. “We need roads, hospitals, jobs, infrastructure, but for some reason it never comes. There is much work to do here but no one to pay for it,” they said to me. They then went on to talk about religion and discrimination. “It used to be there was much discrimination, you know, my caste is better than

your caste, my religion is bigger than your religion. But here we are friends. He is Gurung; he is Gocham; I am Tamu. We are all different but we are friends. We do not discriminate,” they said matter-of-factly. When I skyped with them months after the earthquake, it seemed as though they were speaking about these issues with even greater urgency. They spoke of how the government needed to change and that most of the aid being brought to Nepal didn't reach the people: “The government is so corrupt, even after the earthquake. They are still so selfish.”



(Photo: Sudip, Oban, Sudeep, Sujal and Laxu speaking to me by the lake about their schooling experiences and their political opinions)

They were having these very insightful conversations amongst themselves, when they weren't in school, sitting by the lake or wandering around the city, out of the earshot of the adults who might discourage them. They had a secret political life that no one was listening to, that they felt they mostly had to keep to

themselves. It was only because I asked and spent so much time with them outside of school that I was able to discover it.

They were also active in creating small spaces of solidarity among themselves in response to the abuse they were experiencing in school. I was a part of this, too, as discussed in previous chapters, but they took control over the situation after I left in a way that undermined the shame they were being encouraged to feel as punishment. For a while, they were meeting each other outside of school every couple weeks to talk about their experiences and to try to find ways to change the situation. Most of them felt afraid to go to school, but told me that coming together in solidarity and resistance against the teachers made them feel less alone and more able to face each school day. In this subtle way they were trying to reshape and challenge a culture of abuse through which they felt hurt and alienated, and this role of children in shaping the boundaries of cultural practices, what's acceptable and what's not, should be credited to them (Stephens 1995: vii).

It seems clear that there is no way to shield or insulate children from the politics of everyday life, nor the wider structural forces shaping their lives that they can't always necessarily see (Scheper-Hughes & Sargent 1998: 2), and I would argue that we miss valuable, insightful contributions young people might make to these conversations by trying to shield and exclude them from such considerations. If we are to think meaningfully about young people's agency, and about the (secret) political life of children, it seems important that they no longer be treated as though they are not sufficiently competent actors to be able to engage with and add their voices to the political issues affecting their lives and shaping their childhoods. The global schooling project and its values are impacting and transforming these young people's lived experiences and

childhoods, and the earthquake has impacted on everyone they love and the place they call home-- shouldn't they too be given the credit and opportunity to add their voices and agencies to these conversations, to direct the currents shaping their everyday lives? On Mansawar Street they found ways to exercise this agency and cultivate their political voices, even if no one was listening.

Hope and Horizons

Emphasising young people and families' agencies and resiliencies in light of hardship and exploitation doesn't erase or render irrelevant all the many ways in which choices and horizons are constrained by the circumstances of one's life and the situatedness of one's self in this world. An individual or a community's ability to carry on and make the most of their situation doesn't mean they should have to or that it's fair. On Mansawar Street, horizons were constrained in ways that I could only begin to understand, and in that way, their lived experience of the global schooling project also gave them hope and a belief in their ability to change their circumstances that I do not want to underestimate or trivialise.

Santosh and his family were some of the most remarkably 'resilient' people I've ever encountered. They had endured so much hardship and so many injustices throughout their lives, but they never let that diminish their internal reserves of kindness, their warmth, their generosity and their hope that things would improve. They were living for each other—for community, family and friendship, more than for anything else, and this contains its own resiliency. They had a way of finding moments of joy, love and inspiration where others would have likely only seen deprivation, disappointment and dissatisfaction. They were

carrying on because their feelings of gratitude miraculously always outweighed their feelings of misfortune, and this was the culture of Mansawar Street.

