

DISCOURSES OF AWARENESS NOTES FOR A CRITICISM OF DEVELOPMENT IN NEPAL

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Within the modern world that has come into being, changes have taken place as the effect of dominant political power by which new possibilities are constructed and old ones destroyed. The changes do not reflect a simple extension of the ranges of individual choice, but the creation of conditions in which only new (i.e., modern) choices can be made. The reason for this is that the changes involve the reformation of subjectivities and the reorganization of social fields in which subjects act and are acted upon. The modern state – imperial, colonial, postcolonial – has been crucial to these processes of construction/destruction.

– *Talal Asad, Conscripts of Western Civilization (1992:337)*

In contemporary Nepal, there is a proliferation of discourses about new modes of 'consciousness' or 'awareness' – modes of consciousness that are often regarded as leading necessarily to new ways of conducting life appropriate to the changing times. In the past five decades, development discourses in Nepal have not only insistently labeled those identified as the 'underdeveloped' part of the population as somehow lacking in consciousness, but have also helped create conditions in which variously positioned people speak in terms of the state of their own and others' consciousness. 'Consciousness' in such talk often denotes a general urge to transform oneself and one's environment, precipitated by a sudden discovery deep in oneself of a fundamental desire for improvement and progress. Simultaneously, in many cases, this consciousness is seen as implying very specific attitudes and conduct, such as financial frugality, use of contraceptives, use of a pit latrine, growing of cash crops, the ability to sign one's own name on paper, or stating one's own name and making a speech in front of a group of people.

What follows is an exploratory essay aimed at sketching out a critical perspective on development that would, among other things, take these discourses of consciousness and awareness seriously. My effort here will be largely conceptual, and I proceed mainly by examining the critical works on development written by others. I will first describe further what I mean by discourses of awareness, and then, I will go on to discuss two

important examples of reflections on the state of development in Nepal towards the end of the 1990s – namely, those by Devendra Raj Panday and Nanda Shrestha. Then, I will engage in a close reading of the works of two cultural anthropologists, James Ferguson and Stacy Pigg, whose criticisms of development I have found particularly illuminating. I will try to build on, and expand their criticisms of development. More specifically, I will try to suggest ways in which their critical engagements with development can be folded into a more general project of the analysis of the political present.¹ Any such analysis, I would argue, need to take account of the rapture, the radical reformation of subjectivities and reorganization of social fields that Talal Asad, above, speaks of. I will conclude with comments on the relevance of the perspectives on development I discuss in this essay, for the analyses of two contemporary political issues in Nepal, namely the Maoist ‘People’s War’ and the Kamaiya liberation movement. Let me begin with more words on the discourses of awareness.

Discourses of Awareness

In 1994, Keshab Gautam wrote of the apparent consensus among substantial numbers of both rich and poor, educated and uneducated, about the cause of poverty and immiserization in Nepal. All agreed, he said, that they were due to the lack of education. If you ask a poor man in today’s Nepal why he is poor, Gautam writes, the most likely reply is “Because I lack education” (Gautam 2051 v.s.:42). Education, seen as a particular set of skills and range of knowledge imparted in school, rather than seen as one among many possible means for building a better life, is taken both in professional and popular discourses to be the single most important determinant of the fortune of individuals and communities. Arguing the arbitrary nature of this promotion of education as the ultimate cause of happiness, and pointing out that the concept of empowerment does not have to be limited to such activities as learning to read and write, Gautam argues for Paulo Freire’s much broader and dialectical notion of literacy, knowledge, and empowerment (Gautam 2051 v.s.:43-45; Cf. Freire 1970).² Gautam explains Freire’s notion of human-being and its knowledge as involving the following assumptions: a) no one has

1 I borrow the metaphor of 'folding' from David Scott (1999:136), who in turn borrows it from William Connolly. Indeed, the way I frame the problem of criticism here owes much to my reading of Scott (1999).

2 On the fetishization of education in contemporary Nepal see Liechty (2002:212-16) and Skinner and Holland (1996).

complete knowledge; b) no one completely lacks intelligence; c) no one can be productive by him or herself; d) all productive processes are communal; e) knowledge is a product of human interactions; f) human interaction is the primary way through which people attain their goals (Gautam 2051 v.s.:43). For my part, I would like to highlight here the basic vision that undergird these assumptions – i.e. the radically social, and hence historical, nature of human being and its knowledge. Freire, following Marx and others, insisted that human beings are simultaneously the products and producers of history. For me, what this insight entails is that what counts as true ‘knowledge’, ‘consciousness’ and ‘awareness’, differ from historical period to period. The forms of these knowledge, consciousness, and awareness, are determined to a large extent by prevailing structures of human interactions at the time, the structures that are, in turn, affected by the dominant forms of knowledge, consciousness and awareness at the time.

Let us, then, look further at examples of what were being spoken as proper forms of consciousness and awareness in the late-1990s in Nepal.

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Until very recently, before the Maoist war and the State of Emergency came to dominate and over-shadow all other topics in the public discourse, hardly a day went by without a politician, in one place or another, proclaiming lack of education as the single most important cause of poverty in Nepal. There would be ‘awareness raising programs’ on topics including sanitation, saving, family planning, gender equality, and forest preservation, held in many corners of the country. Every day, development fieldworkers would visit village houses, to convince the villagers to build a toilet, make a vegetable garden, build a ‘smokeless’ stove, join a saving and credit group, or use a contraceptive device. If the villagers did not oblige, the development worker would say, “they lacked awareness (or *unītharuko awareness chaina*).” If eventually, some villagers started to build toilets, or create a small vegetable garden by their houses as told, the development worker would say, “finally, they gained some consciousness (*cetnā*).”

In 1999, I was speaking with Dar Bahadur Yeri³, a retired forest officer in the western hills. He was telling me about changes in inter-caste relations over time. Thirty or forty years ago, he said, it used to be that if

3 Some of the names which appear in this article are pseudonyms.

you went to a crowded festival and came back, before going into the house, you would have your body purified with water imbued by gold because, in the crowd, your body may have touched a damai ('tailor') or sarki ('leather worker'). Nowadays, he said, people don't do thus. When I asked what caused the change to happen, he said, "We became aware. We understood that whether you are sarki or damai, if you are cut, blood flows. We have the same red blood." I asked if changes in the political system also had something to do with changes in inter-caste relations. The upper castes, after all, needed the votes from the lower castes to win the election.⁴ After a pause, Dar Bahadur said, "No, no. We became aware. We realized that in our bodies runs the same red blood." The point that I want to highlight in this example is Dar Bahadur's insistence that the change came from *inside*, through people becoming conscious, aware of the truth, and not through external changes in political or economic conditions. The realization that Dar Bahadur spoke of involved the sense that he was henceforth *free* not to purify his body with gold-imbued-water because he had become aware of the truth of the commonality of red blood.

Early in 1997, I was at an annual meeting of a major local NGO in western Nepal. A part of the two-day event was an 'interaction program for women's leadership'. A male politician flown in from Kathmandu was there to address the participants in the program, consisting mainly of leaders of small local women's groups from the hills and the plain. During his address, the politician put a question to the women, "Why are boys and girls treated differently?" There were various responses from the floor, including one from a woman who said "sons stay home, but daughters leave." The speaker asked that respondent, "Do *you* treat your sons and daughters equally?" She said no. The speaker then said "So, maybe the root of the problem is *within* yourself. Maybe you should start by changing yourself."

The speaker went on to talk about how women can start improving their lives themselves. For example, they can make a small vegetable garden by their house and dramatically improve the health of the entire family. An old woman in the group stood up and began to speak in a non-Nepali language. For those who were not fluent in her language, including myself, she seemed to be talking about her house and village including where the water source was located in relation to where she

4 At the time of this conversation, I had just read Akhil Gupta's book (1998) that advanced just such argument.

lived. In short, her speech was an explanation as to why it was not possible for her to create a vegetable garden next to her house. The politician was listening in the beginning, but eventually asked a development worker present to make the old woman stop and sit down. The speaker then began to explain how the women could educate themselves even if they couldn't go to school. For example, they could learn a lot from listening to the radio. A woman said some of them were so poor that they could not afford a radio. The speaker did not have a good response. He said radios weren't very expensive, and moved on to another topic.

A few weeks later, back in the hills, I visited one of the women who was a participant at the 'interaction program'. Kamala Pun, in her late 30s, was one of the first to join when the NGO started its adult literacy program in this hilly district, around 1995. In 1996, when the NGO began its "Women's Development Program," she became the leader of one of the newly formed local women's groups. Through the group-savings-and-credit program, she bought potato seeds and planted them near her house. All the potatoes died, perhaps due to frost. This was a blow because her family is poor. Indeed, her husband must go to India for about 5 months a year as a seasonal migrant laborer. They have four children, all of whom go to school, adding to the expenses of the household.

While offering me home-made liquor inside the house, she began saying, without being asked, "I didn't know anything before the NGO people came and talked to us. I still don't know much, but at least now I know I must learn. I am trying to learn whatever I can and trying whatever small things that I can do to improve our condition." It appeared to me that, during the interaction program, all that the politician told the group of women was useless to say the least. After all, the women must have already known well what it would take for them to function better in the individual situations they lived in, indeed much better than the politician who was lecturing them. However, I did not know what to make of Kamala Pun's words, coming from her own mouth, that she had not known anything before she talked with the NGO people, and that she still did not know much.

