

**LEARNING AS BECOMING:
THE SUBJECT, BODY AND KNOWING IN LEARNING**

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Certificate of authorship

I certify that the work presented in this dissertation has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged in the text.

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Abstract

This thesis offers a conceptualisation of how individuals learn in experience in their everyday lives by locating learning in individual accounts of personal change. Framed by Karen Barad's concept of intra-action grounded in onto-epistemology, the inquiry understands learning as a continuous process that shapes us towards becoming who we are and what we do in our everyday lives. The thesis locates learning in interactions in the immediate world as an ongoing process of becoming in life. The fluid nature of interactions means that objects and subjects do not exist prior to engagement but emerge as a result of it. By giving ontological privilege to relations instead of forms of being, this approach disrupts notions of the stable subject, the essential body and reified knowledge in learning.

The research employs a post qualitative approach, applying diffractive analysis to read the life experiences of change of eight female participants from different parts of Nepal. In asking 'How does learning work?' in the participants' narratives, the thesis argues for and explicates the nature of three interconnected dimensions of learning: the subject, the body and the process of knowing.

Drawing on ideas from Deleuze and Guattari and Spinoza, the thesis argues that the subject in learning can be explicated as a nomadic multiplicity, consistently in motion and constituted through material discursive intra-actions. The body is conceptualised as a desiring assemblage of material and discursive elements that constantly shift by affecting others and by being affected. Knowing is an emergent process of coming to matter in the world through becoming. Knowing is becoming.

Through four linked propositions the thesis presents an account of learning as becoming as an emergent ongoing phenomenon characterised by expansion in the complexity of the bodily composition. Bodily complexity changes through shifts in the relational composition with respect to the immediate milieu in which it is situated. In the process of this bodily becoming, the context in which it is situated also emerges.

The significance of this study lies in its theoretical contribution to reconceptualising the notion of learning as a process of becoming in ways that allow us to better understand the processes of learning in everyday life and the possibilities of personal change. ■

Chapter 1

What is there to learn about learning?

1.1 Introduction

Learning is a very elusive phenomenon to study. Of the many ways to understand and explain learning; some perspectives are more comprehensive than others. In this introductory chapter, I argue for a reconceptualisation of learning as an ongoing process of becoming in life through everyday experience. I start with a story drawn from my personal and professional experience that made me question the very notion of learning and which motivated me to explore learning differently. I discuss some of the key tenets of relevant theories of learning to situate this inquiry. I introduce the research questions that drive this inquiry, describe the approach taken and present the main conclusions and significance of this research. Finally, I summarise the organisation of the thesis.

1.2 Genesis of the research: the woman who did not learn

In my work as a development consultant in Nepal, I have had the privilege of travelling around the country and listening to many stories of personal change. Most of these stories are narrated as evidence of the success of a particular adult learning program implemented either on its own or often as part of a broader 'empowerment' program. On one particular occasion I was evaluating a program that included an awareness workshop against domestic violence when a local community facilitator confided to me her dilemma and frustration. It concerned a woman in the community who

continued to live with and tolerate her abusive husband without doing anything about it, although she had participated in many awareness workshops on domestic violence and had become an advocate herself. The question the facilitator put to me was, 'Why does she not learn from her experience?'

In the course of my professional career, I have come across different ideas about what counts as 'knowledge' and 'learning' and who gets identified as a 'learner'. In the field of development work the discourses of empowerment have their own constructions of 'learning' and 'knowing'. The above experience set me wondering. Surely, I reflected, the woman who did not take any action against her abusive husband in spite of the many workshops she had participated in must *know something* to continue to live with him. She must have her own *understanding* of her situation and have some reason to do what she was doing (and/or not doing). Or perhaps she just *knew it*, without having a specific thought or reason. How could we understand her learning, which in fact had been deemed to be 'non-learning'?

My interest in conducting this research specifically on learning arose from my professional and personal experience in Nepal. I have come across women in rural Nepal who were perceived as 'uneducated' or 'disempowered' and in need of 'awareness raising'. In listening to their life experiences, I often found the women to have acted in ways that enabled them to go beyond what was possible. Some of them acted in ways that did not conform to the prescribed ways of being as a woman in society, which led to changes in them that they could have not predicted. Through such changes, some of these women also influenced change in others around them, affecting their immediate family members and relatives and their communities.

In my work, I came across remarkable stories of personal change without the individuals involved ever having been participants in any formal or non-formal educational programs or having received any 'intervention'. There were also cases where a few participants from an adult education program would become exemplary success stories of personal change while many others would not have been influenced to the same degree. As a 'development consultant', I found it difficult to simply attribute some of these acts and personal changes solely to a particular pedagogical intervention. The change and learning was much more complex than simply having more knowledge or awareness raised from an adult education or empowerment project.

The question that interested me was this: When one encounters a particular situation or context at a given time, what enables or makes individuals do what they do and how? Is it the 'knowledge' they have? How do they know? This research interest also emerged from a self-reflexive stance. I am a woman born into a middle-class family in the capital city of Kathmandu. I have had a relatively privileged upbringing compared to many women in Nepal. By common understanding, I am generally perceived as a 'modern empowered woman' who is educated and financially independent. So the assumption would be that as a 'knowledgeable and educated woman', I should know better than to succumb to some of the traditional and seemingly 'oppressive' social practices. Yet in my personal life as a married woman and daughter-in-law, cultural norms meant that there were times when I felt utterly disempowered and unable to act in particular situations. Some of the limitations and restrictions I felt are due to my very specific location in caste and social class terms.

Many times I just could not do as I had *known* and the circumstances made me act and perform in ways that felt less than empowering. Many

times, as I listened to inspiring stories from other women in rural contexts who seemed less privileged, I felt a tinge of jealousy and a sense of inadequacy at my own inability to act in particular contexts. What I concluded from my own and others' experiences was that although formal education and financial capacity might enable a person to do certain things, there are still other ways one's actions could be limited, making the person feel 'disempowered'. On the other hand, while individuals may not have 'knowledge' from formal education, they may still have the capacity to act in ways that are empowering. Knowing does not only come from formal learning; there are other ways of knowing in life. Learning cannot be only understood in the instrumental sense of a person using acquired knowledge to solve a problematic situation. I understand human action as a much more complex process than this instrumental pragmatism.

Among all the different stories that moved me to think about this research, I choose to frame this research with particular stories of change in mind. These are stories where women in their everyday experiences have done extraordinary things. Here, by extraordinary I am not talking about a quality of performance that is measured or compared against what is deemed 'ordinary'. I am referring to the kinds of acts that enabled the person to move away from fixed ways of being and influenced their becoming in life. I use personal change as an indication of learning in everyday life.

For the purposes of this research, I locate the phenomenon of learning within the context of everyday life, where I take experience as the foundation for learning. Within this perspective of learning, I understand learning as a social and embodied process that is enacted in the ongoing engagement in life. Through these engagements in life, we act and change and are always in the process of becoming through experience. Hence, I use the concept of

becoming to think about learning as an ongoing process in life. In this research, I explore learning as a process of becoming through life experiences.

1.3 Theories of learning

1.3.1 What counts as learning?

The incident mentioned above, where the facilitator asked me why an abused woman did not ‘learn from experience’ begs the question of what counts as learning? Barnett (2011) distinguishes four different epochs of learning, each with its own set of assumptions about what may count as learning. The first three are named the metaphysical, the empirical and the performative. The fourth and the latest learning epoch, which he claims is constituted by ‘learning-amid-contestation’. This epoch is characterised by a situation of ‘supercomplexity’ due to the proliferation of multiple and competing perspectives of the world we live in (p. 7). Given this situation, it is almost impossible to come to universal agreement on what is learning. Thus, the concept of learning has been theorised and examined from many different perspectives in different contexts with different agendas (Fenwick 2010), which has led to the establishment of several distinct theoretical fields of learning.

Fenwick further states that in the research into ‘learning’ as a phenomenon, the multiple perspectives do not just represent different meanings of learning, but also different ontologies; that in conceptualising learning, researchers actually ‘delineate different objects of study’ (2010, p. 80). She points out that such differences resist the assumption that learning is a singular universal phenomenon. On the other hand, the establishment of ‘fields of learning’ also demarcates what aspects of learning are valorised and what gets overlooked or even ignored. Learning is a contested notion because it is a ‘conceptual and linguistic construction’ (Hodkinson 2004) and

accordingly can have very different meanings and understandings depending on the social and cultural contexts within which it is constructed. Learning is not a fixed thing, process or otherwise, that exists in the world and that has a universal meaning or understanding. Instead, different kinds of activities or processes or outcomes in different contexts are identified as different modes of learning.

The learning that I am interested in for this research is what can be called 'everyday learning': the kind of learning that happens informally as one engages in everyday life (Illeris 2007, p. 215). This is not to claim that I position this study as the exploration of 'informal' learning. As already mentioned above, demarcation and distinction of fields as formal and informal can be problematic. With that said, Hager and Halliday (2007) assert that it is both useful and feasible to make the distinction between formal learning and informal learning in most contexts. They define informal learning as 'all ... situations in which people learn without sometimes intending to learn [which] includes those situations within formal educational institutions' (p. 2). Hager and Halliday identify some of the attributes of what they refer to as formal learning: that it occurs in formally constituted institutions, follows prescribed frameworks, has specific desired outcomes or broader aims. They identify lack of intention to learn as marker of the informality of learning.

On the other hand, Malcolm, Hodgkinson and Colley (2003) give a different perspective, saying there is no clear distinction between formal and informal learning that can be broadly applied and suggesting that we see 'attributes of informality and formality as present in all learning situations' (extraction from executive summary). The feasibility and usefulness of the distinction may perhaps be relevant in particular discourses of learning but not for this study. In trying to locate what counts as learning, it might be

more useful to locate the context of learning, the situation where learning is assumed to take place.

1.3.2 Life as the context of learning

This study does not locate learning in a designated place of pedagogy, an identifiable institutionalised context of learning. This warrants a discussion and clarification of the notion of 'context' in this study. The kind of learning that is the focus of research is the learning that happens in life through experience. I am interested in change experienced by women in their adult lives in everyday situations. I am particularly interested in the things women do that may have influenced the change process. In this sense, everyday life is the context of learning in this research. This may imply that living and learning are synonymous. If learning is approached as a phenomenon undifferentiated from everyday living, this poses a methodological challenge in framing and conducting this research.

Edwards, Biesta and Thorpe (2009) point out this issue by questioning how one is to understand the learning context when the learning is 'not necessarily bound by a specific set of institutional relationships and structures' (p. 2). They further explain that notions of context have shifted from seeing contexts as 'bounded containers' to instead seeing context as fluid and consisting of relational practices that focus on activity. Thus, instead of being a stable thing with fixed structures, the learning context is seen as the outcome of activities or a set of practices.

Lave (1993) drew attention to the 'problem of the context' where theories of situated practices assumed that the activity of an individual cannot be analysed separate from the socio-material world within which the activity is taking place. Lave identifies two issues in the problem of the context in learning theories. The first issue is the lack of attention given to

conceptualising *relations* between the person and their immediate world. The second issue is lack of attention given to reconceptualising the person's activities in relational terms (1993 p. 5). Both the activity as well as the persons involved in the activity are always in relation to one another and do not exist or work in isolation. Hence, neither can be examined as autonomous independent entities. She also discusses the difficulty of thinking of learning as ubiquitous in everyday ongoing activities in life, although it is logically hard to deny this. She asserts that in any activity there is always change in knowledge and action, and where there is change in knowledge and action, there is learning. She comments:

We have come to the conclusion, as McDermott (1993) suggests, that there is no such thing as 'learning' *sui generis*, but only changing participation in the culturally designed settings of everyday life. Or, to put it the other way around, participation in everyday life may be thought of as a process of changing understanding in practice, that is, as learning. (p. 5-6)

The theories of situated learning that locate the phenomenon of learning in situated activity offer scope to explore learning beyond the traditional contexts of the classroom, training rooms or formal learning in the work place. These theories fall within the broader category of sociocultural theories.

Sociocultural theories of learning provide the theoretical resource for thinking about learning as something more than just the individualistic cognitive process that happens inside a person's head. Sociocultural approaches to learning, drawing from Vygotsky, share the assumption that human action is mediated by language and other symbols situated within a cultural context (Lewis et al, 2007; Alfred 2003). In these theories, although there has been acknowledgment of the body, the focus is on the sociocultural interactions and participation. The understanding of knowledge is based on

the idea of knowledge being socially constructed through interactions, where the body is seen as a tool for participating in the activity but little is said about the role of the body in knowledge construction (Rambusch & Ziemke 2005). Hager and Hodkinson (2009) use the 'participation' metaphor in referring to situated learning theories and comment that this approach, although useful in certain aspects, fails to acknowledge the personal history, dispositions and agency of the learner. It does not explain the change that is undergone by the individual through the participation and how exactly personal identities evolve from 'novice to a full participant' (p. 627).

In the field of education, activity theory, actor-network theory, practice theory and complexity theory are some of the more contemporary paradigms that have been employed to explore and theorise learning beyond the traditional formal contexts of learning. All of these theories see learning as embedded in human action and interaction. What is different across these different theories is how they conceptualise action and interaction; each theory has its own ontology of social reality and interaction. But all of these see context as an emergent aspect of learning rather than a precondition to learning (Edwards, Biesta & Thorpe 2009).

I take the above assumption about the context of learning as a starting point for this inquiry. Learning is embedded in everyday interaction within the immediate world where the learning context emerges as a result of this interaction. So essentially, any place or situation can emerge as a learning context depending on how the interactions unfold in that context, and this includes educational institutions designated as 'formal learning spaces' as well. The learning affordance is located in the interactions and is not necessarily attributed to the essential characteristics of objects within a space. It is the interaction and relations that then constitute the learning context, regardless of whether or not it is structurally established as such a place. In

this regard, a classroom can emerge as a relatively poor or weak learning context based on the kinds of interactions or limitations on interactions that take place in it. This establishes a relational perspective on learning which advances the theoretical understanding of learning by overcoming some of the entrenched troubling dualisms related to learning, for example individual and social, process and product, formal and informal (Hodkinson 2005; Hodkinson, Biesta & James 2007, 2008).

1.3.3 Learning from lives

In studies aiming to explore people learning from their lives there have been two approaches. One focuses on using biography as method for learning from life experiences (Dominice 2000; Neumann & Peterson 1997). This takes a retrospective approach to learning: one learns through the process of recollecting past life experiences and constructing one's own biography. Here, learning in life is seen as an active search for meaning (Dominice 2000). The other and very similar approach has come to be known as the 'learning lives' approach, a term taken from a longitudinal study (2004–2008) conducted in the United Kingdom (Biesta et al, 2011).

This latter approach combined the learning biography method with lifecourse research to explore different learning processes taken up by adults as they respond to different life events over a period of time (Erstad et al. 2009). Several similar studies have mostly used either of these two approaches to examine learning experiences from lives over a period of time (see Biesta et al 2011, p. 7). In the learning lives study, the focus has been on the identity and agency of the individual in their life course and how these impact on the learning practices of the individuals throughout the period of the study. In terms of identity, the study focuses on multiple forms of identity including identity as a learner.

Particular ontological and epistemological issues arise from these approaches to exploring the phenomenon of learning in life, especially for what these studies imply about learning from life. Several theorists in education have used poststructuralist thought to problematise many of the taken for granted notions in the field that limit our understanding of the world and theorisations of learning (Davies et al. 2006; Lather 1992; Lee 1992; MacLure 2003; Peters & Burbules 2004; St. Pierre 2000; Usher & Edwards 2007). In particular, poststructuralists suggest that the uncritical acceptance of experience expressed in narratives or life biographies as a foundation for knowledge and inquiry is problematic.

Robyn Barnacle (2004) provides a thorough and useful critique of the notion of 'lived experience' in educational research. She argues that the privileging of lived experience in educational research not only promotes lived experience as a ground for knowledge at the expense of other ways of knowing but also treats the notion of 'experience' itself and the constitution of lived experience as unproblematic. She builds her argument through a discussion of earlier work by Robin Usher and Rennie Johnston (1997) that also provides a useful critique of some of the key assumptions underlying the 'dominant, humanist models of experiential learning' (p63).

Paul Hager's (1999) critique points out the limitations of Usher's (1989, 1992, 1993) 'discursive' account of experience. While I agree with the notion of the discursive limits of the personal accounts of experience, understanding experience as only a discursive construction leaves out much of the details of our encounters with this world, for instance, the body itself. For me experience is not a mental or a subjective state; it is the very condition of living in the world (Barnacle, 2004). So when I talk about experience, it is not the experience of a subject per se. Instead I see the subject and subjectivity as both being produced through experience (Colebrook, 2001). The uncritical

reliance on narratives as an accessible and valid account of one's lived experience is grounded in the humanist belief in a stable, coherent, unitary and knowing self (St. Pierre 2000). I present a more elaborate discussion of these notions of experience in educational research in chapter two.

Finally, my project also problematises the limitations posed by representationalist epistemology in educational research (Edwards 2012), in which meaning and matter are deemed to be clearly distinguishable. This leads to categorisations, binaries and dichotomies that discursively impose meaning onto things that then present a reductionist perspective of the world. A poststructuralist account aims to trouble those representations and unfold a bit more of the complexity of human life (Lee, 1992).

The issues discussed above provide some understanding of the perspective behind the question the frustrated educator asked me: 'Why does she not learn from experience?' This question comes from a particular understanding about learning, experience, knowledge and the subject of learning. My intention here is not to dismiss those perspectives completely. There is pragmatic value in operating with such perspectives within particular practices, especially when operating within policy discourses. My interest here is to take an approach to learning in life that may help us capture, theorise and explain to some extent the complexity of learning in everyday life.

1.3.4 Learning as becoming

In the earlier section, I made reference to the emergent aspect of the learning context. Karen Barad offers the perspective of what she calls 'onto-epistemology', whereby the objects emerge as a result of the relations formed in material discursive engagement which she calls 'intra-actions' (2007).

Barad coins the word 'intra-action' to refer to the engagement or interactions

of elements in the world, where the objects in engagement do not exist prior to the phenomenon but emerge through the interactions. In Barad's account, objects are not stable independent entities but are constantly becoming and are known through intra-actions. In contrast to the phenomenological perspective of 'being-in-the-world', in her work she questions the ontology behind this understanding by pursuing how we actually are 'being-of-the-world', that is how we come to be constituted as 'part' of the world (2007, p. 160). This presents a fluid notion of the world where objects (including ourselves) as we perceive them are in constant flux as the relations shift in intra-action. Now if the life-world is assumed to be in constant flux instead of being constituted of fixed and stable entities and objects, how we *become* through experiencing this fluid world also constantly changes. Hence, rather than focusing on what we *become* through experience and exploring knowledge construction in shifts in identities, the focus lies in how we are becoming in experience.

Within the literature in adult learning, there have been different conceptualisations of 'becoming' (Barnett 2011; Faure et al. 1972; Jarvis 2009; Wenger 1998). These more or less adhere to the ontology of a stable world and in some cases are also grounded in the humanist concept of a knowing subject. Hager and Hodkinson (2009) use 'becoming' as a metaphor to present a processual understanding of learning, rather than taking 'becoming' as a distinctive outcome of learning. Some of the key characteristics of this perspective discussed by Hager and Hodkinson include (p.633):

- 'Learning is a social and embodied (practical, physical and emotional as well as cognitive) process.'

- 'When a learner constructs or reconstructs knowledge or skills, they are also reconstructing themselves'; '...people becoming through learning and learn through becoming.'
- 'The metaphor of becoming ... does not entail a fixed state of having become ... [it] entails a sense that learning is never complete.'

This perspective of learning resists the dualisms of individual/collective, mind/body and thought/feeling, providing an 'organic' logic rather than the binary logic prevalent in discussions of learning (Beckett and Hager, 2002, p165). It also emphasises learning as a 'process' in contrast to a product or outcome. Implicit in the notion of 'becoming' is the notion of change, as there is no fixed state in becoming. It also challenges the basic assumption that learning is 'stable' and 'enduring' (Hager, 2005). Instead, this kind of learning is elusive and imminent (Fenwick, 2010). The notion of 'learning as becoming' in this conceptualisation proposes learning as a socially situated and embodied process. Becoming is a lifelong process without a destination. There is no fixed state or identity to become but instead there is the continuity of becoming, and that process in itself is learning.

The metaphor 'learning as becoming' enables us to talk about learning and change together; they are just two concepts revealing the same phenomenon. In discussing the metaphorical framework of 'learning as becoming' Hager and Hodkinson (2009) do not give further insights into how this perspective on learning may be studied empirically. They acknowledge the influence of power on learning using Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of 'habitus' and 'field'. Earlier studies that used the metaphor of becoming have shown that the becoming of a person is influenced and shaped by the positions, dispositions and capital developed in a person (Bloemer and Hodkinson, 2000) and that the patterns of transition occurring in becoming are often non-linear, entailing further dispositional change (Bowman et al.,

2005). In the 'learning lives' study mentioned earlier, Biesta et al (2011) understand becoming as a metaphor for the ongoing process of learning where one may alter, transform or sometimes even reinforce one's positions and dispositions over time. However, it is not made clear exactly how these reinforcements or transformations occur. The ontology linked with the theory of change in learning as becoming is still not clear.

In the studies cited above, 'becoming' has been used as a metaphor for learning to emphasise two main aspects of learning: the infinitude of identity (that one never *becomes*) and the perpetuity of the learning process (that learning as becoming is never complete). The studies in themselves focus on the issues of identity and agency in adult learners. Becoming implies fluidity and movement, while identity implies that motion is captured. Identity suggests an attempt to stagnate becoming, unless the identity of someone lies in the flux itself. Identity may be like a river. As Heraclitus indicated centuries ago, the identity of a river lies in it not remaining the same. We may think it is the same river but it is not the same anymore. In exploring notions of becoming, I next encountered the work of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, which took me in new direction.

1.3.5 Becoming in Deleuze and Guattari's work

In exploring Deleuzian becoming, Todd May (2003) does not ask 'What is it?' but instead 'When is a Deleuzian becoming?' He answers that becomings occur in the 'unfolding of difference in time' (p147). May explains that becoming is a process 'by which stable identities—the majorities—are dissolved in creative acts in which more fluid "identities" are created, but only as the by-products of the process itself'. Deleuze's notion of becoming is a rich concept with many layers. I draw on this notion in order to conceptualise learning as becoming. Instead of trying to find the meaning of becoming—for there is no fixed meaning of becoming—Claire Colebrook

(2001, p. 4) advises readers new to Deleuze's writing to take each concept or idea as a 'challenge to think differently'. I take up this suggestion in using some of the conceptual tools offered by the repository of Deleuze and Guattari's works in this thesis. When trying to understand learning, thinking with Deleuze's concept of becoming disrupts some of our commonly held notions.

The first challenge it poses is to the concept of identity. When we think about learning as becoming in the usual sense, we are accustomed to think about learning that is guided by some idea of what one is to become. Colebrook (2001) argues that this way of thinking is the result of the influence of two dominant theories, structuralism and phenomenology, both of which ground difference and becoming upon a foundation. That foundation is either a structure or the subject's experience. The challenge here is to understand becoming and difference without using such ideological foundations.

According to Deleuze and Guattari (1987, p. 237):

A becoming is not a correspondence between relations. But neither is it a resemblance, an imitation, or, at the limit, an identification ... To become is not to progress or regress along a series.

In other words, there is no foundation or basis for becoming. They explain that there is no point in asking how real or accurate the becoming is, and that the only real thing is the process of becoming itself. All the different becomings Deleuze and Guattari talk about in their work *A Thousand Plateaus*, such as becoming-woman or becoming-animal, are not about *really* becoming woman or animal. They are about the process of becoming and producing difference, disrupting the majority and moving towards minority ways of being. The 'woman' and 'animal' are used to indicate becoming-

other, moving away from the dominant androcentric and anthropocentric ways of being.

The second challenge the notion of becoming poses to thinking about learning is related to representation. Like becoming, learning also cannot be conceived based on some representational foundation. When learning is conceived based on representation, thought is seen as a form of recognition, objects of knowledge are seen as representations of some essential 'truth'. In this view learning becomes a process of passing from non-knowledge to knowledge with a definite beginning and end (Bogue 2004). Deleuze (1994, pp. 25 - 26) calls this understanding of learning 'reproduction of the same' and argues that the representational perspective of learning ignores the production of *difference*. The concept of difference is important for innovation and creativity in becoming. We do not create or innovate by reproduction. Deleuze claims:

learning takes place not in the relation between a representation and an action (reproduction of the same) but in the relation between a sign and a response (encounter with the Other). (1994, p. 25)

Reproducing the same works through the identification of sameness. Hence understanding and knowing are based on maintaining this reproduction. Problems and solutions are also recognised and worked out, based on this logic of representation, whereas learning occurs as an *encounter with the Other* where the 'Other' is non-representational, and understood as a sign. Here, objects encountered in the world in everyday life are not apprehended as the representation of something but as signs, and the sign is understood as 'an internalized difference pointing toward something other than itself' (Bogue 2004, p. 333).

The notion of *difference* is key in understanding becoming and learning from this non-representational perspective. According to Deleuze (1994, p.26-27), difference does not happen in correspondence to an essential given entity or a precursor, so difference is not understood as *difference from* or *different to*. He calls this 'negative difference' because difference is understood in terms of negation relative to a precursor. Instead, difference is understood in the affirmative, as 'positive difference' that is conceptualised as *difference in itself*. Difference is not the alterity from a concept (such as non-resembling) but alterity in itself.

1.4 Conceptualising learning as becoming

As the concept becoming is not based on a foundational identity and representational concept, the questions 'What is learning as becoming?' or 'What does it mean?' become philosophically inconsistent. Learning as becoming cannot be conceptualised in terms of a set of propositions that represent a stable phenomenon or a set of meanings. The question to ask here in the Deleuzian sense is 'How does it work?' (Jackson & Mazzei 2011, p. 92). Based on this, I frame the overall aim of this inquiry in terms of the question 'How does learning as becoming work?'

With this encounter with Deleuze, I go back to Hager and Hodkinson's (2009) exposition of learning as becoming. They talk about the learner reconstructing her/himself in the process of learning. This implies the idea of an unstable and fluid notion of self. This challenges the notion of a stable subject that is becoming or learning. Who is learning in becoming? The challenge for me here, especially given my interest in knowledge construction with focus on women's experience of change, is to explore knowledge construction without the use of a stable subject. How do we think of the subject in becoming? Thus the notion of learning as becoming warrants a

different conceptualisation of the subject of learning. This frames the first question I ask in conceptualising learning as becoming: How does the subject work in becoming?

Like many recent theorists of learning, Hager and Hodkinson (2009) also emphasise learning is an embodied phenomenon. Rather than seeing learning as something occurring inside one's head, learning as a process of becoming is seen as a social and embodied practice where the physical, emotional and the cognitive are all employed. The idea of embodiment is often used in learning theories but is based on a relatively narrow perspective on what the body entails. The body is often understood as a natural 'perceiving apparatus' (Buchanan 2000, p. 167). Most of the theories of learning espouse a stable ontology of the world, where objects and subjects are relatively fixed. As stated earlier, for this study I hold the assumption of the context being emergent in the process of learning. I base this assumption on Karen Barad's (2007) concept of onto-epistemology where objects are not fixed and stable but are emergent in phenomena because of the relations formed. Based on this premise, how may we think about the body in learning? My second objective here is to further expand on the notion of embodiment within the understanding of learning as becoming. Thus, the second question I ask is: How does the body work in becoming?

Finally, with the deconstruction of the stable subject, the learner, along with the ontological position of the emergent quality of objects in intra-action, the last issue I explore in conceptualising learning as becoming is the concept of knowing. As stated earlier, for Deleuze becoming is not an imitation or resemblance; becoming is not based on the foundation of a representation. This challenges the notion of reified 'knowledge' and also disrupts what is understood as knowing. How do we then think about knowing in becoming? Hence, the third and last question I ask is: How does knowing work in

becoming? By exploring these concepts—subject, body and knowing—in this thesis I expand on the concept of learning as becoming as a theoretical resource to add to our understanding of learning in life.

1.5 Research questions

In this research, I approach learning as a continuous process that we undergo as part of our everyday living in our immediate worlds. Through this study, I have worked to contribute to shift our understanding of learning through a particular concept of ‘learning as becoming’. Drawing on Deleuze’s way of thinking, I approached this research not with the question ‘What does it mean?’ or even ‘What is learning?’ Instead I asked, ‘How does it work?’ The aim of this study was not to come up with a theoretical account of what *learning really is* but to offer a philosophical perspective on learning that disrupts our common assumptions about learning and, in so doing, changes how we think about learning. Taking this approach, the research was guided by the overall question: How does learning as becoming work?

With this broad aim for the study, I narrowed the scope of my inquiry to three specific issues posed as questions about the conceptualisation of learning as becoming:

1. How does the subject work in becoming?
2. How does the body work in becoming?
3. How does knowing work in becoming?

These are large questions in themselves and each could have been treated as a separate thesis topic. However, my key interest is in the third question of knowing. The two preceding questions are approached in ways that allow me to build an argument that moves towards answering the third question.

Hence, in this study the concepts of the subject and the body are intimately linked to the issue of knowledge construction.

1.6 Research approach

As indicated earlier, this research is framed within onto-epistemology: a particular understanding of the world that collapses the separation between ontology and epistemology. What is known is emergent in the very process of how it is coming to be known. This establishes an understanding of the world that is not constituted of fixed essential elements but always in a flux. Where do we locate learning in this fluid world?

In conducting this research, I located learning in individuals' experiences of change in their everyday lives. I undertook in-depth conversational 'interviews' with eight women from different parts of Nepal to elicit accounts of their lived experience of change in life. While I do not hold that the identity 'woman' is a foundational aspect of learning, I worked with the assumption that the discourses of gender intra-acts with materiality in the lived world of these participants to produce particular outcomes of learning as becoming. For this reason, I chose to focus exclusively on *women's* experiences of change.

The philosophical basis within which the research was framed posed challenges for the conduct of an inquiry using conventional qualitative approaches. A key challenge is the very notion of experience and using 'lived experience' as data for this inquiry. There are further problematic issues with notions of representation, the idea of an interview and analysis of interview data and the practice of reflexivity. In order to overcome the limitations of conventional qualitative inquiry, I carried out this research using a 'post-qualitative' (St. Pierre 2011a) approach, where I drew on notions of non-

representation and used 'diffractive analysis' (Barad 2007) as an analytical tool.

In addition, in doing the analysis, I have drawn on different concepts from the work of Deleuze and Guattari to think differently about the subject, body and knowing. As with the framing of the research, the analysis throughout the thesis has been driven by an analytical approach that asks 'how does it work?' rather than an approach that uses the logic of representation to analyse the narratives to establish claims of how things 'really are'.

1.7 Summary of outcomes and significance of study

This thesis is a provocation to think about learning differently. I use the conceptual tool of *becoming* to think about learning as an ongoing process of becoming in life. As a theoretical outcome, I offer the following propositions as a way to think about learning:

1. Learning as becoming is characterised by the expansion in the complexity of our bodily composition and is manifested through our ongoing ability to form further relations in daily intra-actions in life.
2. This bodily complexity is expanded in the relational sense where transformation occurs through changes in our relational composition in our ongoing becoming.
3. The context shapes the constituting process of becoming through its own emergence.
4. Learning in life is emergent.

Thus, the significance of this study lies in its theoretical contribution to the field of study of learning. By using the conceptual tool of becoming, I offer an ontological approach to thinking about learning. This approach overcomes

the dualisms of body/mind, individual/social and matter/discourse, while preserving the fluidity and complexity of the process. Embedded within the conceptualisation of learning as becoming, I offer a particular perspective of transformation based on a relational ontology that transcends the individual/society dichotomy.

1.8 Organisation of the thesis

There are eight chapters in this thesis. Chapter two, 'Learning in experience', reviews the literature on the concepts that are central to exploring the phenomenon of learning. Here, I review the existing concepts of experience in the theories of learning and present an alternative account of experience based on Deleuze's philosophy of transcendental empiricism. The remainder of the literature review focuses on the three concepts central to this research; the subject, body and knowing and how these concepts have been conceived in learning theories. This chapter further establishes the rationale for reconceptualisation of the subject, body and knowing in conceptualising learning as becoming.

Chapter three describes the research methodology. I discuss some of the limitations of conventional qualitative approaches, arguing for using a 'post-qualitative' approach (St. Pierre 2011a). The chapter discusses the research design and implementation process including the methods, analysis and presentation of data and ethical considerations.

Chapter four introduces the reader to the eight participants in this research. In the conversations, the participants shared their detailed experiences of personal change, explaining how they used to be and what life events led to the changes and influenced their becoming in life. Chapter four presents a brief summary of each of the eight stories of change, followed by a mapping of how these stories are employed in the subsequent analytical

chapters. The detailed stories of change reconstructed from the conversations appear in Appendix B (from page 229).

Chapter five, 'Subjects in learning: nomadic multiplicities', asks: How does subjectivity work in learning? In explicating the subject of learning, I move away from the humanist subject prevalent in accounts of learning towards a relational notion of the subject using the concept of *multiplicity* (Deleuze & Guattari 1987). I use the notion of *nomadic* subjectivity (Braidotti 1994) to argue for a fluid and unstable concept of subjectivity. The notion of the subject as a nomadic multiplicity gives ontological privilege to relations instead of structure (material or discursive) in the emergence of subjectivity. The 'structures' that appear to influence subjectivity do not exist prior to the subject but emerge in the process of subject formation. In the context of this research this means that the specific idea of the 'body' of a woman as well as the meaning of 'woman' are both emergent through intra-action and do not shape or determine learning. I conclude that there is no pre-existing subject that engages in learning but that particular subjects emerge in learning as becoming through material discursive intra-actions.

Chapter six, 'Bodies in learning: affect and desiring assemblages', chapter draws on the Deleuzian concepts *assemblage*, *affect* and *desire* to theorise how the body works in learning. The body is conceived as an assemblage that gives the body a relational ontology instead of a unified whole with essential characteristics. Using the notion of affect, sensing by the body is seen as a relational process where the body comes to sense what happens to it through relations formed with different material discursive elements. Affect is understood as what happens to the body in experience, while emotions are socially qualified and produced in experience. Desire is seen as the productive force that enables the bodily assemblage to form new connections, thus changing its composition and undergoing transformation and becoming.

I argue that human bodily action is not a movement guided by a thought or bodily sensation but a pragmatic movement of the body guided by desire.

Chapter seven, 'Knowing in learning: imagination, desire and the emergence of knowing', presents this study's onto-epistemological stance, whereby being and knowing are not seen as separate phenomena but emergent through the same intra-action. In this chapter I argue that this stance warrants a different conceptualisation of the ontology of knowing, and ask: How does knowing work under this philosophical premise where ontology and epistemology are not separate? I draw on Spinoza's account of imagination and how it works to conceptualise the ontology of knowing. The concept of imagination also conceptualises the role of the body and mind without maintaining the dualistic perspective that separates the two. Here, I argue that we come to know the world and ourselves as beings in experience through impressions on our bodies that register in us in terms of changes in our bodily composition. So we come to form our knowledge of the world around us through changes in our body. Hence, we do not have access to some reified form of 'knowledge' but only engage in the continuous process of knowing through becoming.

Chapter eight presents a synthesis of the key issues discussed in the analytical chapters five, six and seven on the subject, the body and knowing respectively. Drawing from that discussion I then present theoretical implications for conceptualising learning as becoming, followed by a statement of the significance of this research and suggestion of further issues to be explored. ■

Chapter 2

Learning in experience

2.1 Introduction

There is a saying in Nepali, '*kita padhera janincha, ya parera janincha*', which loosely translates as 'you either know from reading or you know through what happens to you'. The variation of the word '*parnu*' used in this saying literally translates as 'to happen'. So there is the understanding that we know through what happens to us in life. Also there are particular kinds of knowing that are only available through this 'happening' which is exemplified by another common phrase I heard often when growing up: '*talai pare pachi thaha huncha*'. This means 'you will know only when it happens to you'. This reflects the commonly understood idea that you learn through what happens to you in life. This 'happening' is also referred to as *experience*.

The purpose of this chapter is to review existing literature to discuss the theorisation of some of the concepts that are central to exploring the phenomenon of learning. This literature review serves to situate this inquiry within the ongoing conversations about some of the underlying philosophical issues in theorising learning. I take experience as the most fundamental basis for learning to take place. First, I review how experience is conceptualised in theories of learning. After underscoring the uncritical acceptance and problematic notions of experience in the literature on learning, I then present alternative accounts of experience based on a relational ontology that I see useful for this study. The remaining discussion of literature in this chapter is organised around the three concepts that frame this study: the subject, body

and knowing in learning. This discussion of the current theorisation of these three concepts forms the basis for my argument that we need to reconceptualise how we understand the subject, body and knowing in theorising learning from experience.

2.2 Experience in educational research

It has been well argued that experience is an integral part of the process of learning. Irrespective of the context or situation of learning, all forms of learning involve experience (Boud, Cohen & Walker 1993; Dewey 1938; Fenwick 2000; Jarvis 2006). The main points of contention are, firstly, the notion of experience itself and, secondly, the question of how experience contributes to learning. In the field of adult learning, the notion of experience has received most attention through the concept of *experiential learning* where it has been explicitly conceptualised (Boud, Cohen & Walker 1993; Jarvis 1987; Kolb 1984; Marton & Booth 1997; McGill & Weil 1989). The theory of experience offered by John Dewey (1938) has been a key influence in theorising learning from experience. Salling Olesen (2006) departs from the Deweyian influence and offers a 'critical' account of experience based on the work of Theodor W. Adorno and Oskar Negt. Olesen argues:

Experience is the process whereby we as human beings, individually and collectively, consciously master reality, and the ever-living understanding of this reality and our relation to it. (2006, p. 60)

He argues that Dewey's theory of experience was offered as a critique to the then model of education and is rationalistic and not useful when theorising everyday learning in socio-cultural contexts. I agree with this reading and I understand how Dewey's notion of experience can lead theorists to take an uncritical stance of the everyday world. Furthermore, I feel that the theoretical potential of Dewey's philosophy has been under-used in the field

of experiential learning where the prevalent notion of experience is one that still maintains the mind/body and subject/object dualisms. Dewey's notion of experience as a 'transaction' in his later works overcome some of these dualisms and will be discussed in the next section.

Usher (1989, 1992, 1993) questioned the narrow concept of experience, saying that the discourse of experiential learning constructs the notion of 'experience' in particular ways. In contrast to the discursive practice of experiential learning, where learning from experience happens in a systematic and methodological manner, Usher (1993) sees learning from experience as something that happens in everyday living. He proposes a discourse where the 'experiencing subject is ... situated rather than transcendental, subjectivity relational rather than essential, and where sociality ceases to be the feared and rejected other, the source of the bad' (p. 178). In a critique of Usher's conceptualisation of experience, Hager (1999) argues that Usher accords ontological superiority to discourse rather than to sense experience. For Usher, both experience and the experiencing subject are constituted by discourse and thus all materiality including the body is secondary and only seems to matter through meanings provided by discourse.

Michelson (1996) contends that there are two schools of thought that shape the idea of experience. One is that of liberal humanist thought, which sees experience as a 'shapeless, pre-linguistic product of unmediated sensory input'. The other is the emancipatory thought that sees experience as 'socially constructed rather than as unmediated' (p. 439).

This points to the debate about what the foundation of experience is: materiality or discourse?¹ Whatever the understanding of experience may be, in experiential learning in general, experience is deemed insufficient and various tools and methods have been proposed in order to treat experience in ways that then generate learning (Usher 1993, 1997; Michelson 1996). Michelson (1996, p. 442) thus states that experiential learning sees experience as the 'raw material for reason'. The theories of experiential learning situate learning as a specific activity that is conducted in certain pedagogical contexts with particular outcomes or objectives.