Santosh, though one of the least privileged among his friend group, was one of the brightest, and he saw school as something he could excel at regardless of how much money his parents made or his family caste. Though on many days he would complain about school and speak about how it made him feel sad and tired, I cannot deny that he and his family, and many families on Mansawar Street, perceived of schooling as an equaliser, as a way for them to realise the potential they knew was inside of them and change their circumstances—especially in light of the hardships the earthquake brought to Mansawar Street. Just because I might have my critiques about the broader problematic trends the global schooling project is empirically instantiating—especially the fact that they will be made to feel like failures if they don't succeed in schooling as a means to express this inner potential—I cannot dismiss the reality that this was how *they perceived* of their participation in the pursuit of schooling. I cannot deny that this was also something that got Santosh out of bed at 5:30am every day, that ignited his hopes and dreams for his future and that gave him something to look forward to, no matter how remotely or illusively far off in the distance. The question I find myself asking is: is an exploitative hope better than no hope? If schooling didn't have this presence in their lives, what would be the alternative? I don't know the answer to this, but I do know that these young people relied on having hope in their lives almost as much as they relied on having somewhere warm to sleep every night.

Santosh and I still skype regularly and he is working harder than ever in school. Right now, towards the end of 2017, he is in his second to last year of what is the equivalent of high school in Nepal. He is starting to worry and wonder about

what he will do for a job when he finishes, something that he never used to speak about so explicitly. Each time we speak it sounds more and more as though he is feeling like it's time for him to "grow up" and take on what he perceives as adult responsibilities to improve his life. "I think I will be very sad to leave Pokhara and all my friends here, but I am excited to explore new things. I can keep learning and also make money for the future. Nepal is changing and I can't stay here forever," he said, ready to move forward into an uncertain horizon; sure of his ability to find hope, opportunity and community wherever he might end up.

Chapter 8

Conclusion: Schooling's Ambiguities



(Photo: Santosh at the All in One Cafe)

Schooling, in its many diverse manifestations, has often been an ambiguous resource. It has been a means of both domination and liberation, and a tool of both oppression and the pursuit of 'freedom.' It has been used to eliminate Indigenous knowledge and to promote diversity of thought through democratic dialogue. It has ignited imaginations and smothered them. It has been withheld from some and made abundant to others. It has been a cause for empathy and a catalyst for fear and ignorance. It has legitimised divisions and given reasons for unity. It has engendered passivity and provoked engagement. It has been standardised and instrumentalised in the pursuit of an insatiably growing global economy, and customised to embrace the unique, creative potential within each person. And it has also been mundane, ordinary and boring, failing to always to live up to an experience of wonder and transformation.

This ethnography has shown the lived experience of schooling in one place, through Santosh and his friends and family on Mansawar Street's experience of it. As I began writing the conclusion of this thesis, I wanted to ensure that the voices of those it took shape around didn't get lost, so I asked Santosh via Skype to write me a paragraph about what he thought of his school and its role in his life and his community. He wrote nearly a page and told me that he wanted me to put this in my PhD for others to read. This is what he had to say:

"As the term education and economy go side by side, it has been a practice in Nepal for decades. People here have given their prior valuable time, money and efforts towards it. Even though they are not educated, they have the feeling of giving education to their children compulsorily, even if they are not in the state of fulfilling. Me being born in Pokhara I am very fortunate as I was able to be born in one of the major cities of Nepal with parents who help me succeed. Nepal is a country not economically developed or developed in the sense of infrastructures of development but in the sense that it is a naturally admirable place. That particular reason makes tourists from other sides of the world want to visit Nepal. This can also be a help for the upliftment of our nations economy and for friends. The education of Nepal is far different than that in many foreign