That many failures of development projects are due to an enormous ignorance about local situations on the part of the agents of development has been proven many times (Cf. Berreman 1994, Campbell, Shrestha and Stone 1979, Hobart 1993, Justice 1986, Lewis 1986, Mamdani 1973, Marriott 1952, 1955, Stone 1986, 1989). Furthermore, that development discourses which misrepresent material and social reality often end up

servicing dominant interests (such as the capital, or the national elite) by functioning as ideological screens to hide the reality of domination and exploitation, has been convincingly argued many times (Cf. Freire 1970, Integrated Development Systems 1983, Panday 1999).⁵

Yet, to understand Kamala Pun's statement, it is not enough to say that what was happening was misrecognition on her part; to say that she was somehow led to believe that she did not know anything while in truth she knew a lot about the life in the hills; that she was mistaken in thinking that her state of mind was mainly responsible for her situation while it was really the objective, socio-economic and political structure that placed her in a condition of poverty. However, the alternative interpretation was not convincing either. This was the interpretation that what happened to Kamala Pun, as well as to Dar Bahadur (when he felt he needed no longer to be so strict about inter-caste regulations), were really an awakening: that they had become free by recognizing theretofore repressed truths; that they had learned that they did not need to follow blindly the way of life handed down to them by the ancestors. My challenge, in other words, was to find an alternative position to account for Kamala Pun's and others' statements about 'awareness', a position that did not reduce such statements to distorted reflections of the real (political-economic) processes that were happening elsewhere, or confine them to an idealism of a liberal progressivist narrative. In what follows, I turn to examples of critical engagements with development that were offered through the 1990s, in part examining in what respects they are helpful in appreciating the statements by Kamala Pun and others, and in what respects they are not.

“Failed Development”

Reflecting on the initial decades of development planning in Nepal, Devendra Raj Panday wrote, in 1998:

In our innocence, we felt that it would be relatively easy for Nepal – known for being peaceful, climatically hospitable, politically stable and culturally and economically unsullied by the aggression of the colonial powers – to accomplish development more speedily and smoothly than many other countries in the third world. The dream was

5 For instance, Panday, citing Freire (1970), speaks of the “credulity of the oppressed”: “The idea is to make sure that the world is not revealed to the people whose job is to receive the *word* passively; they should not know that the *world* is not being transformed as promised” (Panday 1999:14, emphases original).

to see the country transformed from its state of pristine primitiveness ... to an equally pristine “modern” state, progressing in history without, however, undermining the past and “indigenous systems” (Panday 1998:i).

Panday further wrote, now adopting an external view:

In the initial decades of planning and development, the country at the lap of the serene Himalayas looked like an oasis in a South Asian “desert” – with its wars, assassinations, coup d’etat, religious feuds, insurgents, civil strife, and the mammoth population sizes (Panday 1999:10).

For those who believed Nepal to be a land of peace rare in the world, and dreamed that Nepal would one day “metamorphose into an Asian Switzerland” (Panday 1999:10), the violence of ‘the People’s War’ that led the country into a State of Emergency by the end of 2001 would appear as a true nightmare. For Devendra Raj Panday, the crisis in the form of the People’s War was but one, albeit the most prominent and catastrophic, among the many products of “failed development” (1999:10-14). He viewed this war as a result of the general loss in Nepali society of “development enabling values and institutions in general and in the declining capacity to support development-oriented action” (Panday 1999:9). What troubled Panday most was the lack of commitment on the part of the contemporary Nepali elite concerning the ideal of development, an “almost utopian” vision of social democratic progress (Panday 1998:ii). The question which Panday urges his fellow Nepalis to reflect upon is “how and why development came to represent our national aspirations and yet how it has become a mere ‘word’ not a ‘true word’ in practice” (Panday 1999:xix).

While for Panday, many of the ills in contemporary Nepal are due to the *absence* of real development, for Nanda Shrestha they are the direct products of the *existing* development process. In Nanda Shrestha’s view, development has produced nothing but “a trail of victims” (Shrestha 1998:xix). For him everything from poverty, corruption, prostitution, and the deepening disparity and antagonism between classes is a symptom of the cultural and spiritual deterioration of Nepali society brought forth by development. Development initially presented itself as a “messianic” hope of “salvation” from poverty. But it left the peasants with loss of their traditional subsistence bases and a deep sense of frustration (Shrestha 1998:96). What is more, development has “colonized” the bodies and

minds of the Nepalis, “gradually planting the seeds of Nepali inferiority and the demise of their self-dignity and self-respect” (Shrestha 1998:209).

Shrestha recalls with nostalgia, the time, less than 40 years ago, when “a strong sense of community existed in almost every part of the country”:

We came together to uplift our respective communities, a process which contributed to Nepal’s moral and civil social order. We marched with a passionate feeling of collective responsibility for our country as we raised our voices in unison acclaiming: *haste ma haste garera, Nepal lai uchalau* (Let’s join hands and push each other to uplift Nepal). ... I still have fond memories of reciting this melodic motto countless times with my friends when we would be engaged in community projects such as school construction or some other voluntary social works (1998:xiii-xiv).

This manifestation of community sentiment, Shrestha writes, has been replaced, through four decades of development, by “a tune laced with predatory selfishness and cutthroat social callousness. *Ke painchha* (What’s in it for me?)” (1998:xiv). Consequently, he continues, “the house that Nepal built more than 200 years ago is now falling apart as we, her children, are divided into two broad camps—elites and the masses. What is raging across the country is a virulent class war, pitting brothers against brothers and sisters against sisters. In this conflictual situation, no one is secure” (Shrestha 1998:xiv).

For Shrestha, then, the processes of actually existing development is to blame for the socio-economic and psychological ills in contemporary Nepal, while for Panday, it was the absence of development that was the conditions for those ills.

What does each of them mean by ‘development’? For Panday, development is an ideal, a vision of social democratic progress, which, he claims, became ‘national aspiration’ during the 1950s and 60s. Despite the historical specificity of its promotion in Nepal, the value of development, Panday claims, is universal. Writing at the close of the 1990s, Panday defines development as a process that is realized through an institution of the “positive-sum game of a kind where nobody loses, in the end” (Panday 1998:ii). The institution of this positive-sum game, Panday argues, requires in part that all the players – that is, all the Nepali individuals – be motivated by “‘proper’ self-interest” (1998:ii). For Panday, “*there is no alternative*” to pursuing this vision of development (1998:iii; emphasis mine). Any other vision of progress – he lists Social

Darwinism and armed (communist) revolution – will be unacceptable for a rational, enlightened human being (1998:ii).

For Shrestha, on the other hand, development is a mystification that hides beneath it the brutal processes of capitalist exploitation and dehumanization. Shrestha argues that what development actually fosters is not the proper, enlightened, self-interest that Panday speaks of, but ‘predatory selfishness and cutthroat social callousness’. Shrestha suggests that people had a much healthier moral life – ‘a strong sense of community’ and ‘passionate feeling of collectivity’ – *before* the onset of development processes. Let us contrast Panday and Shrestha, once again in simplifying terms. For Panday, his ideal moral community exists in the future, and this moral community would be both a condition for, and an effect of, the real development process. The current tragedy, from his point of view, then, can be described, at least in part, as a consequence of the failure of Nepal to mature into a community of citizens with enlightened self-interests. For Shrestha, the ideal moral community existed in the past. The tragedy consists in the destruction of this moral community by the processes of development.

For both Panday and Shrestha, disjuncture between the ideal and the real constitutes a key trope in their respective formulations of the problem. However, the ways in which they contrast the ideal and the real, I would argue, result in occluding the actual interrelationships between the ideal and the real in historical processes. Let us recall Shrestha’s description of his childhood activity quoted above. He presents it as a manifestation of traditional community sentiment in Nepal before the onset of development. Yet, it is impossible to imagine that 200 years ago, or even 70 years ago, a poor peasant boy in Pokhara (as Shrestha describes himself) would have chanted “*haste ma hoste garera Nepal lai uchalau,*” let alone constructed a “school building” with his friends as a form of “voluntary social work.” Panday, on the other hand, acknowledges, as we have seen, that it was at a certain moment in history, namely around the 1950s, that the ideal of development entered the imaginations of the Nepalis and was became the ‘national aspiration’. Yet, as we have also seen, Panday grounds his definition of development in the notion of enlightened self-interest that, in principle, transcends historical determination.

For both Shrestha and Panday, ‘Nepal’ constitutes an almost taken for granted referent of their discussion of development. Yet, it was at a certain, and relatively recent, moment in history that “Nepal,” the object of national development, came into being. More specifically, it was

through a series of conceptual and institutional interventions in the context of the decolonizing world of the mid-20th century, and not, say, in the period of the expansion of the Gorkha Kingdom in the 18th century (which has retroactively come to be called the period of ‘national unification of Nepal’), the emerging ‘national’ leaders had come to imagine a geographically bounded nation on the path toward development.⁶ Similarly, it was through a series of concrete conceptual and institutional interventions that, at a certain point in time, a peasant boy in Pokhara began to imagine a “Nepal” that was in need of “upliftment” through “volunteer social work.”⁷

What I *do* find most valuable in both Shrestha’s and Panday’s arguments is their insistence that development, and socio-political change more generally, has to do first of all, and most critically, with the moral conditions of the people in a given community. Yet the rhetorical

6 On the critical importance of the history of decolonization in the construction of contemporary nationalism, see Kelly and Kaplan 2001. They argue that we need to look seriously at World War II and its aftermath, for example, at the US president Woodrow Wilson’s “valorization of ‘self-determination’, his world that ‘must be safe for democracy’” (Kelly and Kaplan 2001:59). Most importantly, they argue that we need to look at the emergence of the world system of nation-states: “the United Nations world in which [sentiments for ‘self-determination’ and ‘democracy’] rule out colonization, a world in which the formal symmetry of nation-states makes decolonizing the ticket of entry and promises substantive development at the price only of amnesia about colonial exploitation and in its place, shame at ‘backwardness’. Before the ‘world wars’, ambitions could be open ... Nations could have glorious destinies, and their states could have War Departments rather than the Defense Departments. Then came the new system. ... [E]verything happened as if the United States, bomb in hand, commanded every nation in 1946 to henceforth imagine itself only as a community, to abjure all other histories and destinies, with demonization of all resistance from communism to Islam” (2001:59). On the question of geographically bounded nation, see Michael 1999.