Tara Fenwick (2000) argues for expanding the conception of experiential learning. Fenwick questions its validity as a distinct category from other kinds of learning: 'What manner of learning can be conceived that is not experiential, whether the context be clearly educational or not?' (p. 244). She presents a critical review of five different perspectives in adult learning that all assume experience as a part of learning: reflection, interference, participation, resistance and co-emergence. However, her discussion focuses on reviewing the assumptions these different perspectives make about how cognition occurs in experience and offers limited insight into how experience is theorised in the first place.

The notion of *lived experience* that is a central aspect of phenomenology captures the situatedness of the subject and its relational subjectivity and embraces the social as an important element in experience. However, Barnacle (2004) signals two problems with the way lived experience is employed in educational research. The first is the positioning of lived

¹ The recent work in education that is situated within the field of sociomaterialism (Fenwick, Edwards & Sawchuk 2011; Sørensen 2009) theorises the role of materiality in the process of learning.

experience as a privileged site of knowledge in binary opposition to what she terms the 'non-lived' experience or the theoretical. In response to the traditional privileging of theory over practice and reason over experience, there has been a tendency to privilege the other side of the dualisms (practice and experience), thus preserving the dualistic patterns.

The second problem Barnacle identifies lies with the uncritical epistemological value accorded to lived experience as a legitimate foundation for knowledge, where experience is 'treated as having access to some sort of pure, or unmediated, knowledge or understanding' and the experiencing subject as a knowing subject (p. 62). The problem is with the lack of reflexivity and acknowledgement of the constitution of lived experience. Barnacle further explains that lived experience does not represent a mental state but instead designates 'the condition of being in relation (to the Other)' (p. 65).

In light of these problems, how may we conceptualise experience in ways that reflects this relationality and situatedness in the world? Theories that assume a relational ontology offer a different perspective on experience, as will be discussed next.

2.2.1 Relational ontology in learning and experience

The idea of relational ontology can be found in the works of some of the key influential thinkers in the field of learning and education, most notably in the works of Piaget, Dewey and Vygotsky (Stetsenko 2008). Building on the work of these thinkers,² there are several approaches to conceptualising learning that emphasise the interaction and relationality in the process of

² Hager (1996) offers another account of relational ontology to conceptualise professional practice, particularly to overcome the practice/theory dichotomy based on philosopher Bertrand Russell's relational realism.

learning. These include the work of Lave and Wenger (1991), Actor Network Theory (ANT), cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT) and practice-based theories (Nicolini, Gherardi & Yanow 2003). Relational ontology holds *relations* as primary as opposed to the *relata*, and emphasizes *interaction* in understanding learning. Learning happens through acting and being acted upon in the world (Stetsenko 2008).

Although rooted in different theoretical foundations, the notion of relational ontology can also be found in the learning theories informed by complexity theory. Within complexivist thinking, Davis and Sumara (2007) argue that complex phenomena such as learning are determined by structure, and that:

learning is not a change in behaviour due to experience; it is change in structure that contributes to the ongoing coherence of the learner. Learning depends on experience, but it is determined by the learner's structure, not by the experience. (p. 464)

Here, learning happens because of experience but it is not the experience that determines the learning. In complexity theory, learning is understood to result from an ongoing process of adaptive activity within the environment. In other words, it is interaction within the environment in an effort to adapt that leads to resultant changes in the structure of the learner, and this is what shapes learning (Davis & Sumara 2007).

John Dewey also emphasised this interaction within the environment as the basis for learning. According to Dewey (1929), experience happens as a result of things or objects interacting with one another. In Dewey's words, 'Things interacting in certain ways *are* experience; they are what is experienced' (1929, p. 4a). As Biesta and Burbules explain (2003, p. 9), Dewey's philosophy deals with knowledge 'within the framework of a

philosophy of *action*, in fact, a philosophy that takes action as its *most basic* category' (emphasis in original). According to Dewey, what is understood as human action is always 'the interaction between elements of human nature and the environment, natural and social' (Dewey 1922 cited in Biesta and Burbules 2003, p. 10).

This interaction, or what Dewey later called *transaction*, is the basis for knowing and learning. Learning occurs in the transaction between the human being and their environment. For Dewey, the undergoing of this transaction with the environment is what constitutes *experience*.

A key point in relational ontology is that whatever happens—what is referred to as 'experience'—happens due to interaction. In that sense, this interacting is what experience is, as Dewey put it earlier. It is this interaction or experience that makes learning possible. So the distinction here is that learning happens *in* experience and not *from* experience.

A second point relevant here is that theories of learning also differ in how they conceptualise this interaction, including what drives it. Many of the theories that build on the work of Piaget and Dewey take learning as an adaptive process, prompted by the imbalance created by the ongoing interaction with the environment (Stetsenko 2008). This perspective sees actions as responsive rather than agentic or driven by the person's intentionality.

A third point of difference is that many of the theoretical approaches that build on relational ontology subsume the individual dimension under the social process or the system. At the same time many aspects of the individual dimension have remained under-theorised (Stetsenko 2008), specifically the notions of subject, body and knowing—the three foundational aspects of learning that I explore in this thesis. My aim is not to regress towards the

separation of individual versus collective learning. My intention here is to work with the relational ontological framework as it enables us to overcome some of these dualisms while exploring how subjectivity, the body and knowing work in the phenomenon of learning.

To build on this relational ontological perspective that has shaped theories of learning, I draw on the work of Karen Barad and the French philosopher Gilles Deleuze. Barad's (2007) notion of *intra-action* supports relational ontology while also acknowledging the fluid and dynamic characteristics of beings. Objects (human and non-human) are not fixed unified entities that come into a relation in interaction. They are co-constituted in the process of intra-action; hence the use of the term *intra-action* and not interaction.

Karen Barad's work may be situated within the field referred to as 'new materialism' (Coole & Frost 2010). Barad's work aims to de-centre discourse without ontologically privileging materiality. Her take on the role of materiality and discourse is grounded in what she has called 'onto-epistemology'. This philosophical perspective collapses the dichotomy between ontology and epistemology and asserts *knowing in being*. Barad contends that matter is not a passive product of discursive practice. According to her, matter is not a thing but a doing:

Matter is not a linguistic construction but a discursive production in the posthumanist sense that discursive practices are themselves material (re)configurings of the world through which the determination of boundaries, properties, and meanings is differentially enacted ... Discursive practices and material phenomena do not stand in a relationship of externality to each other; rather, the material and the discursive are mutually implicated in the dynamics of intra-activity. (2007, p. 152)

So for Barad, neither the material nor the discursive are ontologically prior to the other but they are both co-constituents in the production of experience through intra-action. In this sense, what we come to experience is neither determined by discourse or by materiality but is a co-production of both the material and the discursive. Barad uses the phrase 'material discursive' to refer to this understanding of materialisation, a phrase I use throughout this thesis.

The perspective of the ontological primacy of relations is also found in Deleuze's work on *transcendental empiricism* where he says that relations are separate from their terms (1991). With the idea that everything is in constant flux, always changing, Deleuze (1986, p. 10 cited in Bryant 2008, pp. 199–200) argues that relations are what make experience possible:

If one had to define the whole, it would be defined by Relation. Relation is not a property of objects, it is always external to its terms ... Relations do not belong to objects, but to the whole, on the condition that this whole is not confused with a closed set of objects. By movement in space, the objects of a set change their respective positions. But, through relations the whole is transformed or changes qualitatively.

What that means is that it is not the terms (or objects or bodies or *relata*) that determine the relations formed in the intra-action; the relations are exterior to the bodies themselves. The relation formed between their bodies in a particular moment of time is independent of the bodies between which it is formed. Instead, the relations belong to the broader assemblage or the whole of which they are component parts. This perspective then gives primacy to relations over the objects or bodies. In other words, *bodies are what they are because of the relations*. This presents a particular idea of embodiment, which I will build upon in conceptualising the body in chapter six of this thesis. Here it is important to distinguish the ontological understanding of 'relations'

from social 'relations'. Social relations such as specific gender relations for instance are not ontologically prior to experience but are understood as the *effects* of the intra-action or experience. I discuss this specific issue of the emergence of gendered relations in more detail in chapter five.

These understandings of experience open up several questions about the subject, body and knowing. In the analytical chapters five, six and seven I revisit and further explain the specific theoretical concepts from the work of Deleuze and Barad as I apply them in my exploration of the subject, the body and knowing respectively. In the following sections, I review the conceptualisations of these three concepts in theories of learning.

2.3 The subject of learning

In theories of learning, both the notion of subjectivity and the subject of learning have been conceived from a range of philosophical perspectives. The various conceptualisations of subjectivity differ from one another in terms of 'the degree to which the personal or social, or some combination of both, play in the construction of the individuals' subjectivity, including how relations of power contribute to this construction' (Billett, Fenwick & Somerville 2006, p. 9). Underlying these different conceptualisations of subjectivity lie different conceptions of 'self' or subjects, including the idea of what it means to be a learner.

The autonomous knowing subject is perhaps one of the most powerful and pervasive constructs of humanism and is one that has defined the idea of the 'learner' in the field of adult learning. In humanism, the person is understood as being a 'stable, rational, conscious, unified, coherent, knowing, autonomous and ahistorical individual' (St. Pierre 2000, p. 500). According to Butler (1995, p. 136) the humanist individual is assumed to be 'endowed with a will, a freedom, an intentionality which is then subsequently 'expressed' in

language, in action, in the public domain'. This assumption—one that underlies the humanist understanding of a learner—may explain what led to the confusion of the facilitator who asked me 'Why does she not learn from her experience?' in the anecdote reported in the introduction to this thesis (page 1). A conscious, knowing, rational and autonomous person would go ahead and do what was necessary, as taught in the workshop. That autonomous subject would demonstrate the desired behavioural outcomes of learning and change, without any social or historical constraints. In the case mentioned in the introduction, the individual's lack of desired action or lack of visible change in how she dealt with domestic violence was understood as lack of learning on her part, raising pedagogical concerns and puzzling the program facilitator. Hence, the facilitator's question, 'Why does not she learn from her experience?'

Critical and emancipatory approaches to adult learning saw the subject as one with 'false consciousness' constructed through oppressive social structures. Learning involved *conscientisation*, leading to freedom from the oppression (Boud 1989; Tennant 1998). This critical and emancipatory perspective constructed individual subjects as 'victims' of particular ideologies, devoid of agency and in need of help through particular educational interventions (Usher 1992; Usher, Bryant & Johnston 1997). Pietrykowski (1996) argues that the subject of transformative learning as proposed by Jack Mezirow, while situated and constituted by a social context, resembles the humanist learner who strives for 'undistorted discourse, true knowledge and emancipation'. Mezirow³ responded to these critiques defending and asserting autonomy as the goal of transformative learning:

³ See also Mezirow's response to Pietrykowski in Mezirow (1998)

The emancipatory process of fostering autonomy is precisely that of encouraging transformative learning through enhancing context awareness, critical reflection of assumptions, discourse and reflective action. (Mezirow 1999 para. 10)

The problem for adult learning of both the transformative approach of Mezirow (1994, 1995, 1997) and the critical emancipatory approach of Freire (1970) lies in this assumption of the autonomy of the person towards reflective or emancipatory action based on awareness and reflection. It is assumed that the individual will have the ability to act on their newfound awareness without any kind of constraints. This assumption can also be detected in the case that I talked about earlier, the woman who did not act in the desired ways in spite of the critical awareness she gained through the workshop. One may become aware of one's social situation and how it shapes one's thoughts and existence but that awareness alone may not be sufficient to affect action on part of the person, or action may happen in different ways.

A further critique is that the goal of autonomy is a western ideal based on humanistic traditions, and has been introduced into Nepal through the discourse of modernisation and development. In contrasting western notions of selfhood with eastern notions, David Ho notes:

Eastern conceptions negate the Western centrality and sovereignty of selfhood in different ways. The self is not the measure of all things ... Relational selfhood ... takes full recognition of the individual's embeddedness in the social network. The social arena is alive with many actors interacting directly or indirectly with one another in a multiplicity of relationships ... selfhood is realized through harmonizing one's relationships with others. (1995, pp. 132-133)

Ho likens this Eastern notion of a decentred self to Derrida's 'deconstructed Western self'. This idea decentres the self from the individualistic sense to a more relational self.

Billet (2006) summarises four different conceptions of the self and subjectivity in the context of workplace learning: the autonomous, the subjugated, the enterprising and the post-structural. The subjugated self represents the discursively constructed subject, while the enterprising subject is self-reflexive, self-regulated and entrepreneurial. Billet offers an understanding of the post-structural subject as an 'individual selectively engaging and negotiating with social suggestions to secure, develop and maintain their identity' with the underlying concept of subjectivity as being 'open, reflexive, embodied quality of human agency' (p.15).

What Billet (2006) presents is a snapshot example of the diversity of concepts of the self. He and others show that the 'post-structural subject' is not a singular concept; neither is the idea of post-structuralism (Lee 1992; Peters & Burbules 2004). Under the broad theme of post-structuralism, there has been a very diverse range of concepts of the subject and subjectivity that problematise the notion of the subject from different angles and attempt to capture the complexity of the construction of the subject.

2.3.1 Key issues in post-structuralist accounts of the subject

I must explain that my intention for this section is not to provide a comprehensive review of the use of post-structuralist approaches towards theorizing the subject. My reason for discussing the subject and subjectivity is in the context of exploring knowledge construction. The humanist account of the subject and subjectivity takes a particular understanding of knowledge and knowledge construction, privileging rationality and ignoring the social

situatedness and (to some degree) the embodiment⁴ of the subject in knowledge construction. The focus of my discussion in this section is: What are the implications of theorising the subject from a post-structuralist perspective?

Post-structuralism emerged as a philosophical movement with a number of thinkers contributing. Nietzsche presented a 'critique of truth' and emphasised the 'plurality of interpretation' while Heidegger critiqued a concept of the subject that does not consider the 'external conditions of the subject's possibilities' (Peters & Burbules 2004, pp. 18-22). On the theoretical implications to the notion of the subject, Peters and Burbules summarise (2004, p. 22):

Poststructuralism emphasizes the discursive constitution of self (and self-regulation)—its corporeality, its temporality and finitude, its unconscious and libidinal energies, and the historical and cultural location of the subject.

While this is a very broad summary, it still captures the main issues surrounding the concept of self. On the question of the subject, Foucault has had a major influence. Foucault's early analysis of the subject implied a naïve passive subject clueless about the constitutive effects of discourses. However, Foucault (1982) explains that the goal of his work has not been to analyse the phenomena of power but instead to focus on 'modes of objectification which transform human beings into subjects' (p777). In comparison with his earlier view, it is this particular mode of objectification of the individual, *subjectification*, where theorists have explored the possibilities of transformation (Butler 1999; Tennant 1998).

⁴ Transformative learning and experiential learning approaches do acknowledge the role of the body and emotions in knowledge construction. However, this role is secondary and is limited to providing input for reflection and rationality.

In subjectification, the subject constitutes herself in an active way through what Foucault has termed the *practices of the self* and these practices takes place in the intersubjective space that becomes available in interacting with the world (Biesta 1998, p. 7). This intersubjective space is not a pre-existing space that simply 'becomes available', but is a space that itself is also constituted through the discursive technologies of subjectivity (Bhabha 1994; Rose 1995).

The idea of the discursive formation of the subject and subjectivity has been a productive resource, especially for feminist scholars, as it has enabled theorists to destabilise the idea of an essential subject. I have already briefly touched on the limitations of only acknowledging the discursive and of ignoring the body or materiality in the constitution of experience. The critique of the absence of the body applies to certain theorisations of the subject and subjectivity as well. Majorie O'Loughlin (1997) comments critically on the absence of the body from postmodern accounts of the subject in educational research and proposes Merleau-Ponty's articulation of the 'body-subject' as 'an intelligent, holistic process which *directs*, carrying out behaviours in a fluid, integrative fashion' (emphasis original, p. 25). The earlier citation from Peters and Burbules (2004) on the notion of poststructuralist thought of the self acknowledges the corporeality of the subject. What has been a key issue that is not often explained is exactly how the corporeality of the subject works in the constitution of subjectivity.

Theorists—particularly those trying to shift the discussion from what has been felt as an overemphasis on language determining everything—have actively debated the role of discourse and materiality in knowledge production in terms of what precedes what or which of these have ontological priority. Returning to the material and corporeal was an

important move, especially for feminist scholars looking to theorise the subject of feminism and to articulate a useful notion of subjectivity⁵.

For Braidotti (1993, 1994, 2003) the feminist subject of knowledge is non-unitary, nomadic, rhizomatic and embodied. Braidotti argues that:

Fantasies, desires and pursuit of pleasure play as important and constructive a role in subjectivity as rational judgement and standard political action. (Braidotti 2002, p. 39)

Susan Hekman (2008) points to the work of Donna Haraway and Bruno Latour, saying that for both of them 'the point is not to privilege the discursive over the material but to understand the material in discursive terms' (p.88). Along with Haraway's influential work, the idea of 'new materialism' (Coole & Frost 2010) has shifted the concern for materiality beyond the corporeal. What the new materialism does is to extend the understanding of materiality beyond the human to the non-human. This implies that it is not just the materiality of our natural biological bodies that matters, but that all the other material objects that are part of the intra-action also matter (Barad 2003). As I have stated earlier, according to Barad's onto-epistemology, knowledge construction does not lie either in the discursive or in the material, but in the phenomenon of intra-action. So along with the constitution of the subject, both discursive and material elements are also constituted in the phenomenon of experience or in what Barad calls intra-action and Dewey calls transaction.

Post-structuralist accounts of subjectivity offer new and diverse ways to conceptualise the subject. These new conceptualisations of the subject also

⁵ Some works of feminist scholars theorising the subject and subjectivity include Braidotti (1994); Bray and Colebrook (1998); Butler (1993); Davies et al. (2006); Gatens (2000); Grosz (1994); Haraway (1991); Jaggar and Bordo (1989).

open up new questions and possibilities for how we think about and understand learning. In asking how the subject works in learning as becoming, the issue for me is the ontology and constitution of the subject. Given the concept of experience I have taken up based on Barad's intra-action, I can no longer hold on to the stable subject of humanism. Consistent with the relational ontology that I have adopted in framing this research, in chapter five I argue for a *relational* conceptualisation of the subject as a *nomadic multiplicity*, drawing primarily on the work of Deleuze.

2.4 Body and embodiment

In the previous sections the notion of embodiment was embedded in the theorisation of the subject in noting that subjectivity is embodied. The body also becomes an important element in the new materialist approach to exploring knowledge construction. But how does the body work in the constitution of subjectivity? We usually refer to the brain and its cognitive abilities when we talk about knowledge, but what does the body have to do with how we come to 'know' the world and our 'self' in the world? Before exploring the theoretical possibilities for these questions, I first engage with existing theorisations about the body and embodiment in knowledge construction and learning.

Throughout history, different schools of philosophical thought in the East and West have accorded different degrees of importance to the body in the production and evaluation of knowledge. In the Western tradition of knowledge-practices, René Descartes has been held responsible for privileging the mind and completely rejecting the body as a site of knowledge with his defence of Cartesian dualism. This form of dualism holds that the mind and matter are made of different substances and hence have different attributes (Calef, 2014).

In the field of learning, different theories have either explicitly or often implicitly marked the 'absence of the presence' (Turner 1984) of the body in learning; the body is undeniably there yet it is rendered invisible or absent to different degrees. In recent decades there has been much work done to unveil the body to various degrees and to give it a place in the theorisation of knowledge and learning. Literature in the field of learning that includes discussions of the role of the body works to challenge the established assumption that the body is irrelevant or sometimes even an impediment in learning. These discussions make their arguments based on different ontologies of the body. I therefore organise this discussion according to these different notions of the body and their role in knowledge construction: the natural body, the inscribed versus the lived body and the enacted body.

2.4.1 The natural body

One of the commonly accepted roles of the human body in learning is that it is the medium through which sensations are received. The body sees, feels, hears, tastes and smells. What it receives through these senses is processed by the brain (of the body) to develop some kind of awareness about the immediate environment within which it is situated. In addition, the human body also has the capacity to have awareness of temperature, motion, balance, pain, pressure and height through coordinated use of multiple sense organs. Then there are the other physical and mental capacities of the body like strength, size, physical make-up, dexterity and agility that can influence activities that the body might engage in (Biesta et al. 2011, p. 92). The biological and physiological characteristics of the human body thus appear to have an obvious role in learning. This perspective on embodied learning assumes the body as an essential, natural, given object. Accounts of this body in learning can be found in behavioural theories, neuroscience and embodied cognition as well as in phenomenological approaches to learning (Juelskjær,

Schilhab & Moser 2008, p. 10). In these fields, the emphasis has been on the role of the natural body in human cognition as a major component of learning. However, in each of these areas the extent to which the body is accorded significance in knowledge construction differs.

Behavioural theories see the body as a passive object that reacts predictably to external stimuli. The other abilities of the human body such as emotions, perceptions, thoughts and interpretation are not given attention (Burns 1995). More recent research on human cognition in neuroscience reveals a more complex role for the body in cognition, including the importance of emotions. Rather than the body simply receiving sensations for the brain to process, the brain and the body are interlinked and interdependent in cognition, decision-making, social functioning and learning (Immordino-Yang & Damasio 2007).

Despite these developments, inadequate attention has been given to the socio-cultural context within which the body (with the brain) is situated. Whatever discussions of context exist are more concerned with generalised ideas of social interaction and tool use in relation to cognition (Rambusch & Ziemke 2005), and are not particularly about learning per se. In a literature review conducted in the field of neuroscience research on human cognition and learning, Scott and Curran (2010) identify what they term 'the problem of language'. Their main findings include the sterilised language used to describe human experiences and feelings and the reduction of subjective experiences and emotions to physiological events occurring inside the brain, thus evading any inclusion of context in analysis. They also point to a philosophical problem in the way the language used implies that the mind and the brain are one and the same.

This acknowledgement of the body as the natural essential entity in learning maintains the problematic mind/body dualism. The mind reigns as the site of cognition and knowledge construction. Michelson (1998, p. 218) extends this critique to the field of experiential learning, which she claims has had 'an ambivalent relationship to the rejection of the body as a site of knowledge'. In theories of experiential learning, bodily experiences are taken as raw material to be processed by the mind into knowledge and claimed as holistic learning. For learning to happen, Michelson argues that one is expected to transcend subjectivity, emotions and the partiality of experience. The body is still a non-thinking but sensing thing that just assists the mind to think and construct knowledge. This emphasis solely on the biology/physiology of the body also ignores the socio-cultural location of the body and difference across different bodies. However, there has been a shift away from this sterile and essentialist perspective of the body and emotions to the understanding that emotions are dependent on the contexts within which they surface and hence are socially constructed (Dirkx 2008).

In these different understandings of what I will call the 'natural knowing body', emphasis is placed on establishing the body as a source of knowledge through intuition, imagination, memory, emotions, affective knowing and spiritual knowing (Merriam & Bierema 2014). Missing from these discussions, I suggest, is the ontological concept of the body itself and perhaps a richer discussion of how it works in the complex process of knowledge production. The given in these ideas about the body is that it is a natural biological entity with specific characteristics and abilities. Sometimes, there is also a sense that embodied knowing is an 'add on' to the already established cognitive knowing and that embodied knowing is just a piece of the puzzle to complete the whole picture and enable holistic learning. For

instance, one chapter in a journal edition dedicated to the body and embodied learning concludes:

Knowing is clearly a holistic process that cannot be explained by reason alone. Embodied knowing along with reason helps us to understand ourselves more fully as human beings. (Lipson Lawrence 2012, p. 71)

However, as social beings, the biology and naturalness of the body works within a complex socio-cultural environment. Depending on the context, there are different notions of what the body can do and be, how it can learn and change. The idea of the natural biological body ignores the social complexity within which the body functions and how the context impacts upon the body.

A further issue with the general literature on embodied knowing and embodiment in learning is that it tends to maintain the human subject with an uncritical acceptance of the experience of the subject. The focus of analysis is on the 'intentionality' of the knowing subject and the way subjects make sense of their bodily experiences (Blackman 2008, p. 121). This intentionality of the knowing subject is challenged in the notion of 'inscribed bodies'.

2.4.2 The inscribed and the lived body

Postmodernism applied the notion of bodies as inscribed to theorise the socio-cultural dimensions of the body, through the notion of the body as disciplined by discourses (O'Loughlin 1998). This notion of the body aimed to deconstruct the naturalised, universalised and essentialised body that I discussed as the 'natural body' by recognising the history, temporality, spatiality and difference of the body (Bordo 1989; Butler 1993). The potential of this perspective was enormous across disciplines, including in education and learning, as it opened several ways to articulate the body and produce multiple forms of knowledge.

However, concerns began to emerge about the social constructionist version of the body due to the insufficient attention it gave to corporeality or materiality in the analysis of the body in social theory (Barad 2003; Csordas 1994; O'Loughlin 1997). Elizabeth Grosz (1993; 1994) talks about the body in ways that enable exploration of the socio-cultural locations of the body while also valuing its corporeality. Grosz distinguishes between the 'inscriptive' and the 'lived body'. The inscriptive body is conceived as a surface upon which the social norms and values are inscribed. This perspective is used to analyse the body as a text to be read. In this sense, the body is a social phenomenon that works to reproduce socio-cultural meanings. The lived body is the body that experiences the outside world and the term refers to the internal inscription of the body. In this view the body is analysed as a site of action but also as a potential site of struggle and resistance as it actively takes part in social practices. This body does not passively get inscribed upon but is an active doing body. Grosz (1993, p. 199) argues that in the everyday social activities, the lived bodies 'though marked by law, make their own inscriptions on the bodies of others, themselves and the law in turn'. Grosz's intention here was not to create yet another dichotomy but to synthesize the two:

The body can be regarded as a kind of hinge or threshold: it is placed between a psychic or lived interiority and a more socio-political exteriority that produces interiority through the inscription of the body's outer surface. Where psychoanalysis and phenomenology focus on the body as it is experienced and rendered meaningful, the inscriptive model is more concerned with the processes by which the body is marked, scarred, transformed, and written upon or constructed by the various regimes of the institutional, discursive, and nondiscursive power as a particular kind of body. (pp. 196–197)

The notion of inscribed bodies has been a helpful theoretical tool to explain how macro structures encroach upon bodies to limit their possibilities and demarcate their actions. But this notion of embodiment focuses on the discursive construction of the body to the extent that it excludes any attention to the biological body (Barnacle 2009, p. 23).

The phenomenological approach of the *lived body* has been an alternative to return to the corporeality of the body. Merleau-Ponty's *The Phenomenology of Perception* (1962) has had significant influence in theorising the lived body. The lived body is a 'body-in-situation' (Young 2005, p. 16). It is a physical body situated in a specific socio-cultural context that experiences the materiality of its body in relation to the immediate environment. Young (2005) explores the possibility of replacing gender by the idea of the lived body. She argues that the concrete materiality of the body and its environment constitute 'facticity', and states that the body as an actor has 'an ontological freedom to construct herself in relation to this facticity' (p.16). What this implies is that the materiality of the body and the immediate environment also play an important role in social construction. The important point here is that it is neither materiality nor the symbolic that determines the body and its subjectivity. Instead, it appears that the material and symbolic mediate one another.

The phenomenological perspective of the lived body based on narratives produces an enriching account of participants' bodily experiences from a particular subjective perspective. As discussed previously the key issue here is to take into account the material while also acknowledging the influence of discourse, with the understanding that neither is prior to experience and hence neither exclusively determines the subject or body. This is the very issue that Elizabeth Grosz raises and discusses in her influential book *Volatile Bodies* (1994). This gives a very different ontological understanding of the

body, and from this understanding comes the concept of enacted bodies, discussed next.

2.4.3 The enacted body

In her book *The Body: The Key Concepts* (2008), Lisa Blackman describes different social concepts of the body. Of the many concepts covered, Blackman talks about the 'body as enactment' and positions this as the analysis of 'what the body can do' in contrast to previous concepts that ask 'what the body is'. She cites AnnMarie Mol (2002) to argue that a body is not a singular bounded entity but rather the body extends itself to 'connect to other bodies, human and non-human, to practices, techniques, technologies and objects which produce different kinds of bodies and different ways, arguably of enacting what it means to be human' (p.9). This gives the sense of the body as being open and relational and not having a definite boundary on the inside or outside or where the body begins or ends. The body as enactment characterizes a body in process and in movement. The body does not pre-exist but *becomes* through the enactments, the potential of enactment contingent on all the processes and relational connections with other bodies. Hence, this perspective examines the enactment of the body. In essence, what the body can do and become in enactment is about its capacity to have relations.

The body as enactment is a concept found in the more recent work related to the field of professional learning, particularly in work that uses socio-material theory, complexity theory and practice approaches to studying professional learning. The philosophical foundations for the socio-material approaches in learning that employ actor-network theory (ANT) lie in the work of Bruno Latour and John Law (Blackman 2008). Instead of studying the human body in isolation this approach sees the body as part of a 'well-formed assemblage' (Latour 2005, p. 8 cited in Blackman 2008, p. 122) that

includes different human and non-human objects which, through inter-relations and co-existence, enable the body to be and do in certain ways. The notion of assemblage in ANT offers analytical power in order to acknowledge and identify the agential power of inanimate materials (Buchanan 2015).

In their recent book, Green and Hopwood (2015) situate the body in practice to explore the different ways the body can be theorised in professional practice, learning and education. In the introductory section, the body is explored in practice theory and the concept of the body is outlined based on the work of Theodore Schatzki. The three dimensions of 'body-ness' include being a body, having a body and the instrumental body (p 9). In complexity theory, the body is seen as a self-transforming complex adaptive system, the structure of which is influenced by both biology and experience. The notion of *enactivism* is used to highlight the claim that the knowledge and identity of this structure is not stable and does not pre-exist but is enacted in a dynamic adaptive ongoing process (Davis & Sumara 2007).

The notion of the body as an enactment allows us to conceptualise the body as a dynamic, evolving and adapting entity. It takes into consideration the materiality of the body as well as the discursive aspects that shape the enactment of the body. In this thesis, I build on this notion of the enacting body to explore how the body works in becoming. In chapter six, I use the concepts of assemblage, affect and desire based on the work of Deleuze and Spinoza to build a particular ontology of the enacting body.

2.5 Knowing in learning

In exploring learning as a process of becoming, my interest lies in the process of knowing, rather than in exploring knowledge as the product of learning. However, concepts of knowledge and knowing are intricately linked and often one emerges out of the other. Ideas about knowledge and knowing are

found in the epistemological beliefs embedded in any particular theory of learning and express each theory's understanding of the nature and justification of knowledge; in other words what counts as knowledge and what entails knowing.

One of the challenges in reviewing epistemological beliefs and ideas about knowing in learning theories is that theories locate knowing and learning differently. Murphy, Alexander and Muis (2012) examine notions of knowledge and knowing in different learning theories by mapping them across two dimensions to construct the 'epistemic vector space'. On one axis they map where the theory assumes knowledge to come from: is it the individual mind that produces knowledge or is it socially derived? This is about the nature of the knowledge. On the other axis, they map whether the theories focus on individual or social knowing. This is about the subject of knowing: who does the knowing? This schema of notions of knowing highlights the dichotomy found in theories of learning between the individual and the collective.

Earlier, I situated this study within a relational ontological framework that assumes learning to take place *in* experience and not *from* experience. This inquiry aims to explore learning that takes place in life as experienced by individuals. The focus is therefore on knowing in experience. Interest in the individual subject's experience narrows the scope to individual human learning. However, from a relational ontological approach to understanding learning the 'individual' is not seen in isolation. Hence, learning by the individual is always already part of a collective. I will limit my discussion of concepts of knowing within theories of learning to those that assume this relational ontology of learning.

Dewey's pragmatic approach to understanding knowledge focuses on transaction, the ongoing adaptive interaction between the environment and the human. Knowing lies in the enactment of the human in this transaction, not in the mind or in ideas alone. This intimate connection between knowing and doing is what is understood as pragmatism (Biesta & Burbules 2003, p. 6). The pragmatist perspective thus emphasises knowing in doing. Within this pragmatic framework, knowing and doing are guided by the need to adapt in response to the ever-changing environment. Here, knowing is identified or acknowledged within the scope of adaptive needs.

A similar perspective on knowing can be found within complexity theory.⁶ In this framework, knowing is understood as a cognitive practice, where cognition is 'understood as ongoing processes of adaptive activity' (Davis & Sumara 2007, p. 467). Cognition is not seen as a process occurring inside the mind of the cognising agent; instead it refers to all the processes that are part of the ongoing adaptive action. Complexity theory also conceptualises learning as a pragmatic process. *Emergence* and *enactivism* are two key words that complexity theory uses to understand knowing and knowledge. Davis and Sumara (2007, p. 472) define emergence as a 'bottom-up phenomenon through which transcendent unities arise without the aid of instructions'. The key point here is that any change in the system emerges from within and is not guided by any external idea. They also explain that the term enactivism highlights the notion that identity and knowledge—in other words, being and knowing—are enactments. In this sense, cognition or knowing emerges through the enactment of various dynamic forms in their

⁶ Complexity theory is a heterogeneous field of theories originating from different disciplines: evolutionary biology, systems theory and cybernetics to name a few. Here, I engage only with Davis and Sumara's (2007) work as it uses complexity theory to explore learning.

ongoing adaptations. Thus, knowing, being and doing are all part of the same phenomenon and hence inseparable.

One issue that needs noting here is that of the limitations in how we can understand knowing within relational ontology due to 'representational epistemology' (Osberg, Biesta & Cilliers 2008). Here, the authors use the term to refer to how something (a word, an idea or an object) can stand in for something else, claiming a similarity in the public sphere. Within representational epistemology, knowledge works to stand in for reality or to depict a representation of what the world really is. Osberg, Biesta and Cilliers (2008, p. 223) argue for a 'complexity based' understanding of knowledge derived from Dewey's transactional realism. In what they call this 'emergentist' epistemology, the world and the knowledge of it are understood to constitute the same complex system.

We can find this representational epistemology at work in some models of socio-cultural theories of learning where knowing and becoming are guided by representational logic, particularly in approaches that theorise learning in terms of 'practice'. The use of the term practice denotes the connection between knowing and doing. Within the practice model of learning, learning is understood as a 'situated practice of knowledge production and reproduction using technologies of representation and mobilization' (Gherardi 2000, pp. 218-219). Here representation works in the *reproduction* of knowledge while there may also be *emergent* production of knowledge in practice.

However, practice theory is not a unified theory and there are variations in how knowing is understood within practice. Gherardi (2008, p. 518) identifies three types of relations between knowledge and practice prevalent in practice theory in theorizing knowledge and practice. First, knowledge is

understood as contained within practice where the practice is constituted as an objective entity; here the ideas of knowledge and practice are relatively separate and objective. Second, knowledge and practice are understood to be in a relation of mutual constitution where knowing and practice are not separate but occur together and produce each other. The third relation is what Gherardi calls equivalence, where there is no separation between knowledge and practice. Practising is *knowing in practice*; knowing and practicing are understood synonymously. The first relational category hints more at a teleological understanding of knowing while the third adopts a more emergent understanding of knowing.

This caution about the limitations of representation has also been extended to the pragmatic approach to understanding knowing. Referring to Bergson, Allen (2013, p. 39) critiques the utilitarianism in pragmatism in which knowing means 'extracting what stability and regularity there is in the flow of reality' (Bergson, 1934, 2007). Allen further explains:

only when we know how to make something present and stable can we act on it. Consequently, our logic is a logic of solids. Concepts are schemes for solidifying whatever we think about, endowing it with edges, surfaces, and boundaries. This practical intellect must distinguish matter and form. That too is a prejudice of action ... Dedication to practicality also introduces the bias of discontinuity. Our interest in things is in the beings they are becoming, not the becoming itself, the continuity of things, which we ignore. We are at liberty to choose the mode and scale of discontinuity, but we have the feeling of understanding when we schematize change with discontinuous concepts. (p39)

In the above excerpt, what is understood as pragmatic is a stable subject acting in specific purposeful ways in a given time. This critique is, I feel, directed at the Newtonian mechanistic worldview where objects are fixed

and tangible with fixed properties and where knowledge equates with reality. What Allen describes here appears to be like the 'practical' rather than the 'pragmatic', the practical being the situation where 'knowledge and action are strictly separate' (Biesta & Burbules 2003, p. 6). It is hard for us to talk about relevant and meaningful human action without concepts that stabilise and concretise flow. In fact, we develop meaning through this process of stabilisation and through representation. We form static identities of our being to get a sense of self, of who we are, and to talk about personal change and the things we do to make those changes.

The key issue here is about how we come to know matter (objects) and meaning (representations) in processes of learning. Knowing in experience is not about engaging only with the material world but also with the social world of meanings and ideas. Fenwick and Edwards (2013) argue that one of the central tenets of actor network theory (ANT) stands against this ontological separation between materiality and meaning that is prevalent in learning theories. They explain that ANT does not try to illuminate what material objects in learning contexts mean or represent but *what do they do*. Hence, ANT decentres the human in knowing and acknowledges the role of the material in the meaning making and knowing process. The meaning of the objects (both human and non-human) emerges with what they do, in other words, in the enactment. Hence, a material object may have different meanings for different people depending how that object performs in the learning process.

Barad (2007) argues that this separation of meaning and materiality is due to the separation of ontology and epistemology. She points to the long held assumption of a distinct pre-existing material world out there that needs to be known, where being and knowing are understood as two independent phenomenon. However, Barad (2007, p. 185) contends that knowing and

being are part of the same phenomenon. She coined the phrase 'onto-epistemology' to refer to the study of the practice of knowing in being. Within this understanding, materiality and meaning emerge together in the process of becoming through intra-action. Hence, she claims phenomena are always material discursive. The material world does not passively pre-exist to be ascribed discursive meanings by humans.

This has implications for how we think about the subject, body and knowing in experience. In the analytical chapters (five, six and seven), I use this onto-epistemological understanding of phenomena in conceptualising the subject, the body and knowing. In chapter seven on knowing in becoming, I use Spinoza's account of imagination to theorise the ontology of knowing and how it works. Building on this conceptual understanding of how knowing works, I use Deleuze's transcendental empiricism and desire to conceptualise the emergence of self as a coherent gendered being.

2.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have discussed four key notions that are relevant to this inquiry into learning: experience, the subject, the body and knowing. Learning has been theorised from a wide range of perspectives and has been delineated through different entities in different locations. The main objectives of this review were to situate this study within the vast body of work on learning theories and to connect this inquiry with some of the key contemporary issues in conceptualising learning. As this study focuses on learning that happens in experience in everyday life, I discussed theories that highlight experience in learning. I suggested that in theories that focus on learning from experience, the notion of experience is either under-theorised or conceptualised in narrow and problematic ways.

I have argued that theories of learning that assume a relational ontology provide a useful way to conceptualise the relation between experience and learning. This perspective locates learning in the ongoing interaction with the world and hence conceptualises learning *in* experience and not *from* experience. Here experience is not understood as sense experience processed in the mind but as a relational engagement with the world. However, within this perspective I noted a wide variance in how interaction is conceptualised. For the purposes of this study, I adopt Karen Barad's (2007) concept of intra-action, which supports relational ontology but acknowledges the fluid and dynamic characteristic of beings. Beings, both human and non-human, are not unified previously existing entities that come and participate in the world. Instead, they are understood to be constituted in the process of intra-action. This applies to materiality and meaning as well. It is not that we experience the materiality of the world and in the experience assign discursive meanings to the matter. In Barad's onto-epistemology, where knowing and being happen together, both the material and discursive are co-constituted in the intra-action. Hence, the phenomenon of learning is always material discursive where matter and meaning are produced together.

This philosophical perspective on learning opens up questions about notions of subjectivity, the body and knowing. In theories of learning, the autonomous humanist subject has been the dominant perspective on the subject of learning and still remains influential in thinking about learning. This perspective on the subject limits the ways in which intra-action can be explored in the context of this study. Post-structuralist thought offers possibilities for thinking about a dynamic, fluid and embodied subjectivity and hence for conceptualising personal change in different ways. In chapter five, I further explore the concept of subjectivity building on the post-structuralist perspective.