countries. In foreign countries, they do mostly practical, skills training but here it is just the opposite. Some of the teachers are good and kind and want to help, but some of the teachers can also be strict, strict to the point where they would punish you physically and can even give you mental torture regarding assignments. Which for me is one of the major problems to be solved. The behavior of the teacher towards the children must be very good so that the students may respect their position and learn but if the teachers behavior towards the student is not good, the students get negatively affected. Some friends and me try to stand to teachers but we get in trouble. And since the school is supposed to be for children's benefit, the parents mostly don't care about these things. For me the education here is not the best as practical, skills education is not a compulsion. My zeal is to become a scientist and work for NASA or either way become a cinematographer but due to lack in technology sources and lack of practical education I am being unable to work accordingly. We learned a little astronomy but not very much. But for me its not that big of a problem because I look up to internet every now and then from which I am able to know little amount of outer knowledge than in the textbook. I like skateboarding the most as a hobby and my teachers are just oppose to it. So, in my opinion the behavior of teachers towards their children should be very positive and they should be supportive and listen to their students, otherwise it is a bad thing.”

For Santosh, schooling has an ambiguous role in his life. It is a place where he experiences constraint and occasionally abuse, but also a place where he learns things that ignite his imagination and dreams, like astronomy and chemistry that have inspired him to want to work for NASA. It's a place where he feels he isn't taught things that are of practical significance to him and where he's discouraged from some of his favorite activities, such as skateboarding, but it's also a place where he builds new friendships and interests. It may impinge upon the amount of time he gets to spend playing or roaming around the city and the nearby hills, but it also provides a structure to his life. He wishes his parents would pay more attention to the way his teachers are treating him, but he understands that they only want what's best for him. He speaks about feeling gratitude for his situation in Pokhara and his ability to go to school, and he also feels the need push back against it and the aspects of it that he finds hurtful and

alienating. He holds these tensions and navigates schooling and the presence it has in his everyday life by folding it in and around the things he cares most about.

He also recognises that going to school and getting a good education is valorised in his social world and in Nepal more broadly, and that many people dear to him make sacrifices to be able to give him this opportunity. So in some ways his prioritisation of school is fulfilling an emotional obligation at the same time that it is fulfilling an aspirational one, and just as Santosh and his friends value Mansawar Street and its ecologies, they also share in this valorisation of schooling and its importance for their future. They care about the quality of the school they are enrolled in to, the kinds of things they are being taught, the treatment of their peers and friends in class, the opinions their teachers have of them and their success or failure as a student. But Santosh's aspirations to be a good student are not at odds with or contradictory to his aspirations to be a great skateboarder, and his time spent roaming freely on Saturday isn't antithetical to his time spent in school learning lessons from a textbook. Santosh learns and shows care for the different spaces, people and creatures that are important to him in many ways specific to him. He is not just a passive recipient of knowledge, aspirations and expectations; he is also critical of them. He shapes and makes sense of his everyday exposures (Thomson, Berriman & Bragg 2018): interacting with the tourists in his own unique ways, starting up conversations with passing strangers where many other young people may not have; working hard on his homework while everyone else is out playing on the street; bringing leftover food to the stray dogs because of a care and compassion he felt was significant. This follows along the lines of some conceptualisations of young people's agency (Dyson 2014; Alderson 2013; Montgomery 2009), emphasising that Santosh was shaping his exposures, and situating himself in his world in a way that worked for him. He was making

sense of each of these spaces, navigating his different roles, cares and responsibilities in each, and carrying lessons and ideas from each into the other.

The school also provides a concrete and real place for him to go most days of the week, that he recognises *may* enable him to build a future, however tenuous this may be. Santosh is made aware by many of the adults in his life that he respects and trusts, Suresh and his parents specifically, that school is important to his future, even if the precise ends to which it will lead him are unclear. Though Santosh thinks the teachers who are poorly treating the young people at Shining Star need to change, he doesn't paint the adults, teachers and practitioners who would most quickly be identified as those enacting the global schooling project and imposing it onto his childhood as villains in this story. To Santosh, his school, his teachers and their treatment of him are what he sees of the global schooling project. He cannot see or know the many layers of actors, institutions and unseen forces that lay behind what has materialised as his schooling experience, yet they are still impactful on his life. So he doesn't necessarily know who to hold responsible or who to turn to, but he seems to understand that adults wanting the best for their child and acting on their behalf doesn't imply that they don't also value their opinion, and that valuing their protection and vulnerability isn't the same as trivialising their voices and agencies. He understands that his teachers are also constrained, that some of them are trying to help improve the experiences of him and his peers, and that the frameworks of opportunity and possibility these teachers enact for their students to succeed within doesn't necessarily mean they are responsible for their failures. He cannot discern precisely how the messy, vague landscape of global schooling has taken shape in Pokhara, but he is compassionate towards those who are also trying to navigate and make sense of its contours.