7 On the construction of Nepali nationalism, see, e.g., Onta 1996a, 1996b, 1997, Burghart 1984. English translation of one of King Mahendra Bir Bikram Shah Dev’s poems, published by His Majesty’s Government of Nepal in the 1960s reads, in part, as follows: “Come, let us join our hands and strive / To build the Nepal of our dream ; / A ship can’t ply in a small stream, / We have to push the banks aside. / The country that has the backdrop / Of the world’s most gorgeous *Himal* – / That country’s flag let’s hold aloft, / For that’s our country, our Nepal. / ... / This land where *Vishnu* and *Buddha* / Walk side by side through trackless time – / We are the Nepalese of Nepal, / Attentive always to her call.” (Shah 1964:10-11).

strategies that they adopt – their ways of contrasting the ideal and the real – preclude certain questions from being asked. What drive both Panday's and Shrestha's arguments are accusations of duplicity. Most important for Panday is the duplicity of the Nepali elite, who are committed to the ideals of development only in words and not deeds. For Shrestha, development itself is a mask that hides exploitation and dehumanization. Although both of them are keenly aware of the decisive effects of the constitution of Nepal as a modern nation-state in the mid-20th century, a systematic investigations into the implications of that singular event, and the actual *work* of development that followed it, tend to get obstructed by their insistence on exposing duplicity, lack of fit, and *absence*.

This is one of the reasons why approaches adopted by Shrestha and Panday are not well equipped to deal with statements and actions of people like Kamala Pun. Kamala Pun speaks of a radical change of her consciousness through her encounter with, and participation in, NGO activities. Although the involvement with the NGO led her to experiment with a new form of economic enterprise (i.e. potato cultivation with a loan from the women's saving group), this has not led her to become a selfish or callous person, that Shrestha's description might make us fear. Her desire for improvement goes beyond wishing good for herself or her family members. To be sure, even before she participated in the NGO, she was known to be a very helpful person beyond her family, kin, and friends. But unlike Shrestha, she would not describe her current urge to improve herself and to help others improve as an expression of 'traditional Nepali community sentiment'. Her current sentiments and motives, she would tell you, are very new, and it has everything to do with her encounter with the work of development. To revert to Talal Asad's vocabulary, we need ways to appreciate Kamala Pun's statements as referring to an experience of radical reformation of her subjectivity – into a kind of subjectivity that is neither an expression of 'communal traditional culture' nor a 'selfish-self' of 'modernity' that is simply a mirror image of 'tradition'.

I will also note here that unlike for Panday and Shrestha, Kamala Pun's notion of improvement and development does not have 'nation' as its primary referent. I will discuss later, towards the end of this paper, how Kamala Pun's desire for improvement, although empirically connected to the project of nation building, stands in a very different relation to it, compared to those of Panday and Shrestha. At this point, I would like to underscore that Panday's and Shrestha's insistence on the *absence of or duplicity in* development tend to take our attention away

from how actual changes are being caused by the activities of development. Consequently, the empirical histories of Kamala Pun's encounter with and transformation through development get left out in their modes of criticism.

I would like now turn to examples of anthropological criticism of development. I will engage in close readings of the works of James Ferguson and Stacy Pigg, because I believe they help us move beyond reducing the issue simply to a matter of success or failure, or good or bad of development. Instead, their efforts have been to construct a perspective from which to envision 'development' as an historically specific configuration of ideas and practices producing certain systematic effects. I will be arguing that their works, ultimately, fall short of providing us with adequate conceptual grounds to take account of Kamala Pun's statement. My aim, again, is to argue that their critical efforts be redirected and their insights be folded into another critical project that has a differently conceived target. Let us begin by looking closely at James Ferguson's work.

Development as a "Depoliticizing Machine"

In the Preface to *The Anti-Politics Machine*, first published in 1990, James Ferguson wrote of the centrality of the idea of 'development' in our times. Asking, "What is 'development'?" a question which strikes us as "so natural, so self-evidently necessary" is actually of very recent origin, and "would have made no sense even a century ago" (Ferguson 1994:xiii). The concept of development, argued Ferguson, functions as the concept of 'civilization' must have functioned in the nineteenth century, or the concept 'God' in the twelfth.

Each of these central organizing concepts presupposes a central, unquestioned value, with respect to which the different legitimate positions may be arrayed, and in terms of which different world views can be articulated. "Development" in our time is such a central value. Wars are fought and coups are launched in its name. Entire systems of government and philosophy are evaluated according to their ability to promote it. ... Like "civilization" in the nineteenth century, "development" is the name not only for a value, but also for a dominant problematic or interpretive grid through which the impoverished regions of the world are known to us (Ferguson 1994: xiii).

Ferguson's call for us to question the unquestioned nature of development as our core value and interpretive grid was extremely refreshing to me, and

apparently, to many others.⁸ It is the clarity with which he constructs his object of criticism, 'development', as well as his influences, which include what I regard as unhelpful tendencies, on the others, that make his work deserving of close critical treatment.

At the time Ferguson wrote, the literature on development could be divided into two main camps. As short hands, we could call one liberal and the other neo-Marxist. The liberal writers, among whom Ferguson included most anthropologists, saw development as an essentially good idea, scrutinized 'what goes wrong' in the actual implementation of this idea, and tried to propose reforms to the workings of development institutions. The neo-Marxists, on the other hand, saw actually existing development institutions and practices as essentially promoting capitalist expansion and exploitation in the Third World. Despite the apparent diametrically opposed political postures, both camps operated within similar problematics, focusing on the gap between what development was supposed to do and its actual performance. Seemingly radical critiques by the neo-Marxists, Ferguson argued, thus, are "still organized around the politically naïve question: 'Do aid programs really help poor people?'" (Ferguson 1994:12).

What Ferguson proposed instead was to scrutinize how development was actually organized both conceptually and institutionally, and to analyze its actual social and structural effects (i.e., to consider what development does, rather than what it fails to do). What followed in Ferguson's book was indeed a brilliant and devastating critique of the representational and institutional practices of such major development agencies as the World Bank and Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA).

Ferguson closely analyzed the World Bank Country Report on Lesotho, published in the mid-1970's, and showed how the report represented the country in a way that was radically incongruent with what the social scientists knew to be the reality of the place. The World Bank report, Ferguson argued, was organized around four basic assumptions: (1) Lesotho was an aboriginal economy virtually untouched by modern economic development; (2) it was an agricultural economy; (3) it constituted a bounded and definable national economy; (4) it had an economy and society that were within the control of an effective national

8 On the influence *The Anti-Politics Machine* has had on subsequent critiques of development see: Fisher 1997; Fairhead 2000; Kiely 1999; Cooper and Packard 1997; Escobar 1995:12, 47, 143.

government. All these assumptions were in contradiction with the facts of Lesotho, because: Lesotho has been a labor reserve for the South African mining industry for more than a century; farming has contributed only 6 percent to rural household income; and effective governance was noticeably absent (Ferguson 1994:25-73). The effect of these erroneous assumptions, Ferguson wrote, was that many reports on Lesotho produced by the World Bank and other major development aid organizations looked “as though they would work nearly as well with the word ‘Nepal’ systematically substituted for ‘Lesotho’” (1994:70).

Turning our attention back to Nepal, we might recall here the passage by Panday I quoted earlier wherein Nepal was described as a pristine, primitive country that was to be transformed into an equally pristine modern one. Two observations might be made at this point. First, the thrust of Ferguson’s argument is that the four principles of representation described above operate with regard to almost any Third World country regardless of the particularities of the specific country in question. His argument is not that a World Bank report constitutes a gross misrepresentation with regard to Lesotho, but may count as a relatively accurate one with regard to Nepal. Instead, Ferguson is urging us to be alert to the existence of a “set of rules of formation for discourse” in any field,⁹ whether in development or social science, and the “theoretical work of translation” involved in any form of representation (1994:28). We must reflect on how development discourse has restricted what we are able to imagine as the historical and social realities of Nepal. In particular, we should reflect, for example, on the way, in history, the Rana period has been seen as a ‘dark age’ when ‘nothing happened’¹⁰, or on the way, in economy, migrant labor has been viewed as anomalous in national development despite its documented and lived significance.¹¹ Yet, we should also take note, as a historical fact, that Nepal *indeed* appeared to agents of development in the 1950s and 60s, more closely than other

9 For a concise statement of the method of discourse analysis, see Foucault 1991b. One of the earliest analysts to strongly advocate use of Foucault’s methods to the issues of development was Arturo Escobar (see Escobar 1984).

10 Des Chene 1995; cf. Onta 1997. The ‘Rana period’ refers to the period between 1846 when the Rana family took over the effective control of the country and ruled it ‘autocratically’, and 1951 when the Shah king was restored to power and proceeded to adopt ‘development’ as his supreme objective.