The body plays an important role in conceptualising experience, subjectivity, knowing and learning. Most learning theories assume a natural body with essential characteristics and inherent abilities. This perspective on the body is inconsistent with the ontological assumptions I build on in this inquiry. The notions of the inscribed and the lived body work to conceptualise the discursive and material constitution of the body where the body is not an ontological given but a construction. The enacted body sees the body as a dynamic changing entity where neither the discursive nor the material are pre-determined but emerge in the enactment of the body. I situate the theorisation of the body for this study within this perspective of the body as enactment. In chapter six, I further build upon this conceptualisation of learning using the work of Deleuze and Spinoza.

The concept of knowing and knowledge embedded in theories of learning or the epistemology is intimately linked with the implicit view of the world or ontology. The relational perspective on learning embraces the situatedness of knowledge and knowing is located in relational interaction, as opposed to perspectives that locate knowing either in the individual's mind or in the collective. Theories in this perspective understand knowing, doing and being as intimately linked. However, there are variations in how this relationship between knowing, doing and being is conceived. In conceptualising knowing one of the issues is how we come to know matter (the objects) and the meanings attached to those objects (representation). This is linked to how the relation among knowing, doing and being is conceived. Within the onto-epistemological framework, knowing, doing and being are not separate and are equivalent. Being is an act of knowing and doing, and in this sense, being is always becoming. I will revisit this topic in further exploring knowing in chapter seven. Throughout the remainder of this thesis,

and particularly in the analytical chapters, I revisit and further elaborate on the key concepts introduced in this chapter. ■

Methodology: doing post-qualitative inquiry

3.1 Introduction

The main issue in this inquiry is the phenomenon of learning with a focus on reconceptualising subjectivity, the body and knowing in learning. I conceptualise learning as a process of 'becoming' and use the phrase 'learning as becoming'. In framing this research, I draw on post-structuralist thought to problematise notions of experience, subjectivity, the body and knowing and to argue for a different conceptualisation of these concepts. Hence, many of the key philosophical assumptions underpinning this research are embedded in the theoretical concepts I engage with. This reliance on post-structuralist concepts has significant implications for the methodology I adopt in this study.

In this chapter, I revisit the focus and research questions of this study. I then discuss the approach I have taken. I start by discussing the limitations of conventional approaches to qualitative inquiry given the post-structuralist framing of this inquiry and I argue for a *post-qualitative* approach (St. Pierre 2011a). I discuss the key elements of post-qualitative inquiry relevant to this research and then explain my research design and implementation process, including the methods and tools, the application process and the limitations of the methods. I then discuss the analysis and presentation of data and review the ethical issues considered at different phases of this research.

3.2 Revisiting the research questions

In this research, I approach learning as a continuous process that we undergo as part of living our everyday lives in our immediate worlds. In framing this inquiry, I use the concept of becoming as a way to think about learning as an ongoing process of change in life. Drawing on Deleuze's way of thinking, I framed the research question by asking 'How does learning as becoming work?' The aim of this study is not to come up with a theoretical account of what learning 'really is' but to offer a philosophical perspective on learning that disrupts our common assumptions about learning. In doing so, I offer a different perspective on how we think about learning.

With the aim of expanding our understanding of learning from this perspective, I articulated the focus of my inquiry through three specific questions:

1. How does the subject work in becoming?
2. How does the body work in becoming?
3. How does knowing emerge in becoming?

As I indicated in the literature review in chapter two, conceptualisations of the subject and the body are intimately linked to the issue of knowledge construction. Exploring these concepts therefore establishes the scope of the inquiry and discussion through the first two of my questions. The focus is on understanding subjectivity and the body in knowledge construction, given the particular conceptualisation of learning as a process of becoming.

The methodological challenge in studying learning as a continuous and lifelong process has been highlighted by Fenwick:

Learning as a process is elusive and imminent. It resists representation, and is usually inferred through glimpses such as narrative accounts or 'indicators' awkwardly manufactured from visible activity. (2010, p.87)

Fenwick points to one of the key questions in investigating the phenomenon of learning: Where do we locate it? That is, what is the object of inquiry when we study learning? Depending on one's theoretical orientation, learning as a process manifests in different ways. For this study, I have located learning in the process of becoming. Implicit within the concept of becoming is the process of change. My conceptual understanding of becoming is shaped by Deleuze and Guattari's concept of becoming as the process where there is no correspondence between relations and there is no identification or resemblance with something to become (1987, p. 237). There is *nothing to become* except for the process of becoming itself.

Hence, I chose to locate learning in changes experienced in everyday life. This posed some methodological challenges for me, particularly in how I could go about exploring 'experience of change' in order to say something about the subject, the body and knowing in learning. In designing this study and before and during the fieldwork, I had planned to take an interpretive qualitative approach using life history (Goodson & Sikes 2001) as method of inquiry and had conducted in-depth conversations. It was only towards the end of the seven-month long fieldwork in Nepal and during my initial engagement with the conversation transcripts that I confronted the methodological challenges of dealing with the data. I had collected lived experiences of change focusing on details of everyday events from a diverse group of women from different places in Nepal. I struggled with coding the data and with putting sections of the stories under themes that would represent a common meaning across these different stories. The challenges I experienced resonated with St. Pierre's (2011a) experience during her doctoral research that she describes so clearly:

To study the construction of subjectivity (including my own), I dutifully designed and accomplished a qualitative study that was a combination of

an interview study with older women who lived in my hometown and an ethnography of their community. Until I began to write my dissertation, the two bodies of literature I had diligently studied— theory and qualitative research methodology— mostly remained separate. But as I wrote the dissertation, qualitative methodology, so clearly grounded in the humanism (and positivism) I no longer believed, ruptured. (p.620)

Like St. Pierre, I had also studied the theories and research methodology literature separately. I had become suspicious and critical of the humanist subject so prevalent in theories of adult learning but it took me a while to bring this critique to the research methods I was using. As I started working with my data and attempted to write my analysis and methodology, I gradually came to realise the philosophical inconsistencies between a research inquiry framed by post-structural theories and my use of conventional qualitative approaches in the methodology.

In exploring ways to extricate myself from this situation, I came across the concept of ‘post-qualitative’ research (Lather & St. Pierre 2013; St. Pierre 2011a; St. Pierre 2011b; St. Pierre 2013). This helped me to shift my thinking about how to analyse the data and in fact how to approach the entire inquiry. In the next section, I discuss some of the challenges I faced and explain the research approach I adopted in the face of the constraints of conventional methods of qualitative inquiry.

3.3 Research approach

3.3.1 Encountering the limits of conventional qualitative inquiry

Most approaches and methods used within qualitative inquiry fall into what Elizabeth St. Pierre calls ‘conventional humanist qualitative inquiry’ (2011b). St. Pierre argues that the ‘post’ theories have ‘had little effect on the humanist underpinnings of qualitative inquiry, chiefly because its ontology

remains intact (2013, p. 649). In her critique of conventional qualitative inquiry, she points to the tenets of positivism exemplified in notions of 'bias' and 'triangulation', and in general in how data is treated for validity and rigor. She notes the influence of structuralism evident in how data is organised and coded into themes and linear narratives, and how research is taken as a linear process that produces 'orderly, coherent, rational structures of meaning' (2011b, p. 42). She further asserts that while interpretive approaches were used to counter positivism and structuralism, most often in interpretive work 'meaning-making and experience too often go untroubled and are assumed to be natural, real, authentic, simply the "way it is"' (2011b, p.42).

Robyn Barnacle (2004) raises concerns about the uncritical acceptance of lived experience as a source of knowledge in educational research. In the phenomenological tradition of using lived experience, she identifies a knowing subject who is assumed to be 'pure and present to themselves' and who, through the immediacy of his or her experience, has access to 'some sort of pure, or unmediated, knowledge or understanding' (p. 62). The 'lived experience' collected through various methods—predominantly in-depth interviews—is deemed authentic, completely ignoring the constitution of those experiences and taking the narrative data for granted as holding true knowledge. This tendency also has to do with privileging the voice in qualitative inquiry, the assumption being that voices express the truth of consciousness and experience (Jackson & Mazzei 2009, p. 1). Hence, there are notions of 'giving voice' or letting the 'data speak' where we as researchers rely on selected sections of the narratives to speak the 'truth' through the words of our research participants. In addition, there are also the knowing researchers who are assumed to be separate yet connected to this 'truth' telling process by virtue of their 'positions'. The researchers confess their

position (*how do they come to know?*) from which they interpret, select and (re)present the data for analysis.

The problem of 'voice' in qualitative research has been identified and discussed extensively. These discussions have raised problems of representation and ethical concerns, noted most prominently by researchers using feminist, emancipatory and post-colonial approaches⁷ (Behar 1993; Fine 1992; Jackson 2003; Lather 1991; Spivak 1988; St. Pierre 2009). For the feminist researchers, the concern was with giving voice to women; and for the emancipatory and post-colonial researchers, it was about giving voice to the marginalised. The assumption that the marginalised or the 'subaltern' had the ability to speak and be heard was challenged by Spivak (1998) in her seminal work where she asks, 'Can the subaltern speak?'

The main concern in qualitative inquiry has generally been with the authenticity and representation of voices and there have been several approaches used in this regard. There have also been discussions about the researcher's positionality, the reflexiveness of the power relations between the researcher and the researched, the need to present participants' stories in unadulterated forms and to include a multiplicity of voices. Jackson and Mazzei (2009, p. 2) argue that these innovative practices in qualitative research that aim to deliver narratives or data that is more authentic do not help in dealing with the epistemological and methodological limits of voice. This does not mean that they advise us to give up on voice altogether. What they are suggesting is that we give up on the desire for authenticity and representation through voice and that we understand the limits of voice.

⁷ Alecia Youngblood Jackson (2003) provides a useful mapping of the different issues and dilemmas of voice in emancipatory research, feminist research, post-structural theory and post-structural feminist research.

They advocate finding new ways to ‘strain the voice in ways that complicate meanings, that tangle our voices with those of our participants, that produce different understandings or that save us from ourselves’ (2009, p.2).

To sum up, as St. Pierre pointed out, qualitative approaches have maintained the ontological assumptions of humanism although there may have been shifts in epistemologies, from positivist to critical or interpretive. The limits that I face in this particular study arise precisely for this reason. In theorising notions of experience, subjectivity and the body I do not take a foundational perspective on experience, subjectivity or even of the body for that matter. I do not assume these to be uncontested and reliable grounds of knowledge. They do not offer a ‘reality’ that I could access and comprehend through interviews or by employing particular analytical methods. This also places this inquiry in a tricky situation. The question I face here is: Given the ontological and epistemological positions I take that are based on post-structural theories, how do I employ a methodology that is consistent with this positioning? To solve this situation, I chose to take a ‘post-qualitative’ (St. Pierre 2011a) approach to inquiry.

3.3.2 Post-qualitative inquiry

St. Pierre (2011b, p. 53) emphasises the fact that researchers have been problematising and deconstructing many of the categories in conventional qualitative inquiry for decades now; categories such as data, voice, reflexivity, authenticity, interview etc.⁸ In using the deconstructive approach,

⁸ To highlight some of the work in this regard: Wanda Pillow (2003) provides a critique of the practice of ‘comfortable use of reflexivity’ and advocates for a move towards ‘reflexivity of discomfort’. Maggie MacLure (2013a, 2013c) and St. Pierre (1997) offer alternative ways of dealing with data. The book edited by Jackson and Mazzei (2009) discusses the limit of voice and offers alternative ways to think about voice in qualitative inquiry.

they work within and against these categories at the same time, re-inventing approaches to carrying out qualitative inquiries. Patti Lather (2013) captures these different movements in qualitative approaches with a layering schema. Qual 1.0 is the conventional interpretive inquiry that resisted positivism. Qual 2.0 still holds onto the humanist concepts of subject, power, knowledge, reality and language while acknowledging multiple reality, multiple voices and messiness. Qual 3.0 is the movement that uses 'postmodern theories to open up concepts associated with qualitative inquiry: validity, voice, data, empathy, authenticity, experience, interviewing, the field, reflexivity, clarity etc.' Lather states that this particular movement 3.0 has stalled for years. Now the latest and contemporary movement in qualitative research is Qual 4.0, which Lather (2013, p. 635) explains as follows:

Qual 4.0 is *becoming* in the Deleuzian sense as researchers who, weary of a decade of defending qualitative research and eager to get on with their work, again imagine and accomplish an inquiry that might produce different knowledge and produce knowledge differently. This inquiry cannot be tidily described in textbooks or handbooks. There is no methodological instrumentality to be unproblematically learned.

This is what I have attempted to do through this research, 'to produce different knowledge and produce it differently' (Lather 2013, p. 635; St. Pierre 1997, p. 175). I attempt to produce a different understanding of learning from a different ontological basis which, as I have stated before, is based on Karen Barad's concept of 'onto-epistemology' (2007). Here, I have chosen to rely on St. Pierre's term 'post-qualitative approach' to articulate the methodology of my inquiry. St. Pierre explains the aspects of post-qualitative inquiry in this way:

the post-qualitative inquiry that ... is to-come. But it is already happening when those who have studied post-structural theories come upon humanist

qualitative methodology and resist it. For example, they are leery of interviewing, refuse to 'describe' participants, believe words in their literature reviews are as much data as are words in interview transcripts and field notes, refuse to code data, and refuse to write it up. (emphasis in original, 2011b, p. 53)

So in this sense, post-qualitative inquiry is an approach that cannot be neatly described or defined. It is an approach that is full of resistances, escapes, refusals and a different kind of belief about conducting inquiry. This research inquiry has a methodology that is becoming, resisting and refusing to 'fit' with conventional approaches.

Resisting representation

I have already discussed and problematised the particular ontological stance underlying notions of experience, the subject and the body in the previous chapter. The idea of experience that I have used for this study decentres the human. Experience is not understood as the subjective account of the individual; it is a phenomenon through *intra-actions* (Barad 2007). Barad's notion of intra-action assumes that bodies or objects (stasis) do not pre-exist relations but emerge through intra-actions. So I adopt the assumption that subjects and body are both produced through experience.

This orientation to experience resists the logic of representation that is prevalent in conventional qualitative inquiries. Lecerle summarizes the logic of representation as follows:

The logic of representation is what constitutes our reality ... in short, it is the structuring process that constructs a liveable world around us. The result is the production of stable meaning and stable subjects to exchange it. (2002, pp. 59-60)

In the context of carrying out and writing up this research, representation

occurs through discourses. Here, I use words to represent the phenomenon of learning and the complexity of it, how it happens, who engages etc. Words stand for something that is assumed to exist out there. Deleuze and Guattari (1987, p. 98) talk about the struggle in language between *is* and *and*. The logic of representation uses 'is' for replacement and abstraction. Although there is no continuity or contiguity between the representative and the represented, the 'is' creates the logic where the representative replaces or steps in for the represented and the representative is abstracted from the represented (Lecerle 2002, p. 56). For instance, the word 'woman' in English replaces and abstracts a way of being, although it can never fully 'represent' that which it is representing (i.e. a way of being in this world in a particular socio-cultural context which is much more than what the word 'woman' can signify).

The logic of representation assumes that there is a primary stable world out there that can be known or found and that it can be represented by language (St. Pierre 2013, p. 649). For instance, this research is based on the premise that there is a phenomenon of 'learning' happening and I have chosen to locate this phenomenon in the change experienced by women in Nepal. The premise of this study is full of representational thought; the idea of learning, woman, change, experience, Nepal etc.

Resisting the logic of representation is not about completely dismissing language or even representation for that matter. It is about being reflexive and aware of what kind of claims may be possible given the limits posed by representational thought. For instance, for this study, I have exclusively focused on women participants. Here, I am not using the category 'woman' as an ontologically stable category and I do not aim to make claims about 'women's learning'. Both of these representational categories assume a second-order truth (an essential truth about 'woman' and that women learn in ways unique to their gender). This second-order 'truth' is expressed in

language that is separate from and that represents a 'first-order originary material reality' out there (St. Pierre, 2013, p. 650).

The phenomenological approach to inquiry is organised by this kind of representational logic: it argues that there is a brute reality out there—the tangible materiality of the world—that can be observed or accessed through methods and (re)presented as *what it is really like*. Here in this study, I am not concerned with either the discourse of gender or the materiality of the female body as foundations of knowledge. Both are deemed to be productions of experience or, according to Barad (2007), both are produced through intra-actions.

The research approach I have adopted—one that takes an ontological approach that is wary of representation—also complicates interpretation (MacLure 2013b). This has implications for what counts as data in this research, how it is produced through 'interviews' and what kind of analysis I can do with the data. Resisting representation challenges the very notion of conducting an 'interview' for 'data'. Hence, instead of conducting 'interviews' in the traditional sense, I recorded in-depth conversations with women. These were conversations where certain 'realities' of 'lived experience' were co-constructed through the intra-actions of various material and discursive elements in that time and space⁹. Given my resistance to representational logic, I could not code the data, or put them into representational themes. I had to find a way to approach data differently in order to 'produce different knowledge and produce knowledge differently' (St. Pierre 1997, p. 175) following the ethos of post-qualitative inquiry.

⁹ I further problematize the idea of conducting an 'interview' in this chapter on pages 82-83

In using a post-qualitative inquiry, I resist tenets of humanism and interpretation grounded in the logic of representation. As I have said earlier, resistance is not complete dismissal. I cannot write an academic thesis while claiming to completely reject some of these approaches. I still retain elements of each of these in this thesis while trying to work against the limitations they impose. In this sense, I take a diffractive¹⁰ (Barad 2007) stance when using categories such as ‘woman’, ‘learning’, ‘researcher’ or when using conversation transcripts for data. My goal here is not just to disrupt the structures, for many of these structures are already falling apart or are in ruins owing to the work of many others over the past two decades. What I hope to do is work differently with what is there to find ways to think differently and to ‘pursue the *supplement*, what always already escapes the structure’ (St. Pierre 2011a, p. 613).

On selecting ‘women’ as participants

With regards to my choice to focus exclusively on women for this study, the reason for this is, as Wegner (2002, pp. 341-342) puts it:

Sometimes *how things seem* is more important than *what they are* ... The fact is that it seems to each of us that we have conscious will. It seems we have selves. It seems we have minds. It seems we are agents. It seems we cause what we do. Although it is sobering and ultimately accurate to call this an illusion, it is a mistake to think *the illusory is trivial*. (emphasis added)

From a theoretical point of view, the idea of a knowing subject with a conscious will or the idea that there is an identity of ‘woman’ that can be represented may be deemed an ‘illusion’. However, for the participants of

¹⁰ I discuss ‘diffractive analysis’ in the section on data analysis of this chapter (from page 85-87).

this study these illusions constitute the 'reality' of social life. The discourse of gender intra-acts with materiality to produce particular outcomes that are specific for a particular group of individuals. It is because of this that I chose women as participants for this research. I do not believe that gendered notions either of 'woman' or of the material female body are foundational in the construction of knowledge. However, how discourse and materiality work to produce the subjective experience of 'woman', gendered spaces and the female body is an important issue for me. The lived experience of 'woman', though an illusory construction of many material and non-material elements, is not trivial for me.

Ethics, positionality and reflexivity

For this study I undertook in-depth conversations with women in Nepal, recording the transcripts in Nepalese. And I write this thesis in English, translating the words expressed in Nepalese to English. My 'position' has implications at all the different stages of this research: the approach and design of it, negotiating access to participants, the methods I use, translation and analysis, the writing up and the representation of data in English. In most qualitative research, reflexivity is invoked as a key methodological tool to ensure ethical research. The issue of reflexivity becomes an ethical concern because writing up research and research as a practice of constructing or generating knowledge is concerned with representation. Hence, reflexivity is also concerned with the positions of the researcher and the researched and how the differences in positionality influence the research and what is produced as knowledge (Ward & Wylie 2014).

I have taken to heart Jackson and Mazzei's (2009, p. 2) advice about 'straining the voice and complicating meaning'. The ethical issue here goes beyond how I use the chosen methods to conduct the research, how I access,

interpret and store information and data, and how I 'represent' and use the data in English. In doing research, ethics is also involved in how we produce ourselves as subjects—as the knowing 'researcher'—and more importantly, in how we produce others. The issue is how I produce others not just as the 'subjects' of the research, as 'interviewees' or 'participants' or whatever 'correct' sounding word I use, but also as human beings. What kind of human beings do we (re)produce through our research? For example, 'woman', 'uneducated', 'marginalised', 'learners', 'knowledgeable', 'empowered', 'researcher' etc. I apply this same ethical stance when implementing the various tools and methods in doing this research, as will be discussed in detail later in this chapter (page 88).

Conventional qualitative methods deem it important to acknowledge one's position in order to be reflexive about how the position works in the production of knowledge. But I am not so sure about my own position or identity. The different aspects of my positioning (urban, educated, middle class, privileged caste, Nepalese, woman, PhD candidate in Australia) do not pre-exist but emerge or get produced in the inter-subjective space created in the interaction and work in ways that I cannot always predict. During my field visits and whenever I had conversations with participants, I paid attention to how I spoke, how I dressed and how I approached the occasion in order to mitigate the potential influences of my privileged position. I was aware that different parts of who I am would play into what stories got told, what got censored. I knew that how I listened influenced how the participants spoke to me. I also know that how I write up is shaped by the academic practice of writing a thesis in a particular academic culture of my university.

I was to some extent aware that my perceived position could work to exclude or include particular individuals as potential participants in the

research. On one occasion, a participant commented in a matter of fact way, 'In the past, I would not have spoken to someone like you, wearing glasses, but now I am confident'. I asked her what she meant by that and she said, 'You know people who wear glasses are knowledgeable intelligent people'. Until that moment, I was unaware what my glasses could do, how they produced me in particular ways, although I took steps to downplay my privileged positioning.

The point I am trying to make here is that no amount of self-disclosure will enable me to know myself or others for that matter or will ensure better or more authentic representations of what it is really like for the participants in this study. The declaration of one's position presupposes a knowable fixed being or identity. It also assumes that somehow this can be transcended or the epistemological limitations can be resolved through the practice of reflexivity (Pillow 2003). As Spivak points out, 'calling the place of the investigator into question remains a meaningless piety' (1988, p. 271). Given the post-structuralist stance and post-qualitative approach I have taken in this study, how can reflexivity be practiced in this research and for what purpose?

Pillow (2003) suggests practicing reflexivity as a methodological tool that helps to disrupt the practice of gathering data as 'truths', instead using reflexivity to push us 'toward an unfamiliar, towards the uncomfortable'. She calls this a 'reflexivity of discomfort', which she explains as 'reflexivity that seeks to know while at the same time situates this knowing as tenuous'. According to this kind of practice, the positioning of reflexivity is not about clarity, honesty or humility but is 'practices of confounding disruptions' (p. 192). With regards to this study, I have attempted to practice this reflexivity of discomfort by inhabiting a place of tentativeness and uncertainty in my approach and analysis in this thesis. Throughout the research process, I

pushed the familiar away, uncomfortable with familiarity, and remained suspicious of my 'knowing' from my 'insider' position. At times, the stories I was told seemed a little too obvious and familiar that I struggled to analyse them. 'What is the new knowledge in this?' I asked myself. This working with the discomfort and non-acceptance of the familiar, took me through many shifts in my inquiry, including shifts in my methodological approach itself and in the study's philosophical orientations.

In conclusion, in attempting a post-qualitative inquiry, I am not claiming to take an alternate or opposing approach to conventional qualitative inquiry. In carrying out this inquiry, I use some of the established methods of qualitative inquiry. At the same time I deconstruct those practices and resist interpretation based on the logic of representation. To achieve this, I practice the 'reflexivity of discomfort' throughout the process of writing up this research.

3.4 Research design and implementation

This section documents and explains how I carried out this inquiry exploring learning as becoming. Like most doctoral research work, conducting this research has not been a straightforward linear process following the learnt academic practice. The process has been messy and full of challenges given how the framing of the research shifted as my understanding of the issues evolved. Here, I provide an account of how the study was conducted with all the messiness encountered along the way and how I negotiated with some of the ethical and theoretical concerns to produce this thesis in its current form.

As I have acknowledged earlier, this inquiry has been a very messy process. In the initial stages, the design of the study was very different. It was initially conceptualised from a life history approach with a different research question that stemmed from a different philosophical understanding. This

approach collapsed as the study progressed. For practical reasons, I worked with the debris and insights gained from that collapse to build the inquiry as it is presented in this thesis.

3.4.1 Site of the study

As I mentioned earlier in revisiting the research objectives, I locate learning as becoming in the process of change as an integral and continuous aspect of everyday life. The idea of change, or what counts as change, is subjective and depends entirely on the individual. Change is also a product of experience; change emerges through experience. But this is not a process that I can access as it happens. In order to access the subjective experience of change, I needed access to personal stories of change but there is no specific site or physical location where this change can be exclusively located. As the experience of change in everyday life is one that everybody experiences, the design and approach of the study did not require that I focus on any one specific locality or even population. I chose to conduct this study in Nepal mainly because of my personal connection with the place. I wanted to invest in research as a 'knowledge building' practice in the place where I live, and wanted to work with individuals whose experiences and knowledge do not get enough recognition. In addition, I was interested in carrying out this study in Nepal because the inquiry itself was triggered by my personal and professional experiences in that place. Within Nepal, I did not pick a specific location and I recruited participants from different parts of the country.

3.4.2 Negotiating access and recruitment of participants

In order to recruit interested participants for this research, I employed multiple strategies. In two districts east of the capital city, Ramechhap and Okhaldhunga, I did a brief fifteen-minute presentation about my research, explaining what I wanted to explore through this study. I requested this

opportunity with a local organisation¹¹ that works exclusively with women. They invited me to deliver the presentation at one of their workshops attended by representatives from the mothers groups¹² from the 51 village development committees of the district. At the end of the presentation, I explained that I was seeking potential research participants to share their personal experiences of significant change in their lives. I also used this opportunity to go through the information sheet in Nepalese (see Appendices A and B for the Nepalese and English versions). I explained what was expected from the participants and how I envisaged the conversation process. From these two districts, I had a total of seven participants come forward expressing an interest in participating in this research. I scheduled a time and place that would be feasible for each.

I took a slightly different approach in three other districts (Surkhet, Mahendranagar and Bardiya) in the far western part of Nepal, where I approached local nongovernment organisations to access potential women participants from that area. The community facilitators in those organisations provided me with the names and contact details of those they thought might be interested. I then called each woman by phone to further explore interest

¹¹ Here, my professional network and identity as a development consultant gave me privileged access to local organisations and government bodies to seek support in reaching the local community, rather than directly approaching community members. I also wanted local institutions to be aware of my purpose and presence in those areas. As a result, I had numerous informal discussions and shared my research ideas with different groups in the different places I visited. Although these informal discussions were not part of the research design, they nevertheless contributed to how I approached my work.

¹² A mothers group is part of the Nepalese Government's community health approach. Women in communities have been mobilised to form informal groups through which various health interventions are carried out in order to enhance awareness, education and access to health services all over Nepal.

in participating in the research. In these three districts, I ended up contacting 11 participants.

A third approach I took was to send an email to a network of professional acquaintances and colleagues with a brief cover letter and the information sheet. I asked that my contacts share the information with anyone who could potentially be interested in participating in my research. I received three responses through this approach.

In total, I made contact with 21 individuals as potential participants for this research. One thing that was important for me was that I did not want to identify and select participants using specific selection criteria. I wanted to reach the potential participants in such a way that those who were interested would volunteer themselves and approach me. The rationale for doing this was to avoid selecting participants based on a fixed criterion of what counts as personal change. I wanted individuals to come forward with their own subjective understanding of personal change, claiming for themselves the position of individuals who had experienced change.

Of course, how and through whom the participants received information about the call for participation would influence who came forward. I became aware that such an open call for participation would attract different kinds of individuals with different interests, not all of which would be relevant to my research aims. They were mostly women who were articulate and confident in expressing themselves and perceived themselves as being 'knowledgeable' with the ability to speak to a 'researcher'. The main limitation of this approach is that it potentially leaves out those who do not see themselves as 'knowledgeable' or as having something worthwhile to say.

At the time of recruitment, I was concerned to recruit as diverse and representative a group as possible. But as my research approach evolved and

given my resistance to representation, my objective changed. It was not about giving voice to my participants, nor was it about arriving at an authentic representation of how it really is for individuals in specific socio-cultural positions in society. This change shaped my selection of eight participants from the 21 individuals contacted as potential participants. This selection will be further explained in the next section.

3.4.3 Guided conversation

Once the interested participants were approached, data in the form of narratives were generated through 'guided conversations' (Cole & Knowles 2001, p. 72). The data collection was conducted over a period of seven months from mid-June to January 2012 in Nepal. I wanted to hear personal narratives of change and how individual participants did things differently or perhaps how the change(s) affected who they become or were becoming in their everyday lives. At that time, as I was exclusively meeting women, I was also keen to hear stories of how individuals were able to be and do differently from what was conventionally possible given the discursive position of 'woman'—in other words, stories of 'becoming minoritarian' in the Deleuzian (1987, p. 292) sense.

In the earlier stages of the fieldwork I was wary about using any particular key words and about asking specific questions using words such as 'learning', 'knowledge' or even 'change'. So in the initial discussions, I took an open approach with the participants, stating that I wanted to hear their everyday life experiences. While I was open about my research interests and shared information about them as much as I could in the initial solicitation stages, during the actual conversation I tried to be as vague as possible, leaving it entirely to the participants to start as they wanted to or to tell the story as they pleased.

This vagueness created its own challenges. The challenges were related to how the participants understood and interpreted my research objectives and what was required of them in terms of the timing and the content of the inquiry. I had limited control over how and where the conversations would take place and what kind of 'data' would be generated through the process. Three participants in different parts of the country invited me to their office premises and allocated around half an hour for the conversation during which most of the content shared was about their organisation. When I sensed that these individuals were reluctant to share personal information, I did not push further. On one occasion, I was invited to join a protest event and the participant wanted to use the time sitting at the protest to do the interview. The conversation ended up focusing on political issues related to the protest. The context and the content of these conversations make them irrelevant for the study.

In some of the conversations, the narratives presented followed the storyline of a much-rehearsed discourse about the status of women in Nepal. Participants stated that the life of a woman in Nepal was hard, oppressed by the traditions and culture with few chances for respite, unless supported or 'rescued' by someone. Although focused on individual life experiences, these narratives did not talk about change and did not seem to fit my inquiry. I am not implying that these narratives of 'a hard life' were less valid or not representative of 'truth'. I do not mean to invalidate the participants' lived experiences as they chose to tell them. Taking a post-qualitative stance resisting representation meant that the narratives were not judged for their 'authenticity' as narratives of change. However, given that I located the phenomenon of learning in the experience of change in life, for analytical purposes I felt I needed information that explicitly narrated experiences of change. However, there were no specific criteria to represent or signify what

this change would entail. I excluded the discussions that did not materialise as a 'guided conversation' about the experience of change.

The conversations with participants took place in an iterative process over the seven-month period I was in Nepal. Hence, the experience of interviewing in the earlier stages informed how I interviewed in the later stages. I made the decision that I needed stories that explicitly narrated experiences of personal change. As a result, in the later stage of the field work I changed my strategy and invited participants to share experience guided by the question, 'If I had known you ten years ago, and met you again now, how would I find you? Would there be any difference between who you were then and who you are now as a person?' The conversations guided by this question conducted in the later stages typically lasted for up to two hours.

By phrasing this question, I narrowed the concept of experience of change to be represented by stories of personal change in one's sense of self. The narratives were presented as a linear process of change indicated by movement from one stable sense of self to another – 'this is how I used to be before and this is how I am now'. As discussed earlier, one cannot completely avoid representation in doing research. This shift was not intended to get more 'authentic data'. My inquiry is not about illuminating how individuals really experience change and undergo learning in life. I made the practical choice to locate change in subjective accounts of change. Having done that, I had to be wary of how I analyse these stories that claim to represent 'personal change' and what claims I can make based on these stories.

In light of this change in my approach, I asked participants I had met in earlier stages of the research if I could meet them again to get more specific stories that focused on their experiences of change. I ended up having follow-up meetings with three participants. In two cases, the conversations occurred

in a few sessions across the day, as suited the participant. In both cases, I stayed with the participants in their homes and we found time in-between their different chores during the day. I took this approach as the participants expressed interest and invited me to their homes but they could not dedicate a large chunk of their time (two hours) in one block to sit for an conversation in one location. I used a voice recorder to record the conversations. I took very few notes during the conversations, as I wanted to fully engage with the participants in the conversation. In some cases, I did not even carry paper or pen. I usually wrote any thoughts about the meeting after it finished. In this way, of the 21 participants who had expressed interest and approached me, eight provided information about their personal experiences of change. It is these eight participants' stories that I have analysed in this study.

Given the post-qualitative approach of my inquiry, using conversations or even 'interviews' as a method of data collection and personal stories as data is problematic. For this research, I chose to use conversations to get participants' accounts of experience of change. One theoretical problem with using interviews is the roles implied. The interview assumes a knowing subject (the interviewee) who has access to reality through experience and has the ability to present it through language; this 'reality' is then received by another knowing subject (the researcher) who can then represent this knowledge authentically in the thesis.

Silverman (2007) has been critical of the over-reliance on interviews as a preferred method in qualitative inquiry. He claims interviewing to be a process of 'manufacturing' data as opposed to 'finding' data through other methods (p. 32). Although, I am not comfortable with the idea of 'finding' data, I do agree with the idea that the situation and process of the interview is constitutive in the construction of the story as it is being told and that the story is an attempt to construct a version of one's lived experience. From a

post-qualitative stance I am suspicious of the claim that any kind of 'data', either manufactured or 'found', can be the sole foundation for 'knowledge'. It will simply relay *a* perspective, a constructed version of 'reality'.

Silverman (1993, p. 98) argues that a part of the problem with using interviews is to do with how researchers treat the data and the status that is accorded to the data in making knowledge claims. In other words, the problem lies in the philosophical approach to interviews and data. The approach to interview data depends on one's approach to inquiry, one's understanding of knowledge and one's view of how claims can be made based on the data. Silverman is not arguing against conducting interviews, but cautions on the limits of interview data as a basis to making knowledge claims with reference to one's inquiry.

I see sitting through a conversational interview as an event of *intra-action*. During the conversation, each participant is being constituted as two kinds of subjects: as subjects of knowledge who are telling their life experiences during the interview (the knower) and then as subjects of change and learning *within* the stories told during the interview (the knowable learner). Even within these two kinds of subjects, multiple subjects emerge depending on the situation, meaning the knower and the knowable are not stable positions held by the participants throughout the interview process. My subjectivity as the interviewer/researcher is not fixed either and the emergence of different subjectivities also changes how the story gets told. Then there are the material and discursive elements that are co-constitutive in this *intra-action*, all of which are part of what emerges in the inter-subjective space during the interview.

What the above implies is that social circumstances cannot be regarded as containing 'problematic' elements or as being obstacles that need to be—or

can be—resolved to produce a ‘better’ interview, i.e. one of greater clarity, authenticity or even objectivity. The interview situation is fundamental and not incidental to shaping the form and content of what is said, and how meaning is assembled in the process (Gubrium & Holstein 2012, p. 32). However, I understand the situation as fundamental in a co-constitutive way and not as determining the process. Given this understanding of the interview process as a method, what can be done with what is collected—or rather *constructed*—from the interviews? This will be discussed in the next section.

3.4.4 Data preparation, analysis and presentation

As is conventionally done with data from interviews, I transcribed the conversations. For the purpose of analysis, I transcribed in Nepalese. In the initial stages of data analysis, I engaged with the transcribed texts in an attempt to see patterns. Finding patterns was a relatively easy task for most of the stories were assembled along a particular logic of representation, implying the structuring process that produces ‘a liveable world’ with ‘stable meaning and stable subjects to exchange it’ (Lecerle 2002, p. 60). So at first, I only saw familiar patterns in the data, the reproduction of the known. This familiarity of the data was uncomfortable. I was troubled, wondering, ‘What is the ‘new knowledge’ in this?’ With attempts to find ‘newness’ in the data, I listened to the recorded conversations again and again, instead of simply reading the ‘inert’ transcripts. Each time I listened to a particular segment of the conversation; I wrote notes over the transcript, adding additional interpretive layers to the transcribed data. Hence, I used the recorded conversation along with the transcript combined with notes as the ‘data’ for analysis.

In terms of analysis, I experimented with different tools until an approach emerged that worked for me that reflected my growing theoretical

understanding. This analytical approach relies on particular concepts on approaching data generated from conversations. It influenced how I listened to the recording, how I questioned the data and how I tried to make sense of the data. Mazzei (2013, p. 106) cites Deleuze (1990b) from *The Logic of Sense* to say that he claims that it is only out of nonsense that thinking can occur. I used this as a guide when listening to the stories. I looked for places where the words did not offer themselves up to easy interpretation by me, or to easy explanation by the participant. I looked for places where the stories took abrupt turns, or where the story seemed to reach a bottleneck or knot, where it did not flow seamlessly; places where participants struggled and stuttered to offer explanations of what they had experienced and sometimes said, 'I don't know' or 'I'm not sure how or why'. The intention of this process was not to produce themes or to code particular aspects of the data. The post-qualitative approach of inquiry requires resisting this urge to essentialise human experience through the reductive process of coding (Jackson 2013, p. 746). As I said, one way to resist easy interpretation was to look for moments that were 'unfamiliar' or difficult to make sense of, the 'nonsense' parts of the conversation. The next step was to decide what to do with these stutters and struggles in the stories.

Part of the discomfort with the stutters and unfamiliarity in the texts is to do with the analyst's inability to explain these moments with ease. They do not fit easily into the representational schema of how things are usually understood. At first, they appear as inadequacies in the process, perhaps indicating the interviewer's inability to ask deeper, more meaningful questions that perhaps would have generated better answers and made interpretation easier. In order to resist representational thought, I avoided the interpretive question 'What does it mean?' and instead engaged with the selected bits of the data, the stutters and weird bits, by wondering 'How does

this work? What is being produced here?' (Jackson & Mazzei 2011, p. 92; Lenz Taguchi 2012, p. 268). Trying to map an incoherent event in the story using this perspective helped me to see different things and to produce a different understanding. As I practised this, I started to apply this question of 'How does this work?' to parts that appeared familiar or even common sense.

Adding one more layer to my analysis, I use the work of Karen Barad (2007). Barad uses the concept of 'diffraction' from quantum physics as an analytical tool to think about social practices. Barad explains that the word 'diffraction' is used to disrupt the widespread use of the other optical metaphor: 'reflection'. Reflection maintains representations; it is about finding sameness and authenticity and reducing distortions. It is based on the epistemology/ontology binary and the notion of interaction of separate unified entities. In contrast, Barad explains that diffraction is about unfolding the difference in the world. In her words, it is based on the onto-epistemology that 'knowing is a matter of part of the world making itself intelligible to another part of the world' (2007, p. 185). This activity of a body making itself intelligible to another is what Barad calls 'material-discursive intra-activity' (Lenz Taguchi 2012). Understanding knowing from this perspective is part of conducting a diffractive analysis. I therefore asked myself: How do I go about doing a diffractive analysis of transcribed data?

In my search, I came across a few published empirical studies that took an experimental approach in using the concept of diffractive analysis (Davies 2014; Jackson & Mazzei 2011; Lenz Taguchi 2012; Palmer 2011). Informed by these studies of doing research diffractively, I worked with the recordings. My listening to each of the recording is a moment of intra-action, where through the voices, words and sounds, bodies come to be known. What becomes *known to me* is then co-constitutive of who I become in the intra-action. Hence, the way I understand diffractive analysis is partly by

'becoming' with the data and by understanding that what becomes known is also through one's own becoming. Diffractive analysis offers a way to see 'how something different comes to matter, not only in the world that we observe but also in our research practice' (Davies 2014, p. 734). Here, what comes to be known in my reading and listening to the recording is always partial and a glimpse of the potential but not the absolute reality. This analysis also applies to what emerges during the conversation, in the intra-action between the participants and myself and all that is there in the production of the story.