The experience of Santosh and some of his friends on Mansawar Street furthers Jeffrey et al.'s (2008) argument made with reference to Northern India, that upon finishing school, and in the context of widespread unemployment in Nepal, education and schooling need to be rethought of as a contradictory resource which not only provides opportunity, possibility and select freedoms for young people, but that can also have the effect of pulling them further and more inextricably into systems of alienation and inequality. This was present in many of the conversations I had with young people in urban Pokhara who had finished school to find none of the opportunities for employment they had expected, and who then often found themselves in exploitative working conditions abroad. But my ethnography extends this finding to show the same kinds of tensions, ambiguities and contradictions are at play not only after young people finish school, but also while they are still students. Schooling is experienced on Mansawar Street as something that provides some opportunities for learning while taking away others; as a place containing both friendship and fear; and as a place that might provide knowledge and inspiration, but that also creates hesitancy, shame and uncertainty (Huf 2013; Fisher 2008; Brooker 2008). In Pokhara at Shining Star Private school, school was an ambiguous resource in the classroom as well as outside of it.

In this way, the ambiguity of how schooling and its possibilities were entangled with the wider world waiting upon schooling's completion brought attention to the presence and absence of the state in the lives of the residents of Mansawar Street. Though this was not an initial or central point of interest of my ethnography, this came up in several conversations as something that was significantly shaping these people's horizons. Though the Nepali state and the Ministry of Education are the primary actors involved in how schooling became and continues to be operationalised in Nepal (Wood 1965; Caddell 2002),

people's perceptions of the state and local municipalities' role in overseeing, regulating and monitoring schools, particularly private schools, is one of negligence. It became clear throughout my ethnography that part of what the residents of Mansawar Street were frustrated with not only centred around schooling and its failures, but also around the failures of the state and democratic institutions. Given that Nepal is a relatively recent democracy, as it had been under the control of an oligarchic monarchy until 1951 (Wood 1965), it is unsurprising that many Nepalis I got to know in Pokhara seemed uncomfortable and unfamiliar with democracy as a concept, as they were not able to ever recall the existence of a functional, stable democratic government. In this way, on Mansawar Street the state was often experienced through its apparent absence, and this is significant because if the voices of Mansawar Street are to be heard, one of the primary venues through which this becomes a possibility is through articulating those voices in state and democratic decision-making spaces. This might imply that part of the reason why school and its ability to provide a better future was widely valorised and relied upon was due to the absence of other institutions these people could turn to with the hope of meaningfully shaping and changing their circumstances, potentially providing a pathway for future research.

Reflecting on the point of departure of this research and its aim to address the gap between the aspirations of the global schooling project and the unique realities of those young people it's intended to reach, it seems worth reflecting on the complexity of what are commonly labeled its 'failures.' Alongside highlighting the progress and successes of the global schooling project and its initiatives, the UN's yearly Global Education Monitoring Reports continually emphasises that these initiatives are not meeting their stated aims, and that their efforts require further funding and expansion (UNESCO 2017). What this

intimate ethnography of one group of young people on one small street's experience of the global schooling project can draw attention to is not the failure of these policies to enroll every single young person in school, but rather the complexity of their reach, how they reshape lives and communities, and the many ways young people navigate the ambiguous role of schooling in their lives: its potential to help them find of job, its shortcomings in how they are treated by their teachers, the many diverse forms their learning takes, and the many social and emotional complexities of young people's everyday experience of being students, both inside and outside of the classroom.

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