11 See Seddon 1998.

Third World countries to approximate a textbook case for development intervention, a stable, 'pristine primitive society' to be touched for the first time by the hand of development planning. This is an important factor in accounting for the saturation of Nepali society by development aid and discourse, of particular vulnerability of so many spheres of life to be defined by problematics of development.¹²

To return to Ferguson's text, after presenting the four assumptions of World-Bank-style representation, he related them to the institutional structure of development. Representational practices become intelligible when we consider that institutions such as World Bank are set up to provide technical (not political) help for development. Hence, any analysis that does not locate the source of a problem (whether poverty or hunger) in the lack of development, conceived as modern/technical input, is deemed useless. Ferguson did not stop there. He further argued that development, consisting of the conceptual and institutional apparatuses described above, had profound, 'unintended' or 'unrecognized', effects on the target society. The effect of development was double: it "depoliticized" what was really a political problem of poverty; it expanded bureaucratic state power into further spheres of life. (1994:xiv-xv, 20-1, 251-56).

Ferguson began his book by pointing out that for many of us development appears unquestionably good and necessary. What Ferguson thought he needed to do, then, it seems, was to make development appear strange. This move was necessary for him to create a critical distance between development and 'us', so that we can treat development as a curious object, and proceed to carry out an analysis that "closely resembles vivisection than critique" (Ferguson 1994:xv). In that spirit of estrangement [*exstraneare*], Ferguson went on to label development "the anti-politics machine," like the 'anti-gravity machine' in science fiction stories (1994:256). Ferguson explained:

The short answer to the question of what the "development" apparatus in Lesotho does, then, is found in the book's title: it is an "anti-politics machine," depoliticizing everything it touches, everywhere whisking political realities out of sight, all the while performing, almost unnoticed, its own pre-eminently political operation of expanding bureaucratic state power (1994:xv).

12 Some of the statements made by 'development experts' in the 1950s and 60s on the 'primitive' nature of Nepal can be found in Fujikura 1996. Clues to historical precedents that may have contributed to the perception of Nepal as a pristine land untouched by modernity can be found in Liechty 1997.

Ferguson's claims, although based on data about Lesotho, undoubtedly have much wider relevance. It is, in fact, about development as a "central organizing concept" of our time comparable to the concept of "civilization" in the nineteenth century (1994:xiii). His characterization of development as a machine that depoliticizes everything it touches, contains an obvious implication – it is better not to touch (or be touched by) it if you believe positive changes come through political actions. It is this last point that is, I think, an unfortunate implication of Ferguson's book. Ferguson himself foregrounds this implication in the section titled 'Epilogue', his "personal statement" about "what is to be done" about poverty and suffering (1994:279-88). First he divides the question "what is to be done?" into "what should they do?" and "what should we do?" With regard to the first, if "they" in the question are defined as "the people" of Lesotho, then, Ferguson writes:

It seems, at least, presumptuous to offer prescriptions here. The toiling miners and the abandoned old women know the tactics proper to their situations far better than the experts does. Indeed, the only general answer to the question, "What should they do?" is: "They are doing it!" (1994:281).

With regard to the second question, "what should we do?" he defines 'we' to mean "we scholars and intellectuals working in or concerned about the Third World" (1994:283). While acknowledging the good will of researchers with a "left-populist perspective," who work for development agencies, Ferguson argues that it is a wrong choice because 'working inside development' ultimately means that you accept the wrong assumption that empowerment of the lower class comes from the state or large international agencies (1994:282-5). The only right choice is to identify groups or organizations (such as labor unions, oppositional political parties, cooperatives, or religious organizations) that clearly represent "movements for empowerment" (1994:286) and to lend your skills and expertise when and if needed by them (1994:286-7).

Ferguson's conclusions and recommendations, I argue, cannot be accepted by those of us who are concerned with contemporary Nepal, for both empirical and theoretical reasons. Empirically, time has changed. Ferguson's case is based on his critical observations of an 'integrated rural development program' (IRDP) in Lesotho from the late-1970s to the mid-1980s. IRDPs, with their focus on coordination between different government agencies and their emphasis on delegating authorities from the central government to local bodies, were also popular in Nepal around

the same period as in Lesotho.¹³ The way development operates has changed significantly since then. Among the most significant changes have been the proliferation of NGOs over the course of the 1990s and the emergence and growth of a complex network of ideas, funding and people that have accompanied it (Fisher 1997; Arellano-Lopez and Petras 1994). Even if it were possible to state with some plausibility, as Ferguson does (1994:284), that to work for development during the 1980s was to work as an agent of the state or of inter-state organizations, it has become very difficult to say so today. I will have more to say later on the relationship between the governmental and non-governmental activities.

Devendra Raj Panday's words are instructive in regard to changes in the development industry since the 1980's. Responding to Nanda Shrestha's call, made at the end of the 1990s, for the boycott of foreign aid, Panday reminds us that it was he who first suggested suspending foreign aid in the early 1980s (Panday 1998:ix; Cf. Panday 1983). Yet, Panday goes on:

I do not know if I can say now what I said in 1983 on this subject ... I said then that if the character of aid was such that "it could only be an instrument of plodding along in support of status quo" and if it could not be an instrument of progress in support of the poor who needed development most, "it would be better to stop aid altogether." The irony is that, whatever may be our opinion on the subject, the donors themselves are giving an impression that many of them may be relatively more inclined to leave us alone now than they were then. This is the message I take from the unabashed criticism they level on the government today in almost an orchestrated manner. Indeed, now that anything from food subsidies to bad governance from appointment of a project manager to the scheme of decentralization and from corruption to civil strife can be a ground for aid withdrawal by some donors, one never knows where we are headed in this respect. ... Is it possible that the more powerful of the donors are becoming less tolerant not because we have gone worse, but because the supply of aid is drying up while the global demand for it is increasing? (Panday 1998:ix-x).

Ferguson's target was a development industry, powered by international donors, which advocated projects to expand agricultural infrastructure, increase production subsidies and encourage administrative reform, all of

¹³ For critical discussions of integrated rural development programs with reference to Nepal, see Justice 1986 and Zurick 1993. For a broader conceptual discussion and comparative perspective see Cohen 1987.

which resulted in the expansion of the reach of bureaucratic power without helping the poor. We do not know if we are dealing with the same entity now.

There are also conceptual problems in *The Anti-Politics Machine*, most generally with the notion of the political. Ferguson's main thesis, to repeat, is that the "instrumental-effect" of development consists of "the entrenchment and expansion of institutional state power" effected "almost invisibly, under cover of a neutral, technical mission" that depoliticizes "both poverty and the state" (1994:256). Yet, Ferguson *knows* that poverty is not a technical problem to be solved by technical means. Instead,

... since it is *powerlessness* that ultimately underlies the surface condition of poverty, ill-health, and hunger, the larger goal ought to be *empowerment* (Ferguson 1994:279-80; emphasis added).

Those who have worked in the field of development throughout the 1980s and 90s know how elusive and problematic the notion of 'empowerment' can be. Ferguson's book, of course, is not a book about empowerment. All we can gather from the book is that empowerment is something that development, as a depoliticizing machine, is not. Thus the world is sharply divided in two. One is the world of development, of bureaucratic blueprints and of economic and agricultural experts that collectively constitute an anti-politics machine. The other is the world of real politics, of political parties, politicians, trade unions, "toiling miners and abandoned old women," who are in perfect touch with reality, who know clearly the "tactics" of power "proper to their own situations" (1994:281).

Yet, Ferguson's ethnography belies this sharp divide. His concrete descriptions and analyses of development projects reveal numerous interpenetrations between these two worlds. For example, his description of the failure of a 'decentralization program' shows that the participants – Lesotho administrators and bureaucrats, as well as some personnel from CIDA – appear to know exactly what is politically at stake in the administrative reform. Indeed, it is such knowledge that accounts for the intense maneuvering on both sides, one trying to effect decentralization, the other trying to subvert it. The only people who even partially believed that decentralization was "an apolitical administrative reform" and hence misunderstood the situation, according to Ferguson, were some of the CIDA project staff and planners. We are thus led to wonder if the ideological effect – 'depoliticization' – only applied to some of the development bureaucrats.

Ferguson's sharply divided world does not allow us to explore the questions we want to ask. It does not help us make sense of Kamala Pun's statement that she did not know anything before the NGO came to the village. It does not help us understand why Nanda Shrestha, a peasant boy in Pokhara, was chanting '*haste ma hoste garera Nepal lai uchalau*'. On the proper political choice for 'us', Ferguson further writes:

The political task as I see it is not to eliminate one or two of these arbitrarily selected forms ("hunger," "homelessness"), but to work to eliminate the conditions of possibilities for *all* such forms of humiliation and degradation. This amounts to a political choice in favor of focusing broadly on empowerment, not narrowly on poverty; freeing the slaves, not feeding them better (1994:303).

I have heard something similar to this many times in development training sessions, be they about 'local institution building', 'savings and credit training', or 'women's leadership training'. The facilitator will tell the villagers, "We are not here to feed you fish; we are here to teach you *how to fish*" (Cf. Manandhar 2002). Of course, such a statement is not exactly the same as the one Ferguson makes about freeing the slave. But I think they both reflect similar assumptions, about which I will have more to say later when I discuss discourses of self-help, empowerment, and social change.