In listening to the recordings diffractively, I pay attention to the material discursive construction of the subject through intra-action with the material conditions of their everyday lives. To distinguish this method of analysis, then, reading diffractively is different from *deconstruction* of the discourse and then construction of a newer paradigm to counter the effects of discourse. A *deconstructive method* of analysis works by illuminating how discourse functions and produces subjects. The *method of diffraction* emphasises how discourse materializes. 'A diffractive reading is not about what is told, or experienced—it is about the ways in which what is experienced is formed in the intra-action between the material and discursive' (Jackson & Mazzei 2011, p. 130). There is no distinct analytical method to describe here. With each intra-action with the recorded data, the objective is not to grasp authenticity or become clearer about what exactly is being said. Each time, something else becomes known, and what was known before becomes known differently. As Lenz Taguchi explains:

Diffractive analysis ... relies on the researcher's ability to make matter intelligible in new ways and to imagine other possible realities presented in the data: a real *beyond* those produced by processes of recognition and

identification in reflexive interpretations or discursive perspectives or positionings. (2012, p. 267)

In terms of presentation of the data, in chapter four I provide a brief summary of the stories of change from the eight participants. The aim here is to introduce each of the eight participants and briefly outline their specific story of change. The transcripts of the stories shared during the conversations are long and are written in Nepalese. I have reconstructed these stories in English in Appendix B (from page 229). In the following analytical chapters, I use selected excerpts from the narratives of only two or three participants at a time in each chapter. I approach the excerpts from the narratives in light of the research questions related to the subject, the body and knowing in chapters five, six and seven respectively. With my philosophical stance of onto-epistemology (Barad 2007), I explore each of the three concepts, guided by the question, 'How does learning in becoming work'? I understand the subject, the body and knowing as all co-emergent in the process of becoming. The analysis is therefore driven by trying to understand how these three aspects are constituted in everyday events and how they shape one's becoming and hence one's learning in life.

3.4.5 Ethical concerns in research implementation

The overall ethical stance of this research is embedded in the philosophical approach informed by a post-qualitative inquiry as discussed earlier. The ethical concerns lie in how particular versions of 'truths' are produced through research as a knowledge-making practice, and what implications these 'truths' have for those concerned in the process. The ethical concern here is about how representation works and what it does. In resisting representation, I practice a 'reflexivity of discomfort' (Pillow 2003) where I question the familiar and given. Ethical concerns arise from the very beginning in framing the research (the rationale for doing research) through

to the implications of the claims and conclusions. The broader ethical concerns related to representation, positionality and reflexivity discussed earlier have direct implications for how the research is conducted in practice. This demands sensitivity to and awareness of the potential ethical problems that may arise in the actual doing of the research. This section discusses some of the practical ethical concerns foreseen and mitigated in the process of doing the research.

As part of the formal requirements, before starting fieldwork I submitted an application where I outlined the nature of the research, ethical considerations and measures planned to ensure responsible and ethical research practice. I started the fieldwork and data collection only after receiving a formal approval from the UTS Human Research Ethics Committee. Filling out the ethics application form was a valuable exercise in thinking about how I should approach my fieldwork from an ethical standpoint. The ethical issues that I took into consideration during the fieldwork and data collection are briefly discussed below.

The first consideration was how I would approach and select the participants for this study. I have already discussed the strategies I used to approach and select participants. As I have already explained, I employed the strategy of ensuring that the participants received adequate information about my research project and expressed interest in participating. Once interest was expressed, I took time in the initial part of the conversation to establish that the participants fully understood the requirements and purpose of the meeting. I also ensured that they would have no objections to me recording the conversation and using their stories for analysis in the thesis. While discussing these points, I presented each participant with an information sheet in the Nepalese language with my contact details (see Appendix A).

This part of the meeting also gave participants the opportunity to ask me questions or seek clarification of anything they were concerned about before they verbally agreed to participate in the research. For instance, some participants asked me what exactly I would do with the data, in what ways their stories would appear in my thesis and how I would ensure confidentiality. I identify this stage as the establishment of verbal consent and I chose not to use formal written consent forms. I opted against using written consent because some of the participants had limited literacy skills to fully read and understand the form. Some participants might have been concerned about signing something with text that they might not fully comprehend. In order to maintain the participants' confidentiality, I de-identified the stories by giving each participant a pseudonym and by not disclosing detailed information about their immediate contexts. I worked on transcribing the conversations myself. All the recordings and transcribed documents related to the data were securely stored on the personal computer at my workspace.

I also considered any incidental opportunity costs that might be borne by the participants as a result of participating in this research. The key consideration here was the time required for meeting up as most of the participants had intensely busy lives. For this reason, I travelled to the prospective participants' locations, often conducting the conversations in local places or homes. We negotiated times to talk that would be the least disruptive to their daily work. Hence, the conversations took place in less conventional places: one happened in a forest as we went herding the goats; one took place in the kitchen while we made kurauni¹³ on the firewood stove; and one meeting took place late at night after the evening chores in the

¹³ A form of condensed milk made by slowly heating fresh milk.

participant's home. Only two of the eight conversations took place in my personal office space in Kathmandu.

With regards to ethical concerns related to data analysis and presentation, I addressed these concerns by taking a post-qualitative approach in this inquiry. Earlier in this chapter I discussed the ethical concerns I had with this research, when I problematised notions of representation, interpretation and reflexivity as analytic practices in qualitative inquiries. I am wary about how I go about re-telling and representing the lived experiences of the participants. I do not intend to claim to tell exactly how it is for these participants. I resist looking for meaning, and I resist categorising and essentialising the stories. Instead I look for ways to show 'how something different comes to matter' (Davies 2014, p. 734). Most importantly, as I mentioned earlier, one of the key ethical concerns for me is my role in producing subjects and, through this research, my role as a researcher in 'helping constitute who and what come to matter' in the production of knowledge (Barad 2007, p. x).

3.5 Conclusion

The objective of this chapter has been to describe the methodological orientation in this study of exploring learning as becoming. I started with discussion of the research issue that is the focus of this inquiry and I discussed the methodological challenges faced in doing this research given its theoretical framing. Given that a post structuralist theoretical orientation problematises the concepts of 'learning' and 'experience', I have chosen to use the concept of 'learning as becoming'. This made it necessary to design this study and select methods that were philosophically consistent with the post-structuralist framing. Hence, the methodology of this study has been guided by the concept of post-qualitative inquiry.

In terms of data collection, I used the method of conducting interviews or what I called 'conversations', while being aware of their limitations in making claims and exploring 'truths'. I explained that in working with the data of individual stories of life changes, I resist representation and interpretation. I engage with the data, asking 'How does it work?' instead of 'What does it mean?' With my reliance on onto-epistemology where knowing and being are co-emergent, I use the method of diffractive analysis to explore how subjectivity, body and knowing work in becoming. The information in this chapter provides the philosophical and methodological underpinnings of the analyses I present in subsequent chapters. ■

Chapter 4

Narratives of personal change

4.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to familiarise the reader with the stories of change presented by the eight participants in this inquiry. As explained in chapter three, I conducted in-depth guided conversations with the eight participants. The participants were encouraged to talk about their experience of change in life guided by the question, 'If I had known you ten years ago, and met you again now, how would I find you? Would there be any difference between who you were then and who you are now as a person?' In response to this, the participants shared their experiences of personal change, explaining how they used to be and what life events led to the change and enabled them to become how they are now. This chapter presents a short introduction to each of the eight participants and a summary of their sense of personal transformation. Following the brief narratives of change, I present a mapping of how these stories are revisited in the subsequent analytical chapters of this thesis.

4.2 Introduction to the eight participants

The eight Nepali women who have generously given their time to share their stories in this study come from different parts of the country. The stories they share are not intended as a representation of what it is like to be a woman in Nepal. Instead, their stories are indicative of the specific socio-cultural milieu within which they are situated. The historical context of the country has had significant bearings on the lives of women in Nepal in general. The previous

official status of Nepal as a 'Hindu Kingdom'¹⁴ meant that the broader social order has been heavily influenced and shaped by the hierarchical stratification of caste and gender based on the Hindu Brahmanical social order where women were placed at a relatively inferior position in society. This means that women in general were and still are to this day subjected to rigid social norms. Some of these norms are also reflected in various state mechanisms and social institutions. Furthermore, Nepalese society is made up of a heterogeneous mix of different ethnicities with very distinctive indigenous cultural traditions. Hence, the subjective experience of being a 'woman' in Nepal is diverse and is intersected by multiple positions mediated by geographical location (mountains, hills or plains), caste, ethnicity, age, religion, class and so on.

I have constructed detailed stories of each participant based on their sharing in the conversations. These stories are available for reference in Appendix B (from page 229). What I present below is only a brief introduction to each of the participants with a summary of their experience of the change they narrate.

4.2.1 Kala's story of shifting relations

I came in contact with Kala through a community organisation in her village in Bardiya district in the far western part of Nepal. Her village is about a three hours bus ride from the nearest town. She is in her late 20s and a mother of two, a son aged eight and daughter aged five. She lives with her mother-in-law and father-in-law in a small two bedroom house. Her

¹⁴ Nepal as a state has been undergoing political restructuring since the end of the constitutional Monarchy in 2006. As part of this political transition, the interim constitution 2007 and the recently promulgated constitution of 2015 declare Nepal to be a secular state.

husband works in the Nepal Army and is mostly away. Kala has finished her 12th grade schooling. She spends most of her time in household work and farming activities. She does not have formal employment but is an active volunteer at the local community-based organisation.

Kala shares her story of personal change in terms of her improved relationships with her in-laws and how she understands and works in her relationships with those around her in her community. Kala attributes the change to a particular event in her life: her participation in a fourteen-day residential workshop on peace building in communities. Prior to the change, she was already working in the community but says she was arrogant, stubborn and believed that only her thinking was right and what others say was wrong. She used to be disrespectful and have fights and arguments with her in-laws. Through her experience, Kala says she came to realise the importance of relationships:

I came to realise that I have to do the work at home first. I have to establish peace inside my own home, within my mind and with those in my family. How can one do big talks about peace in the community when there is conflict inside your own home, your own mind? I realised that it's not appropriate as a community leader to dominate the women in your own home, your mother-in-law or your sisters-in-law, and then go out in the community and talk peace. You have to be a role model in your own home first. Only with the support of the family have I been able to do whatever I have done so far in the community. That has been my learning from this experience.

Currently, Kala continues to volunteer as a community worker, organising and leading activities that help the marginalised in her immediate community. She says she does not consider herself 'empowered' as there is a lot more she wants to do but has not been able to do because of many

limitations. She says, 'Living is always a struggle, you get one thing and then you want another. It is never-ending'.

4.2.2 Beena's journey of becoming educated

Beena is in her mid-40s. She was born and raised in a village in the western part of Nepal. She has an academic background in Forestry and holds a doctoral degree from a university in Europe. She currently lives and works in Kathmandu in a senior advisory position in an international aid organisation. Beena is single and lives with her elderly father and two sisters. Beena has chosen to stay single and often gets comments from colleagues and sometimes even close female friends that she has made a mistake by choosing to remain single. She says she never got any pressure from her father or sisters to get married. Her father always said she is wise and capable enough to make decisions about her life.

In her story, Beena shares her life journey of coming from a rural background and her struggles to get educated and build a professional career. When she was 12 years old, her mother passed away, leaving her dad to take care of the five daughters. Her father had made some bad business decisions and wasted most of the money and property they had. After her mother passed away, Beena feels that the neighbours started to look down on her family. She remembers neighbours coming to her place and saying, 'Poor things, unfortunate ones, the dad lost all his property and wife and now he is stuck with five girls.' Beena says she wondered, 'What was so bad about having girls? Why do they keep saying like that to us? So what if he has only daughters and no sons?'

From a very young age, Beena had the resolve to become educated, get a job and support her family. Through her own hard work and persistence, Beena overcame many obstacles and has managed to achieve more than she

had ever imagined. This is what Beena defines as her personal change, becoming a self-reliant, educated and professionally accomplished individual who is able to support her family; and to do this in spite of the challenges she faced being a girl.

Beena's story of personal change is different from the others, as she does not have a definite story that follows the narrative of 'I was like this before and now I am like this'. Her story centres on her desire for education. Throughout her story telling, her sharing also focuses on the topic of her interest, which is social exclusion. I sense that her narrative in this conversation is very much developed through her own theoretical and philosophical understanding of social exclusion and her own experience of feeling excluded because of her gender. But she also points out that what she has done and how her life has turned out also comes from specific historical and social conditions. She wonders if her life would have been the same if her mother had not died. She speculates it may have been very different and perhaps she might not have had the same passion to become educated.

4.2.3 Shanta's story of resistance and change

Shanta approached me after attending one of the community presentations I had conducted about my study. Shanta lives in the hill district of Okhaldhunga in the eastern part of Nepal, a very rough twelve-hour bus drive from where I live in Kathmandu. Shanta's father was a school teacher and she was sent to school and finished year 10 by 16. At 17, she got married to her husband through an arranged marriage.

Shanta is in her late 30s. She says she grew up in a relatively comfortable manner as she was the only daughter in the family and did not feel very restricted before marriage. After being married, her life was different. Shanta's story is about the challenges she faced in a new role and how she

changed through that experience. She was one of the very few educated women in the village and wanted to do something beyond her domestic chores. Despite heavy resistance from her in-laws, she got training to become an adult educator and started the first literacy classes for women in her village. That was just the beginning for her. After that, she became involved in many community activities, got further training and education to become a female community health volunteer and became engaged with organising and leading the local mothers group. Through all this, she not only faced criticism and resistance from her own family members but also from the villagers as well. But over time, she has managed to gain and build the trust of those in her family as well as the villagers. Today she leads the network of mothers groups and is actively involved in representing the women of the village on the local council.

For Shanta, this is her transformation. Once she lived under very oppressive conditions within her own family, and she remembers feeling helpless. But now she says she is confident that she can survive anywhere under any condition. She is confident that she can always find a way to earn a living for herself and does not have to put up with anybody's oppression anymore. She wants to carry on being a local leader in her village as long as she can and as long as she has the trust and faith of the society.¹⁵

¹⁵ I spoke to Shanta on the phone in the aftermath of the devastating earthquake that shook the country on 25 April 2015. She is one of the two participants who live in some of the worst affected areas in the recent earthquake. She told me that there is not a single house left standing in her entire village. In her confident voice, she informed me that she has called a meeting of the mothers group network to discuss their relief and reconstruction priorities and their way forward.

4.2.4 Kabita's new identity

Kabita, in her early 30s currently lives in a town in the southern plains of mid-western Nepal. She lives with her husband and two children. She was brought up in a relatively poor family, the eldest of seven children. She says at the age of 16 when she finished 7th grade, she decided to get married as a way of lessening the burden on her parents of feeding seven children. She gave birth to her two children early on and was mostly busy with domestic chores, getting fodder for the animals and working on the small piece of land they owned. She says that during those days, she did not have any particular notion of life being hard or of having any problems. 'I felt life was supposed to be like that in villages for all,' she says.

For Kabita, her experience of change was triggered by her participation in a local community group organised and facilitated by a local nongovernmental organisation. She did not think of joining them initially but was convinced by one of the staff members one day when she was out on her way to gather fodder. The experience was very new for her. She found their talk interesting and new, especially their talk about the importance of organising and solving problems. Kabita says that she did not really know what they meant by organising and solving problems. She says she was not even aware that she had problems.

As a result of her participation in the community meetings, Kabita talks about how her understanding of her living conditions shifted. She not only began to see problems but also got the courage to do something about them. Her husband did not do any work and never contributed to helping the family. He used to waste money on alcohol and gambled all day. Kabita was the sole earner for the family, mostly relying on farming for food. There were no alternative sources of cash income. She said it was difficult for her but she used to think that was just the way things were. She never questioned it.

After the community meetings, she confronted her husband. She says she also developed confidence in her own abilities as she spearheaded a campaign against alcohol abuse and gambling, as it was a significant problem in the entire community.

For Kabita, the way she understands her transformation is through her sense of self and how she is seen in the community. Kabita articulates her personal change as someone who has become educated, knowledgeable and also perceived and respected as a capable person in the community. After her community experience, she enrolled herself in school in 8th grade. At the time I met her, she had completed year 11 and was doing private studies to finish grade 12. She attributes her change to not just the knowledge but the courage to act. When I ask her about her future plans, she says she does not have any specific plans but says she has come to understand that there is no limitation to what one can do but one has to try. The main thing is 'doing'. She says, 'Whatever I am now, what I know now, it is only because of what I did ... I learnt from doing things.'

4.2.5 Rama's story of speaking

Rama¹⁶ is in her mid-40s. She lives in the hilly regions of Ramechhap district east of the capital of Kathmandu. I also got to talk to her when she responded to one of the presentations I had conducted seeking interested participants for my study. Rama was born in the hills, the only daughter of five children. She says she was 'put in her place as a girl' from early on in life. She was not sent to school by her parents but managed to study up to the 5th grade by sneaking into the classroom at the local public school on her

¹⁶ Rama is the other participant who also lives in an area badly affected by the recent earthquake in April, 2015. I have not been successful in contacting her despite several attempts. Hence, I am still unaware of her status following the earthquake.

own. She got married at 13. After her marriage, Rama's life became even harder. She was given little to eat, had to manage with few clothes and spent most of her time on domestic chores.

For Rama, the main change she experienced in life was the ability to speak. She feels that earlier on in her life, she did not have the ability to speak. She silently suffered hardships but could never speak up against the bad treatment she had to deal with. But through her experiences, gradually she says she learnt to speak. She identifies a pivotal moment in her life when she spoke openly and assertively to her mother-in-law for the first time about not having enough clothes to wear. She says after that, she got the courage to speak.

Rama built on her courage and ability to speak to become a female community health volunteer. She says that initially she faced criticism and resistance from the villagers; they accused her of corrupting and misleading the daughters in the village. She faced difficult circumstances and accusations for her outspoken behaviour and engagement in the community. But over time, she earned the respect and trust of her community. She summarises her sense of change when she says, 'If I were the same person as before, I would not have volunteered like this and come forward myself to be interviewed by you. I would not have known how to speak, I wouldn't see myself as someone who knew anything to speak about but now I am different.'

4.2.6 Gita's narrative of widowhood

Gita is a 34-year-old mother of a daughter who lives in a town in the plains of far western Nepal. She identifies herself as a 'war-widow' and currently is the president of the single women's group in her district. Gita's narrative evolves around her experience of becoming a widow at the young age of 21 and how the experience led her into her personal transformation. She got

married when she was still in high school in the 9th grade. Her husband was a soldier in the Nepalese Army who was killed in the armed conflict¹⁷. Till that moment she says she had a happy fulfilled life, living in the joint family with her in-laws, her husband and her three-year-old daughter.

After the sudden death of her husband, Gita was confronted with many challenges. In her story, she highlights the challenges she faced in learning how to be a young widow. Coming from a Hindu family, there were religious and social norms that determined what she could and could not do. One such norm had to do with the dress code. Gita was required to wear white and avoid wearing any jewellery or make-up to signify her status as a widow. For Gita, that was just one of the many adjustments she needed to make. Over a five year period, Gita defied many rules of being a widow including the practice of wearing white. She started wearing red, the symbol of auspiciousness. Her new status as a 'widow' made her aware of her socio-cultural positioning and she moved towards seeking a life of becoming self-reliant and financially independent. In that process, she not only worked to help herself, but also worked to help many other women in her area who had lost their husbands and family support due to the conflict. She got herself trained in sewing and set up a small tailoring business. She then trained several other women and expanded her business.

Despite her success in gaining financial independence through her business, Gita endeavoured to re-connect with her family. She believed that family acceptance was of utmost importance to allow the practice of wearing

¹⁷ This refers to the armed conflict between the Maoist rebels and the government forces for about a decade in Nepal which ended in 2006 with a comprehensive peace accord. Among many other aims, the Maoists forces sought to bring an end to the two-hundred-year old monarchy system in Nepal.

red by widows to become a socially acceptable norm. Initially she faced resistance and was estranged from her family due to her defiance of religious and social norms. But today, she has reconnected and her in-laws have come to accept her and her changed ways.

Gita reflects on the transformation she has undergone and speculates that this change may have not happened if she had not become a widow. She believes that being a widow and learning to survive in society as a widow has brought the biggest transformation in her. The biggest change of all has been the self-confidence she has gained: 'I have discovered what I can do and everything I have tried, I feel I succeeded in it, although I have had to suffer in the process. So now I have the confidence that I can handle anything in life. I have managed to mend my relations with my family, and I am happy that my daughter has a home now. I think that has been the most valuable outcome of this change.'

4.2.7 Anju's becoming 'woman'

Anju approached me to express her interest in participating by responding to the email I had sent out. Anju is in her late 20s, born and raised in Kathmandu. She received her high school and tertiary education in Kathmandu city. Since her university days, Anju had been an active founding member of a youth environmental activist group. Recently, she has entered academia as a researcher at a local university.

Anju shares her life experiences by talking about her childhood experiences, particularly the kind of incidents that shaped her subjective experience of being a girl. Given her familiarity with gender discourses, she highlights the moments that she believes were instrumental in shaping her understanding of self. In her story, Anju constitutes herself as a critical person, always suspicious and resistant to the gender norms that worked to

limit her being. As a result, she also developed a critical stance towards the idea of marriage and resisted getting married. By the time she reached her mid-twenties, her attitude shifted and she started accepting the thought of getting married. This acceptance was not borne out of the acceptance of the norms she says, but arise mostly because of her growing awareness of the potential challenges she will have to face as an unmarried single woman in society. When I met Anju, she had been married for about a year.

The process of getting married and her adjustment to her way of being in life as a married woman was the major experience of transformation for her. Within a few months of getting married, Anju faced a situation where she made a difficult decision. She decided to quit her job to be with her husband who was transferred to another town. Anju feels that this decision and the act of following her husband were unlike her. It also surprised many of her friends who perceived her as an independent and career-oriented person. Anju says that she has realised that a person's sense of self and priorities in life do change as the situation changes. She says she made this decision from a very different understanding of herself in which there were so many other things to think about other than just her career. Anju thinks this is the change she has undergone and continues to go through as she is still trying to figure out who she is as a married woman.

4.2.8 Radha's ways of knowing the world

Radha is in her early twenties and belongs to the Tharu indigenous community in the western part of Nepal. She never got the opportunity to go to school, as she had the responsibility of looking after the cattle and her younger siblings as her mother had passed away when she was young. She says she never regrets not having gone to school. She was happy to help out with the family so that her younger brothers and sisters could attend school. After she got married at the age of 16, her mother-in-law taught her all the

housework and more. She gave birth to a daughter at 20 and recently had a son.

Radha attributes the changes in her to her participation in a community meeting organised and facilitated by a local community-based organisation. She says that prior to attending those meetings, she had heard about people going to meetings, but had no idea what it meant. She used to wonder, 'How does one sit in a meeting? What does it mean?' After participating in a few meetings, she understood what the meetings were all about and she also learned to speak and actively contribute in the meetings. These events also opened up new experiences for her. She started going to other places, expanding her mobility. Before, she never went out and she was not even familiar with the names of the nearby roads or villages.

Radha also developed an interest in activities outside her domestic life. She learnt about mushroom farming. She found out about an organisation in a nearby town that helped local farmers with a mushroom farming kit, providing basic materials and the seeds. She visited the organisation on her own, learned about mushroom farming and tried it at home. For her the main change through these experiences has been her coming to know new things—knowing the names of places and roads, knowing how to catch a bus, knowing new skills and applying them.

Radha senses a tremendous transformation in herself because her everyday way of being has changed significantly for her. She is doing things that just a few years ago she was not even aware of. As her engagement in activities beyond her domestic life increases, she is coming to see and learn about new things, new ways of doing things and a new way to engage in the world. What she is doing now may not appear to be of major significance. What does matter here is that these changes are of major significance for her

and it is through these experiences that she is able to conceptualise her future. She is able to imagine the possibilities for ways of being and doing in her immediate future.

4.3 Stories in analysis

Examined on their own, all these different stories present their own perspectives on what personal change entails as put forward by their narrators. They locate the personal change in the shifts in their sense of self. These narratives have the underlying theme of '*I used to be like this before and now I am like this*'. These differences in selves are often articulated in terms of their individual capacities. For instance, Rama identifies change in self in her ability to speak; Radha locates change in self in terms of her new knowing and ability to do things as a result of that knowing; Beena sees the change in herself in terms of her educational and professional status; and Kabita talks about her enhanced confidence in her own capabilities as an individual. For some, the change in self is manifested in the way they relate to others in the world. Hence, they identify change in their relationships with those around them in their family and communities. Kala talks about how her change has improved her relationships with her in-laws and in her community. Gita talks about what she did that led to change in her life but highlights the change in her relations with her family and society as a widowed woman. Both Shanta and Anju's personal transformations started with new relations and they evolved through being in those relations, redefining the possibilities for their becoming in the process.

What was presented earlier is the reconstruction of the individual stories of personal transformation that emerged through the in-depth conversations. Through these stories, the participants shared their subjective experience of change. The participants constructed their personal narratives in ways that

constituted coherent unitary selves. In the stories there is a certain 'starting' point, exemplified by the triggers of change, a major event that had made the process of transformation perceptible. Although the process of change may have had a noticeable beginning, the participants do not express a definite 'end' or completion of the process. They talk about desirable states of being they arrived at as part of the transformation; such as 'being educated', 'being able to speak', 'becoming somebody', 'being recognised', etc. In their personal journeys, these points may once have represented a destination to arrive at. But upon arriving there, they all come to understand that the journey continues and from the vantage points of these states of being, other possible destinations of 'being' become visible. They all talk about change as a never-ending process, one that will continue into the future and a natural process of becoming and living in the world.

In analysing these stories, I do not take the stories as linear progressions of change. Instead, I explore sections of them to illuminate specific aspects in the stories. The intention here is not to discount participants' subjective understandings of the change event itself; nor do I seek to present an alternative narrative from the researchers' point of view. Here, my approach is to explore *how something works* instead of exploring *what something means or represents*. By using this approach over specific parts in their stories, I hope to unpack the richness of their experience.

In the subsequent chapters, sections of the participants' narratives will be used for analysis. I have not used any rigorous criteria for deciding whose narrative is examined under which analytical chapter. What I have relied on in selecting whose story is analysed in which chapter is the salient moments in the narrative that raise interesting questions for the respective issue under examination in the chapter. Arguably, each story could be taken and analysed using the theoretical resources I have used in any parts of the

chapter. For instance, I could have taken any one of the eight participants' narratives to examine notions of subjectivity. Out of practical necessity, I only focus on selected excerpts from the narratives in each chapter as follows:

- In chapter five, in exploring notions of subjectivity I examine sections from Rama's experience of speaking and Shanta's experience of entering her husband's home as a daughter-in-law.
- In chapter six, in exploring the notion of the body I examine sections from Gita's embodied experience of changing from a white saree to a red saree, Kala's pivotal moment with her mother-in-law and Beena's desire to be educated.
- In chapter seven, in exploring the notion of knowing I take parts of Radha's experience of knowing new things through her engagement in community meetings, Anju's shifting understanding of herself and Kabita's understanding of her new knowing.

4.4 Conclusion

In exploring the phenomenon of learning as a process of becoming, I locate learning in the process of change in life. I have used in-depth conversations with the eight participants in which they narrated their experiences of change in life. The stories have been told from different subjective perspectives of what entails personal change. The different perspectives of change are also situated in different socio-cultural contexts within Nepal. In this chapter, I have reconstructed summaries of the stories told to provide a sense of the personal change explained in the narratives. In the subsequent chapters, only selected excerpts from the detailed narratives will be used for analysis. ■

Chapter 5

Subjects in learning: nomadic multiplicities

5.1 Introduction

In arguing for a reconceptualisation of the subject, Elizabeth A. St. Pierre (2004, p. 293) claims, 'All of education and science is grounded in certain theories of the subject; and if the subject changes, everything else must as well.' Following this argument, a different conceptualisation of the subject that moves away from the humanist account of the subject would then entail a different conceptualisation of learning. This is the thought underlying the first question for this thesis: How does the subject work in becoming?

In this chapter, I use the narratives of two participants, Rama and Shanta. First, I provide a brief rationale for the key concepts I employ in theorising the subject from an onto-epistemological stance. Taking such a philosophical stance requires the disruption of the stable unitary and knowing subject and a different imagining of subjectivity. In trying to reconceptualise the subject differently, I explore three aspects related to the constitution of subjects through a post-structuralist perspective.

Firstly, I argue for a relational ontology of the subject instead of an autonomous unified whole subject, using the concept of *multiplicity*. Second, I explicate the instability of subjectivity through the concept of nomadic subjectivity. Through these concepts, the idea of subjectivity emerges as a relational phenomenon. This understanding of subjectivity gives ontological privilege to the *relations* that produce subjectivity instead of to subjectivity's

material or discursive structure. Thirdly, I focus on how gendered subjectivity is a production of both the material and discursive elements. I argue that while neither exists prior to intra-action, both are produced in the process of subject formation. What this means, for instance, is that both the specific idea of the body of a 'woman' as well as the discursive meaning of 'woman' are both emergent through intra-actions. This then leads to the conclusion that learning is not an act intentionally performed by subjects. Instead, learning is the phenomenon through which particular subjects come into existence.

5.2 Issues in theorising the subject

When we think about 'learning' as a phenomenon we automatically assume *human* as the subject of this phenomenon; it is the human who learns. What is this human subject like? How do we understand this subject? In the context of this study, the question becomes: Who are the subjects that are learning and becoming through their life experiences? In this study, the female participants who share their life stories of change are assumed to be the subjects of learning. Earlier in chapter two I discussed different theorisations of the subject in the context of learning, including some key issues within the post-structuralist account of subjectivity. In this chapter, I focus on those theoretical aspects of the notion of subjectivity that enable the reconceptualisation of subjectivity necessary to expand our understanding of learning as becoming. Here, I move away from the humanist understanding of the subject and use a post-structuralist perspective to reconfigure the subject of learning.

As stated earlier in chapter two, there is no uniform singular concept of the subject within post-structuralism. Under the broad theme of post-structuralism, different terminologies have been used to deconstruct the

humanist subject and redefine subjectivity. For example, common references used to describe the subject within post-structuralism include: embodied, fragmented, reflexive, complex, in-process, unstable, non-unitary, to name just a few (Billett 2010; Braidotti 1994; Davies 1997; Weedon 1987). One feminist poststructuralist conceptualisation of subjectivity suggests it to be 'unstable, multiple, contradictory, and in the process; continuously being shaped in discourse and other material social practices as we interpret and act upon the world' (Cahill 2007, p. 269). Some of these notions of subjectivity have also appeared in the discourses of learning and in the field of educational research in general. What is often not found in these accounts of the subject is not so much what these terms mean but how they work in the constitution of subjectivity. What new perspectives in understanding the constitution of subjectivity do these terms offer?

The argument for the reconceptualisation of the subject of learning and the specific notion of subjectivity discussed in this chapter are situated within a particular understanding of experience as intra-action. Within an onto-epistemological stance and Deleuze's account of human subjectivity, human subjects are not understood as stable beings that pre-exist to act and experience the world. The human subject is seen as a product of intra-action or experience. By 'experience', I am not referring to a person's subjective experience. As discussed earlier in this thesis, I understand experience as the intra-action of all material and discursive elements in the immediate context, through which the 'reality' emerges. The use of Barad's word 'intra-action' implies that none of the objects and subjects exist prior to the experience but are co-constituted through material discursive practices and emerge in the process to produce 'reality'. It is not the elements in the intra-actions that have ontological priority but the relations through which they emerge. This emergence of the subject through relations is theorised through the concept of

multiplicity (Deleuze & Guattari 1987). In the next section, I explore this relational ontology of the subject through the concept of multiplicity.

In the emergence of 'reality' in experience, viewed through an anthropocentric lens the human appears to be prominently active as the 'subject' while everything else appears as the background 'objects' or what we commonly refer to as the 'context'. This does not mean that subjects are final end products of a phenomenon. I see subjects and subjectivities more as temporary by-products of an ongoing phenomenon, which we take to be real and accessible. As a becoming, there is neither a beginning nor an end. In the course of life experiences with the flow of time, subjects are constantly being produced and produced differently through the ongoing material and discursive intra-actions at any given time. This instability and 'in process' quality of subjectivity is theorised through the notion of 'nomadic subjectivity' which will be further explored in section 5.2.2 below.

In this study, I have chosen to focus on the experience of change from the particular gendered position of woman. The objective in this chapter is not to re-tell or re-construct the story of how the participants experienced everyday life as a 'woman' subject in their stories or to deconstruct the constitution of 'woman' in discursive practices. The aim is to explore how one *becomes* a subject in experience. In the final section, 5.2.3, I discuss the constitution of subjectivity as a material discursive production in experience. As stated earlier in chapter two, one of the issues in theorising subjectivity has been whether it is the materiality or discourse that has ontological priority in shaping subjectivity. From Barad's perspective of intra-action, the material comes to matter through discourse and discourse becomes active only through the material. Building on this perspective, I argue for an understanding of gendered subjectivity as a production of both the material and discursive elements, while neither exists prior to the subject but both are

produced in the process of subject formation. The discursive idea of 'woman' as well as the 'female body' are both effects of experience and not something that organise experience. In this sense, meaning and matter emerge together.

In the sections that follow, I read participants' stories diffractively to explicate three aspects of the emergence of subjectivity: the multiplicity, the nomadic and the production of gendered subjects through material discursive intra-action.

5.2.1 The multiplicity of subjectivity

Multiplicity, a concept drawn from Deleuze's work, indicates the rhizomatic and relational aspect of subjectivity:

State of things are neither unities nor totalities, but multiplicities. It is not just that there are several states of things (each one of which would be yet another); nor that each state of things is itself multiple (which would simply be to indicate its resistance to unification). The essential thing, from the point of view of empiricism, is the noun multiplicity, which designates a set of lines or dimensions which are irreducible to one another. Every 'thing' is made up in this way. (Deleuze & Parnet 2002, p. vii)

The multiplicity of subjectivity is not about multiple subject positions or 'several states' of being that one could claim in their everyday life.

Multiplicity is a noun that conceptualises its ontology and not an adjective that describes it. The multiple subjects that emerge in experience are not neat totalities of a way of being in different location and points of time. Instead, the multiplicity of subjectivity is conceived in terms of relations among different elements. What counts in the constitution of subjectivity is not the specific elements (material or discursive), but the relations between them. From the Deleuzian perspective, a multiplicity can thus be understood as an

assemblage,¹⁸ which is a 'temporary grouping of relations' (Coleman & Ringrose 2013, p. 9), always moving and in process. It is these groups of relations that characterize becomings. Becoming is not therefore a movement from one fixed state to another. The differences in the state of being emerge through shifts in the assemblage or the temporary grouping of relations.

How does the notion *multiplicity* help us understand the emergence of subjectivity in everyday becoming? I use this concept to analyse Rama's story of change. In her narrative, Rama claimed that the most significant experience of change in her life was from being someone unable to speak to becoming someone who can speak. Right at the beginning of the conversation, she claims the position of a speaking subject:

If I was the same person as before, I would not have volunteered like this and come forward myself to be interviewed by you. I wouldn't know how to speak and I wouldn't see myself as someone who knew anything to speak about but now I am different.

In volunteering to participate in the research and through taking part in the conversation process, Rama is becoming the knowing speaking subject *in the interview*. In the intra-active space of the conversation, Rama enacts the rational, autonomous, willing, knowing and speaking subject. The possibility of her becoming this subject becomes available through the material and discursive elements assembled in the conversation period. In the intra-action during the conversation, discourses of autonomy and competency are enacted materially. Rama explains how she was 'voiceless' and unable to speak in the earlier stages of her life and how she has now learned to speak. There are also specific discourses in what constitutes a conversation, the

¹⁸ Deleuze's concept of the *assemblage* will be revisited and explained in more detail in the next chapter 6.

interviewer and interviewee relations and what happens during such an event. The discursive research skills and protocols along with our bodies and other materials work to enact 'the interview' producing the interviewer and the subject of the interview and particular knowing in the moment. There is the pen and the note pad, the recording device switched on at the appropriate time when the conversation started. There is the privacy of the room rented to conduct the interview along with the bed we both sat on to be comfortable. In the intra-action of these material and discursive elements, I am becoming the 'interviewer' and Rama is becoming the knowing and speaking subject, constructing her stories from my cues and questions.

The story about how Rama changed is produced and unfolded through these becomings. The storyline that emerged during the conversation is guided by Rama explaining how she used to be unable to speak and the shift to her becoming able to speak. This is not to imply that we become these subjects at the start of the conversation and 'perform' like stable actors throughout the process. As a multiplicity, our subjectivities are intertwined, interdependent and relational. Any shift in our becoming is not an absolute shift of our 'being' from one unified state to another but a shift that happens through the changes in relations. The shifts in the group of relations enables for different subjects to emerge, so it is not a transition from one unified subject to another. These different subjects are produced over and over again, constantly shifting; while other potential subjectivities emerge in the process and intervene. This performativity is not about stable bodies performing discursive roles or multiple roles at a time (being woman, interviewer, urban, educated all at the same time or switching between those 'positions'). Instead, the different subjects emerge in the moment of the intra-action, as a resultant effect of the intra-action where different material and discursive elements are

performing. In other words, every element that is in the intra-action is performing, through which *we become* as those bodies and particular subjects.

In her story, Rama describes her change as a shift from the 'voiceless subject' to the 'speaking subject', two subjects positioned in binary opposition. To illustrate this shift, she talks about the earlier years in life when she felt she could not speak. She then highlights a particular event as the moment that changed her, and offers more anecdotal evidence of her speaking in various occasions in her more recent life experiences. Rama's subjective experience of being 'unable to speak' is a production of her material discursive experience. When she says she was not able to speak or was not allowed to speak as a girl, it is not about a stable fixed subject (girl who cannot speak) without the capacity or skills to speak. This voiceless subject is unstable and emergent, depending on the interplay among the different material discursive elements at any particular point in time. I will discuss the material discursive production of gendered subjects later on in this chapter. For now, I would like to focus on the multiplicity of subjectivity in Rama's story.

In her narrative, Rama talks about a specific event which, according to her experience, was a pivotal point at which she felt she was able to speak. This was a moment when she felt she was able to speak to her mother-in-law in an assertive manner for the first time. But while listening to her story, the speaking subject emerges several times even before this particular event that she describes as being pivotal and the significant moment of speaking. One such moment is seen when Rama talks about going to collect grass after she was married and living with her husband's family:

I would finish my chores early in the morning and then I would be off with my friends to collect grass. Once we made our bundles, we would sit under a makeshift shelter and talk. I used to be the entertainer, I would tell them

stories, jokes and sometimes sing. When I came home, almost every day my father-in-law would scold me saying my bundle was not big enough. When I heard him yell at me, I didn't know whether I should eat my dinner or cry. But still I was very courageous. When alone I would cry and then convince myself to stop crying ... What good would crying do?

In these paragraph recounting Rama's daily experience while living in the Terai plains with her in-laws, I initially read multiple subjects. There is the 'entertainer' who tells stories, jokes and sings. This subject has no problem speaking. There is the helpless subject who is yelled at and who cannot speak or respond to the yelling. But there is also the 'courageous' subject who would cry in private but also know to stop crying. This subject is dignified and exercises self-control.

An initial reading of this paragraph through the logic of representation makes sense of what is happening here in the following manner: Rama is being pragmatic in her behavioural acts and is doing what works and what is allowed in the given circumstances. It appears that she takes on these various subject positions willingly and knowingly in strategic ways. She *knows* that she can talk to her friends openly but cannot talk to her father-in-law. A diffractive reading of this text sees how the materiality and discourse in her immediate world make the emergence of these different subjectivities possible. Rather than multiple positions intentionally taken by Rama, these are fluid unstable *figurations*¹⁹ (Braidotti 1994) in her becoming. Rama's possibility of becoming the 'entertainer' lies in the assemblage of the grass-bundle-collection, the Terai plains, the makeshift shelter, the other 'girls' and their 'female' bodies, the discursive ideas of 'friends', how friends engage

¹⁹ Braidotti (1994, p. 10) explains, 'A figuration is a living map, a transformative account of self; it's no metaphor.'

and so on. It is the group of relations or the assemblage—and not specific terms—that offers the possibility of this subject. Multiplicity is a way to conceptualise the various connections that work to produce the subject.

To reiterate a point made earlier, multiplicity of subjectivity is not about the subject performing multiple discursive roles simultaneously at a time. Instead, the subjectivities emerge in the moment of the intra-action, as a resultant effect of the intra-action, where different material and discursive elements are performing through their relational connections. It is the group of relations through which the elements gain their performative quality and come into existence. The multiplicity of subjectivity as a ‘group of relations always moving and in process’ is what leads to its instability. This instability of subjectivity will be explored through the concept of ‘nomadic’ subjects in the next section.

5.2.2 The nomadic subjects

Instability, fluidity or the ‘always in movement’ concept of subjectivity has been conceptualised by Braidotti (1993) through the term ‘nomadic’ subject deploying the Deleuzian concept of ‘nomad thought’ (1973). For Braidotti (1993, 1994, 2003) the feminist subject of knowledge is nomadic, rhizomatic and embodied. Braidotti (1994, p. 5) explains that ‘the figuration of the nomad renders an image of the subject in terms of a nonunitary and multi-layered vision, as a dynamic and changing entity’. The notion of multiplicity conceptualises the relational aspect of subjectivity, while the idea of the nomad helps us to think about the subject as this unstable, dynamic state of being. In her narrative, Rama constitutes herself as a stable subject in explaining her transformed ‘self’. Thus she presents her ‘self’ as a speaking subject. What I explore in her narrative is the nomadic aspect of this speaking subject while also trying to understand the possibilities of the emergence of this subject.

In describing her days of struggling to speak, Rama tells a story about how she managed to get clothes on loan from a local store in her village. Here I reconstruct this story. Rama says she always wore cotton saree²⁰ back then. She had three sets that she had received from her parents when she got married and she had been managing with just those three saree-blouse sets for about three years since her marriage. During the rainy season, she had to go plant the rice fields and her clothes would get muddy and dirty but she did not have enough clean clothes to change into every day. So she would wash her clothes every night and wear damp clothes the next day. When it got too much for her, she went to a local store to buy herself clothes on loan.²¹ According to her, this was a big step but she was in desperate need of clothes. Here is how she described the event at the store:

I went to the store and said to the shopkeeper there, “Bua!” ... I addressed him as bua (father) and said, ‘Can you give me some clothes?’ He asked, ‘What kind would you like?’ and I said, ‘Well I don’t have much money, so give me the kind that a poor man’s daughter can wear.’ I used to be afraid to speak at home, mostly because of the scolding but outside I used to speak clearly and without any fear. Also people loved me in the community so I wasn’t afraid. I told him that I didn’t have any money to pay and that I would pay when I could. He said to me, ‘Now that you are like my daughter, you don’t have to pay, just take the clothes.’

²⁰ The saree is a garment commonly worn by women in Nepal consisting of meters of fabric wrapped around the waist and draped across the shoulders with a blouse on top.

²¹ This is a common practice in rural places and even in close-knit local communities in urban areas of Nepal, whereby local customers may ‘purchase’ goods on loan, with the mutual understanding of payment in the very near future. The practice is often based on accumulated goodwill and trust.

Rama gives me evidence of a speaking subject in describing her act of going to the store and asking for clothes on loan. She emphasises the fact that in her conversation with the storekeeper she calls him 'bua', the Nepali word for father. Here, my reading is that she was emphasising the kind of relationship she had established with the storekeeper. But what we see here is that this relationship offered her the possibility of positioning herself as a 'daughter' in this particular transaction. Rama appears to willingly position the storekeeper as father by addressing him as 'bua', thus placing herself as the 'daughter'. The risk that Rama takes here is the recognition and validity of this relationship. The storekeeper does recognise this relation and appears to willingly take up the position of 'father' and this acceptance of this relation is manifested through his polite offering of the clothes to Rama for free.

The way Rama shares this story and her emphasis on her use of the word 'bua' makes it sound as if she was taking a rational strategic approach and it seems to have worked for her. Perhaps in retrospect she has come to understand the importance of the nature of this relationship and how it mattered in her interactions in the store. She says she was able to speak clearly and without fear with people in the community because they loved her. In the narrative, Rama constitutes herself as this speaking subject who is loved and is in a father–daughter relationship with the storekeeper. The kind of relationship she had with the storekeeper played a role in her ability to take up that subject position and interact in the way that she did. But the possibility of taking up positions as 'daughter' and 'father' also lies in the broader socio-cultural discourse of village life and in the storekeeper's social understanding of this kind of relationship. For instance, this kind of transaction might not be taken for granted or easily recognised in urban centres. So here in the narrative, although Rama and the storekeeper seem to be willingly taking up this relationship that shaped the nature of their

transaction, it is dependent on and possible only because of the socio-cultural milieu in which this interaction takes place.

Relevant here are the regulatory effects of discourse on cultural intelligibility—the ways in which discourse materialises something as intelligible and legitimate. The response to a speech depends on whether that speech falls within the norms governing what is speakable or unspeakable in that subject-hood (Butler 1997, p. 133). But the eligibility of Rama's subject-hood as 'daughter' also depends on the storekeeper's cultural understanding of this subject-hood and in that understanding inadvertently being subjectified as 'father'. This shows the disciplinary effect of discourse: that the discourse opens conditions of possibilities for being and engaging in the world, while also demarcating the boundaries for how that engagement might be possible. Being subjectified as 'father' by Rama's speech also makes the storekeeper respond in what may seem a 'fatherly' manner.

If we see this 'event' at the store as an intra-action, then none of the discourses and materiality exists prior to the event. Rama did not conveniently step into a prior existing discursive position 'daughter' by constituting the elderly male at the store as 'father' through calling him 'bua'. Through a diffractive perspective, the discursive father, the speaking subject and the discursive daughter are all emergent through the enactment of the discursive and material elements. These nomadic subjects are possible through the materialisation of the discourse: the elderly 'male' body that becomes the discursive father, the 'female' body that becomes 'daughter', the materiality of the store, the offering of clothes. All of these materialisations are part of the becomings of the nomadic subjects.

This is not to say that the materiality, including the biological bodies, lay there passively waiting to be inscribed by discourse to become intelligible.

What we come to recognise as the 'male body' discursively inscribed as the 'fatherly' figure is itself a production of this whole event. That applies to all the material elements in this enactment. The matter (corporeality of the body) and meaning (male, father) *become* through the same phenomenon; neither exists prior to the enactment. This nomadic subject is emergent in that moment only through the group of relations, the multiplicity of subjectivity in that moment. That 'location' of subjectivity is a momentary space and the emergent subject will shift as the assemblage is always shifting as a dynamic arrangement.

Rama's narrative recounts how, after she got the clothes on loan, she was able to pay back her loan to the shopkeeper by collecting leftover corn in the fields after harvest. She sold the corn to pay off her loan and was also able to feed herself when necessary. At this moment in her life, Rama describes a specific event with her mother-in-law as a pivotal moment identified as a 'speaking' moment in her life:

Now I would not be hungry. I would be full and I think I started becoming brave. I started getting courage. And then one day I came home and said to my mother-in-law, 'I've been living in this house for all these years ... Since I came here, I have not been given a single pair of clothes ... Wouldn't that lower your reputation? Even your son hasn't bought a single thing for me till this day ... I'm the only daughter-in-law of yours here, I'm like your daughter'. I had never spoken at home like that before ... perhaps because I had earned money, I got the courage to speak. My mother-in-law spoke, 'What can be done? You know your father-in-law would get mad ... he wouldn't give, he would only scold.' I told her it's okay and perhaps later in life I would somehow become able to buy clothes for myself. I said that to her without being angry or mean, with a smile ... she might have felt bad inside but that day I spilled out the stifling discomfort I felt inside. I felt

light and cool after speaking. But she didn't respond, she couldn't say anything back to me.

In this narrative here, Rama constitutes herself as the one who did not have the social legitimacy to speak. She tries to rationalise and explain her act of speaking to her mother-in-law by saying she had courage, perhaps because she had earned money. In comparison to the earlier cases of speaking, this is no ordinary speaking. The other speaking subjects that appear earlier in her narrative seem to have some kind of legitimacy to speak; they are either speaking as knowing subjects or willing subjects in legitimate relations. In other words, the relations legitimise the speaking. The legitimacy of the enunciation of those subjects is established by the available discourses, such as in the case where she is talking to her friends.

Within her talk to her mother-in-law, Rama takes the subject-hood of the daughter saying '*I'm like your daughter*', a position that perhaps provides a greater possibility for speaking than the position of daughter-in-law. She also tries to invoke the subject that is the bearer of family reputation: what her body wears signifies the reputation of the family. Rama is very aware of the limitations of the position of the daughter-in-law and this awareness comes from the habitual experience of being subjectified in that position. She is used to being shut down, scolded and muted in her position as a daughter-in-law. Hence, for Rama speaking as '*like your daughter*' provides her with the space to say what she needs to say. I see these alternative subjects that speak through her as nomadic.

Rosi Braidotti (1994) explains that being nomadic does not mean not having a stable place to stay or being always on the move for the sake of moving in the literal sense:

Being a nomad, living in transition, does not mean one cannot or is unwilling to create those necessarily stable and reassuring bases for identity that allow one to function in a community. Nomadic consciousness rather consists in not taking any kind of identity as permanent; the nomad is only passing through; he makes those necessarily situated connections that can help him to survive, but he never takes on fully the limits of one national, fixed identity ... This idea of passing through, of cutting across different kinds and levels of identity is not a way of avoiding the confrontation with the very real, ideological, and social constraints under which one has to operate. Quite on the contrary, nomadic consciousness expresses a way of dealing with these constraints. (p. 64)

For me the idea of a nomad helps me to think about the space where the nomadic subject situates herself not in a passive way (being there just because it is there) or in confrontation to the constraints imposed upon her (the idea of an intentional resisting subject). Nomadic subjectivity emerges out of pragmatism, through the situated connections that help the subject survive in that particular moment. This is the space where Butler (1999) sees the possibility of intervening to resignify 'woman' through 'subversive repetition within signifying practices of gender' (p. 199). I think the possibility for change opens with this nomadic characteristic of subjectivity. These transient subjectivities allow the possibility for being in ways that further enable new connections, new relations and new becomings.

This nomadic quality of subjectivity indicates that, like all subject positions, 'woman' itself is not a stable subject. How the subject 'woman' comes to emerge varies. In the case above, there is a difference between the two women; the 'woman' as mother-in-law and the 'woman' as daughter-in-law. The two women are discursively produced in different positions, one in a relatively more favourable position than the other. This discursive position

is not stable and it is materialised in the women's everyday life through the things they do and the relations they have. In the narration, Rama's mother-in-law acknowledges her limitations and access to decision-making. With regards to the ability to make decisions about spending money, both women are in similar positions in relation to the patriarch of the house. Rama picks this up in her speech and entertains the possibility of buying her own clothes, which she had already achieved in her own ways. It is perhaps this subjectivity that enables the two women to connect and gives Rama the possibility of speaking without the risk of any consequences for her daring act. Had she attempted this with her father-in-law, it might have turned out differently.

So far, I have discussed the multiplicity and instability of subjectivities. Reading the stories, the lived experience of being 'woman' seems stable and real. Such is the case in the story of another participant, Shanta. Her life story reads as continuous struggle and resistance to the material discursive subjectification. Underlying Rama's story of transformation from the voiceless to the speaking is also the struggle with the limitations of her gendered positioning. Reading Shanta's and Rama's stories what comes across is how both experience gender throughout their lives and how they manage to become in ways that subvert the norms of gender. That is their subjective experience. From an analytical perspective, what I am interested in is how this experience of gender is formed in the intra-action between the material and discursive elements (Jackson & Mazzei 2011, p. 130) and constitutes their subjectivities. From an ontological perspective, as I have stated earlier I take the position that material and discursive structures do not exist independently prior to experience to organise the world. Barad (2007, p. 229) cites Foucault (1978) when she argues that 'structures are not only productive; they are themselves produced through the very practices of

subject formation'. In this sense, gender is not only productive as it allows the possibilities of constitution of particular subjects, but gender itself is produced through formation of subjects. This is what I explore in the next section.

5.2.3 Woman and subjectivity: gendering through material practices

Of the many discursive structures at play in the socio-cultural contexts of the women I talked to, I focus on gender in this section as it plays a critical role in the constitution of the subjectivities of the participants in this research. As a social construct, the notion of 'gender' is complex and evolving. For the purposes of this study, and for this particular section, I am only addressing the construct of 'woman' as per the dominant heteronormative discourse in the Nepalese society. When Rama tells the story about how she was a voiceless person but now has become a person able to speak, she does not directly attribute this to her gender. Nevertheless, in narrating her story, her experience of being a girl figures prominently in the constitution of her subjectivity as a person not being able to speak. Here is an excerpt from her story about her childhood:

In the village where I was born, girls were not allowed to go out, not sent to school, expected to work at home and in the fields. We were told not to sit where the elders were sitting and not to speak in front of them. I was the only girl of five children. My four brothers were sent to school while I had to go gather fodder for the animals. They used to say daughters should not study. I used to run away to school pretending to go to the forest to get fodder. I would quickly gather a bundle and place it outside the classroom and sit inside. My friends would give me a copy and a pen. My school was not that far away from home. When my brothers saw me at school, they would threaten me. It used to hurt me a lot inside. I at least learnt to recognise letters.

Through a diffractive reading of this conversation excerpt, I see how material conditions and discourse work together to materialise relations of gender and produce the subject 'girl'. Here, Rama mentions the physical locations where she is not supposed to enter as a girl: the school, places where elders are sitting and places outside the houses other than the ones that are sanctioned by the rules for girls. Then there are locations where she is meant to be: the fields, the forest, the cowshed and places inside the home. The way the places are identified makes it seem as if the social world is a place filled with fixed objects in fixed places that exist independently and then get categorised according to gendered norms. For example, the work of gathering fodder appears to be a gendered task reserved for girls, while going to school was meant for boys. This becomes normalised in rural contexts of Nepal because it gets produced over and over again so that it appears to be just the way things are meant to be.

Yet how was it possible for Rama to go to school, although she was not meant to be there? Reading this part of her story diffractively, I argue that instead of the discourse of gender determining the space (school for boys only), the materiality, discourse and space intra-act to produce gender relations. The discursive gender relations get produced materially through the material conditions of place. Hence, the subjects 'girl' or 'boy' become possible only through these relations. In other words, the subjectivity of 'girl' is a product of the relational entanglement of matter and discourse.

In this sense, subjectivity is seen as a relational phenomenon. For instance, Rama says that as the girl of the family she had to go and gather fodder while her brothers went to school. There is no stable causal relation between the subject 'girl' and the act of gathering fodder. But in Rama's case, the intra-action between the materiality of everyday life in that particular part of the world and the discourse of gender produces the subjectivity of being a

'girl' in her village. Given that gathering fodder for the domestic animals is a material necessity for daily living for most households in that part of the world, this aspect of material life would constitute the subjectivity of many other young girls in that context, although in different ways and to different degrees. It is not a fixed reality per se, but a production of the discursive and the material. It is this performativity in the production of 'reality' that makes it possible for Rama to go to school although she says that 'girls were not allowed to go to school'. While at school, her becoming emerges in different ways, perhaps as a student. This is not to say that gender does not emerge inside classrooms, but Rama does not talk about what she experiences inside the classroom.

At this point, I would like to engage with Shanta's story. Her father was a school teacher and, unlike Rama, Shanta had the opportunity to go to school as a child. She got married at the age of 17 after she finished year 10. After marriage, Shanta's life changed as she had to learn to be in particular ways as the daughter-in-law of the family. She narrates her experience on the very first day she entered the house as a new bride:

After the evening chores were finished, mummy²² told me to go to our bedroom ... she gave me a *mali*²³ full of sesame oil and told me, 'Take this with you, you have to oil the feet of your husband before bedtime.' As I was about to leave with the oil, I thought, perhaps I should oil her feet too. So I sat down and tried to reach out to her feet. Mummy said to me, 'Not me now, first you have to oil the feet of your *nanda*, then *amaju*,²⁴ your aunt and

²² Throughout her narrative, she refers to her mother-in-law as 'mummy'.

²³ A wooden bowl

²⁴ *Nanda* refers to the younger sister and *amaju* refers to the elder sister of the husband.

only then me.' So I massaged their feet, all four of them. And then I took it to the room. I was really scared ... he is someone else's son, a stranger ... how am I going to just go up to him and massage his feet? We hadn't even spoken to each other yet. So I just stood there at the door. When he noticed me, he asked, 'Why are you standing there?' I then walked in. He asked, 'What did you bring?' I explained to him, 'Mummy told me to massage your feet'. And then he asked me, 'Did she ask you to do it for others?' So I told him. He then suddenly took the *mali* and threw it out the window ... I was so scared. The next morning before everyone else was awake, I refilled the *mali* and left it in the kitchen. After that day, I massaged all the women's feet in the house, but he never let me touch his feet. He said, 'If you oil my feet, you have to let me oil yours.'

Shanta's story of change is about the challenges she faced and the choices she made with all the restrictions and limitations she encountered after being married. Unlike Rama, in Shanta's story she does not have a clear distinction between how she used to be and how she has undergone transformation to become different. Her story of change is how she dealt with the everyday challenges of her life and how she managed to do things despite those challenges. The narrative above gives some idea of how she was subjectified as a 'daughter-in-law' in the family. Shanta attributes her personal change to her mobility outside the house. For her, interacting beyond her domestic life opened up opportunities for her to change as a person.

Shanta was one of the few educated women in the village. Hence, she was approached by the village development committee member to be trained to become an adult educator. Her father-in-law was against her working outside the house. Despite strong objections from her in-laws, but encouraged by her husband, Shanta attended the training and started conducting adult literacy classes in the evenings. This was her first

experience of paid work outside the house. To stop her from working, her father-in-law offered to pay her the amount she was receiving as a salary. She explained to him that she was not doing it for the money but for the opportunity to meet new people and learn new skills. A year later, she got accepted for another training course and became a female community health volunteer, facing similar struggles. Since then, Shanta has been involved in local community work in various capacities over the years. Currently, Shanta leads the local mothers group and represents the group in the village council and at the district level.

In reading Shanta's narrative of her encounters on the first day of entering her husband's house, I immediately recognise discursive patterns. What I recognize is the representational logic of the narrative that connects what is going on with something that it resembles, fitting it into a pre-existing category organised by the logic of representation. I read the discursive construction of Shanta as the new bride and daughter-in-law; how she is made to do things to put her in her place in the family hierarchy. Within the Hindu community, touching someone's feet is a show of one's reverence and subservience to that person. By telling Shanta to oil the feet of her husband as well as all those of the other women in the family, it appears that her mother-in-law is establishing Shanta's position at the bottom of the family hierarchy. When her husband insists that he would only allow it if he is allowed to oil Shanta's feet in return, he is attempting to subvert the cultural practice of oiling feet. This act on his part works to reproduce the gendered relations between husband and wife differently.

While working in the community, Shanta faces objections from both within family and from community members. These objections come from established norms of how a female family member is supposed to behave and act within and outside the home. Similarly, there are discourses working in

the community about how women are supposed to behave and what roles they can take up within the community. Reading through Shanta's complete narrative, I understand that it has been possible for her to be the 'daughter-in-law' in the normative sense and still become *different*. This also shows her nomadic subjectivity; she is 'daughter-in-law' yet not quite the 'daughter-in-law' approved by cultural norms. The discourses that work to discipline women in their mobility in the community and demarcate their actions also work to produce particular subjectivities for Shanta in her work outside the house.

How does this discourse work to produce the gendered subject? The discursive elements at work here are multiple and interconnected. There are gender norms as well as other socio-cultural norms at work that produce 'woman' differently in different locations. Here, I am not referring to the 'different' women vis-à-vis their different positions in the family. It is not about Shanta becoming different in relation to her new social positioning as a daughter-in-law; neither is it about her becoming different from the woman who was bound to stay at home. These ideas about difference work to produce categories of 'empowered'/'disempowered', 'domesticated/professional', labels attributed to particular ways of being.

These ideas of difference are based on an understanding of difference as signs of alterity in terms of identity (Lenz Taguchi 2013). Instead, I am referring to the 'positive' difference as conceptualised by Deleuze (1994). It is not about being 'different to' with respect to an ontological state (non-resemblance), but it is a process of differing. Difference in itself is seen as an ongoing flow of affirmative relations (Lenz Taguchi 2013). With this kind of positive difference, there is no precursor. Difference is *difference in itself* and not *different from*.

In Shanta's case, this difference is produced through her encounters in her immediate life world. Her subjectification as the new daughter-in-law is productive in this sense. Following the method of diffractive analysis, I understand Shanta's subjectivity to be multiplying through this process of difference instead of understanding it as a negative difference from the other. From the perspective of negative difference, Shanta's transformation would be understood as a linear change from being in a relatively 'empowered state' prior to her marriage, then becoming 'disempowered' through various discursive practices, and then through her everyday resistance to the 'oppressive norms', becoming 'empowered' again as a liberated woman. Through the multiplicity of her subjectivity, there are possibilities of becoming in multiple ways and becoming *different in herself* instead of becoming *different from* 'what she used to be'.

Lenz Taguchi (2013, p. 714) cites Braidotti (2012) when she writes:

Subjectivity is determined by its capacity to be both *grounded* in what is *already given*, and to simultaneously *flow* and change in relation to what is *given* in new events of encounters with other bodies, matter, or concepts/discourse. (emphasis in original)

What is already given in Shanta's context is both discursive and material conditions that are constantly being produced through various enactments. When Shanta enters the relational entanglement in her new home, her presence leads to new intra-actions and new ways of being. The socio-cultural discourses that govern social relations between husband and wife, man and woman, daughter-in-law and other in-laws in the family and the notions of these identities are produced through the material discursive intra-actions (Barad 2007).

What can be read in the narrative is the counter-discourse that intervenes in the constitution of Shanta's subjectivity, multiplying her subjectivity. Her husband's refusal to have Shanta oil his feet intervenes in the production of the normative role of 'wife' and produces difference in being 'wife'. But this does not stop her from oiling the feet of others in the family. The introduction of adult literacy classes in her village opens possibilities for Shanta to move beyond her immediate domestic life. Here, the material discursive practice of adult literacy for 'women' offers the possibility of a new event in Shanta's life course. Through this event, new subjectivities emerge in relation to the new material and discursive elements entangled in the literacy practice. This encounter is partly grounded in her being 'woman' and 'educated'.

Rama and Shanta's narratives of their experience of change can be read for an understanding of how subject formation and hence the constitution of subjective experience is a material discursive phenomenon. From this perspective, gender relations do not exist as fixed discursive structures that organise or determine subjectivity. Instead, the discursive elements of gender intra-act with material elements to produce fluid subjectivities. In this emergence, gender gets produced in materially specific ways to establish particular gendered relations, including what we come to understand as specific material bodies. In other words, the discourse of gender and material objects with specific subjects all come to be known through this becoming. When we think about reality as emergent in this manner, not as an ontological given but produced through relations, then I argue we can see possibilities for change through the emergence of different subjectivities.

5.3 Conclusion: subjects in learning

Taking an onto-epistemological perspective of how things come into existence, I see subjectivity as constituted through the intra-action of multiple

realms of the social, political, linguistic, biological and physical aspects of this world. All these different aspects of the world are understood as material discursive constituents in intra-actions in Barad's terminology. These constituents are not stable entities with defined properties but are also produced in the process. In this chapter, the exploration of the concept of subjectivity has been undertaken within this onto-epistemological premise.

In their stories of change narrated by the participants, Rama and Shanta claim two distinct subject positions: I used to be like *that* before and now I am like *this*. This is how one attempts to make sense of the change they have experienced in life and understand their becoming. They do so by identifying themselves in stable subject positions. Those 'stable' positions are constituted through specific intra-actions of material discursive elements. For instance, the way Rama and Shanta constituted themselves as subjects of particular kinds of change is also a production of the intra-action in the conversation. Several discursive and material elements produced all the participants and their subjectivities in particular ways during the conversation. What this means is that subjectivity is not fixed either discursively or materially. Subjectivity is a relational phenomenon. At any one point in time, one's subjectivity is an outcome of the relations formed among the various material and discursive elements in the intra-action. This emergence of subjectivity through shifting relations instead of arising from some stable ontological foundation is what is understood as the multiplicity of subjectivity.

A diffractive reading of the stable subject positions claimed in the narratives shows that those positions are not as stable as they are subjectively perceived to be. We use the logic of representation to construct our reality, to produce stable meanings and stable subjects and objects that interact. Through that very process we also produce ourselves as stable subjects, as representations of self in that world (Lecercle 2002). What I have argued here

is in everyday life, it is through experience that subjects are constantly being produced and differently produced depending on the mix of the various material and discursive elements in that moment of intra-action. The multiplicity of subjectivity—or the notion that it is a production of a group of relations—also implies its instability, for any shifts in any of those relations would change the whole constitution of subjectivity. The concept of nomadic subjectivity works to conceptualise this instability of subjectivity, not in the representative sense but as a way to think about subjectivity differently. The nomadic subject is a multiplicity, a temporary constitution held up by different relations. It is this multiplicity and instability of subjectivity that produces one's becoming. We are constantly in the making through experience in the world.

I have used Shanta and Rama's story to illustrate how particular experiences of gender are produced through material and discursive practices. Various structures, such as gender for instance in the context of this research, do not work to *determine* subjectivity as external organising mechanisms. I explored this using Rama's childhood experience of being a 'girl' and argued that her gendered subjectivity was produced through the material conditions of her everyday life. Shanta's subjectivity as 'daughter-in-law' and 'woman' in the community are all shaped by gender discourses intra-acting with material elements to produce particular gendered relations with her immediate life world.

Barad (2007, pp. 226–230) uses a study by Fernandes (1997) to examine in what sense structural relations are produced and what this production entails. She argues that structures are not an external set of relations. She cites Foucault (1978, p. 92) to claim that structures are instead 'force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate'. It is through this immanence of relations that gendered subjectivities come into being. The group of

immanent relations that are constantly shifting to produce difference is what I understand as the multiplicity of subjectivity and also the cause of its movement.

What questions does this conceptualisation of the subject and subjectivity raise for how we understand learning? What new thoughts about learning does it afford? In light of the discussion in this chapter, the phrase 'subject of learning' has a new meaning. This phrase does not refer to the unitary, autonomous, stable entity that is somehow ontologically separate and that actively engages in the process of learning. When we conceptualise the subject as unstable, non-unitary and as a multiplicity, it does not make sense to say that the *subject learns*, for there is no stable subject who learns. From the perspective of learning as an ongoing process of becoming, it can be understood that subjects *emerge* in learning. This leads to the understanding that learning is not an act intentionally performed by subjects, but the very process through which subjects come into existence.

If the subject is fluid and transient, what is the foundation for knowledge construction? From this analysis, it follows that knowledge claims cannot be attributed to essentialised positions of being. There is no fixed position from which we can get a grasp on 'reality'. This understanding of subjectivity has implications for how we think about knowledge and knowing in understanding learning. In discussing the constitution of subjectivity, although I have highlighted the importance of the material and the discursive, I have deliberately left out discussing one of the key aspects of this formation, namely the corporeal body. The new materialist understanding of subjectivity already encases the human 'body' within the concept of materiality. The conceptualisation of the subject as a multiplicity, nomadic and relational phenomenon has implications for theorising the

body. In the next chapter, I explore the notion of the body while drawing on and building upon the arguments developed in this chapter. ■

Bodies in learning: affect and desiring assemblages

6.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I argued for the material discursive constitution of the subject, where the body is part of the constituting process. In this chapter, I conceptualise the notion of the body in learning, asking 'How does the body work?' Karen Barad claims that 'all bodies, not merely "human" bodies, come to matter through the world's iterative intra-activity—its performativity' (2007, p. 152). From an onto-epistemological stance, the human body is neither a natural 'given' nor a discursive production. The intra-actions through which bodies come to exist as particular objects (including human bodies) involve material-discursive and natural-cultural elements. Barad further contends that this applies not only to the external contours of the body or what demarcates the outline of the body, but to the whole physicality of the body, including its 'atoms'. Bodies are thus not fixed objects with inherent boundaries and essential properties. Instead, they come to exist as material discursive phenomenon. Barad's argument allows for the possibility of moving beyond the philosophical stalemate of the dichotomies of material/discursive and nature/nurture.

In this chapter, I draw on the work of Deleuze, specifically his concepts of assemblage, affect and desire, to reconceptualise the body in learning. I read excerpts from the narratives of three of the research participants: Gita, Kala and Beena. I use Gita's experience of change after becoming a widow to

explain the concept of the body as an assemblage, a dynamic arrangement of heterogeneous material discursive elements. I employ the concept of affect in reading an event in Kala's narrative, suggesting how the bodily assemblage 'perceives' what happens to it. Sensing by the body is taken as a relational process rather than an imposition of the external world on the passive sensing body.

While affect is what happens to a body in experience, I suggest that emotions are socially qualified and produced through experience. Emotions are not pure bodily sensations that contribute to reason and thought; emotions and thoughts are productions of what happens to the body. I work through Beena's narrative of change using the notion of desire. Desire is understood as the force that moves the bodily assemblage to form new connections with other bodies and undergo transformation. Finally, I argue that human action is a situated and pragmatic event where action is not driven by conscious thought or sensations but by the productive force of desire.

6.2 Rethinking the body

Influenced by Deleuze's thought, my approach has been to explore the body with the question, 'How does the body work in learning?' My reference here is to the human body. Taking the onto-epistemological perspective necessitates that we understand the body differently from the natural or discursive body. How may we conceptualise the body *in process* and not as a fixed stable entity or as a product of passive inscription with specific characteristics? First, with reference to Gita's narrative I elucidate the concept of the body as an *assemblage*, as a moving and fluid arrangement. This concept offers a relational ontology of the body in contrast to the perspective of the body as a unified whole.

In the previous chapter, I discussed the material discursive production of subjectivity. Materiality—including the corporeal body—does not exist prior to experience but emerges in the process. We need then to ask: How do we think about the body while it is undergoing experience? What happens to the body in experience? We can no longer consider the body as a ‘perceiving apparatus’ (Buchanan 2000, p. 167) where the body is a natural entity and perception is taken as an activity done by the body during experience. The notion of the body as an assemblage requires a different conceptualisation of what the body undergoes in experience. Deleuze and Guattari claim that ‘we know nothing about a body until we know what it can do, in other words, what its affects are’ (1987, p. 257). The idea of *affect* enables an active notion of the body rather than seeing it as a passive ‘perceiving apparatus’. In further exploring how the body works in learning, I use the notion of affect and the affecting body to read Kala’s narrative.

A bodily assemblage is not a random arrangement of different material and discursive elements that just happen to encounter or connect with one another. Different elements form connections with one another to constitute an assemblage for a purpose. The body as assemblage is affected to move. In order to develop an understanding of how bodies work, the third aspect to explore is how bodies move. In other words, what makes the body move to act? This question is to do with human action.

In the Deweyian framework, the relational system with bodies and relations is seen as an adaptive system where action happens to maintain a dynamic balance with the fluid environment (Biesta & Burbules 2003, p. 10). In this sense, the arrangement of bodies and relations is understood to be a responsive system and human action is understood as a responsive adaptation in a given situation. In this perspective, change happens in order to adapt to the constantly changing situation. While this perspective has been

a useful way to theorise system level changes and movements, it is problematic when theorising individual action and intentionality (Stetsenko 2008, p. 482).

A relational ontology of the body understands the individual's body as a shifting group of relations among different elements and not a distinct autonomous entity. How then do we make sense of 'individual' acts performed by the body? To situate that question in the empirical context of this study, we are asking what makes participants do what they do? What makes the body move and act in specific ways in given circumstances? I use Deleuze's concept of desire and bodies as desiring machines to argue that it is desire emerging from the bodily assemblage that produces interests that move the individual body to act in particular ways. I use this concept to read Beena's story of change and to explore how desire works in her becoming. Before analysing the narratives using the concepts of assemblage, affect and desire, I briefly discuss each of the theoretical concepts I use in the analysis.

6.3 The body as an assemblage: What can the body do?

Like most of Deleuze's concepts, the assemblage needs to be understood as a conceptual ontological framework for thinking about a phenomenon and not as a metaphor that represents a phenomenon. According to Deleuze, the work of philosophy is to create concepts and concepts are not meant to describe things but to 'produce an orientation or a direction for thinking' (Colebrook 2001, p. 15). Concepts are not meant to represent something out there—an object or a phenomenon—but to help us think about what we wish to examine in innovative and productive ways and extend our thoughts.

Buchanan (1997, p. 74) suggests that to understand the body in Deleuze and Guattari's collective work, one must start with the philosophical problem that the concept of body was trying to address, which is the Spinozist

question: 'What can the body do?' Deleuze and Guattari (1987, p. 257) define this approach as ethology, in which they avoid defining the body by its organs and functions or by its species and instead describe it through its affects and actions. In this sense, they claim, 'A racehorse is more different from a workhorse than a workhorse is from an ox.'²⁵ In the same way, although biologically and physiologically similar, human bodies vary from one another in terms of what the body can do. Here, one needs to be careful not to invoke the biological or physiological understanding of the body in trying to imagine what it is that the body can do. So how do we come to understand the body through what the body can do? Deleuze and Guattari argue:

We know nothing about a body until we know what it can do, in other words, what its affects are, how they can or cannot enter into composition with other affects, with the affects of another body, either to destroy that body or to be destroyed by it, either to exchange actions and passions with it or to join with it in composing a more powerful body. (p. 257)

The above excerpt suggests the vast potentiality of the body, what the body can do in relation with other bodies, and implies that one cannot fully access or comprehend this potentiality of the body. This indicates the creative potential of one's becoming. Two important concepts to understand in Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the body are *affect* and *desire*, both of which are explained in more detail later in this chapter.

²⁵ The same logic can be applied to understand why some groups of women find more in common and are more in solidarity with men in similar socio-material conditions than with women from different conditions. This difference is one of the key issues for black feminists and feminists from so called 'third world' and post-colonial contexts.

To put the notion of body as assemblage within the onto-epistemological framework, Deleuze and Guattari are saying that what a body can do is dependent on the relations it forms as part of its constitution. Some relations might inhibit the body's capacity to act, some may make it more powerful. The relations formed with other bodies might 'destroy' that body, meaning that relations have the capacity to completely change a body by changing its constitution. What a body *is* ontologically at any point in time; is the *effect* of all its relations with other bodies. So it is not the inherent quality or capacity of an essential body that characterises what a body can do, but the group of relations that connects it with several other bodies. In that sense, an assemblage is a *multiplicity*. Thus, Deleuze and Guattari conceptualise the body in relational terms.

6.3.1 The concept of assemblage

Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the assemblage is useful in capturing the relational, fluid and dynamic ontology of the body. The assemblage is a functional arrangement of heterogenous terms. An assemblage is not an organisation or ordering of different fixed elements that are predetermined prior to being part of the assemblage. It should also not be understood as a 'whole' with interacting parts. There is no particular condition that designates the 'wholeness' of the assemblage as it is always assembling and disassembling. An assemblage is always moving and so it is not a static structure.

An assemblage is conceptualised as having two aspects along one axis: *the state of things (bodies)* and *utterances* or a system of signs, which include discourse, words, meanings and relations. The only unity in these different elements is their co-functioning, where 'the expressed of the utterance and the attribute of the state of the body' are one and the same function (Deleuze & Parnet 2002, p. 71). The state of things and signs are on one axis that

divides the assemblage. There is a second axis along which the assemblage moves between territorialisation and deterritorialisation. Assemblages have territories but these are not stable; they are constantly shifting.

The words territorialisation and deterritorialisation denote the movement of the assemblage. The word *deterritorialisation* conceptualises the movement of the assemblage away from the territory; when it moves back it *re-territorialises*. In an instance, particular states of objects expressed by certain enunciations arranged together form particular territories. The territory of the assemblage is not just about the space it creates, but the expressions and claims it makes (Wise 2005, p. 78). It is this territorialisation that produces the sense of stability or fixity of a being. Hence, one of the claims the territory of the assemblage might make is to do with claims about identity.

The concept of assemblage enables us to think about the body as an 'open' arrangement, while taking into consideration all the material and discursive elements that intra-act to constitute the body. I understand the 'state of things' to refer to materiality and 'utterances' to refer to the discursive, neither of which are units on their own. The only unity lies in their co-functioning, where 'the expressed of the utterance and the attribute of the state of the body' are one and the same function (Deleuze & Parnet 2002, p. 71). All the components of the bodily assemblage get assembled and are immanent properties of the assemblage. They are not previously existing structures that organise (the inscribed body) or determine the essence of the body (the natural body).

Within this perspective of the body as an assemblage, the body is neither a natural sexually specific body, nor a gendered body. Both sex and gender are immanent properties of the bodily assemblage. This point has implications for how we think about the role of the body in knowledge

construction and these are dealt with in chapter seven. In the next section, I will explore Gita's bodily assemblage.

6.3.2 Gita's experience of embodying 'widowhood'

Gita is a 31-year-old woman who identifies herself as a 'war-widow'. She became a widow at the age of 21. In her story, she talks about the personal changes she went through after becoming a widow and specifically her resistance to wearing white and her journey to wearing red again. In her narrative, Gita talks about the untimely death of her husband when she was 21 and reflects on what happened:

A woman who entered the house as *Laxmi*²⁶ – suddenly I became an *alakshina* (inauspicious) because my husband had died. As per the customs, I wore white clothes for the first 12 days. But for the 13th day of the death rites I had to change my clothes and I tried to talk my family into letting me wear normal clothes. I was concerned about my little girl and I didn't want her to see me in a white plain saree all the time. I thought she might feel bad ... she was barely three years old. I was ready to follow all the other rituals ... I said the saree does not have to be colourful as long as it is not plain white. On the 13th day, people from my *maita* (parent's home) came to see me and my *bhauju* (brother's wife) brought me a brown saree with a brown blouse for me. I wore that, but there was this talk going around that I

²⁶ The Hindu social order has a relatively more ambivalent position on valuing femininity compared to western societies. From religious perspectives, femininity is also revered and worshipped. This is exemplified through the feminine representations of deities such as Saraswati, the goddess of wisdom, Laxmi, the goddess of wealth and Shakti, the goddess of power to name just a few. When entering the family home after marriage the daughter-in-law is celebrated as the symbolic entrance of the Goddess Laxmi whose arrival brings prosperity and fortune into the home.

was making a fuss about clothes at such a time of grieving. I ignored those comments. I felt I needed to do what I needed to do.

Having to resist wearing white was Gita's earliest struggle, one of the many she experienced as a young widow. Due to challenges at home, she left home with her daughter, learned to sew and started her own tailoring business. She also took the initiative to organise a community group of conflict-affected widows. Through this activist work, she started wearing red. Gita's personal change from having to wear white to wearing red was not a linear process and she does not make it out to be so in her narrative. It was not a choice she made out of awareness of the 'oppressive' condition of widowhood practices. It was more of a negotiated and mediated change that took place over a period of five years and through many different actions as she was in the process of determining her place in society as a widow.

To get a sense of Gita's embodied subjectivity as a widow wearing white and her resistance, one has to understand the socio-cultural context and the social significance of the embodied practices of widowhood. According to Hindu practices, upon the death of her husband a woman is expected to change her bodily appearance. This is regarded as a form of penance for the sin of having outlived the husband. This practice is also understood as a disciplining the body of the widowed woman, to remain celibate and faithful to the one man even after he is gone. As part of the death rites of the husband, all marks of marriage or *signs of saubhagya* on the widow's body are ritualistically removed; the red vermillion powder in the parting of the hair, the bangles, the necklaces, red or bright coloured clothing and any jewellery or other forms of make-up. The woman is expected to wear white and live the life of an ascetic for the rest of her life.