Ferguson, for his part, indicates that his position derives from his observations about the meanings and uses of the words, 'government' and 'governing'. He argues that the mistake of the decentralization planners resulted from the fact that they saw "Government ... as a machine for delivering services; but never as a way of 'governing' people, a device through which certain classes and interests control the behavior and choices of others" (1994:225). My contention is that, whatever the planners think they are doing, and whether or not they name what they do as 'political', much of what they attempt in the name of development is 'governing' – the "control [of] the behaviors and choices of others." In the name of development, people are urged to grow hybrid plants rather than local ones, to raise cash crops rather than subsistence crops, and to send their daughters to school rather than make them work in the field. Development *is*, to use Michel Foucault's terms, about the 'conduct of conduct' (Foucault 1983:220-21; Cf. Gordon 1991:5).¹⁴ According to

¹⁴ Foucault writes that the word 'government' designates "the way in which the conduct of individuals or groups might be directed; the government of children, of souls, of communities, of families, of the sick. It [does] not

Foucault and others, social problems, including those of poverty and delinquency, became increasingly assimilated into the realm of political concern, and hence the object of government, towards the nineteenth century in Europe.¹⁵ Foucault, in showing how insanity, criminality, or sexuality became invested with political stakes, I believe, was not advocating that we abandon those cognitive-institutional spheres altogether and start the work of genuine emancipation ‘somewhere else’.¹⁶

Here, I believe Sarad Paudel’s argument, written in the late 1990s, is highly relevant (Paudel 2055 v.s.). Paudel was responding to claims, made repeatedly by leftist intellectuals and politicians in Nepal, that NGOs are ‘reformists’ (*sudhārbādī*) who focus, and make the poor and the working class focus, only on small superficial problems, thus occluding the underlying reality of class structure and exploitation, and hence obstructing true, radical social transformation.¹⁷ Paudel asks in return why “those people who are for radical transformation” could not, at the same time, work on ameliorating immediate problems and on improving daily lives without being accused of being ‘reformist’, or the enemy of revolution (2055 v.s.: 28-29). Paudel relates a story in which he visited a community of sarkis (‘leather workers’) during a monsoon when a wide spread diarrheal disease had already taken the lives of a couple of infants. At a meeting in which possible measures against the disease were being discussed, a local leader of a ‘revolutionary (*krāntikārī*)’ party did not say a word about diarrhea, or measures for improving the immediate situation in which the sarkis lived. Instead, the local party leader preached about revolutionary materialism, which, Paudel felt, was thoroughly unhelpful

only cover the legitimately constituted forms of political or economic subjection, but also modes of action, more or less considered and calculated, which [are] destined to act upon the possibilities of action of other people. To govern, in this sense, is to structure the possible field of action of others” (Foucault 1983:221).

15 For a classic discussion of the ‘rise of the social’ see Hannah Arendt (1958). See also: Foucault 1991a; Gordon 1991; Procacci 1991; Donzelot 1979; Deleuze 1979; McClure 1992; Riley 1988; Dean 1999.

16 For an introduction to Foucault’s work, see Foucault 1988.

17 More specifically, Paudel’s article was written in response to opinions expressed at the conference, “NGOs and INGOs: Reality and Myth,” organized jointly by Pragatishil Budhijibi Samgathan and Akhil Nepal Budhijibi Sangha in Kathmandu, 15 Chaitra, 2054 v.s (28 March 1998). Paudel’s article as well as an account of the conference in general, and the articles by some of the participants of the conference can be found in the Saun 2055 v.s. issue of the magazine *Bikās* (Paudel 2055 v.s.; Bikas 2055 v.s.; Bhattachan 2055 v.s.; Pragyannaratna 2055 v.s.).

and completely irrelevant to the situation (2055 v.s.:29). The 'revolutionaries', by conceding the immediate and critical concerns of everyday life to NGOs and other 'reformists', concede too large a part of reality.

Alternatively, we might have begun our criticism of Ferguson's recommendations by focusing on how he defines 'we' in the epilogue to *The Anti-Politics Machine* as "we scholars and intellectuals working in or concerned about the Third World" (1994:283). In other places, he appears to be speaking, more specifically, to "American anthropologists" (1994:286-7). Taking our cues from this, it seems that Ferguson imagines as the collective, as the 'we', those people who feel that they have a *choice*, a choice whether or not to engage with the conceptual-institutional space of development. I doubt that many of us have that choice. What Paudel's argument suggests to me is that much of what counts as reality in Nepal, much of how people live their lives in the short and long run, is already shot through by discourses and practices of development. In attempting to escape from development's 'touch' we become confined to our own little Tundikhel (an open space with an open air stage, south of Ratna Park at the center of Kathmandu, where political rallies are often held), or embark on a puritan and, I would argue, unpromising search to identify groups "that clearly represent movements of empowerment" (Ferguson 1994:286).¹⁸

Ferguson's critical strategy was to characterize development as a very strange object – a strange machine that stands between the Third World reality and 'us' – in order to help us take a fresh look at 'development' and to recognize its very peculiar mode of operation. Yet, as I have argued above, this strategy also led Ferguson to an overly simplistic division between development and political reality and, consequently, to politically unproductive conclusions. I would argue that while we need to retain the critical attitude towards development that Ferguson's work helped us foster, we also need to bring the object, development, back home. That is, development that has been made to appear so strange, remote, and even exotic, should now be returned to lived experience.

I think Stacy Pigg's work helps us take steps towards that direction. In contrast to where *The Anti-Politics Machine* ends, her critical work on

18 Barbara Cruikshank has usefully reviewed a genealogy of 'depoliticization' arguments in North America, including Hannah Arendt's stances on 'the social' and 'the political' (Cruikshank 1999:43-66). For a useful discussion of the historical and biographical contexts of Arendt's arguments about 'the social' see Pitkin 1995.

development begins from a realization that there is no clear division between ‘development’ and the ‘reality out there’. This is to say, there is virtually no direct access to a ‘reality’ unmediated by the discourses of development in Nepal. Below, I consider where her work can take us.

“Cosmopolitan Villagers”

Stacy Pigg writes of the typical responses elicited by her statement that she was in Nepal to study *dhāmi-jhākris*, or shamans, during the mid-1980s:

First a chuckle, and then a comment. One way or another, this comment would focus on the oddness of a person from a “developed country,” a *bikasit des*, trying to know about this most “Nepali” phenomenon. “So what have you decided?” I would be asked by a laughing stranger, “Do you believe in dhamis?” (Pigg 1996:160).

The topic of *dhāmi-jhākri* prompted comments as to whether they are to be ‘believed’, as to if there is a scientific basis for their efficacy (such as ‘psychological effects’), and as to why a person from a country with many doctors needed to be studying such arcane practices. Thus, Pigg learned that shamans in Nepal, as in many other parts of the world, were already “caught up in the meanings of modernity” (Pigg 1996:161). Inquiry into shamanism seemed always to be interrupted by commentaries, or meta-discourses, on shamanism’s place in a world divided into developed and undeveloped places, a universe divided into cosmopolitan and (merely) local knowledge systems. Pigg could not study shamanic practices *in themselves*, as it were; when she arrived in the villages, she found people who were not simply participating in shamanic practices, but already reflexive about the meaning of such practices in the contemporary world. Pigg makes it clear that it was not simply her presence that prompted the discussion of whether shamans were to be believed. It was an ongoing and important topic in the people’s daily lives. Hence, it became important to understand why people were so interested in talking about “who believes what”? (Pigg 1996:162).

Obviously, such interests were connected to the idea of modernity which, in Nepal, had become inseparably tied to the project of development, or *bikās*: “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 1996:163). Yet, Pigg warns us against simply taking the skeptical or dismissive statements by the villagers regarding shamans as symptoms of a

'modernization' that is eroding the traditional belief system. The modernization narrative of progress tells us of the transition from superstition to science, from blind faith in ritual and magic to a critical and rational attitude towards the world. Such modernization narrative is itself a myth. Pigg shows, instead, that skepticism is an integral part of the shamanic practice. From the beginning, when one decides to call on a shaman, one needs to select the one among many who will be most effective, who will know better than anyone else what to do about the particular problem with which the client group is faced. Once one contacts the shaman, what follows is a delicate bargaining "over what will be done, what is needed for a ceremony and how much it will cost" (Linda Stone 1986:300 quoted in Pigg 1996:182). There is constant discussion over how to distinguish more trustworthy *dhāmis* from those who are less so. Hence a 'belief' in the ability of a particular shaman also implies a position, more or less permanent, based on careful judgement (Pigg 1996:190). In contrast to the portrait of the irrational, superstitious believer that the modernization discourse provides, "To be a believer [in a village regarding a shaman] is to be a conscious agent, a thoughtful acting subject – very much like the rational knower in the discourse of modernity" (Pigg 1996:190).

That so-called 'primitive social practices', such as witchcraft and oracular divination, actually invoke skepticism and involve critical thinking has been part of the corpus of anthropological knowledge at least since E. E. Evans-Pritchard wrote his ethnographies in the 1930s (Cf. Evans-Pritchard 1976). Yet Pigg has a further important point to make. Yes, skepticism is an integral part of shamanism, and hence you cannot assume that the expression of skepticism towards shamans is something new in Nepal. But, nonetheless, skepticism is marked as modern "*by implication* in a social context in which 'blind belief', 'superstition', 'wrong beliefs', and 'ignorance' are equated with the 'backwardness' of 'tradition'" (1996:191; emphasis original):

This very notion of a progressive transition away from belief has currency in Nepal and elsewhere. It has become a familiar interpretive frame. What makes skepticism 'modern' is the fact that this skepticism can be – and often is – interpreted as such by others (Pigg 1996:191).

What Pigg attempts is indeed a complex maneuver. On the one hand, she criticizes and debunks the modernization narrative by showing that villagers are not prisoners of their own 'local culture', blindly following

closed and inflexible ‘belief systems’. Yet, she also explores how that very modernization narrative, with its simplistic dualisms – modern vs. traditional, scientific vs. superstitious, cosmopolitan vs. local – does indeed construct social reality and identities in contemporary Nepal.¹⁹

First let us look at Pigg’s analysis of how the idea of modernization structures the production of development discourse and practice. Pigg has carefully analyzed programs aimed at integrating local knowledge and traditional medical practitioners (TMPs) into the health development effort in Nepal. She finds, for example, a report that claims “Knowledge of the relationship of food intake to severe malnutrition is extremely low among village women” (Pigg 1995a:60). This is an extraordinary claim: village women don’t know malnutrition has to do with not eating well? Pigg tracks down how this conclusion was arrived at. In a report from a successful community health program preceding the one Pigg was looking at, it was said that all the children described by adults as ‘*runche*’ suffered from early stages of malnutrition. The word ‘*runche*’ itself describes “a child who is whiny, unco-operative and sickly in some vague, indeterminate way” (Pigg 1995a:60). The celebrated recommendation from the community health project was to give high-protein nutritional supplements to children who were described as ‘*runche*’. This sound lesson was later, in the program Pigg was looking at, transformed. Specifically, the English word, ‘malnutrition’, was made the semantic equivalent of the Nepali word ‘*runche*’. So, the question posed to the women, intended to ask them what they would do for a child with malnutrition, in effect, asked them what they would do for a child who is vaguely whiny, unco-operative, and sickly. The majority of women

19 From a different angle, Elizabeth Povinelli has written about the central importance of a notion of ‘doubt’ – self-doubt, in particular – in contemporary liberal ideology. This self-doubt involves an acknowledgement of the radical contingency involved in the constitution of self. Liberals are aware of the existence of the other, and are ready to listen to the cries of others in order to broaden their moral horizon. This liberal sense of self initially appears as if it is conducive of tolerance. Yet, Povinelli shows that this presupposes two distinctive social roles within society: “Liberals will listen to and evaluate the pain, harm, torture they might unwittingly be causing minority others. Nonliberals and other minority subjects will present their pained subjectivity to this listening, evaluating public” (Povinelli 2001:329). Povinelli talks of the grave consequences that can visit those minority groups – indigenous peoples, religious fundamentalists and others – who are deemed too radically different, and hence, incapable of coexistence in the liberal world.

answered that they would take the child to the traditional healer instead of increasing food intake (Pigg 1995a:60).

Perhaps more care on the part of the program personnel might have avoided this particular mistake. But, Pigg argues that this and other mistakes are symptoms of a more systematic problem: "There is more than insensitivity or misuse of words at stake here. Translations circulate endlessly through what researchers ask respondents and what researchers hear respondents say" (Pigg 1995a:61). What Pigg points us towards is the existence of the rules of discursive formation and their systematic effects, rules and effects we have discussed above with reference to Ferguson:

In translating information about 'local ideas and practices' into development discourse, 'traditions' are systematically rendered as isolated 'beliefs' and 'customs' with little social basis aside from the fact that they are features of a traditional society. The decontextualization of 'tradition' is accomplished through certain habitual procedures embedded in research (Pigg 1995a:60).

Those 'habitual procedures' include the following: 1) the delineation of exotic features, such as rituals, supernatural beings, and pollution beliefs which get recorded while more unmarked features that seem closer to western or Hindu high-caste norms are omitted; 2) the privileging of precise and explicit statements of rules, the ignoring of context-sensitive and complex practices and the translating of these complex practices into 'absence of concern'; 3) the understanding of tradition as inherent to a place or social identity. For example, ethnic identity, such as being 'Rai', is taken to override all other social factors that might structure opinion, ideologies and action (Pigg 1995a:60).

In effect, the implementation of even very well intended development projects that seek to involve local people and their knowledge "subsume 'local tradition' under the universalistic rationality of the development model" (Pigg 1995a:62-63). Pigg argues that it does not do for us to try to "tune-up" the "development machine" to "solve its functional glitches." Instead, she argues that "we strive to step outside the development paradigm all together" (1995a:62). Because, even

'mere' words are produced by and reproduce a power asymmetry that becomes more entrenched every time development visions turn into policies and policies turn into actual programs. The scale of this activity is immense, global. Instead of joining in development's continual production and marketing of solutions, perhaps it is time to consider that development discourse also produces distinctive

problems, and in fact these problems are necessary to development power and must be perpetually recreated in order to sustain it (Pigg 1995a:62).²⁰

Pigg's argument here clearly shares much with Ferguson's. We may also recall Panday's statement that 'development' in Nepal has become mere words devoid of any sincerity or substance. What Pigg urges us to see is that even those 'mere words' have powerful structuring effects. What Pigg then goes on to do, unlike Ferguson, is to explore how development discourse is shaping, not only the worldviews of development bureaucrats, but ways people in the villages see the world and their place in it. She argues: "Development offers persuasive new frameworks through which social relations, and especially social differences, are discussed" by the people who are themselves the 'target' of development (1993:47). For Pigg, this *ideological impact on the target people* needs more attention.

Pigg notes that, from the point of view of the villagers, there could at least be two models of development. In the realm of health development, for example, one model would acknowledge the efficacy and rationality of local knowledge and integrate "Western-style medicine into a local scheme of knowledge in a way that posits the possibility of a *bikasi* village" (Pigg 1995a:33). The other model is the one that we have already seen. It places "the doctor's medicine and the shaman's mantra in separate worlds, thus reinforcing a definition of the village as the place development can never reach" (Pigg 1995a:33). Both models can be compelling. But, Pigg argues, only one has "a life outside local experience. The model that insists that *bikas* and the village are distinct and mutually exclusive finds echoes in the messages of schoolbooks, the rhetoric of development, stereotypes of ethnic sensibilities, and the conventions of everyday speech" (Pigg 1995a:33). This predicament, the sense that there is no prospect for an autonomous and creative path to development for Nepali villages, constitutes the kernel of Pigg's criticism of development.

As I have already mentioned, a critical approach to development that I will advocate involves target and strategy that are ultimately different from Pigg's. However, I would like at this juncture to underscore that Pigg's work embodies an important and critical motif in anthropology. In contradiction to a prevalent conception of modernization as 'the broadening of choices', a number of anthropologists have endeavored to

20 See the section titled "Author's Note, 1998" in Pigg (1999:21-22) for her response to the reactions that this article on TMPs generated, including the reactions to her call to 'step outside the development paradigm'.

show that the process of modernization involves often irremediable losses. That is, to return to Talal Asad's formulation quoted at the top of this paper, modernity creates conditions in which people become *unable* to make many choices that were previously available to them. Let me provide just one more example from the many works with this motif.²¹

In his 1990 article, Arjun Appadurai has argued how the changes in the culture of agriculture in western India over the last century have *forced* farmers into "large-scale, metropolitan interactions, contexts, and modes of thought" (Appadurai 1990:208). Appadurai traced this process at two levels. One was the emergence of the indigenous "agronomic discourse" over the last century, a kind of autonomous, scientific discourse about agriculture (considered as a capitalistic enterprise) that separated itself from the social and moral contexts of agricultural practices. The agronomic discourse increasingly renders context-sensitive local knowledges about agriculture obsolete, and leads to their eventual loss. On another level, Appadurai discusses concrete instances of technological change related to irrigation, and how the new cluster of technologies (e.g. electrified wells) lead again to the loss of local knowledges, as well as to the corrosion of the "core cultural value" in the villages, which he identifies as "sociality" (1990:212). Hence, changes at both the ideological and practical levels lead to the loss of local knowledges (including subsistence-oriented knowledges crucial for survival in times of need) and, more generally, to the obsolescence of certain epistemologies and to the corrosion of certain values. Thus, changes in agricultural technologies, often described as 'rationalization', 'modernization', and 'progress', Appadurai shows, involve the reduction of options. This reduction, furthermore, in narrowly economic terms, leads to an increase in risk for farmers, especially poorer ones.

Investigations into the loss of options through the processes of modernization not only are critically important in themselves, but they are necessary step in a larger investigation into the nature of emerging socio-political conditions after the onset of modernity. Some of Pigg's works, as the ones we saw above concerning medical knowledges and practices, describe different instances of the narrowing of choices, and identify the character of the basic predicament. She says, the process of

²¹ In this regard, consider the titles of two important collections of essays on development: *An Anthropological Critique of Development: The Growth of Ignorance* (Hobart 1993) and *Dominating Knowledges: Development, Culture and Resistance* (Appel-Marglin and Marglin 1990).

development, in essence, is a process of reproduction and entrenchment of power asymmetry. This predicament, she concludes, can only be overcome by ‘stepping outside the development paradigm all together’. Yet, I doubt that this conclusion is helpful or even feasible. I also think that this radical conclusion derives more from the way Pigg herself constructs the problem, rather than the actual situation itself. I will try to illustrate this point through discussing further Pigg’s arguments concerning consciousness-talks.

In an article published in 1992, Stacy Pigg observed that, in the development discourse in Nepal, the villagers were regarded as “‘people who don’t understand’ (*kura bujhdeinan*) and as in need of pedagogic intervention” (1992:507). Yet this vision was not “simply imposed from outside on rural people but assimilated into the ways they see themselves and their relations to other Nepalis” (Pigg 1992:507). Development discourse provided a ‘map’ (Pigg 1992:511) that located the village at the bottom of an evolutionary scheme, defined villagers as ignorant, and regarded local knowledge as ultimately useless. How could villagers find this map compelling?

To answer this riddle, Pigg introduces us to a kind of villagers whom she calls “cosmopolitan” (1992:510). ‘Cosmopolitan villagers’ are those who, while they are themselves villagers for all intents and purposes, nonetheless refer to other villagers as ‘those who do not understand’. In Pigg’s interpretation, cosmopolitan villagers seek to differentiate their consciousness from that of others by asserting their ability to recognize the characteristic of the ‘generic villager’, thereby aligning themselves on the side of *bikās*. According to Pigg, this move is an important strategy in the politics of representation in a society where “Increasingly, the apparatus of *bikas* ... is the source of power, wealth, and upward social mobility” (1992:511). Pigg further writes that the cosmopolitan villagers figure that they can gain the advantage of *bikās* “by becoming an agent of *bikas* rather than one of its targets” (1992:511).