These commonly known and understood interpretations of the rituals of widowhood have become out-dated in general but are not completely obsolete, although the austerity of the ritual practices has eased. But the degree of austerity of the rituals and practices varies from family to family, depending on family traditions, caste group and the immediate community within which the person is situated. Nowadays, it has become acceptable for a widow to start wearing non-white clothes after the initial mourning period but she is still socially restricted from wearing red.²⁷ What a woman can do is less about her free choice and more of a negotiated practice. According to Gita, in her immediate community, wearing red *tika (bindi)*²⁸ on the forehead and red clothes as a woman whose husband has died is the ultimate resistance to the social enactment of 'widow'.

6.3.3 'Widow' as an inscribed body

From the perspective of the emancipatory feminist ideals, the ritualistic obligation to wear white clothes, the prohibition to wear anything red or to use objects of beautification may be understood as Hindu patriarchal control over the body. This control is exclusively for women; there are no such ritual markings through clothing or ornaments for males to indicate their marital status or widowhood. There have been initiatives by social activist groups throughout the country in organising mass ceremonies of *wearing red* campaigns where widows have participated. There could not be a more palpable example of the feminist slogan, 'The personal is political'. Wearing

²⁷ The colour red has special significance in Hindu culture and on married women red or variation of shades of red is understood as a sign of auspiciousness and good fortune.

²⁸ Tika, also known as bindi is a dot of vermilion powder or a sticker worn in the middle of the forehead, which socially symbolises 'auspiciousness'. It is a practice for both married and unmarried women to wear a tika but it is forbidden for widows. For married women, the customary practice is to wear a red tika.

red by a widow is both a sign of resistance and a subversion of the cultural meaning of red on a female body.

An initial reading of Gita's story can be interpreted as Gita learning to 're-claim' her 'body' from the religious cultural inscription of widowhood. But this practice of bodily inscription is not just about the material clothing on the *outside* of the body. It is not just about the colour of clothes or the absence of ornaments. These inscriptions do not just mark the body but work to constitute the embodied subject 'widow', her relations and her possibilities for action in her everyday enactment as a human being. From a western perspective,²⁹ some of these ritual practices may appear 'oppressive' but then these practices are no more inscriptive than the clothing, accessories and various bodywork practices (Coffey 2013) that constitute female bodies in particular ways as being desirable or undesirable in western societies.³⁰ However, the perceived aesthetic values based on cultural notions of beauty or health of some of these western practices may give them the appearance of not being as 'oppressive' as some of the cultural practices in the non-western societies.

The different procedures that inscribe bodies in different ways are not necessarily imposed on the individual from the outside and are usually taken up voluntarily and actively by the individual (Grosz 1994, p. 143). This is true for many of the discursive practices that constitute bodies in western societies; there is a sense of being in control of one's body and deciding for

²⁹ I use the words 'western' and 'non-western' here in a loose way referring to those who are respectively outside and within the socio-cultural context organised according to the Hindu Brahmanical order.

³⁰ Here, I am thinking about all the things done to the body as bodywork practices; the notion of fitness, 'sexiness', body tanning etc. that work to privilege particular looks and shapes of the body.

oneself rather than being 'oppressed' into a particular way of being. For some Hindu women, having to wear white may not be an oppressive experience and they might find some kind of spiritual or social value in the practice. Like any other social practice, wearing white as a widow may do different things for different people given their specific locations and for some it may be experienced as oppression. Likewise, having to adorn oneself in red or wear all the ornamental objects that signify marital status may also feel oppressive for some.

My point here is that I do not find it useful to valorise Gita's learning experience as a transition from the 'oppressive' state of having to wear white to a 'liberated' one of wearing red. This would reinstate the humanist unified knowing subject that intentionally moves from one stable identity (although a construction) to another. In wearing white, Gita's body is not a passive object being subjected to this cultural inscription. As said earlier, subjectification works by subjects voluntarily taking up practices. This is exemplified in Gita's deciding to wear red later in her life. But this 'volunteering' is not a willed intentional act but a pragmatic act. It is because of the availability of this cultural practice of wearing red and its culturally perceived signification that it becomes possible for Gita to do so.

The body is neither a passive object open to social inscription nor a 'free agent' that can act as it chooses (Budgeon 2003). Instead the body acts according to *what it can do* in any given moment. I do not mean to undermine the significance of Gita's experience of change. What I am arguing for is a different understanding of this embodied change, recognising that it is located much deeper in the body than simply a change of inscriptions on the external. The body that attempts to escape the social inscription of 'oppressive' widowhood by wearing the 'emancipatory' red does not become devoid of representation. The body just moves from one form of

representation of wearing white to another of wearing red. Is the 'emancipatory red' outside of the phallogocentric discourse of Hindu patriarchy? In other words, as Massumi asks:

Aren't the possibilities for the entire gamut of cultural emplacements, including the 'subversive' ones, precoded into the ideological master structure? Is the body as linked to a particular subject position anything more than a local embodiment of ideology? (2002, p. 3)

Understanding the social body in terms of bodily inscriptions may give us particular insights into the process of learning and change, as we can see from Gita's case, but this understanding is not without limitations. The idea of learning to reclaim one's body from the social inscriptions of widowhood implies the need to find a 'pre-representational, authentic body' (Budgeon 2003). Yet there is no previously existing full and real feminine body of Gita's that can be 'empowered' and saved from the repression of Hindu Brahmanical discourse. Bray and Colebrook (1998, p. 38) argue that the idea of the corporeality and materiality of the body as anterior to thought or excluded by representation is only a reaction against dualism. Hence, it is necessary to conceptualise the body differently from one that is negated, excluded or violated by representation.

The argument above implies that there is no authentic feminine body from which Gita experiences the world and that gives her access to authentic knowledge uncontaminated by discourse. Her embodied experience and learning are more complex than the re-signification of her body as 'auspicious' or 'resistant' through wearing red. The idea of moving from one 'positionality' to another is only the representation of the 'displacement' of the subject in an ideological gridlock. In these interpretations of personal change, the notion of movement as qualitative transformation is missing (Massumi 2002, p. 3). My objective is to foreground the body in this process

of Gita's learning while arguing for a more complex process of embodied change rather than simply changing from one representation to another. For this reason, I use the concept of assemblage.

6.3.4 'Widow' as a bodily assemblage

In thinking about the body, I rely on Barad's argument about how 'objects' come to 'matter' in the world. In this thesis, I have taken the onto-epistemological stance that the material discursive elements intra-act to produce reality and in that process we come to recognise 'objects'. In the same way, bodies are also products of material discursive intra-actions. So from this perspective, Gita's body is not a natural feminine body that is 'oppressed' by the customary white saree that signifies 'widow' and then 'emancipated' by the auspicious red saree. The white saree and the red saree work as material discursive elements in the constitution of her subjectivity and body and not as material things with representational meanings that organise Gita's embodied subjectivity.

Massumi (2002, p. 9) explains that the field of emergence through which 'bodies' emerge is not pre-social; rather, it is social without determinate borders. This social field is *prior* to the distinct separation of objects and subjects, the human and nonhuman and the individual and the social. None of these elements exists previously as independent units. All are produced in particular ways through intra-action. They are always in process but at the same time they are producing 'objects' and 'meanings'; such as the feminine body, mourning rituals, religious customs, death of a husband, the idea of social relations and so on. For instance, Gita's female body is not a pre-existing natural body signifying 'woman' that then gets subjectified as 'widow' through the discursive power of the white saree. Gita's female body (the sexed body) along with the idea of woman, the white saree and the

meanings of a woman in a white saree, are all produced through the phenomenon.

In exploring Gita's body as assemblage, the issue is not what her body is, or what wearing a white saree versus a red saree means. Instead, along the lines of the Spinozist question the issue is, 'What can the body in a white saree do?' This question does not aim to find out what the physical body can intentionally do; rather, it is about the capacity of the body to connect and form relations in its processual becoming. The discursive white saree alone does not determine the 'widow' body. Instead, all of the things that come to 'represent' widow—the feminine body and the white saree (the material parts of the 'widow' body)—along with the discursive meanings, are all produced by the widow-body-assemblage. Both the meaning and the body of 'widow' are productions of the assemblage.

As assemblages are not static structures but dynamic arrangements, the feminine body and the meanings produced are also dynamic and flexible. What this implies is that Gita's embodied subjectivity in wearing white or red is fluid and dependent on its constitution within the immediate environment. What she can do as an individual is dependent on what the bodily assemblage can do in particular situations. In some instances her body may be composed in ways that may not enable her to move or connect with other bodies even though a red saree is part of that composition. In some situations, wearing a red saree will produce an embodied subjectivity of emancipatory experience. The liberatory power of red is not exclusively derived from discourse but is produced through material discursive intra-actions.

What is of significance at this point is the material discursive production of the 'widow' through the assemblage. As a dynamic arrangement of the ongoing intra-action of material and discursive elements, shifts in relations

produce *difference* in Gita's bodily assemblage, which characterizes her *becoming*. I see Gita's act of wearing red as a possibility not borne out of willed ideological resistance to a practice, but as a product of the process of differing through a continuous flow of intra-actions and the formation of affirmative relations. I understand it as a result of her becoming *other*. The notion of becoming *other* conceptualises difference in itself and not as different *from* a representational idea.

From the position of representational logic, Gita's change from wearing white to wearing red can be seen as an act of empowerment, a negative difference—*different from* a perceived previous way of being. Using the perspective of positive difference, as indicated above Gita's transformation is a process of becoming *other*, where intra-actions produce the subjective understanding of wearing red as 'empowered' woman. This movement deterritorialises Gita from the 'widow' assemblage and reterritorialises her 'being' as 'empowered'. Her becoming 'empowered' is not a stable state that she *becomes* in her life but is understood as a passing through to her becoming *other*.

Gita's bodily assemblage is always in process due to the shifting relations and connections among the various elements that constitute the assemblage at any point in time. This ability to form relations is what makes the assemblage an 'affecting body' and not a representing body (woman, widow or even empowered). The power of Gita's body to produce particular affects comes from this bodily assemblage, and not from an essential feminine body or the discursive signification of the white saree or any specific element in the assemblage. Gita's re-territorialised assemblage of wearing red also works as an affecting body, opening further possibilities for making new relations in becoming *other*. This analysis raises the question discussed next: As an assemblage, how does a body affect?

6.4 The affecting body

Deleuze and Guattari claimed that ‘we know nothing about a body until we know what it can do, in other words, what its affects are’ (1987, p. 257). They suggest that to know what a body can do, we take the hint from children and how they come to understand and be moved by animals. Deleuze and Guattari use Freud’s case study of little Hans’s horse to argue that Hans’s horse is not a *representing body* but an *affecting body*. The horse’s capacity to affect does not come from it representing a species as such but from its being an element in the machinic assemblage.³¹ Akin to Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987, p. 257) analysis of little Hans’s affecting horse,³² Gita’s body in a white saree can be understood as an *affecting body* and not as a *representing body* of widowhood. So the Spinozist question, ‘What can a body do?’ is posed in reference to the capacity of the bodily assemblage to produce affects.

An affecting body should not be understood simply as the body that generates particular emotions or physiological outcomes in other bodies. Buchanan (1997, p. 80) explains that affect is the ‘capacity that a body has to form specific relations’. Affect is an intensity that happens to the body in movement from one experiential state to another in an encounter. When a body encounters another body that is affecting or being affected, there is movement from one state to another. This means there is change. In other words, affect is what happens to the body in experience.

³¹ Deleuze and Guattari (1987) use the term ‘machinic’ to refer to the functionalist and productive nature of assemblages.

³² In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari use Freud’s case of ‘Little Hans’ to present a counter-case against psychoanalysis and the limitations of representational thought. See also Buchanan (2013) *The Little Hans Assemblage* for an in-depth discussion.

In a given instance, the body experiences various forms and degrees of intensities. This affect is pre-personal; meaning it is non-conscious and it is what happens to the body before the affect gets qualified. This affection on our bodies either enhances or diminishes its capacity to form further relations or connect with other bodies. This is what I understand as the *ability to act* in Spinoza's definition;³³ it is not about 'acting' intentionally through bodily movement. The observable action of the body is an effect of the affects, the relations that the body has formed.

The Spinozist notion of affect of the body firstly rejects the mind-body dualism. As Deleuze puts it, 'an action in the mind is necessarily an action in the body as well, and what is a passion in the body is necessarily a passion in the mind' (Deleuze, 1988, p.18). Buchanan (1997, p. 76) explains this as 'what happens to our body also happens to our mind, thus we can come to know our mind via our body, and our body through our mind'. What is ignored in what happens to the body is the multiplicity of relations between different components engaged in this instance of 'happening'.

To understand affect in relational terms, Buchanan (1997) gives the example of the body and hunger. The usual understanding is that our bodies have the capacity to feel hungry; the sensation of hunger happens to the body and through this intentionality of the body, we eat food. The instinct named hunger or appetite that we feel in our body is understood as the cause for eating. However, according to Spinoza, it is an illusion to believe that we eat

³³ In the 'notes on the translation' section in the introduction to Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987, p. xvi), Brian Massumi presents a Spinozist definition of affect: '*L'affect* (Spinoza's *affectus*) is an ability to affect and be affected. It is a prepersonal intensity corresponding to the passage from one experiential state of the body to another and implying an augmentation or diminution in that body's capacity to act. *L'affection* (Spinoza's *affectio*) is each such state considered as an encounter between the affected body and a second, affecting, body.'

because we are hungry. Buchanan (1997, p. 78) emphasises this by saying ‘We are not free to eat, we are caused to eat, which means our hunger is the product of a relation with food.’ The body has a relation with food and this capacity is an *affect* that then produces the effect of eating. The affection of this relation has a particular intensity, which we have come to qualify as the emotion ‘hunger’.

It is not our ‘intelligence’ nor is it us that determine the relation between food and our body; we just come to realise this relation through the principles of association.³⁴ This relation already exists before we come to know about it. Affect is, then, the capacity of the body to form specific relations (Buchanan, 1997, p. 80). The affects of a body are not like specific limited attributes of the body—they are multiple. The relations that a body can form are also virtual and can be actualised when connected to the body. This again indicates the potentiality of the body.

In the literature, the terms affect and emotions are often used interchangeably and are understood as two aspects of the same phenomenon: affect as the physiological aspect and emotions as the expression of this affect (Koivunen 2010, p. 10). Massumi (2002, p. 27 – 28), however, argues for the importance of distinguishing between emotions and affect because they ‘follow different logics and pertain to different orders’. Affect is pure intensity and emotion is qualified intensity. Emotions are not just ‘personal’ interpretations of the pre-personal affect. Like thought, emotions emerge out of a social field. What we come to qualify as ‘anger’ is not our own personal interpretation but something we learn to qualify as such socially. We qualify affective intensities semantically and semiotically, giving them functions and

³⁴ Deleuze describes the principles of association in his explanation of transcendental empiricism. This will be explained more fully in chapter seven.

meanings that we come to perceive as emotions. It is because of this qualification that we come to form ideas about 'negative' and 'positive' emotions based on the social field through which they emerge.

The bodily state underlying emotions is neither 'negative' nor 'positive' but we learn to qualify those states as such. Intensive affects enable us to act and they move us, but sometimes they can lessen our ability to act and weaken our relationships. Massumi further argues (2002, p.260) that affect is unformed and unstructured so it may not be containable in 'knowledge' explicitly but it can be analysed in the effect. So we may not be able to 'know' when we are undergoing an affect but we recognise it only in the effect, which is emotions.

Even before an infant learns the language and notions of hunger and ideas of food, we can see the affect in the infant body, which manifests in emotions as the effect. The infant simply cries when hungry. In fact, the emotions displayed by an infant are 'direct expressions of affect' (Shouse, 2005). This means the infant has not learnt to qualify the intensity as 'hunger' yet but still cries as the direct effect of this bodily relation. As we gather experience and become socialised, we learn to qualify these bodily intensities that are affects and give them cultural meanings and names, often called emotions. We even learn to control the expression of emotions in different contexts. We may feel the effects in our bodies but do not necessarily express them; on the other hand, we may not feel a particular affect but fake the display of emotions. Thus, emotions can be understood as a production of the bodily assemblage.

6.4.1 Kala's affecting body

While narrating her story, Kala locates the change in her sense of self, particularly in her own behaviour and in her relationships. Prior to the

defining event in her story, Kala describes herself as an arrogant person. She also describes her relationship with her in-laws as full of arguments and fights, for which in hindsight she mostly holds herself responsible. In her story of change Kala recounts how she attended workshops in the city on peace building and went through many challenges in experiencing the process of personal change.

Kala focuses particularly on the change in her relationship with her mother-in-law. Kala wished to attend a capacity building program on peace building in communities that included three 15-day workshops conducted over a period of few months. She had been nominated as a sponsored participant through a local community organisation. She faced several challenges: she had two very young children at home and her husband was in the army and was mostly away on duty; attending the workshop would require her to travel to the capital city for at least 15 days at a time. She is aware of and sensitive to her relational dependence on her mother-in-law and comes up with strategies to convince her mother-in-law to allow her to attend the workshops. I focus on a particular incident that occurred when she returned home after attending the second workshop. In Kala's narration, this incident is a significant turning point in her relations with her mother-in-law and in influencing change:

As I entered the house, I was really excited. But I sensed some tension between my in-laws; the environment seemed stressful. I carefully took out the two petticoats I had bought for my mother-in-law and handed them to her. She threw them away on the floor and started yelling at me: 'Now you have been to two workshops, that's it. You won't go for the third one. Your kids give me a hard time ... Who do you think looks after this household when you are gone? If you want to go next time, take your kids with you ...' She scolded me about all kinds of things. I just sat there and listened

to her. Usually I would say something back to her. But this time, I didn't feel like saying anything. I felt perhaps the kids had given her a hard time and also she had to do all the housework in my absence. I felt so bad too. I went to my room and cried a lot. After a while, I got up and went about doing the evening chores. We all ate dinner and I finished the chores and went to my room. Then in the evening, I think my mother-in-law's anger cooled down, she came to my room. She just hugged me and cried saying, 'I said so many mean things to you ... You do understand why I said those things to you? ... I scolded you because of my own tension dealing with household issues ... you understand it right?' I think she felt guilty for being mean to me because I didn't say anything back to her in response.

This particular excerpt from Kala's story is full of emotions. This passage narrates a subjective experience that occurred in the past that was reconstructed and has been re-presented in its current form. The pivotal part of this narrative is Kala's response to her mother-in-law's anger. Kala's bodily assemblage in this instance is the affected and affecting body. The affections impinging upon her body while her mother-in-law is scolding her move her differently.

Kala seems to be confused about her own lack of response in not saying anything to her mother-in-law. Her usual response would have been to say something back. Something happens to her bodily assemblage in that moment but this affect is unqualified, it is not recognisable. Hence, there is a moment in that event that she cannot explain, except to say that she 'didn't feel like saying anything'. She is confused because she could not claim recognisable emotions such as anger in that moment. But she claims another emotion, *feeling bad*. The effect of this emotion is manifested through crying. Later, when her mother-in-law comes to her, Kala interprets her emotion as *guilt*.

Kala's initial response of not 'feeling like saying anything' fails to fit into any representational category. Because of that it may appear novel; it is something 'unlike' Kala. What makes this incident memorable for her is the absence of a familiar response. We know what the body did not do in this moment and Kala is able to isolate this only because of what the body has done in the past and the social coding of that doing. In *Dialogues II*, Deleuze and Parnet (2002, p. 61) quote Spinoza's saying, 'The surprising thing is the body ... we do not yet know what a body is capable of.' It is not possible to know what a body is capable of, for we can never foresee or even be consciously aware of the connections it can make and the affects it can have in any given moment. We only become consciously aware of those few affects that have strong intensities and are qualified. We understand the body in terms of those affects and the relations formed.

The understanding of the body as an assemblage with capacities to affect and a potential to be affected presents a fluid and processual understanding of the body. Because of the many relations formed, the body is always in a flux, always in movement. Even when the body seems to be in the same state, giving us an impression of stability, the body is in change. Most of these changes are imperceptible and when something with intensity happens, as in Kala's case, the event becomes memorable, although our consciousness may not completely capture what transpired in that moment.

With an understanding of the body as fluid and processual, the encounter between these two bodies cannot simply be taken as occurring between two stable knowable entities, Kala as 'daughter-in-law' and her 'mother-in-law'. The idea of the social relations and the meanings of what transpired between these two bodies—including the perceivable emotions that surface in that particular encounter—are effects of the experience. The experience of the encounter itself is more than Kala can make sense of. What Kala experienced

cannot be reduced to the idea of a naturalistic body simply capturing sensations in engaging with its environment. The body is not a 'perceiving apparatus', where the body is a natural entity, perception is taken as an activity performed by the body and affect is a second order response to perception (Buchanan 2000, p. 167).

The body as we come to know it as a sexually specific (female body) or as a natural perceiving body with emotions is produced through experience. What this implies then is that neither thoughts nor emotions are absolute foundations of knowing. They are not prior to action in a way that informs and guides what we do. They are produced through experience or material discursive intra-action and form part of our subjective experience. Emotion and thoughts are effects of experience, not causes. This implies that emotions are not what cause us to do things, any more than reasoned thoughts direct our behaviour in particular ways.

Emotions and thoughts are both effects produced in a process of becoming. We retrospectively attribute causation to them for certain actions or to explain particular behaviours. For instance, Kala believes that the emotion of guilt makes her mother-in-law come to her later and hug her and apologise to her. Kala thinks that her lack of reaction to her mother-in-law's anger has led to the feeling of guilt. Kala's non-responsive mode may have affected her mother-in-law, but we do not know what affections impinged upon Kala's mother-in-law's body; we do not know what her body felt and what connections were formed as a result of the encounter.

This raises a question about human action, and about movement in particular. Through the notion of assemblage and affect, we come to think about a body that is relational, fluid and able to produce particular effects through affecting. But what makes this bodily assemblage move? What

makes it connect to other assemblages and transform? The above discussion implies that it is not thought or emotions that drive action or make a body move. With emergent subjectivity and the body as assemblage, where both thought and emotions are understood as outcomes of the intra-action and not as determining factors of human action, how may we think of what makes a body move? I explore this issue in the next section using the concept of the body as a desiring machine.

6.5 Bodies as desiring machines

From a Deleuzian perspective, an assemblage is a dynamic arrangement of states of things and enunciations. The assemblage is always productive: it works to fulfil a role or benefit someone or something (1994, p. 25). This happens through the production of *desire*. The force that creates movement in an assemblage, giving it the dynamic quality to cause transformation, is *desire*. For this reason, Deleuze and Guattari also used the term 'desiring machines' in their earlier works, before later referring to the notion of assemblage (Buchanan 2015). It is the functionalist and productive notion of the assemblage that makes it a machine.

Desire is the productive force in an assemblage. Deleuze lists three misunderstandings related to desire: desire as lack, desire as natural and desire as pleasure (Deleuze & Parnet 2002, p. 103). Desire does not exist due to a lack of something that is then *desired for*. Desire is not a natural essence of the body but is manufactured through the assemblage. Desire is there because of the way our bodies are assembled in a particular moment. Desire does not work by seeking pleasure (through fulfilling a lack) but through what it produces and preserves.

Deleuze's notion of desire is what Spinoza terms a *conatus*, 'the effort by which each thing strives to persevere in its being' (Jackson & Mazzei 2011, p.

86). According to Deleuze, it is this effort or desire that makes us act the way we do as we encounter the world. Desire gets assembled and produced through one's bodily assemblage. This is not to say that the assemblage causes the desire. Desire is assembled and produced from a composition; at the same time the composition itself is being assembled. This means that an assemblage has desire being produced through the very act of the arrangement of the assemblage itself. Hence, assemblages are also called 'desiring machines'.

Thinking with the notion of desire helps us to understand why some individuals do what they do, although sometimes it may go against perceived 'common' sense. For example, as in the case of the workshop participant I talked about in the first chapter of this thesis. The female participant was seen as a 'non-learner', or incapable of learning for not changing her behaviour towards her abusive husband despite being trained and empowered through relevant workshops.

To further explore the work of desire, I will now read Beena's story. Beena's story is a story of desire. Beena was born and raised in a rural district outside of the capital. She left her village after high school to pursue higher education in forestry science. She started her professional career in the forestry department, working for the government. Later, she completed her doctoral studies in Europe and she is currently in a senior advisory position in an international organisation in Kathmandu. She sees her educational attainment and professional achievements as the main personal change in her life, attained against all the odds she faced in life from a very young age. Beena talks about the untimely death of her mother, who left behind five daughters and a husband. Beena was 12 years old at the time. After this, Beena and her family faced a change of attitude from the villagers. She says the community started to look down on them:

I remember our neighbours coming to our place and saying 'Poor things, unfortunate ones, their dad lost all his property and also his wife and now he is stuck with these girls.' I used to wonder what was so bad about having all girls? Why do they keep saying things like that to us?

Before her death, Beena's mother had sat her and her elder sister down and had told her specifically that she should study while her elder sister should look after all the three younger sisters. Beena took her mother's words to heart and continued her studies while her younger sisters dropped out of school:

In those days, most girls had the notion that being a girl, even if you went to school, sooner or later you had to get married off and focus on your domestic life. All my sisters and cousins were like that, in fact almost every girl I knew around me had that kind of thinking. I think because I saw how my mother suffered and died, I didn't think like that. I used to always talk to my elder sister about studying as much as I could.

In telling her story, Beena constitutes herself as a person who has become successful in life through academic and professional achievement. This is her personal transformation. At first, when I listened to her, I interpreted her story as a discursive valorisation of academic achievement and career. However, in re-reading her story, I attempted to understand what was driving this emphasis on studies and career. How could I understand her drive and commitment towards her academic and professional goals?

I understand Beena's interest in studies and career as a production of desire. The desire that produces certain goals and interest³⁵ is sustained and reproduced throughout her academic and professional life. How does this

³⁵ Here I use the word 'interest' in a loose sense as a 'want' or 'need' and not as the more complex notion of 'interest' from a political perspective.

desire come to be? What I read in Beena's narrative is a desire to be recognised. This desire is produced through her bodily assemblage, constituted through material discursive elements of her everyday life. This desire surfaces not from a lack of recognition as such but from striving and persevering to become someone who is recognisable and worthy. This striving is produced from the assemblage that constitutes her being in that moment.

After her mother's death, Beena is caught up in the *collective assemblage*³⁶ (Deleuze & Guattari 1987) of the community, through the enunciations of the villagers that call her and her family 'poor things' and 'unfortunate'. These enunciations uttered in her presence form part of her bodily assemblage and her subjectivity. In her narration, she questions the relation between those enunciations and the female bodies and asks, 'What was so bad about having all girls?' Her mother's words also become part of her bodily assemblage—her becoming-student.

Beena's becoming-student is not a becoming in terms of her emulating or representing the identity and characteristics of a student. This becoming-student is a movement produced by her desire; it is more about what her body as an assemblage is doing through that becoming. Beena talks about how girls were supposed to be, indicating that sooner or later, she would be expected to quit studies and live a domestic life like other girls did. But the desire producing the interest in or need to study is so strong in her that it makes her continue her studies. In this sense, her bodily assemblage of

³⁶ The concept of the collective assemblage of enunciation is used to denote the social characteristic of enunciation. For instance, when an individual utters 'poor things', although this is an individuated act from a 'subject', it is the impersonal collective assemblage that enables this utterance by an individual subject, including the possible meanings of this utterance (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, pp. 80–85).

becoming-student is an outcome of the desire that is striving to maintain and produce more recognition. This is the productive capacity of desire and assemblages: they work to produce interests, needs and wants that then enable capacity to form further connections, plug in one assemblage into another.

Beena's bodily assemblage plugs into the assemblage of school and studies. This school assemblage transforms her desire into an interest in studies and books; that is what desiring machines do, they produce desire and convert it into interests. There are many events Beena talks about where desire reproduces this interest in studies again and again. It is reproduced through engagements in school, through her grades, through the recognition she receives as a bright hard-working student, the support she receives, her connection to books and so on. All these material discursive elements of the bigger assemblage of 'school' work to constitute her becoming a student, producing desire that not just preserves but produces more and more.

Here, the enactment of Beena's desire that works to maintain recognition is governed by material discursive elements within the constraints of what is normative (Jackson & Mazzei 2011). In this particular case it is the material discursive boundaries of 'school'. There are the discursive norms surrounding going to school, norms about the importance of education if one is to 'become someone', the perceived importance of grades, being a 'good student', doing well in school and so on. But there are also the material elements that intra-act with the discursive to arrange the assemblage of 'student': the school building, the books, the pen and paper, writing homework, sitting exams, male bodies, fewer female bodies etc. All of these work to produce and transform Beena's desire into an intense interest in studies and guide her behaviour in specific ways. To preserve and produce

more recognition she has to enact in specific ways within the school assemblage that her body itself is plugged into.

After finishing high school, Beena acquires a degree in forestry. Once she graduates, her desire flows into shaping her career. She enters into a sector that intensifies her desire and thus her interest in success and personal growth. As a woman entering a highly male-dominated profession at that time, Beena runs into situations that intensify her desire. Again, it was not the lack of recognition that produces desire, otherwise she would not have been in the position that she was in. Here is Beena talking about one such situation:

I was posted as a ranger outside the head office area in the fields. As a woman I could have asked to be posted in the head office but I thought if my other male colleagues are going out in the field and doing work, I could do it too. It took me about two years to really understand the system and how work was done there. In the first year, I was excluded from certain activities. All my male colleagues were assigned projects with a certain discretionary budget mostly involving plantations or building nurseries in communities. I was highly interested in such work but was never offered the opportunity. The first year, I thought it was because I was new and needed time to learn. When the same trend continued in the second year and I was the only one excluded, I talked about it with some of my male colleagues. I asked them how they happened to get involved in those projects whereas I never got the opportunity. They told me it was actually part of the job scope and perhaps I should talk about it with the main boss, the district forest officer. So I did. The DFO called a meeting with his associates after which I was also assigned such projects.

As in the excerpt above, Beena's actions are driven by desire. Here desire is not seeking to acquire something that she does not have. Desire works

through producing effects. Deleuze emphasizes this point when he says, 'It is not lack or privation which leads to desire; one only *feels lack* in relation to an assemblage from which *one is excluded*, but one only desires as a result of an assemblage in which *one is included* (Deleuze & Parnet 2002, p. 103). In the incident above, Beena is situated in a heavily masculine work culture that is exclusionary to women. So Beena's desire is produced not because she is excluded as a woman, but because she is actually part of this work assemblage as an employee. Her bodily assemblage connected into this work assemblage seeks to be how she is supposed to be, like the other employees. How she is *supposed to be* and the way that would preserve her recognition as a capable employee lies within the material discursive constraints of forestry work practice. She is already in a position that warrants certain recognition and her assemblage produces desire that seeks to maintain or produce more of that recognition through doing the work. The desire is not natural. The desire is manufactured due to the particular composition of her bodily assemblage and only makes sense within the 'constraints of normativity' of forestry work (Jackson, 2003). All the social and political relations, identities and objects that are produced in that context work to produce the particular reality of her situation, constituting particular 'truths'. Beena's interests, such as her interest in being assigned a project like those of all her male colleagues is a production of those constituted 'truths'.

6.6 Conclusion: bodies in learning

Influenced by the work of Gilles Deleuze, in this chapter I have moved away from thinking of the body either as a stable natural entity or as an inscribed entity. Instead of trying to conceptualise what the body *really is*, I use a theoretical framework to explore, *how the body works*. Consistent with the notion of onto-epistemology, the concept of assemblage presents a relational ontology of the body in which the relations that constitute the body are

primary and what the body *appears to be* is understood as a production that is the result of those relations.

This understanding of the body as a dynamic arrangement of heterogeneous elements—material and discursive, human and non-human—opens up new questions about how we understand the body in the process of learning as becoming. Given this particular ontology of the body, the question about the body in terms of what the body is becomes redundant. For the body is constantly changing in its composition as the group of relations between different heterogeneous elements are constantly shifting. This is what makes the body fluid, always in process. The Spinozist question, ‘what can the body do?’ shifts the inquiry from the quest for a unified knowable body towards a body that is knowable in terms of its capacity. This capacity, termed as affect by Spinoza, is understood as the body’s capacity to form relations.

The notion of affect as the body’s capacity to form relations has certain implications in terms of thinking about the body’s role in learning. Instead of the commonly understood role of the body as a passive sensing organ that acts in response to sensation, the notion of affect enables us to conceptualise a more active role for the body. That is, we can view the body as a dynamic and active arrangement that has the capacity to affect and be affected. Again, this capacity is not an inherent or natural ability of the body, but a capacity generated out of its arrangement of relations with various elements within its immediate material discursive environment. With this capacity to affect and be affected, bodies change by changing their composition and forming new relations.

Affect is understood as what happens to the body in an experience. Emotions, on the other hand, are understood as productions of experience.

Emotions are constituted and emerge through the social field in which the affection takes place. So the particular intense affections on the body are given social meaning, where the meaning and emotion emerge together. In this sense, the body, emotions, meanings and thoughts including ideas about sex and gender are emergent through the phenomenon or, in Barad's terms, through intra-action. As they do not exist prior to the intra-action, they do not shape or determine experience. What this implies is that emotions are not anterior to thought. Emotions are not pure bodily sensations that then contribute input to reason and thought. As Buchanan (1997, p. 76) captures by interpreting Spinoza's statement that 'what happens to our body also happens to our mind', emotions and thoughts are outcomes of the same phenomenon occurring to the body. They are part of our constituted subjective experience, produced through material discursive intra-actions.

Another implication for thinking about the body as an assemblage is that it also offers a different perspective on how we understand change and the notion of becoming. A person as an embodied individual does not 'become' a particular identity or entity per se. Here, I reiterate the idea of difference that I mentioned in chapter five when discussing subjective experiences of change. Change is not about a body moving from one state to another state, where the states are often understood in terms of stable identities or states of being. These ideas of difference are based on an understanding of difference as signs of alterity in terms of identity (Lenz Taguchi 2013). Instead, I am referring to the 'positive' difference as conceptualised by Deleuze (1994). It is not about being 'different to' with respect to an ontological state (non-resemblance). Instead it is a process of differing; difference in itself as an ongoing flow of affirmative relations (Lenz Taguchi 2013). With this kind of positive difference, there is no precursor. So in that sense, difference is *difference in itself* and not *different from*. This difference in itself is produced

through changes in relations that then change the composition of the assemblage itself.

If emotions and thoughts are effects of the affect on our bodies, what makes the body move? As discussed in this chapter, it is not conscious recognition of the emotion hunger or the conscious thought 'I am hungry' that makes us willingly eat. As Buchanan (1997, p. 78) claimed, 'we are not free to eat, we are caused to eat'. Deleuze's notion of desire offers a way to understand how the body moves. The idea of desire moving the bodily assemblage and enabling it to connect to other assemblages offers a way to think about human action as a highly situated and pragmatic act. What the body can do in any given moment is the result of the specific relational arrangement of all the material and discursive elements in that very moment. This then implicates both the natural and cultural, the material and discursive, and the human as well as the non-human in the performativity of the body. Human action is much more complex than a knowing subject using their sensing body and rational mind to intelligently adapt in relation to an external environment.

What does this do to our understanding of learning as becoming? This understanding of the body deconstructs and shifts some of our basic underlying assumptions about learning, specifically about how the body works in learning. The concepts of affect, assemblage and desire provide a much more active role for the body in constituting becoming. Within a complexity theory framework, Davis and Sumara argue:

learning is not a change in behaviour due to experience; it is change in structure that contributes to the ongoing coherence of the learner. Learning depends on experience, but it is determined by the learner's structure, not by the experience. (2007, p. 464)

The body as assemblage further builds on Davis and Sumara's claim. Learning is determined by the dynamic structure of the body, where the body is conceptualised as an assemblage that is constantly moving in response to the world. The notion of desire gives rise to questions about knowledge. Given the instability of the subject, and our understanding of the body as a dynamic relational entity, what can we say about knowing or knowledge? How do we understand the body in knowing? How may we think about knowing in becoming? These questions are addressed in the next chapter. ■

Chapter 7

Knowing in learning: imagination, desire and the emergence of knowing

7.1 Introduction

What is it to *know*? How does one know how to be and what to do in everyday life? In this thesis, the subject and the body have been understood as fluid and instable, not as fixed entities that exist independently and prior to engaging with the world. Instead, both are seen as emerging in the process of engagement or through intra-actions in the immediate world. From this onto-epistemological perspective, experience as intra-action has been taken as foundational in the process of learning.³⁷ With these understandings of the body and the subject, I can no longer approach this inquiry by asking, 'How does one *know* how to *act*?' There is no subject, no knower, prior to the act that *knows* or has the knowledge to inform the act. I build on this understanding to re-conceptualise knowing in the process of learning.

In this chapter, I draw on the narratives of Radha, Anju and Kabita in conceptualising how knowing works in learning. In the first section, I discuss the theoretical implications of conceptualising knowing from Barad's onto-epistemology and Deleuze's transcendental empiricism, providing the

³⁷ Here, I emphasise the point that while I acknowledge that in other perspectives there may be other ways of knowing that are not based on experience, for this thesis the focus is on *knowing that is emergent in experience*.

rationale for the particular approach I take. Here I see the parallels between Barad's and Deleuze's thought in how we may think about knowing. For both, knowing is emergent *in* experience. Like the body and subjectivity, knowledge is also tentative, always shifting across the flow of time. Hence, knowledge does not exist as a reified object. There is only the continuous process of knowing in the ongoing intra-action of life. The question that still remains here is to understand how that knowing emerges in experience. How does it work?

I explore this question in order to reconceptualise knowing as emergent in the ongoing process of becoming in the world. How does this emergence take place? What happens when we encounter the world? And how does the experience of that encounter lead to the emergence of knowing? I conceptualise the ontology of knowing using Spinoza's account of imagination, drawing on an excerpt from Radha's narrative. The notion of imagination enables us to conceptualise how the mind and body work in experience without holding us to the dualistic view of them as separate entities. Building on this conceptual understanding how imagination works in knowing, I explore the emergence of 'self' in experience. If our bodies and subjectivities are fluid and in movement, how do we come to know a coherent gendered self? If we hold experience as the basis for knowing, we must acknowledge the vast potential of knowing given the experiences that we undergo in our daily lives. What enables the tendency for us to know? Deleuze uses the phrase 'purposiveness' to denote this aspect of knowing while Barad calls it 'mattering'. Using Deleuze's concept of desire and extending on Barad's argument of 'knowing as mattering', I suggest that knowing is a pragmatic act of producing meaning and purpose for the subject to be and do in particular ways. In this sense, knowing and becoming are not

separate but are manifested in the same process. In other words, knowing is a process of becoming.

7.2 Thinking about knowing

Knowing is understood to be an integral part of learning. Depending on how one theorises learning, each learning theory has its own implicit or explicit theory of what knowing and knowledge entail. Hence, there are many ways to think about knowing. The issue I raise here is that, given the philosophical resources I have drawn upon in arguing for a different conceptualisation of subjectivity and the body, what implications does this conceptualisation have for how we might think about knowing?

The notion of onto-epistemology departs from the long held idea of the separation of ontology and epistemology. This separation comes from the philosophical premise of an inherent difference between subject and object, human and nonhuman, mind and body and matter and discourse (Barad 2007, p. 185). There is the assumption that there is an outer reality or world independent of the observer and that there is a human knower (the subject) for whom it is possible to know this world. Hence, epistemology is the theorisation of how the knower comes to know the world, the nature of that knowledge and the justifications for it (Murphy, Alexander & Muis 2012).

In coining the term 'onto-epistemology', Barad challenges this philosophical premise of the separation of subject and object. For Barad, knowing and being are not distinct; instead, knowing and being occur simultaneously. There is no previously existing stable reality out there to be accessed and known by a previously existing fixed subject. In her agential realist perspective, Barad not only dismantles the knowing subject, she also questions the very practice of knowing as being taken for granted as a *human* practice:

There is an important sense in which practices of knowing cannot fully be claimed as human practices, not simply because we use nonhuman elements in our practices but because knowing is a matter of part of the world making itself intelligible to another part. Practices of knowing and being are not isolable; they are mutually implicated. We don't obtain knowledge by standing outside the world; we know because we are *of* the world. (2007, p. 185)

Here, Barad takes a post-humanist stance in understanding knowing.³⁸ The world and everything in it becomes intelligible in its own becoming, whether the human is there to know it or not. And this notion of knowing applies to humans as well. Knowing is the phenomenon through which the objects (including humans) come to matter; knowing is central to becoming.