Pigg returns to this issue in an article on shamanism where she explores the problem of belief we have already touched on above. Here, she writes that a villager sees himself not as a passive believer but as an agent with a reflexive awareness of his own action. ‘Villagers’ may be objectified in a discourse that distances them from a modern space, but actual villagers live in a space that is shot through with modern narratives (Pigg 1996:180).

The problem for the villagers becomes, according to Pigg, one of finding their “subject positions for themselves within or alongside the

objectifying discourse of modernization” (1996:180). Thus cosmopolitan villagers express skepticism towards shamanism as a whole. They also recognize the link between development ideology and social mobility:

In rural areas, *bikas* is associated in people’s mind with social mobility. There has emerged in Nepal a new kind of status that is correlated with economic advantage but not reducible to it. Being cosmopolitan, being a relatively “developed” kind of person, is a form of cultural capital. It is both a requirement for entry into other economic spheres and a result of participation in them (1996:173).²²

The best future for upward mobile individuals lies in becoming a modern Nepali qualified to deliver development. They need to distinguish themselves from the “village” that has been constructed, through national development discourse, as the obstacle of development (1996:187).

In a more recent article dealing with educational programs for the prevention of HIV/AIDS in Nepal, Pigg describes the uneven terrain seen from the Nepali AIDS workers’ perspective as follows:

It is by hanging onto the vocabulary of technoscience that Nepalis variously positioned along a steep grade of inequality can rappel themselves up this cliff face to stand, as it were, on the flat plains of internationally established truth and fact (Pigg 2001:510).

Nepalis at all levels, who are keenly aware of the technoscience’s claim to universal truth, hang on to its vocabulary in their effort to escape being defined as ‘marginal’, i.e., “to be positioned as the exception, the deviate, the parochial, the remnant, or the merely local in the face of the universal” (Pigg 2001:510).

Let me restate Pigg’s formulation. Development provides a map of the world. It assigns slots to people, locations, and forms of knowledge and behaviors, defining some as more modern, progressive, universal, and superior, others as traditional, backward, marginal, and inferior. From the point of view of Nepali villagers, these categories of people and places are not simply differentiated in terms of the degrees of progress but are, in addition, linked to different degrees of access to symbolic powers and material comforts. Villagers’ expressions of skepticism about certain beliefs, and their statements that ‘villagers do not understand’ can then be understood as part of their effort to ‘rappel themselves up’ the steep cliff of unequal inequalities. Accordingly, when the villagers themselves

22 On cultural or symbolic capital see Bourdieu (1977).

invoke the notion of a generic, ignorant villager, they are not simply objectifying themselves, but are actively exercising their 'agency' for the purpose of upward mobility.

Pigg's interpretation is correct, provided that the expression of skepticism or statement about ignorance, in a given context, does indeed constitute its primary meaning through reference to that map of differentiation. Alternatively, if you define development discourse *essentially* as a template of unequal differences *and* regard that template as having a defining power that is pervasive and overwhelming in virtually any context (because, among other things, the template is shared by both the villagers and the powerful people outside the village), then, of course, *all such utterance* need to be interpreted as a strategic move in the 'politics of identity'. The latter argument, of course, is untenable. It is untenable because, among many other reasons, development is, as I have already indicated, not only about asymmetrical differentiation of people and places into categories. Hence we need to understand Pigg's interpretation as applicable *only* in cases where the (cosmopolitan) villager's utterance is intended to refer to *that aspect of* development discourse *which* functions to distribute persons on a scale of differential access to power. For all other cases, we need other interpretations. However, I suspect Pigg, at moments, implicitly collapses this *particular aspect* of development discourse, on the one hand, and the development discourse *as such*, on the other. It is through this logical leap, I think, that she advocates, with Ferguson, that we abandon 'development paradigm all together'.

I would also like to underscore Pigg's use of the notion of 'subject position' (Pigg 1996:180; quoted above p. 298), since I think this notion helps mark the scope of her analysis. The issue for the villagers, Pigg says, is one of finding a 'position' in an unevenly structured field. Even before the introduction of development ideology, people had always been concerned with "status and mobility" (Pigg 1996:172). In one place, Pigg also suggests that the objectifying logic of development is easy for the Nepalis to adapt to because "the notion that some people are inherently more 'developed' echoes Hindu concepts of caste superiority" (Pigg 1993:54). Development introduces a new dimension to the dynamics of stratification and mobility. But the basic issue remains the same: stratification and mobility. The nature of the terrain in which the 'subject' needs to find his or her position has gone through significant changes through development. Accordingly the attributes the 'subject' needs to acquire in order to be effectively upward mobile have also changed. But

the 'subject' itself is the same. It is the same 'subject' desiring to find a better position in the world for him or herself.

Hence, we can state the scope of Pigg's analytic framework in the following manner: it *does* address the changing dynamics of stratification and mobility, but it *does not* address the constitution of the subject *itself*.

Desire for Improvement

I hope it is clear from the above discussion that Pigg's framework by itself is insufficient for understanding Kamala Pun's statements. Kamala Pun said "I did not know anything before the NGO people came and talked to me." She also said "I still don't know much, but at least now I know I must learn. I am trying to learn whatever I can and trying whatever small things that I can do, to improve our condition." Unlike Pigg's cosmopolitan villagers who try to distinguish themselves from other villagers by their statements about ignorance and awareness, Kamala Pun's statement is not aimed at distinguishing her from any other person. Or, more precisely, she is distinguishing herself from herself, i.e., her former self who 'did not know anything'. Thus, her statement, in itself, has nothing to do with 'positioning' or upward mobility. Rather, we need to take her seriously, and see her as *indeed* trying to communicate her new sense of freedom she gained through a new awareness, an awareness that has enabled her to consciously educate herself, to mold herself in an *improving* direction.

I just stated that Kamala Pun's words had nothing to do with trying to present herself as more 'developed' than others in order to gain symbolic or material capital. Yet, her words have everything to do with the history of development that, among other things, identified 'rural women' like Kamala Pun as targets in need of pedagogic intervention.

Kamala Pun, in her late thirties, never went to school, as no girl in her village went to school when she was growing up. Her husband, on the other hand, did go to school for a few years, and hence can read and write. He is also an active Nepal Communist Party (United Marxist-Leninist) supporter. Kamala Pun has never been active in the field of politics, narrowly defined as being active in one or other political party, although she is aware of political ideologies of parties through her husband and others. Although she had always been an active and energetic person, the coming of NGO provided her with a new forum and a new ways of being active.

The NGO, which had begun its activities in the Tarai area, extended its activities into the hill area through the effort of a Pahari (a person of hill-

origin) in the NGO. He encouraged Kamala Pun to enroll in the adult literacy class organized by the NGO, and asked her to encourage others to do the same. Kamala Pun was one of the first persons he contacted, because they were relatives. Within a year, the NGO also began 'Women's Development Program', involving saving-and-credit groups and other training and activities. As a local representative of the 'Women's Development Section', Kamala Pun has traveled to many places in the Tarai for meetings and training sessions. She would not have had the chance to visit those places if it were not for her involvement in the NGO. It is needless to rehearse the argument here that the 'local people', without being taught by the NGOs or other agents of development, are involved in myriad of activities for helping themselves and others to improve their situations. What is important to note here is that the self-help and group activities introduced by the NGO are experienced as something *new*. Through those activities, moreover, one is introduced to new forms of public interactions as well as linkages that are different from, for example, kinship, local forms of collaborative work-groups, or those associated with membership in political parties.

The adult literacy class that Kamala Pun participated in, used *Nayā Goreṭo* ('New Path'), published by Ministry of Education and Culture, as its textbook. I have already mentioned that Kamala Pun's vision of development did not involve 'nation' as its constitutive element, in contrast to visions held by Nanda Shrestha and Devendra Raj Panday. This difference, the presence or absence of the nation as a key element in the vision of development, echoes the difference between the formal school textbooks and the adult literacy (or 'non-formal education') class textbook. As Laura Ahearn has analyzed recently, although the school textbooks and the adult literacy textbook are both published by Ministry of Education and Culture, they incorporate very different messages (Ahearn 2001:152-71). The school textbooks are shot through by nationalist ideology. They aim to foster patriotism and instill 'proper' national culture in the students. Ahearn identifies the following as key themes of school textbooks: "(1) nationalism and development (which are presented as going hand in hand); (2) age and gender hierarchies; and, (3) hegemonic Hinduism" (2001:152).²³ The adult literacy textbook, on the other hand, advocates self-sufficiency, hard work, success, and individual responsibility, with virtually no reference to nationalism (Ahearn

23 For a history of the making of national history in school textbooks in Nepal, see Onta 1996a.

2001:170). From this difference, one is tempted to conclude that the Nepali government, on the one hand, wants the school-going children to grow into patriotic citizens dedicating their energies to developing the nation, but, on the other hand, wants the illiterate adults (mainly women) in the villages only to be able to help themselves, in order not to increase any more the number of 'poor' in the country.