I understand Barad's notion of intra-action as conceptually similar to Deleuze's notion of experience. Barad argues that 'knowing is a matter of differential responsiveness to what matters' (2007, p. 149). For Barad, knowing happens in *intra-action* and it is a process of mattering in the world. How we come to know is a process of becoming relevant in this world. Hence, for Barad knowing and becoming are one. In the Deleuzian sense, knowing, becoming and learning are all part of experience. In *Difference and Repetition* (1994, pp. 25–26), Deleuze defines learning in relational terms:

Learning takes place not in the relation between a representation and an action (reproduction of the Same) but in the relation between a sign and a response (encounter with the Other) ... We learn nothing from those who

³⁸ In her book *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, Barad (2007, pp. 369–384) gives an example of the brittle star to illustrate non-human knowing and I do agree with her understanding of knowing as something beyond the human practice. However, for the purposes of this study, I am interested in how humans become part of the process of knowing and come to know the world.

say: 'Do as I do'. Our only teachers are those who tell us to 'do with me', and are able to emit signs to be developed in heterogeneity rather than propose gestures for us to reproduce.

In this excerpt, Deleuze locates learning in relations using a theory of signs. Learning thus is a process where one responds to the signs, where 'signs are to be apprehended in terms of neither objective nor subjective criteria, but solely in terms of their immanent problematic instances' (Semetsky 2007, p. 201). The way one apprehends a sign and responds to it in one's immediate world is a pragmatic act and not simply a discursive behaviour. This is *learning in experience*. Our interactions with the life world around us emit signs for us, signs that are immanent to the particular interaction they emerge out of. Our becoming is an ongoing response to these signs.

The point that needs emphasis here is that there is no unified subject who is responding to the signs. The signs emerge through the very experience that also constitutes the subject. Responding to the sign is also part of the constituting of the subject. In other words, we are becoming in responding to the signs that emerge in experience. This notion of experience is based on Deleuze's philosophy of *transcendental empiricism*. In elaborating Deleuze's notion of empiricism, Colebrook (2001, p. 80) states that 'empiricism ... argues that ideas do not order experience; ideas are the *effect* of experience' (emphasis in original).

Here, I understand signs and ideas as the same concept, as impressions of the affects on us in experience. Signs are not discursive signs that represent something. They emerge out of experience. So what we come to 'know' is produced in experience through these signs. That includes our sense of self, or of the human subject. If the human subject is produced through experience, then what we come to know as humans is also a product of experience. What this means is that there is no objective reality outside of our

experience. What comes to be known or becomes intelligible in the world is produced through experience.

With the above understanding, I focus on three issues related to understanding knowing in the context of understanding learning as a process of becoming. Experience is understood as the foundation for learning. As discussed above, signs are emitted in experience that are apprehended not in the representational sense or based on some subjective or objective criteria but 'solely in terms of their immanent problematic instances' (Semetsky 2007, p. 201). If bodies are taken to be fluid and not fixed, how are these signs apprehended and how does knowing emerge as a result in experience?

To answer these question I use firstly Spinoza's concept of imagination based on Deleuze's interpretation of his work. I use Radha's experience and her worldly encounter with a 'meeting' to consider how we might understand the emergence of her knowing in her experience. Using the concept of imagination, I argue that the encounters in intra-action work to emit signs or form impressions on us. What we come to know in experience is not the 'truth' or the 'essence' of the objects or the world around us. Instead, what we have access to are the impressions formed on us and the change in our bodily composition as a result of undergoing the experience. What this means is that we come to know the world by the changes it causes in our being and not by apprehension of the 'essential truth' of the world.

The second issue I explore is the emergence of self. How do the impressions in experience lead to the formation of a coherent gendered self? While conceptually I hold that subjects are fluid and tenuous, how does the sense of stability of 'being a girl' emerge? In chapter five I argued that gendered subjectivity is a production of material discursive intra-actions. In this chapter, I read excerpts of Anju's narrative to discuss how the

impressions in experience get organised to produce a coherent self and how a sense of positionality emerges. In other words, Deleuze raised this issue by asking the question, 'How does the mind become a subject'? (1991, p. 23). I claim that the impressions produced in experience get inter-connected and organised according to what Deleuze has termed *principles of human nature* to give rise to coherence in what we come to know. The organisation of the impressions through relations leads to the apprehension of the world as it is subjectively experienced, with the sense of stable objects and subjects, boundaries and forms.

From the first two issues, it is established that knowing is emergent through the connections of the impressions formed in experience. A question that arises from this is: Of all the different potential impressions that impinge upon us, what gives the tendency for particular impressions to inter-connect to produce particular outcomes? If we assume that the multiple impressions formed do not randomly link up but become connected in a purposive manner, what drives this purposiveness in the organisation of impressions? Barad (2007) argues that knowing is a process of mattering. Through knowing our becoming is also emergent, making particular aspects of our being more relevant than others, defining who we are becoming. Below I read Kabita's story of change and shifts in her sense of her capabilities to explore her knowing. Here, I build on Deleuze's notion of desire to argue that it is the production of desire through the encounters that shape or give purposiveness to knowing and becoming. In this sense, becoming is not shaped by some representational criteria of being but is emergent through the desire produced in the very process of becoming.

7.3 Knowing the world in experience

To explore how one comes to have ideas through experience, I explore Radha's experience. In her story, Radha talks about her experience that enabled her to be knowledgeable of the world around her. Her story is about how she came to know things through experience and how that knowing changed her life. She defines her personal change in terms of how the knowledge she gained through specific experiences helped her to do more and be more in life. One such experience she had was to do with attending a community meeting in her village for the very first time:

I used to hear about all the women going to these meetings. I had no idea what they meant. I used to wonder, what does *baithak basne* (to sit in a meeting) mean? How do they actually *sit* in meeting? Then in 2007, some new sisters came to our village and said they would form a group for women. I had no interest in it. But my in-laws put my name down for it; they insisted that I should attend. They told me I needed to go out, meet people and learn new things. In the first meeting ... I was really scared. I wondered what they would say to me, what would they ask me? I'm not even sure if it was fear or shyness, perhaps it was shyness. I just couldn't speak. The first meeting I ever attended was at the house of a community health volunteer. At the beginning of the meeting, we all had to give our introductions. I was scared to even say my name. When my turn to speak was coming up, my inside heated up like an engine ... I just could not speak, so I went quietly and sat at the back. Later, they insisted that I should say something ... so I just told them my name, 'Radha'.

For many who may have professional experience, the concept of a 'meeting' is well developed. We have experienced a 'meeting'. When we use the word meeting or talk about attending a meeting, we have some preconceived idea about what it entails. Nobody really teaches us exactly what one does in a

meeting, but by attending 'meetings' through the course of our student and professional life, we come to know what a meeting is about and how *to be* in a meeting in the general sense. This is what we often present or understand as 'knowing'. To know is to have the basis of understanding of what something represents; the acts, the behaviours, all the happenings, the objects, people and other artefacts in a 'meeting' come to represent what constitutes a 'meeting' for us.

Prior to her exposure to a meeting, Radha's life world did not include the social practice of 'meeting'. She had heard about it from others, but could not fully comprehend what it was or how it worked. Even the idea of 'sitting' in a meeting was something very alien and incomprehensible to her. "How do they actually *sit* in a meeting?" she wondered. In attending her first meeting, Radha discovered that everyone attending the meeting is expected to speak *something* in the group. Speaking to a group of people was another new experience for Radha and she describes the embodied experience when she was about to speak her name to the group. She identifies her emotions as being fearful and shy but she affirms that it is more shyness. Regardless of the name she gives it, she describes her subjective experience of how her body changed when she was required to speak, the heating up of her body with the sensations of her emotions.

Through attending the meeting, Radha comes to know what a meeting is within a particular context and how to speak in a meeting, and this new knowing and her subsequent act of speaking in the group can be taken as evidence that learning occurred for her. The 'learning' and 'knowledge' in Radha's story appears evident when viewed within our common understanding of knowledge and learning, that is knowledge as some form of representation of the world in our mind and learning as the ability to act according to that knowledge. Learning is evidenced by the extent to which

one is able to act in accordance with that knowledge or knowing. This account of knowledge implies that the notion of a 'meeting' as a social phenomenon, has some undeniable truth in itself that needs to be captured as reality by the mind and reproduced in subsequent actions. Once having attended and experienced a 'meeting', it is assumed that one knows or has some idea of what it is and how to perform in the meeting.

Usher and Edwards (2007) talk about learning as a semiotic process in the context of lifelong learning, whereby different 'realities are constructed through ... various significations' and contain different implied values (p 13). In the same way, we could also see the concept of 'meeting' as part of a broader discourse with a constructed 'reality' that codes social interactions. They also talk about how such social constructions of events are articulated as if they are natural—'the world as it really is—rather than socio-culturally contingent' (p. 10). This naturalisation of a socially constructed event like a 'meeting' makes it appear as if it were a part of the 'real world' and something that needs to be 'known'. What Radha comes to know about sitting in a meeting and how to enact this social performance as a participant is constructed but is taken as knowledge of some 'true' reality.

This understanding of coming to know signs and the discursive situated knowledge represented through these signs might challenge the idea of objective knowledge. But it also gives us a sense that our life worlds are determined by these regimes of signs, and our actions limited or determined by this representation. This perspective also subjugates the material to the discursive. Based on the earlier discussions of experience, subjectivity and the body, this account implies that reality itself does not exist prior to our experience but is also a production of it. In that sense, reality (such as the reality of a 'meeting' and what it is supposed to be) also does not exist to

determine experience and demarcate Radha's actions before she experiences it.

Here the 'meeting' is a performance, the various material and discursive components of which are produced through intra-actions. What becomes known in the performance does not exist before but they are materialisations of the intra-action itself. Hence, what becomes known in distinctive material forms such as bodies, tables, floor mats, the room, papers and the discursive meanings attached to them and the rituals of the event are all productions of the same process. The performance of a 'meeting' as a social practice is not just a discursive practice where previously existing passive material things, both human and non-human, are ascribed discursive meanings and roles to perform to constitute the meeting. The material and discursive elements are both active co-constituents in the production of the 'meeting' as subjectively experienced by Radha. How then does Radha come to form ideas about the meeting through her embodied experience? In the following section I use Spinoza's notion of imagination to conceptualise how knowing emerges in experience.

7.3.1 Knowing in Spinoza's imagination

Imagination has played a rather subordinate role to reason in understanding how knowing is produced in experience. Like emotions, imagination has often been seen as merely a link between sensation and reason (Stoetzler & Yuval-Davis 2002, p. 321). Reason and rationality have been seen as the highest forms of knowledge that give us access to understanding the 'real world'. In order to fully appreciate Spinoza's account of imagination, it is necessary to discuss his idea of the mind and body, briefly touched on in the previous chapter in talking about the body and affect. In part II, proposition 12 of *Ethics*, Spinoza states 'If the object of the idea constituting the human mind be a body, nothing can take place in that body without being perceived

by the mind' (2009). This is an important statement if we are to understand his take on the mind and the body. According to Spinoza, what constitutes the mind is the body and not external objects; whatever happens in the body, constitutes the mind. In other words, the mind is simply the *idea of the body*³⁹ (Gatens & Lloyd 1999). This denotes a very different relation of the mind and body. For Spinoza, they are both the same thing expressed differently.

In part II, proposition 17 of *Ethics*, Spinoza defines imagination as follows:

[T]he affections of the human Body whose ideas represent external bodies as present to us, we shall call images of things, even if they do not reproduce the figures of things. And when the Mind regards bodies in this way, we shall say that it imagines. (cited in Garrett 2008, p. 5)

In the passage above, Spinoza claims a direct relationship between imagination and the body. The affections of the body—in other words, what happens to our body—are indications of the presence of something external. The ideas of these affections constitute the imagination. These ideas or images of things do not actually reproduce the actual object in our mind (as we commonly believe); instead they merely represent the existence of the object that produced the affection on our bodies. So when we sense an external object, that sense of the object is available to us through the modifications in our own bodies. So it is not an external object per se that we come to sense but the affect it has on our bodies.

According to Spinoza, this means that any ideas we have of the external world are only possible through the affects they have on our own bodies.

³⁹ This will be the working definition of *mind* for this chapter, *mind as the idea of the body*.

Based on Spinoza's definition above, the mind 'perceives by way of imagination everything that happens' in the body (Garrett 2008, p. 6). We come to know the world through what happens to our bodies through intra-action or experience. In that way, the imagination is kind of a repository of everything that happens to our bodies as we encounter the world. This understanding of imagination gives the body a central role in its constitution.

Most of what Spinoza talks about may seem abstract and perhaps a little inconsistent with our general understanding of the mind and how imagination works. The neurobiologist Antonio Damasio, most noted for his theory of the importance of emotions for human cognition, also finds a powerful philosophical ally in Spinoza. In his book *Looking for Spinoza: Joy, Sorrow and the Feeling Brain*, Damasio (2003) offers his own interpretation of Spinoza's *Ethics* which he claims foreshadows some of the findings of modern neurobiology. For instance, on the nature of the mind, Damasio comments that we commonly regard the mind as being full of images or thoughts of the 'objects, actions, and abstract relations, mostly related to the outside world rather than to our bodies' (p. 214). Damasio asserts that neurophysiological evidence suggests that the 'mind is filled with images from the flesh and images from the body's special sensory probes' (p. 214).

Spinoza claims that imagination is an 'inadequate' form of knowledge. In *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*, Deleuze (1990) provides a useful interpretation of what this *inadequacy of the imagination as a form of knowledge* might mean. As Deleuze puts it, 'An inadequate idea is an inexpressive idea' (p 145). What that means is that the imagination does not necessarily express anything about the source of the idea itself. The primary thing indicated by the imagination is not the essence of our bodies but rather a momentary state of change in our body. This change in state in our body then simply gives us an indication of the existence of an external object that appears to be the

cause of the affect on our bodies. This indication via the imagination does not give us any other knowledge of the external body except for what it does to our bodies. Simply put, images merely indicate the presence of something—our bodies and the external things—but do not express or indicate the essence of those things.

Deleuze explains the two aspects of inadequate ideas. First, imagination 'involves privation' of the knowledge of its cause. Second, the constitution of imagination also 'involves' that cause. What he is saying here is that although imagination consists of inadequate ideas, there is still something positive in those ideas and hence something 'true'. What we can take from the idea of affection is the truth about the affection on our bodies and the existence of something that caused the affect. Grasping this positive in the ideas of affection is then what leads towards having adequate ideas. Based on this positive, we are able to form an idea of what is common in the 'order to Nature' that is common also to the affected body and the affecting body. Now this idea—which is an idea of ideas, also referred to as a 'common notion'—is adequate and becomes the basis of reason. This indicates a different relation between reason and imagination, whereby imagination and reason both are actually grounded in the body and the body's capacity to affect and be affected.

Here I want to revisit Radha's encounter with the 'meeting'. The idea of the 'meeting' itself is made up of several other ideas: the word *meeting* is a sign indicating many other signs of signs and so forth. Like all words used to describe something, the word itself does not express any 'truth' about 'meeting'. Hence, in the past although she had heard about people in the village 'sitting in meetings' she did not understand what it entailed. Through attending a meeting herself, Radha came to experience several regimes of signs which included humans, other objects and rituals. While becoming

familiar with new words, rituals and practices is one way of understanding her experience, this method relies on a particular understanding of learning as the semiotic practice of meaning making through encountering signifiers in experience (Usher & Edwards 2007).

The significance of Radha's experience lies in the bodily affections that occurred during the meeting in encountering the various material and discursive elements. For instance, Radha mentions the 'heating up of the body like an engine' as her turn to speak approaches. Here there is no clear external object per se that can be linked directly as the cause of the bodily affections. Radha attributes it to being 'shy'. Instead of having one tangible external object, here it seems there are multiple objects impinging on her body: the unfamiliarity of the practice, the people and the processes. The 'objects' having affections on her are both material and discursive. There are ideas being produced through these different affections. And here it seems it is an idea of an idea of an idea working to produce these bodily affections. It is the imaginative capacity of her mind that is at work here.

As we discussed earlier, such ideas are inadequate, for Radha is not sure what the cause of the bodily affection is. There is no way she can know exactly what the real cause is of what she feels in her body. This is because of the traces of past experiences and the errors of imagination it can produce. Lloyd (2002) explains that according to Spinoza, the mind as awareness of the body can simultaneously have ideas of what is currently happening in the body while also having ideas of what has happened before. Lloyd further explains that this capacity to retain bodily traces is the source of forming common ideas that lead to the emergence of reason but it is also the source of 'the errors of imagination' (p. 57). The ideas of past bodily traces can make the mind imagine or form ideas of something as being presently real. This creates confusion about the cause of the affection.

When Radha feels her body heating up, it is hard for her to have any knowledge of the cause based on her imagination—she can only be aware of this sensation in her body. But this awareness could be due to past bodily traces and not just what is happening to her body in that moment. What this means is that what she becomes aware of as present and real during the meeting could also be due to bodily traces from the past. How she feels in the meeting may be due to ideas produced from what is presently impinging on her body in this meeting as well as ideas produced from traces of the past experiences. In addition, some of these affects on her body get coded and qualified as particular emotions, such as ‘shyness’ or ‘fear’, as she attempts to make sense of the bodily affections.

As Radha attends more meetings, there is the possibility of forming ideas of the common notions of her body and the affecting bodies in the context of a meeting. From a set of confused ideas, adequate ideas are formed that are based on the common notions of her body and the affecting bodies. The affecting bodies may not just be the people present but a combination of material and nonmaterial bodies all impinging on her body to connect with her bodily assemblage and lead to transformation. These adequate ideas are still ideas of other ideas and hence they are expressive in that they may say something about ideas but they are unable to grasp the essences of singular things. Imagination, by contrast, grasps singular things but is inherently inadequate as knowledge (Lloyd 2002, p. 62). What this implies is that in any instance, knowing simply involves the ideas of relations of a set of ideas and not a stable knowing of the essence of things. An idea is nothing but an inexpressive sign emitted by a phenomenon that forms patterns in relation to other ideas and emerges as knowing.

What does this all really mean? An important point here is the role of Radha’s body and the materiality involved in her knowing from her

experiences. Radha's new knowledge of 'meeting' is not about mentally grasping the discursive notion of meeting and performing discursively based on that understanding. The basis of the thoughts and any ideas Radha comes to develop from the experiences in the meeting are based on how the different objects (material and discursive, human and non-human) impinge upon her body to shift her bodily assemblage. Furthermore, these affections on the body constitute the mind with images of these affections on the body, which then become the basis for reason and understanding.

Some of this understanding or 'knowing' may not be expressed in words and thoughts but may manifest in actions of the body. This gives a different take on the saying 'learning by doing'. Learning by doing occurs in the literal sense. We are learning in action through the body as the body changes its composition during embodied experience. The body learns and knows as it is becoming. Here I talk about how we come to form ideas and know about the external world through our bodies through imagination. Through this same process of experience, we also form ideas about the self and come to have ideas about who we are. I now turn to discuss this point.

7.4 Emergence of 'self' in experience

In our intra-action with the world, we come to form ideas about reality based on affections on our bodies. The affections on the bodies indicate changes in the state of the body as well as the presence of something that impinged on the body. In an earlier section of this chapter, I talked about the mind as an expression of the body. A question that can be asked here is how one comes to know 'self' through experience or through the affections on their body. Deleuze investigates this very issue, posing the question, 'How does the mind become a subject?' (1991, p. 23).

In his discussion of Deleuze's work on empiricism, DeLanda (2006) identifies operators that Deleuze suggests produce associative links between the different ideas to produce coherence in subjective experiences:

the habitual grouping of ideas through relations of contiguity (in space or time), their habitual comparison through relations of resemblance, and the habitual pairing of causes and effects by their perceived constant conjunction (p 48)

These associative links form what Deleuze (2001, p. 39) calls 'principles of association': *contiguity, resemblance* and *causality*. DeLanda (2006) explains how principles of association enable humans to 'match means to ends', while the ends depend on the *principles of passion*:

the habitual pursuit of those ends associated with pleasurable or positively valued passions and the habitual avoidance of those linked with painful or negatively valued ones. (p. 49).

Deleuze further explains that constancy and uniformity emerge due to the 'way in which ideas are associated in the imagination' (1991, p. 23).

Association links impressions or ideas in imagination, whereas passions give a sense or tendency for relations to be created. Hence, Deleuze argues that the impressions in our imagination become associated, guided by a goal or purpose conferred by passion (2001, p. 63). Here, I understand passions as the same concept as what Deleuze in his later work talks about as *desire* and what Spinoza calls *conatus*: the tendency of the body to preserve its being. It is the tendency that emerges out of the way the impressions become associated but also influence the association.

Claire Colebrook elaborates the principles of association in this way:

the point for Deleuze is that there is no subject *who* connects. Rather, there is connection and the mind is nothing more than the site where connection

takes place ... there is a connection of 'a' then 'b', allowed by the flow of time; this is then repeated, precisely because it is the nature of life to produce over and over again. At some point the mind not only registers 'a' then 'b', it anticipates or expects 'b' ... these expectations and anticipations *produce* a cause; such as the idea of a law of nature that causes the sun to rise ... By expecting an event the mind has gone beyond experience (or the given) towards the future, and has done so by relating the present to the past. The crucial point is this: that this imagination which produces ideas begins *from within life*, as part of life's creative flow. Ideas are products of imagination. But the ideas that go beyond experience nevertheless extend experience; they do not organise or construct experience from some separate subjective (or ideal) point of view. (2001, p. 80)

There are a few important points I want to highlight based on the above paragraph. Our mind is full of images of what happens to the body in experience. These images are what Spinoza calls the imagination. The images are impressions on the body and are also referred to as ideas. Earlier I explained how these impressions on the body, registered in the mind as images, are inadequate as a source of knowledge. These ideas or impressions never express the essence or the 'truth' about a reality. What does happen is that these impressions are associated with one another according to principles of association to form common notions. So through experience our bodies acquire two kinds of impressions: impressions of terms and impressions of relations (Deleuze 2001, pp. 37-38).

The point Colebrook makes above is that both ideas about terms and ideas about relations that form associations among the terms emerge out of experience. So it is not the rational subject who intelligently connects the impressions to form a relational idea. The association of ideas become available to us for apprehension. The ideas of relations and terms that

constitute the mind come from experience and work to orient our thoughts and extend experience but they do not organise experience to produce knowledge.

According to Deleuze (2001), ideas or impressions thus do not represent a quality or essence of a thing. The ideas or impressions in the mind are not representational of the world. Instead, they offer a basic schema for constructing ideas about the world, including ideas about the self. So what we come to know as the 'self' is basically a collection of impressions organised in relations pragmatically (driven by principles of passion or desire) through principles of association. The ontology of the subject is similar to the ontology of the body conceptualised as an assemblage, discussed in chapter six. The subject or the body is thus constructed through impressions produced through intra-actions or experiences and is tenuous and constantly in change. There is no fixed 'knowledge' about the subject, the body or even about the world for that matter. There is only the process of knowing unfolding through experience.

In chapter five of this thesis (section 5.2.3 page 126) I discussed how the gendered subject 'girl' is produced in everyday life through material-discursive intra-action. I also argued for a fluid, nomadic and relational notion of subjectivity. I will now build on the previous discussion of subjectivity and the body to explore how knowing the 'self' as 'girl' emerges in experience through Anju's story.

7.4.1 Emergence of the gendered self

In discussing the consequences of Bergsonian thought, Brian Massumi posits the following:

The problem is no longer to explain how there can be change given positioning. The problem is to explain the wonder that there can be stasis given the primacy of process. (2002, p. 7)

If our bodies and subjectivities are fluid and in movement, how do we come to sense a coherent self? How do we come to know positionality (*I am a girl*)? In this section, I explore how one's knowing as a gendered self emerges in experience.

Anju, who is in her late 20s, was born and raised in Kathmandu. She talks about her childhood experiences and how she came to understand the implications of her gender for what she could be and do. She was the middle child of three daughters. Her family of five lived in an extended family with her uncle who had two boys. She spent time playing with her cousins. She shares a specific experience as a child that gave her a sense of being a 'girl' and therefore different from her male cousins:

When I was young I used to play with my cousins. We were very naughty. We used to climb trees, jump over the wall to go to the neighbours and play. Then I think perhaps a year before I got my periods, I started receiving comments from my family members, 'You are a girl, you should stop playing like that with your brothers.' I didn't understand why they said that to me. It took me a while to understand why they were saying those things, but it made me angry and I asked 'Why?' I was smarter than them in class and always got better grades, so I never felt I was any less capable than them. Being good at my studies, I felt I was entitled to do as I please and play as I liked. And then there were also another set of comments from people that would say I should have been born as son, that I behaved like a boy. That confused me as well. Why would they want me to be a boy? I thought being a daughter was just as good. What difference would it make if I were a son?

In Anju's narrative above, we can see how everyday material practices such as climbing trees are figured into the constitution of the female body. The gender discourses of 'being a girl' work to constitute particular relations between the young female body and the act of climbing trees. Anju does not see any logical connection between being a girl and her ability to climb trees. Anju claims that she *knew* she could physically climb a tree but was repeatedly told she could not *as a girl*. She says that after she started menstruating, she stopped climbing trees. I asked her why to which she answered, 'I am not so sure'. She explains she was confused about the comments she received because she was also told that she was behaving like a boy and should have been born as a boy. This indicates the fragility of the notion of 'girl' and what counts as being 'girl': is it about the biological body or behaviour? For some it was problematic that Anju as a 'girl' would do things that only boys could/should do. For others, those of Anju's activities that were discursively understood as 'boy-like' seemed to matter more, hence the questioning of her gender through phrases like 'she should have been born as a son'. For Anju, the start of her menstrual periods was perhaps a step towards social confirmation that she was indeed a 'girl' in the social sense, meaning now she *really* had to perform '*like a girl*'; hence she stopped climbing trees.

In the specific socio-cultural context within which Anju is situated, menstruation has deep and significant social and religious significance. There are belief systems and ritual practices to regulate the menstruating body. My understanding of Anju's experience is not to interpret this as discourse ruling over the female body, nor as the discursive construction of the body. It is hard to deny the biological facticity of the menstruating body. From the narrative, Anju seems to have come to accept the socially constructed notion of being girl after menstruation. As I have argued throughout this thesis, it is

neither the discourse nor the material *alone* that determines the reality of 'girl' and Anju's subjectivity of being a girl. Discourse and materiality *both* are part of the field of emergence in which bodies come to matter but without determinate forms or boundaries. Hence, Massumi (2002, p. 9) claims that the field of emergence is not pre-social but open-endedly social. The determination of girl and boy, for the individual and the collective, emerge as a result of intra-action in the field of emergence.

As discussed earlier, the different material and discursive elements in the field of emergence emit signs for the body to respond to; these elements impinge on the body to produce impressions or ideas in the body. Through associations these impressions produce ideas that then produce ideas of reality, including the idea of the facticity of the female body. Through her experience in childhood, Anju received several such signs or impressions. These impressions were not received by a fixed subject 'Anju as girl'. As time passed all the different impressions became organised through principles of association and principles of passion to produce the effect of the sense of the subject 'girl'.

Anju's subjective knowing of being a 'girl' is therefore a production of experience or intra-action. The stable or enduring sense of being a 'girl' is an effect produced due to the creative flow of material discursive intra-actions over and over again throughout life. Hence, the enduring knowledge of being a girl is an idea produced by the mind through experience and not an absolute reality that exists 'out there' independent of the knower. When Anju's body starts menstruating, this process also produces several impressions in the mind. These impressions become associated to form further ideas of cause and effect. Hence the idea of menstruation also becomes associated with the female body, further affirming the sense of 'being girl'.

The sexually specific body (e.g. the female body) is no more reliable or foundational as a source of knowing than the gendered body. The gendered idea of 'girl' as well as the idea of the female body are both ideas produced through impressions in the imagination. The quest to establish the body (or materiality) as a foundation for knowing or as a brute given of nature rests on the assumption of the distinction between epistemology and ontology, a distinction that assumes the existence of a distinct material body that can be accessed and known by a separate pre-existing knower. Instead, based on the discussion above I conclude that the facticity of the material female body and the discursive idea of 'girl' are both productions of experience. Neither the material body nor discourse alone determines gendered subjectivity. The emergence of the gendered subjectivity of being 'girl' is a production of experience and not a prior 'given' in nature that shapes experience.

7.5 Knowing as a desiring process of mattering in the world

I have discussed how principles of association establish natural relations among ideas in the mind to form new ideas that lead to the formation of the subject. The impingements on the body register as impressions in the mind. The formation of relations among these impressions in the mind lead to the emergence of the subject and reality as we come to perceive it in our minds: the subject and objects, the boundaries of the body and outside, notions of what is human and non-human, material and discursive and so on. But the impressions do not get associated randomly. The question I raise here is: What creates the tendency for particular impressions to become associated? In other words, how do 'things' come to matter in the way they do?

Emphasizing Hume's point on what he calls the *exteriority of relations*, Deleuze explains this concept as follows:

if ideas contain nothing other and nothing more than what is contained in sensory impressions, it is precisely because relations are external and heterogeneous to their terms—impressions or ideas. Thus the difference isn't between ideas *and* impressions but between two sorts of impressions or ideas: impressions or ideas of terms *and* impressions or ideas of relations. (2001, pp. 37-38)

What Deleuze is claiming here is that there is nothing more in the impressions in the mind other than the idea of the impression itself. Hence, it is not the impression that determines the kind of relation it might have with another impression to form an idea of ideas. The relation formed between two ideas or impressions is independent of either of the ideas and is not derived from the ideas themselves. This is what is understood when he says 'relations are external and heterogeneous to their terms'. The idea of the terms (the ideas or impressions that become associated) *and* the idea of the relation between those terms are both produced in experience. So neither the ideas nor the relations are the creation of the mind. Instead through principles of association, ideas and relations constitute the mind.

The above point was made earlier in this chapter, when I argued that there is no subject that makes these connections and forms relations between ideas. The subject itself and hence our sense of 'self' is the production of the association of impressions. The connection happens in the mind and through these connections, the mind is constituted, including the formation of subject in the mind. Over a period of time, the mind receives a large number of impressions. This raises the question: What creates the tendency in the mind for impressions to connect, if the impressions themselves have nothing to do with the relations formed among them? Here I am questioning the purposiveness of the constitution of mind.

Barad (2007) claims that knowing is a process of mattering. This mattering is not designed either by the constituted subject or by the intentionality of the mind. She argues that:

knowledge making is not a mediated activity ... Knowing is a specific engagement of the world where part of the world becomes differentially intelligible to another part of the world in its differential accountability to and for that of which it is a part. (2007, p. 379)

For Barad, then, knowing is part of the ontological performance of the world and not solely a human practice. Hence, the process of becoming and knowing are concomitant and it are purpose driven. The process of the world including the human subject becoming intelligible is a process of mattering. This means that human subjects emerge in the ways they do *for a purpose*. The process of knowing in experience is a pragmatic act. What does this mean? How is this related to knowing in everyday experience? Here I explore Kabita's narrative and suggest that when she questions why she came to know differently from others around her we see Kabita's knowing in everyday experience.

Very much like Radha, Kabita also attributes her personal transformation to her participation in a local group organised and facilitated by a local non-governmental organisation. She avoided the group initially but eventually one day on her way to gather fodder, one of the staff members of the NGO met her and invited her to attend the group meeting that very day. Kabita describes her experience of being in that meeting:

I was very shy of strangers and these were men and it was hard for me to speak in front of men. But I found their talk interesting and new. They talked about the importance of organising and solving our problems through organising. I didn't even understand what they meant by organising or solving our problems ... I had problems but I didn't see them

as problems then. My husband wasn't doing any work and he used to waste a lot of money on alcohol and gambling. We used to get food to eat from the farming that I did but there was no other income, no cash to buy other needs. It was very difficult for me but I felt that was just how things were. I thought it was normal.

As Kabita talks about her experience of change as a result of her participation in the group, she wonders why many of the other women who also participated in the same discussions with her were not able to change much and transform their living conditions. When I asked her what might be different about her experience, she says:

Perhaps they are afraid. Like for me, I got fed up with the problem of my husband playing cards with other men all the time. So I would go where he was playing with his friends and tear up the cards. I wasn't afraid of him, I didn't care even if he beat me later at home or tried to kill me. I had courage.

Kabita brings up the idea of 'courage' several times during our conversation. She attributes to courage most of what she has done to bring about the change in her life. She thinks that some of the other women in her group gained the same knowledge that she did by participating in the group. The knowledge gained for her was the shift in her perspective about herself and about the world around her. She started seeing her husband's drinking and gambling habit as problematic and she became 'fed up with the problem'. Prior to her participation in the group, she did not even see herself as someone who would have anything to do with such groups. Now she sees herself differently. But she thinks there is a difference between knowing something and acting or doing something with what you know. In order to do or act, she thinks one needs something more than just the acquisition of explicit knowledge. She identifies this something as courage and speculates

that it is the absence of courage or presence of fear that may have made the other women in the group unable to act, given that they were also facing similar problems as her and also learnt the same thing in the community group.

How do we understand knowing in this context? As Kabita asks, why is it that some of the women did not change in the way she has although they faced the same problems she had, attended the same program and gained the same 'knowledge'? Kabita's questions and understanding of her personal change come from a 'representational' understanding of change and learning. In other words, what Deleuze (1994, p. 25) terms a relation between representation and action, or the 'reproduction of the same'.

What is presented as 'knowledge' in the meeting is a representation of a particular thought system and is linked to specific ideas of action (how to be and do). In most cases, in such community education programs the efficacy of the program is assessed based on the evidence of 'reproduction of the same'; i.e. the evidence that the learning has led to the desired behavioural change. An example of this logic at work is the example presented in the introduction to this study of the woman who did not learn despite having participated in a workshop. It is this kind of representational logic that categorises some people as 'learners' and others as 'non-learners'. The participants who do not change according to the 'desired behavioural outcomes' underlying the program are deemed non-learners. Within the ideology of change underlying the organisation of the community group, Kabita is thus deemed to be a 'success story' and an example of 'empowerment'. Here, I do not discount the influence of the workshop on Kabita's personal change and learning. However, my attempt here is to understand her learning and knowing from a different perspective than the one based on representational logic.

How can we understand the knowing that emerged in Kabita's experience of participating in the meetings? Kabita's subjectivity is emergent and relational, constituted by the various material discursive elements present in the immediate milieu of the meeting within which she is situated. The field of emergence in this particular context is new for her in the sense that she is encountering material and discursive elements that she has never come across before. The facilitators of the program may have conducted the discussions with particular aims of influencing change in the participants of the meeting. But the constitution of Kabita's mind and emergent subjectivity is not entirely determined by the 'knowledge' presented in the meeting.

As discussed earlier, the various elements in the field of emergence only register in her mind as impressions, and this is the case with the 'knowledge' shared in the meeting too. Like many objects in the world, the knowledge shared and activities undertaken in the meeting also emit signs or produce impressions for Kabita and the other participants to respond to. Given the distinctive bodily assemblage and traces from experiences in the past of each of the participants, how they respond to the impressions from the meeting is also unique. The impressions produced by the discursive knowledge work to constitute each of their subjectivities in that moment through associations that establish relations between those impressions.

Why do these impressions become associated in particular ways for Kabita? As I asked earlier on, what creates the tendency for ideas to connect, if the ideas themselves have nothing to do with the relations between them? For example, how does knowing emerge for Kabita that makes her see the 'problem' of her husband?

Deleuze (2001, pp. 123–125) explains that while the principles of association connect ideas in the mind, the principles of passion determine

which ideas get connected. Drawing on the work of David Hume, Deleuze argues that through experience, the mind also has impressions of pleasure and pain. The principles of passion work in such a way that the mind makes pleasure the end, and hence the prospect of pleasure becomes the motive for action. This creates the tendency or the direction for particular kinds of impressions to become associated and to constitute the mind and subjectivity in particular ways. So Kabita comes to know what she knows through her experience because in that moment knowing emerges, organised by principles of passion and principles of association. In that sense, knowing is a pragmatic act. Knowing happens as a means of serving particular ends that are derived not from the intelligence or intentionality of the subject but from life itself.

I am using the words 'pleasure' and 'pain' not in their hedonistic interpretation. The notions of pleasure and pain used by Hume are parallel to Spinoza's account of joy and sadness. Sadness and joy are different affects produced on our bodies through experience. Joy is understood as the affect that enhances our power in terms of the body's ability to connect further, while sadness is that affect that diminishes the body's ability to act and form relations (Deleuze & Parnet 2002, p. 60). I understand pain and pleasure in terms of Spinoza's sadness and joy respectively.

What Hume calls 'passion', Spinoza calls 'conatus'⁴⁰. As discussed in an earlier chapter, Deleuze's notion of desire is what Spinoza calls conatus, 'the effort by which each thing strives to persevere in its being' (Jackson & Mazzei 2011, p. 86). Desire is not an inherent quality of the body but it is produced

⁴⁰ I am indebted to Professor Ian Buchanan (University of Wollongong) for helping me make this conceptual connection between notions of passion, conatus and desire.

through the ways in which one's bodily assemblage becomes assembled in experience. Desire is a product of experience. According to Deleuze, it is this desire that makes us act and respond the way we do as we encounter the world. Desire is what makes us know, act and become in experience. The desire that creates the tendency of the body to act in certain ways also creates the tendency of the imagination to connect ideas and lead to emergence of knowing. Knowing is a desiring process and hence a pragmatic act. Deleuze calls the principles of relations (of passions and association) 'human nature' (1991, p. 129). This nature is not the essence of the human but of the life world that constitutes the human.

What does this imply for how we may understand Kabita's changed sense of self? What is interesting in Kabita's narrative are the shifts in her sense of 'capability' and what it means to be capable. From where I sit as a researcher, even when Kabita talks about being incapable or not seeing herself as capable, I (the researcher in me) see her as relatively capable for she was singlehandedly in charge of taking care of her family. Her ability to survive and manage her life despite the hardships she faced is an indicator to me of her capacity. Her subjective sense of her capability is reflected when she says, 'I am more educated now. I was nobody before. Now people know me as someone who can give good advice. I have a certain identity as a capable person, and people recognize me.'

Kabita's sense of 'capability' is emergent from her experience. It is more than a discursive construction of 'knowledge' in her mind determined by the discourses of women's empowerment. Using diffractive analysis, we can say that this knowing is emergent from the material and discursive elements in the intra-actions in her life. Through her initial engagement in the workshops, Kabita was moved to act and perform in particular ways, such as confronting her husband about his alcoholism and gambling. Her involvement in the

workshop impacted on her to constitute her bodily assemblage in particular ways that produced desire. This desire became converted into interests that further enabled her to connect to other assemblages, such as her starting a campaign to combat alcoholism and being engaged in community activism.

This is not to imply that desire was only produced in that moment. The production of desire is an ongoing process in the continuous flow of life. But how this production works and how desire flows is contingent on how the body is arranged and emergent amidst the various material and discursive elements. As desire is a product of experience, the manner in which it works depends on the field of emergence through which it comes into existence. This desire works to make particular things more vivid and relevant than others. Through the working of this desire, Kabita's subjectivity, body and knowing emerge in particular ways in particular moments. In this process, material things and discourses come to matter through their particular manifestations. In Kabita's case, the problem of alcoholism and gambling became more vivid and relevant. This knowing led her to respond in certain ways that led to new ways of being and doing. Through these ongoing intra-actions, new subjectivities and new bodies emerged. Along with this, knowing also emerges that enabled Kabita to go in certain directions.