Yet, we should not consider this advocacy of 'self-help' simply as a product of the concern for 'poverty reduction' which came to fore in the development industry during the 1970s. Discourse of self-help has a much longer history, and is intimately tied with the emergence of modern forms of governance. Mitchell Dean, for example, has explored a genealogy of the discourses of poverty and self-help since the 18th century (Dean 1991). Self-help, indeed, has been a key theme ever since the very beginning of the project of development in Nepal. Community development (CD), one of the first development programs in Nepal, was described as "A process of releasing, through effective leadership, the enormous potential that resides in people who discover that through their own efforts they can improve the usefulness of their own lives" (Rose 1962:100). Implicit in this vision was a particular relationship between leaders (national leaders, teachers, village-level workers, community organizers, motivators, catalysts, facilitators) and the 'people'. The people, through facilitation by the leaders, would become aware of their own ability to 'improve the usefulness of their lives'. The techniques involved in CD were aimed at creating in people a new sense of self, a self which could imagine oneself as a self with an enormous potential (and feels, retroactively, that such potential was there all along) – a new sense of awareness that would, then, motivate people to learn to read and write, send their daughters to school, build toilets, and use chemical fertilizers. Kamala Pun's statement, and her sense of freedom, is connected to this history.

The vision promoted by CD linked pedagogy and motivation to the development of villages and of the nation. In accordance with this vision, villagers, or whomever became the 'target' of development, were exhorted to become aware. They were to produce in themselves 'selves' that reflected, evaluated and motivated themselves, so as to help themselves and, if possible, the nation as a whole.²⁴ There were many and repeated

²⁴ Not coincidentally, because they are historically connected, self-help discourses in the United States share basic structures with the ones we are looking at here. Accordingly, Barabara Cruishank argues, with reference to a self-help movement in the US: "self-help was designed to lift the people out of themselves, to get them to objectify their own selves so that

proddings – or, incitements, if you will – to objectify oneself in a particular manner, to desire improvement of oneself and of a larger community.

It is important to note again that there were different forms of development interventions, or proddings, and that they seem to have produced very different desires in different people. For example Laura Ahearn's ethnography, which I have already cited, argues that literacy that was introduced into a hill community through development initiatives, quite unexpectedly, produced within newly literate persons, desire to be a 'modern individual' capable of making personal choices, including a desire to experience and pursue 'romantic love' (Ahearn 2001). As we have already seen, Nanda Shrestha, as a schoolboy in the 1960s in Pokhara, desired to 'uplift Nepal'. Kamala Pun, in the late 1990s, wanted to learn new things, about how to improve conditions for herself, for the members of her organization, for people in the hills, for women in general. But she does not have a burning desire to 'uplift Nepal'.

We may term all these desires as modern, and as being engendered largely by development interventions. Anthropological criticism of development needs to be able to recognize and track down these different desires, or more generally, different re-formations of subjectivities, engendered by the project of development.

Political Horizons

I would like to conclude this paper with brief suggestions, relating the perspectives on development discussed above and two of the major socio-political issues in contemporary Nepal. One is the Nepal Communist Party (Maoist)'s 'People's War'. The other is the movement for the liberation of Kamaiyas (agricultural bonded laborers).

The statement published by the central committee of NCP (Maoist) on Phagun 1, 2052 v.s. (February 13, 1996), the day they launched 'People's War', begins with an observation about the 'failure of development'. It says: The Nepali state, while talking about development and nation building for nearly 50 years, has led Nepal to become one of the world's poorest nation second only to Ethiopia (Nepal Rastriya Buddhijibi Sangathan 2054 v.s.:45). The declared intent of the Maoists, the true nationalists, then, is that they will eventually take over the state-power, and effect real development of Nepal. Maoists, not unlike Panday or

they would have no further need to be the objects of help" (Cruishank 1999:51).

Shrestha, accuse those in power of insincerity. While speaking of development, those in power were poaching the nation, selling national resources and independence to foreign capitalists. While speaking of national unity, the ruling elites were consolidating Hindu upper-caste domination.

It is known that many educated rural youths are involved in the Maoists movement. In attempting to understand their motivations, we need to consider the histories of development interventions, including such things as national education, in encouraging them to envision a developing nation, and to wish to make sacrifices, even their lives, for the creation, first of all, of a *national* society that is just. Of course, it would be ridiculous to suggest that Maoist movement can be understood simply with reference to the history of development interventions. Maoist movement, of course, is a revolutionary communist movement, which calls for any analyst to engage, among other things, with the history of leftist political ideologies and mobilizations. My suggestion here is that in exploring the nature of Maoist mobilization, we consider a possible existence of a generative process of motivation and desires that is at least in part accountable as hybridization between two modernist imaginaries, namely developmental and revolutionary.

The Kamaiya liberation movement, which began on May 1, 2000, and forced the government to declare the 'emancipation' of all bonded laborers in Nepal the same year, is another historic mobilization.²⁵ The movement is still continuing, at the time of this writing, as a large number of 'liberated' laborers are still demanding government to provide them with land to live on and cultivate. The main driving force behind the movement has been a large NGO in western Nepal named BASE (Backward Society Education). This movement contrasts sharply with the Maoist movement in its commitment to non-violence and also in its non-partisan nature (in the sense of not aligning with any particular political party). It does not aim to seize control of the state power. Rather, it demands the state power to make good on its promises of development, of upholding constitution, of basing its claim to legitimacy on being able to ensure the security and welfare of its citizens. Yet, the movement's demands are based on universal principles that are ultimately not conditional on the policies of any particular state. Correspondingly, the alliance that supports the movement crosses state boundaries.

25 For an account of the Kamaiya liberation movement, see Fujikura (2001).

The President of BASE, Dilli Bahadur Chaudhary who founded the organization with his friends, initially in the form of a youth club in the 1980s, explains his initial interest in development activities as being precipitated by his disillusionment with electoral politics. Dilli Chaudhary's father was an elected village chairman. But, in Dilli Chaudhary's evaluation, his father was not able to induce changes to help the poorest Tharus in the community. Dilli Chaudhary and his friends came to age in Dang District in the 1980s, the place which was going through rapid and radical changes, due to building of a branch road from the East-West Highway into the area, and the activities of Integrated Rapti Development Project implemented jointly by USAID (United States Agency for International Development) and the Nepali government. After the restoration of multi-party democratic system in 1990, BASE began to receive substantial funding from DANIDA (Danish International Development Assistance) and other donors, and implement various development projects.

When they launched the Kamaiya liberation movement, involving more than a thousand bonded laborers filing cases with the government demanding protection of their rights and cancellation of their debts, accompanied by massive demonstrations in five districts in western Nepal and eventually in Kathmandu, Dilli Chaudhary described the movement as signaling BASE's move away from 'project mentality' towards 'social movement'. Dilli Chaudhary's explanation may appear to accord well with James Furguson's criticism of development we discussed above. One might be tempted to interpret the changes in BASE's strategies, as a movement away from the 'depoliticizing' realm of development, and into the realm of the real, emancipatory politics. I do not see it that way. BASE's move, to be sure, involved a break away from 'project mentality' towards social change – from the world of technical, bureaucratic, and hence often highly unrealistic blueprints and project cycles. Yet, in launching their movement, what BASE made claim to was precisely what Panday above called 'development values'. BASE's basic argument is that in a society, which is supposedly oriented towards the values of development, no group of people should be left alone to suffer extreme forms of exploitation and poverty. Additionally, from an institutional and organizational point of view, BASE would not have been able to launch the massive mobilization, without the legitimacy and resources, including its massive membership and transnational network of support, that it had built up through its 10 years of work in the field of conventional, mainstream development. Had the leadership of BASE decided early on to

'step-outside' of the world of development, as per the recommendation of Ferguson, the massive social movement would not have happened the way it did.

One of the important things that donor funding enabled BASE was for it to remain independent from any political party. BASE, with its tens of thousands of membership, became a kind of political force that every political party had to reckon with, but no party could control. BASE did not deny the value of political parties. What it did was to create alternative forums and pathways for people to engage with socio-political issues, along side and sometimes in collaboration with political parties. Remember Kamala Pun, an active member of an NGO, whose husband is an active member of a communist party. What BASE has done is not a negation of political parties, or development institutions, but an addition to those institutions, creating new venues and possibilities for socio-political engagements.

Arjun Appadurai, in his recent article, characterized the activities of allied groups working for the urban poor in Mumbai as "politics of patience" (Appadurai 2002). By the term, he meant to designate a form of socio-political engagement that is different from either the project orientations of conventional development interventions, or the violent politics of the revolutionary left or militant ethnic groups. Politics of patience values negotiation and coalition buildings, acknowledging positive social transformations take long time to materialize. Politics of patience, Appadurai writes, is "constructed against the tyranny of emergency" – the emergency experienced everyday by people living under poverty and exploitation.

BASE has represented in Nepal alternative political space and strategies similar to what Appadurai has described in his account of the groups working in Mumbai. However, in Nepal, with the escalation of People's War, especially after November of 2001, that alternative space has increasingly been narrowed from both the sides of the Maoists and the government. It is as if both the Maoists and the government wanted the same thing – a situation in which you were forced to choose either the Maoists or the government, with no middle ground, no other choices.

Among the things that are at stake in this war are many of the values that have been promoted in the name of development. Both the government and Maoists claim that they are on the side of true development. In that sense (as well as in other senses), the war is fought within the problematics of modern governmentality with its goal of creating a societal condition in which both the lives of the individuals and

the society as a whole can improve and prosper. While the government and the NCP(Maoist) fight over the role of leading the nation towards justice and happiness, many other aspirations for improvement, for self and for others, are being suppressed. What a critic of development needs to be doing at this juncture, I suggest, is not one of constructing a stark choice, between development or politics, for example. Rather, an important task at present, it seems to me, is one of nurturing visions that could recognize a variety of aspirations and desires that have been engendered or fostered, in different degrees and aspects, through the history of development interventions. The task is urgent, I believe, especially because some of those aspirations may be in danger of being destroyed.

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