Kabita's knowing is a desiring knowing, where the pragmatism lies in responding to non-representational signs that are emitted in the intra-actions. In this sense, knowing is not understood in the instrumental sense of solving problems. Kabita's knowing cannot be understood only in terms of being driven by the instrumental need to solve the problem of her husband's drinking and gambling. Kabita's act to solve 'the problem' is understood as a pragmatic act driven by desire, rather than an act motivated to fix a 'problem'. Kabita has also come to see herself as 'knowledgeable' and 'capable'. These are productions of her experience that become reified as

absolute 'truths'. The same applies to the 'knowledge' that one is a 'woman'. These forms of 'knowledge' work not in instrumental ways but instead serve as material discursive elements in the ongoing intra-action of life to produce newer 'realities' that in the process shape one's becoming.

7.6 Conclusion: knowing in learning

How does knowing emerge in experience? How do we come to know the 'self'? What shapes the way in which how we come to 'know' the world and self? In other words, in what ways do particular ways of being and doing come to matter? In this chapter, I have explored these issues departing from the premise that experience or 'intra-action' is the foundation upon which our learning depends.

In this chapter, I built on the earlier conceptualisations of the subject and the body to think about knowing. I framed this research within a particular understanding of experience, drawing on Karen Barad's onto-epistemology and Deleuze's transcendental empiricism. The philosophical positioning I have taken throughout this thesis posits that the world does not exist prior to experience as something to be accessed by a distinct knowing subject. The subject who comes to know the world and their body—including the 'reality' of the world—emerges out of experience. This perspective therefore argues that knowing occurs as we are becoming.

To describe the ontology of knowing, I used Spinoza's account of the imagination. This notion of the imagination rests on the assumption of the non-dualism of the mind and body, whereby the mind is the expression of what happens to the body in experience. Imagination is the collection of all the impressions that happen to the body in experience. It is through the imagination that the mind becomes constituted. Through experience, the mind gets filled with two kinds of impressions: impressions of what happens

to the body and impressions of natural relations. What we come to know through experience is not absolute knowledge of the objects in the world but knowledge of what happens to our bodies encountering those objects in the world. Our access to knowing the world is through what happens to us or what kinds of relations are formed among the different material and discursive elements in this intra-action.

The collection of impressions in experience is what forms the imagination and constitutes the mind. When these impressions are inter-connected and organised according to the principles of association and passions, this organisation leads to the emergence of the notions of self and the body. This reaffirms the relational ontology of subjectivity and the body as discussed in the previous chapters of this thesis. We only come to know our self and our body through the relations formed in the immediate context.

Knowing is therefore a pragmatic act that determines how things come to matter in this world. In that sense, knowing is purposive. This purposiveness of how ideas or impressions become associated to give form to reality in particular ways is governed by principles of passions. The principles of passions, also called 'desire' by Deleuze, are not inherent qualities of bodies or humans. As with impressions, these principles are produced through experience. Desire is what gives direction or creates the tendency for ideas to connect in certain ways to produce certain knowing. Desire is what makes things known and what makes them matter. Knowing is not a passive process. Knowing is also not driven by an instrumental need to solve a rational problem. Knowing is purposive in that it emerges to solve a problematic stance created by desire. Hence, knowing is shaped by the force of desire of the bodily assemblage that aims to persist in its being.

Using Spinoza's notion of imagination to think about knowing has implications for how we think about knowing and knowledge. As I have maintained the assumption that there is no fixed objective reality outside experience, then neither is there any fixed knowledge of this world. Knowledge is not something that can be captured by the mind. Knowledge cannot be understood as a reified entity. What we usually refer to as 'knowledge' serves as a source of signs to be responded to. How these signs or impressions are apprehended and responded to depends solely on their 'immanent problematic instances' (Semetsky 2007, p. 201). Knowing unfolds in how one responds to the signs.

The response to a sign is not one designed by the mind or the subject undergoing the experience. This response is a pragmatic response that is constituted in the mind through principles of association and passion. The signs or impressions of the imagination become connected in particular ways that give us a sense of coherence and constancy in the world around us. As I have discussed in this chapter, it is through this association of impressions in the mind that we come to have notions of the self and subjective ideas about being a girl and having a feminine body. The separation between nature (the idea of the biologically fixed body) and culture (the social idea of what it means to be a girl) does not pre-exist, with one determining the other. Both are produced through the field of emergence in experience and both emerge as distinct entities in the way ideas become associated in the mind. What this implies is that there is no brute reality or 'given' in the world that forms the empirical foundation of knowledge.

In Deleuze's account of transcendental empiricism, there is no distinction between knowing and learning. Both are understood as a response to signs emitted in experience. From Barad's perspective, as knowing is a process of mattering in the world, knowing is also a process of becoming. By this

account, learning as becoming can be understood as the ongoing process of change in oneself—change in who we are and how we relate to the world in our ongoing intra-actions in the world. ■

Chapter 8

Conclusions: learning as becoming

8.1 Introduction

This chapter synthesises the key issues discussed in this thesis and discusses the theoretical implications, significance and limitations of this research, identifying further issues to be explored. This research aimed to explicate the phenomenon of learning as a process of becoming in life. Recent theorisations of learning that assume a relational ontology do so by subsuming the individual within the social context in which the person is situated. Hager and Hodkinson (2009) propose the metaphor of ‘learning as becoming’ as a conceptual framework for understanding learning as a social and embodied phenomenon that also acknowledges individual change as well as change in the social context. However, it is still unclear how change takes place. The ontology linked with this ‘learning as becoming’ and the theory of change is not clear.

In this research, I aimed to further elucidate this concept of ‘learning as becoming’ from a particular philosophical perspective. Rather than trying to explain what ‘learning as becoming’ might mean, I approached this concept with the Deleuzian question, ‘How does learning in becoming work?’ That is, if we were to take learning as a process of becoming in everyday life, how does this learning as becoming work? Instead of a metaphor to represent the phenomenon of learning, I have used *becoming* as a concept to think about learning differently.

The research questions as well as this inquiry have been framed from within in Barad's onto-epistemological perspective of the world. In this perspective, materiality and discourse— objects and subjects—are not seen as distinct separate entities but as emergent through the phenomenon of intra-action. The world is understood in terms of *relational ontology* where relations are primary and the objects in relations are secondary and emergent in intra-action. The grounding of the research within this particular perspective challenges some of the prevalent dualisms and foundational concepts in theorising learning. The concept of learning as a social, embodied and relational process has been well established across various theorisations of learning, specifically by those informed by socio-cultural, socio-material and complexity theory. However, within a relational ontology of learning, questions remain. How do we think about the individual 'learner'? And how does the individual come to know? Relational ontology of learning opens up questions about what⁴¹ the learner or the subject of learning is, how this subject participates in learning and how the subject comes to know. I have suggested in this thesis that theorising learning within the onto-epistemological perspective demands a reconceptualisation of the subject, the body and knowing in the process of learning. I used these three core concepts in theorising how learning as becoming works, responding to three specific questions:

1. How does the subject work in becoming?
2. How does the body work in becoming?
3. How does knowing work in becoming?

⁴¹ I say 'what' and not 'who' here because this research is concerned with the ontology of the subject and not the 'identity'.

In exploring how learning works, I situated the phenomenon of learning within the context of life and viewed experience as the foundation for learning to occur. Experience is not understood as an encounter as sensed by a humanist subject who makes it meaningful by further processing of what is experienced. Learning happens *in* experience and not *from* experience. Experience is understood as the intra-action between different material and discursive elements in the immediate world through which 'reality' is emergent. It is in the emergence of this 'reality' that matter and meaning, subjects and objects, human and non-human all unfold and become distinctively known. The world with all its elements does not exist separately for us as humans to interact with, experience and then acquire knowledge of. The world as we come to know it is thus a production of our experience of the ongoing intra-action of material and discursive elements in the world.

Given the philosophical premise of this research, in chapter three I explained that using conventional qualitative methods was problematic and methodologically challenging. To mitigate the limitations of some of the conventional tools of qualitative inquiry, I undertook a post-qualitative approach to inquiry. I located the phenomenon of learning in the experiences of personal change constructed through in-depth conversations with eight female participants in Nepal. Taking a post-qualitative approach meant that the subjective narratives of change could not be interpreted using representational themes. The idea was not to collect 'authentic' personal accounts of change that would shed light on learning through experience in the process of change. Instead, excerpts from the narratives were analysed *diffractively* to explore the ways in which subjective experience was formed in the intra-action between the material and discursive elements (Jackson and Mazzei 2011). The focus was not on what the participants' experiences were, using subjective experience as a foundation for establishing claims about the

phenomenon of learning. Rather, the focus was on how the participants' experiences were produced.

Applying diffractive analysis in the three analytical chapters (chapters five, six and seven) I examined how the subject, the body and knowing worked in the participants' becoming. In doing so, I employed concepts from the philosophical works of Deleuze and Guattari. In chapter five, I argued for thinking about the subject as a nomadic multiplicity, implying that the subject is a relational unstable entity rather than a unified whole grounded in a fixed position. In chapter six, I argued for a relational ontology of the body conceptualised as a desiring assemblage that is capable of transformation by affecting and being affected. In chapter seven, I used the Spinozist notion of imagination and Deleuze's concept of desire in arguing for an emergent understanding of knowing that is contemporaneous with becoming. In the following sections I present an integrated discussion of the main claims and inferences drawn from these three analysis chapters. Based on this discussion, I then present the broader theoretical implications of conceptualising learning as becoming in the form of four propositions. These are followed by a presentation of the significance of this study. I conclude the chapter and the thesis with a discussion of the limitations and issues for further exploration stemming from this research.

8.2 Subject, body and knowing in becoming

This research was guided by the overall question. 'How does learning as becoming work?' I approached this question with a particular onto-epistemological understanding of the world that disrupted the understanding of the existence of distinct subjects and objects as unified entities with essential properties. This study also aimed to focus on the individual in the phenomenon of learning. This demanded a

reconceptualisation of the subject of learning, the body and the unfolding process of knowing in learning. What follows is an integrated discussion of the key claims established in the chapters that discussed how the subject, body and knowing work in learning.

In the discussions, I extended the perspective of relational ontology to theorise the subject as well as the body. Both the subject and the body are relational and emergent, being constituted through the material and discursive elements in intra-action. What this means is that the subject and the body are not unified fixed wholes but come to exist due to the grouping of relations among various elements that compose them. As there are constant shifts in the immediate milieu within which intra-actions take place, the group of relations that constitute these entities are also constantly shifting, giving them the qualities of being unstable, non-unitary and fluid. We are who we are because of how we are related to our environment and there is no fixed essence of the subject or the body that determines our existence and becoming.

With this understanding of the subject, it does not make sense to claim that *the subject learns*. Learning can no longer be understood as an activity performed by a willing intentional subject with a natural sexually specific body. If we hold that the subject and the body do not exist prior to intra-action but emerge in the process, then everything else that we come to know about the subject and the body are also not fixed but emergent through the same process. This includes subjectivities, identities and positionalities. Hence, in the understanding of learning as becoming, the subject and the body are products of the process of learning and not intentional actors in that process. We *become* through this emergence of our subjectivities and bodies in the process of intra-acting in life. This ongoing process of becoming is *learning in experience*.

The relational concept of a body that is constantly in flux due to affections from surrounding material and discursive elements offers a more active role for the body in learning, instead of seeing the body as a passive sensing organ that simply responds to sensation. This capacity of the body to affect others and be affected is not an inherent fixed quality of the body *per se*. It is a characteristic that comes to exist due to the way in which the body is constituted by the groups of relations between the various material and discursive elements in the immediate milieu in which the body is situated. The capacity for change lies in the body's capacity to form new relations; that is, its capacity to affect and be affected and thus enhance the complexity of its own constitution. This concept of the body does not place the body in ontological primacy over the mind. Rather, in Spinozist thought, the notion of affect conceptualises the body and mind as different expressions of the same. What happens to the body also happens to the mind. Hence, this concept of the body overcomes the mind–body dualism.

What happens to us in experience—experience's affect on us—is dependent on the body's specific constitution at that point in time. Hence, although two or more individuals may be situated in the same milieu, undergoing the 'same' experience, the affects on each individual will be qualitatively different. However, through language and meaning-making, the two individuals may come to describe their subjective experiences as being somewhat similar. We come to qualify experiences in terms of emotions and thoughts, and in this way we construct our subjective experience. Although we deem these emotions and thoughts to be 'personal', they emerge out of a social field where social meaning is attached to affects or what happens to us. Our 'personal' thoughts and emotions are products of our becoming within a specific socio-cultural milieu. Thus, affect is seen as primary in relation to emotions and thought in experience. Emotions and thoughts do not

determine experience but emerge through experience. Emotions and thoughts, then, are outcomes of becoming in life and do not precede or determine our becoming.

The above understanding of the subject and the body have implications for how we may understand and conceptualise knowing in the process of becoming. Within the onto-epistemological perspective, there is no separation between the processes of knowing and becoming. We do not exist separately from the world and come to know it. Knowing is not an act of apprehending a pre-existing objective 'reality' of the world. We come to 'know' the world by what happens to us and the changes caused in our bodily composition as a result of being in the world or intra-acting in the world. Essentially, then, we are *becoming* in the very process of *knowing* the world, as our bodily composition is shifting in the process. This is why knowing and learning is an *embodied* process. But it is not just we as humans, or our sense of self as a particular gendered being or as a particular identity, that is becoming. Everything else in the world that we come to know is also becoming and manifesting itself in specific ways in the process. In the ongoing process of intra-action, —long with the world around us— are constantly changing and hence constantly being manifested anew.

This fluid understanding of knowing that is emergent and contemporaneous with becoming challenges how we think about 'knowledge' in becoming. This fluid understanding of the subject, the body and the world implies that knowledge claims cannot be attributed to essentialised positions of being. There is no fixed position as a subject, nor a particular body (male/female, human/nonhuman etc.), from which one can grasp or have access to 'reality'. There is no brute reality or 'given' that is then experienced to form the empirical foundation of knowledge. What becomes known in our encounters with the world is not enduring 'truth'

about the world, but only the emergent effects of the particular relational arrangement of various material and discursive elements at a point in time. Since these relational arrangements or assemblages are always in flux and changing in time, the 'reality' produced as effects of such arrangement is also transient. In this sense, knowing is also relational, emergent and transient.

This point implies that in becoming, knowledge cannot be taken as a reified object that can be captured, stored, accessed, transferred or even shared. The 'knowledge' is emergent in experience and that we accumulate through life or intra-actions is not 'fixed knowledge', categorised as either subjective or objective. Building on the Spinozist notion of the body and mind, what we come to perceive as 'knowledge' can be thought of as traces that enhance the complexity of our bodily composition. What we come to 'know' at any point in time works as a trace that may connect with other impressions received in ongoing intra-actions to form new relations, thus further increasing our capacity to affect and be affected. Using Deleuze's word, we could say that by undergoing diverse experiences and through the accumulation of these bodily traces, our ability to respond to signs emitted within our life-world becomes enhanced and more sophisticated.

The final point I want to make is the pragmatism in the process of becoming. If knowing occurs in becoming, what guides this knowing? Drawing on Deleuze, I argued that desire works to shape our knowing and becoming. Desire works to give an 'end' or a purpose that provides the direction in which knowing and becoming unfold. This end or the purpose is not a definite or a distinctive purpose that shapes becoming in a teleological manner. Desire provides the purposive force by working as a bodily effort that strives to persevere in its being. This *being* is not a distinctive being but the state by which life preserves its existence. This state of being is in flux, always changing. Desire can be understood as the force that works to

maintain the life world. This force of desire is not the essence of the body as such but it is the essence of life itself that is produced in the constitution of the body in experience. What this means is that our knowing is emergent according to how we are being constituted in any given moment within the immediate life world in which we are situated. Knowing and becoming are manifestations of the same phenomenon in time.

I now turn to discuss the theoretical implications of these conceptualisations of the subject, the body and knowing for how we can think about learning as becoming.

8.3 Theoretical implications in conceptualising learning as becoming

This research has been driven by the overall question, 'How does learning as becoming work?' With the understanding of the subject, the body and knowing discussed earlier in this chapter, what answers are provided to this question? I discuss these 'answers' in the form of propositional provocations to shift our understanding of how learning in experience works.

8.3.1 Learning as becoming as the enhanced complexity of bodily composition in experience

Based on Dewey's work, Biesta and Burbules (2003, p. 37) assert that learning is not the acquisition of information about the world but 'the acquisition of a complex set of predispositions to act'. In a similar vein, I conclude that learning as becoming is not about acquiring more 'knowledge' about the world in becoming or becoming in particular ways as designed by a thought system. Learning as becoming is characterised by an expansion in the complexity of our bodily composition and is manifested through our ongoing ability to form further relations in daily intra-actions in life. This 'ability to form relations' can be understood as 'predispositions to act' or respond to the immediate environment. For instance, this kind of learning is

most evident in newly born infants when they surprise us almost every day with enhanced abilities to respond to their surrounding environment.

This forming of relations or ability to act is not the ability of a knowing willing subject but rather an ability derived from the bodily composition in the given milieu in that particular moment. The bodily composition is an outcome of both past traces in the body *and* material and discursive elements in the immediate environment. What this implies is that our becoming is a product of both our past intra-actions and the present context within which one is situated. This indicates an active role for bodily composition in learning as becoming.

Within a complexity theory framework, Davis and Sumara argue that: learning is not a change in behaviour due to experience; it is change in structure that contributes to the ongoing coherence of the learner. Learning depends on experience, but it is determined by the learner's structure, not by the experience. (2007, p. 464)

The concept of learning as becoming developed in this thesis further builds on Davis and Sumara's claims, offering a particular ontology of the 'learner's structure' which is not limited to the natural biological body. Learning is determined by the dynamic structure of the body conceptualised as an assemblage that is constantly moving in response to its immediate environment.

8.3.2 Transformation occurs through shifts in our relational composition in our ongoing becoming

The concept of change is integral to the concept of learning as becoming. Given the philosophical premise of the fluidity of the nature of reality, if the state of things in the world (and that includes our own being) is always in constant flux, how do we conceptualise change? As evidence of learning, we

often identify change in the subject in terms of their physical or mental skills, knowledge and attitudes assessed through various instruments. With the idea of a fluid subject and body that have no stable form, how do we locate change? Kegan (2009) posed the following question in the context of transformative learning: 'What "form" transforms?' In response, Kegan claimed that the real transformation in learning is not just in what we know in terms of changes in perspectives and the content of knowing, but rather a transformation in how we know or the form of our knowing becoming more complex and expansive. This notion of transformation in learning locates change in the epistemology while assuming a static ontology of being.

Earlier studies applying the metaphor of becoming in conceptualising learning as an ongoing process in life (e.g. Biesta et al. 2011; Bloomer & Hodkinson 2000; Bowman, Colley & Hodkinson 2004) locate change in the positions and dispositions of the learner towards further learning in life. Although these theorists also claim the reconstruction of the learner in the process of learning, indicating a flexible notion of the subject, the form that transforms still seems to be the subject. The metaphor of becoming is used to highlight the instability of the subject 'learner' through constantly shifting positions and dispositions in life.

The perspective of onto-epistemology demands a different ontology of change in thinking about learning as becoming. There is no 'fixed' form to transform. What we perceive as forms— subjects, bodies, thoughts, emotions, knowledge etc—are merely *effects* of our ongoing becoming. They are projections created through experience. As stated above, learning as becoming is characterised by an expansion in the complexity of our bodily composition and is manifested through our ongoing ability to form further relations in daily intra-actions in life. This expansion of complexity of our bodily composition is not in terms of an enhanced complexity of a unified

whole entity or a particular form. Within the premise of a relational ontology, change cannot be conceptualised as movement from one stable unified state to another state of being. Here, change cannot be conceptualised with respect to a fixed ontological state. Instead, bodily complexity is enhanced in a relational sense, where there is a transformation in the group of relations that make up the bodily composition. Becoming is an ongoing transformative process in life.

8.3.4 Context shapes the constituting process of becoming through its own emergence

Socio-cultural theories of learning emphasise the role of socio-cultural context in shaping the learning process. Socio-material theories of learning highlight the role of the material within the social context in learning processes. It has been well established in the learning literature that learning is not simply an individual phenomenon where outcomes manifest inside the head of the learner. In recent years, learning has been understood as a culturally shaped and relational phenomenon (Hodkinson 2005). What is still an issue open for exploration is how context actually works in shaping the process of learning and in affecting individual change.

In this study, the immediate life-world of the individual has been taken as the context of learning as becoming. As individuals we are not separate from the context. We form part of the very context within which we are situated. Hence, the context in which one is situated does not work as a prior existing shaper of the process of learning. This is because all the material and discursive elements within the context are not fixed entities with inherent properties themselves but also emergent in the process of intra-action. The material and discursive elements in the context work by creating immanent problematic instances with respect to the body in the specific moment of time. We are constantly changing and becoming in responding to such

instance in relation to the field of emergence. The context itself is becoming in the instance of our becoming.

8.3.5 Learning in life is emergent

Given the discussion of how the subject, the body and knowing work and the fluidity of 'reality', it follows that learning as becoming is an ongoing lifelong phenomenon. In this concept of learning, becoming is used not just in a metaphorical sense but in a literal sense. We are becoming through our everyday engagement in the world. This becoming is not guided by a particular idea of what it is that we are to become. Learning as becoming is not a teleological process but is emergent in the engagements between our bodies and the immediate milieu in which we are situated. Our learning is a product of what we are in terms of our bodily arrangement in ongoing engagement with the surroundings at any given moment. Learning as becoming in life is relational and emergent in this sense.

8.4 Significance of the study

The study of learning is methodologically challenging given its complex and elusive nature. Nevertheless, theorising learning has always been of high significance in the field of educational philosophy and theory. Beyond the field of education, learning has been a marker of progress and growth. How we conceptualise it therefore important. This study locates learning in the context of life and hence expands on our understanding of learning beyond the formal structural settings in which it is often investigated.

Thus, the significance of this study lies in its theoretical contribution to the field of the study of learning. By using the conceptual tool of becoming, I offer an ontological approach for thinking about learning that overcomes the dualisms of body/mind, individual/social and matter/discourse, while preserving the fluidity and complexity of the phenomenon. The main

contributions of this reconceptualisation are to expand our understanding of learning not by offering assertions about what learning is but by offering a way to think about learning differently, as elaborated in the four propositions set out above.

Embedded within the conceptualisation of learning as becoming, I offer a particular perspective on change based on a relational ontology that transcends the individual/society dichotomy. This theoretical perspective on change may be of interest to educators, change agents or anyone who is interested in facilitating change.

8.5 Issues for further exploration

This study was conducted as part of a doctorate degree course and hence the methods adopted were limited to a specific timeframe and other resource constraints. The analyses were based on narratives of personal experiences of change constructed in conversations at a particular point in time in the participants' life journeys. If I were to go back after a few years and talk to the same eight participants, how would they narrate their experience of change? Would it be different or would they tell the same story? And if so, what would that imply? A key methodological limitation faced in this study has been to try to explore a phenomenon as fluid and intangible as learning based on narratives constructed in conversations at a particular moment in participants' lives.

This study takes experience as intra-action as the main foundation for learning. We learn because we are in this world and of this world, always in intra-action with other elements. This perspective on learning as becoming seems to imply that learning is synonymous with living. Learning as becoming takes place in our ongoing intra-action in the world. This begs the question, do all intra-actions afford learning as becoming? In other words, are

all experiences in life learning experiences? Or can there be intra-actions or experiences that are regressive and somehow 'arrest' one's becoming in life?

John Dewey (1938) argues for differentiating 'educative' experiences from the ongoing experiences in life in terms of the principles of continuity and interaction. Dewey claims that every experience in life works as a dynamic force affecting change. Every experience changes the conditions in which the subsequent experiences will take place. He adds that the educative value of experience can be judged only on the basis of the direction in which this change takes place. What this study has ignored is this qualitative evaluation of change or the degree of change affected in experience. When two individuals undergo similar experiences, what makes their becoming different? Why do some people appear to change more significantly than others, while some may appear to remain the same over a period of time? When people do not appear to change (as far as can be perceived) or when they feel they have not changed, how can we understand their learning in life?

This takes us back to the story of the woman who 'did not learn' — the incident that inspired this inquiry. At the beginning of this research journey the issue of someone being deemed as a 'non-learner' posed a particular research problem for me. I hung onto the question asked to me 'Why does she not learn?' throughout this journey. However, my orientation to this question and understanding of how it posed a 'problem' shifted throughout the process as my understanding of how 'learning' can be understood evolved. I can only speculate that perhaps the individual in question had her own understanding of personal change and learning and is becoming in life as a result of her life experiences. I assume that her becoming an 'advocate' having been a 'victim' is some indication of that becoming and that perhaps she does not see herself as a 'victim' anymore.

On a final note, an outcome of this study is that it has made me query the assumption that there exists a phenomenon called learning. Like both Lave (1993) and McDermott (1993), I also conclude that there is no such distinct phenomenon. 'Learning' is a sociolinguistic construction where different 'things' or processes are delineated as learning depending on the theoretical perspective used. In the case of my study, I have identified learning in personal change. What benefit might there be in developing this way of understanding learning as a life-long process? The notion of learning as becoming assumes every human being is a learner in her/his everyday existence in life. We are learning by virtue of the way we navigate our everyday lives. If this assumption were to be applied to formal settings of 'learning', such as a classroom for instance, what would the implications be for pedagogy and how would we evaluate learning? One final contribution of my thesis is to suggest that these are questions that future research might productively investigate. ■

Appendix A

Information sheet

1. Nepali version

महिलाको जीवन अनुभव र सिकाई
सहभागीका लागि जानकारी
(UTS HREC REF NO. 2012-190A)

म, अमिना सिंह, हाल अस्ट्रेलियाको यूनिवर्सिटी अफ टेक्नोलोजी सिड्नीमा (UTS) पढ्दै छु। यस पढाईको क्रममा म नेपालमा महिलाहरूको जीवन अनुभव र सिकाईको बारेमा अनुसन्धान गर्दैछु। मेरो यस अनुसन्धानका लागि सुपरिवेक्षक प्रा. डेभिड बाउड (Prof. David Boud) र सहसुपरिवेक्षक डा. डॉना रूनी (Dr. Donna Rooney) हुनुहुन्छ।

यो अनुसन्धान के को बारेमा हो ?

यो अनुसन्धानमा मैले हाम्रो समाजमा महिला हुनुको अनुभव कस्तो हुन्छ र त्यस अनुभवबाट के सिक्किदो रैछ त, त्यो बुझ्ने कोशिस गर्दैछु। धेरै जसो त हाम्रो समाजमा एउटी महिलाले के कसो गर्न हुन्छ र के के गर्नेपछि, त्यो केहि हद सम्म त हाम्रा सामाजिक मूल्यमान्यता र संस्कारले नै तोकिदिएका हुन्छन्। तर कहिले काही सामाजिक मूल्यमान्यता, संस्कार, रितिरिवाज अनुसार मात्र पनि चल्न सकिदैन। कुनै कुनै परिस्थितिमा त्यस्ता रितिरिवाजलाई त्यागेर वा थोरै भए पनि बदलेर काम व्यवहार गर्नु पर्ने हुन्छ। यो हामी जस्ता महिलाका लागि अहिलेको हाम्रो समाजको बदलिदो समयको माग पनि हो। त्यसैले मलाई खासगरी त्यस्ता महिला दिदीबहिनीहरूको जीवनको अनुभव सुन्ने इच्छा छ, जसले कुनै कारणले सामाजिक मूल्यमान्यताको घेरा नाघेर काम गरेकाछन् व्यवहार गरेकाछन्।

सहभागीहरूबाट के कस्तो सहयोग को अपेक्षा गरिन्छ ?

पहिलो कुरा त यस अनुसन्धानमा सहभागीहुने व्यक्ति आफ्नो इच्छाले, कसैको डर र कर नमानीकन सहभागी हुनुपर्छ। किनभने कुराकानी को क्रममा सहभागीहरूले आफ्नो व्यक्तिगत जीवनको बारेमा खुलस्त भएर बोल्नु पर्ने हुन्छ र यसरी बोल्न सुनाउन भित्री रुची हुनु पर्ने हुन्छ। हरेक सहभागीसंग अवश्यकता अनुसार २-३ पटक सम्म भेटेर कुराकानी गर्नु पर्ने हुन्छ र हरेक भेट १-२ घण्टा सम्मको हुन सक्छ। कुराकानीका लागि म आफै नै सहभागीका लागि सजिलो र धेरै हिंड्न नपर्ने ठाउँमा भेट्ने छु। यसरी कुराकानीबाट बढुलेका महिलाहरूका जीवनका अनुभवलाई केलाएर समग्रमा महिलाको जीवनको भोगाईबाटको सिकाईको बारेमा केहि नौलो कुरा पत्तो लाउन सकिन्छ कि भन्ने आशा लिएकी छु।

सहभागीहरूलाई पर्न सक्ने असुविधा या खतरा केही छन् ?

यो अनुसन्धानको विषयवस्तुको कारणले केही असुविधा हुनसक्छ। कुराकानीको बिषय अलि संवेदनशील भएकोले सुनाउने क्रममा मानसिक तनाव हुनसक्दछ। कसैकसैको परिवारलाई आफ्ना घरका महिलाले यसरी कुराकानी गरेको चित्त नबुझ्न या मन नपर्न सक्छ र यो कारणले सहभागीको लागि अनावश्यक घरमा तनाव वा झगडा हुन सक्छ। यस्ता कुरालाई सहभागीको छनौट गर्ने क्रममा नै छलफल गरिनेछ र आवश्यक सावधानी अपनाईनेछ।

सहभागीले छनौट हुँदा हुन्छ भन्न पर्छ र ?

मैले कुनै व्यक्तिलाई उपयुक्त मिल्ने सहभागी भनेर छान्दैमा वा कसैले फलानो संग कुरा गर्दा हुन्छ भन्दैमा, सो व्यक्तिले म संग कुरा गर्नका लागि "हुन्छ" भन्नु पर्छ भन्ने छैन, कुनै कारण नदिई "हुन्छ", "कुरा गर्दिन" भन्न

सकिन्छ । यस्तो अनुसन्धानमा आफ्ना कुरा गरेर सहभागी हुने या नहुने, स्वयं त्यो व्यक्तिले नै निर्णय लिने कुरा हो । सहभागी हुने भनेर कुरा गर्न थाले पछि चित्त नबुझेमा वा कुनै कुराले अप्ठेरो परेमा, कुनै कारण नदिई कुनै पनि बेलामा छोड्न सकिन्छ र यस्तो भएमा गरिएका सबै कुरा गोप्य नै राखिन्छ र अनुसन्धानको कुनै पनि चरणमा ती कुरा प्रयोग गरिने वा प्रकाशित गरिने छैन ।

सहभागीले यस अनुसन्धानमा कुनै पनि कुरा चित्त नबुझेमा वा थप कुरा केहि भएमा, के गर्नु पर्छ ?

यस अनुसन्धानसंग सम्बन्धित कुनै पनि गुनासो वा अप्ठेरो भएमा, वा अरु केहि जरुरी कुरा परेमा यदि मिल्छ भने मलाई नै सम्पर्क गर्न सकिन्छ । मेरो सम्पर्क ठेगाना:

अमिना सिंह

अनुसन्धानकर्ता

एकान्तकुना, ललितपुर

मोबाइल : ९८४९ १८७४३०

इमेल: singhamina@gmail.com

मलाई सम्पर्क गर्न नमिलेमा, निम्न व्यक्तिलाइ सम्पर्क गरि आफ्ना कुरा राख्न सक्नु हुन्छ:

ईरा श्रेष्ठ

निर्देशक

संस्थागत विकास केन्द्र (Organisation Development Centre Incorporated)

कुपोन्डोल, ललितपुर

फोन: (+९७७ – १) ५५५१९७९, ५५५१९८०

इमेल era@odcincorp.com

आवश्यक परेमा विश्वविद्यालयबाट प्राप्त यस अनुसन्धानको स्वीकृति नम्बर UTS HREC REF NO.

2012-190A दिई UTS का Research Ethics Officer लाइ सम्पर्क गर्न सकिन्छ:

Research Ethics Officer

University of Technology Sydney

Ultimo, NSW 2007, Australia

Phone: +61 2 9514 9772

2. English translation

Women's life experiences and learning

Information sheet for participant

(UTS HREC REF NO. 2012-190A)

My name is Amina Singh and I am a student at UTS in Sydney, Australia. In the context of my studies, I am doing a research project exploring the life experiences of women in Nepal. My primary supervisor is Prof. David Boud and co-supervisor is Dr. Donna Rooney.

WHAT IS THIS RESEARCH ABOUT?

I am interested in listening to women who have experienced personal transformation in life, particularly those who have been able to overcome social norms that limit what they can do or become in their everyday activities. By listening to stories of how women experience this kind of change, I want to find out about the learning process involved in the process of personal transformation. What do women know and how do they come to know in this kind of learning?

WHAT DO THE PARTICIPANTS HAVE TO DO?

First of all, I expect individuals to participate in this research with their own interest and not because of any kind of compulsion. This is because the participants are required to openly talk about their personal experiences out of their own willingness. With each selected participant, I plan to have a conversation exploring their experience of personal transformation and the learning in the process. The conversation may require 2 – 3 sessions, with each session lasting 1 -2 hours time. We can meet at a place that is convenient for you and requires minimal travelling for you.

ARE THERE ANY RISKS/INCONVENIENCE?

Yes, there are some risks/inconvenience. You may experience slight emotional distress in sharing your life experiences. Depending on the nature or content of your experiences, your immediate family members may have reservations with your sharing and being open about these issues. We can discuss these issues when we meet for the first time and find ways to mitigate the risks if any.

DO I HAVE TO SAY YES?

Your name may be recommended to me as a suitable candidate or I might select you, but you do not have to 'yes'. You can simply say 'no' and indicate that you are not interested without giving any reasons. The decision to whether participate or not is solely your personal decision. Even after you have agreed, for any reason if you feel uncomfortable or decide not to continue, you can withdraw at any time without giving any reasons. Anything that you might have shared will be kept confidential and no part of it will be used in this research without your permission.

WHAT IF I HAVE CONCERNS OR A COMPLAINT?

If you have concerns about the research that you think I can help you with, please feel free to contact me (us) on 5525816 or [REDACTED]. Alternatively, if you feel comfortable speaking to someone else other than myself, you may also contact:

Ms. Era Shrestha
Director
Organisation Development Centre Incorporated
Kupondole, Lalitpur
Tel.: (+977-1)-5551979, 5551980
Email: era@odcincorp.com

If you would like to talk to someone who is not connected with the research, please contact the research ethics officer at UTS and quote this number (UTS HREC REF NO. 2012-190A):

Research Ethics Officer
University of Technology Sydney
Ultimo, NSW 2007
Australia
Phone: +61 2 9514 9772

Appendix B

Participants' stories of becoming

Kala's story

I came in contact with Kala through a community organisation in her village in the far western part of Nepal in the terai plains. Like I had done in other locations, being new to this place, I sought access to the local community through the local institution that was working in the area. I contacted Kala through phone and used that first contact to share a bit more about my research, who I was and why I was doing it and what my expectations were in terms of her participation. She graciously invited me to her home for the meeting. It was harvest season, and she was only available for interviewing after dusk. As her home was relatively out of the way from the main town and travelling back to my hotel in the evening after the interview would not be safe, she proposed that I spend the night at her place.

I arrived at her place late afternoon on the day. She introduced me to her father-in-law and her two children; a son aged 8 and daughter aged 5. She is in her late 20s and had a love marriage. Her husband worked in the army and was mostly away, visiting the family whenever he got leave. Her mother-in-law had not returned from working in the fields. We exchanged small talk with tea, her father-in-law inquiring about my background, particularly my caste and my husband's family. They were a Brahmin family and I disclosed that I was a chhetri (Singh) married into a Brahmin family myself; an indication that allowed me access into the house. Her father-in-law expressed delight at this saying that his daughter-in-law (Kala) is also a daughter of a Singh. I explored when and how we should go about conducting the conversation. Before Kala could respond, her father-in-law interjected saying that we should go to her bedroom and talk while he prepared the evening dinner. At that point Kala stood up and led me to her bedroom where we sat to talk. We talked till we were called for dinner and then resumed once we finished the cleaning after dinner. I visited Kala again after a few months to explore a bit more about some of the things she shared in the first conversation, the second visit being a day trip to her village during a lesser busier time for her. So her story is based out of these two conversations.

In telling her story of her personal transformation, Kala centres her story around a particular event in her life; her participation in a 14 days residential workshop on peace-building in communities and the subsequent change that event triggered in her life. Prior to this event, Kala describes herself as someone who was arrogant:

I was already doing a lot of work in the community...but I was arrogant. I was the stubborn kind, I used to think only my thinking is right, what others

say is wrong. I even used to disobey my in-laws at home. I used to think I was the most knowledgeable in this family. I used to have many fights with my in-laws, I used to think that only I should have access to my husband's earning. I used to think they were enjoying his income for free.

Kala sees the biggest transformation in her in terms of her relationships and how she understands and works in her relationships with those around her and in her community. When I ask her to explain that transformation, she starts with how she got to participate in this particular workshop.

This organisation was organising this residential workshop in Kathmandu (the Capital city) and I was nominated to represent our community in this workshop on peace-building. It was a total of 45 days, three workshops of 15 days spread over a few months' time. I was very excited about this opportunity but when I told my in-laws about this, my mother-in-law immediately refused to give me permission. 'Who will take care of your two kids for 15 days?' she had asked. Over several days, I tried many ways to convince her to let me go. But she kept refusing. I was desperate and I didn't want to miss this opportunity. I went and talked to a local community leader and shared my problem. I knew my mother-in-law had great respect for this person and that she would listen to him. I requested this person to go and talk to my mother-in-law and convince her how this was a great opportunity for a fellow community member that should not be missed at any cost. I also asked him not to tell her anything about our meeting and pretend as if he got this information from another source and how he wanted to recommend me to attend this workshop on behalf of the community.

Kala's strategy of influencing her mother-in-law's decision worked and finally she got permission to attend the workshop with the warning that she can only go to the first 15 day workshop. At the workshop during an interactive session probed by the facilitator, Kala shares her experience of how she came to attend the workshop and receives praises for her efforts in making it happen in a peaceful manner without disrupting the relations at home. She manages to convince her mother-in-law to let her attend the second workshop in the capital begging them to do it for her as she really wants to finish what she started.

At the second workshop Kala when probed by one of the facilitators to share any issues or challenges faced in doing the peace-building work in the community, she expresses her financial challenges of attending such a workshop. Kala works voluntarily in the community so she does not have any personal disposable income of her own. The organiser covered the travel and accommodation costs of the residential workshop, but she struggled to manage other costs during her two weeks stay in the capital city. She confesses borrowing NRs. 2000 from a friend after the first workshop and handing it over to her mother-in-law as her earnings from participating in the workshop. She does that to legitimize her participation in the workshop and also as a strategy to seek prior approval for her participation in the second workshop. Kala was not the only person facing such a problem and speaks about challenges faced by others too. Upon listening to this, the organisers make a

decision to provide a certain nominal amount for personal expenses to each of the 25 participants in the program. Excited, when she returns home after the second workshop, she buys two petticoats (worn under sarees by Nepalese women) for her mother-in-law, gift from the city. She describes what follows:

As I entered the house, I was really excited. But I sensed some tension between my in-laws; the environment seemed stressful. I carefully took out the clothes and handed them to my mother-in-law. She threw them away on the floor and started scolding me: 'Now you've been to two workshops, that's it. You won't go for the third one. Your kids give me a hard time ...who do you think looks after this household when you are gone? If you want to go next time, take your kids with you ...' She scolded me about all kinds of things. I just sat there and listened to her. Usually I would perhaps say something back to her. But this time, I didn't feel like saying anything. I felt perhaps the kids did give her a hard time and she also has to do all the housework in my absence. I felt so bad too. I went to my room and cried a lot. After a while, I got up and went about doing the evening chores. We all ate dinner and I finished the chores and went to my room. Then in the evening, I think my mother-in-law's anger cooled down, she came to my room. She just hugged me and cried saying, 'I said so many mean things to you...you do understand why I said those things to you ... I scolded you because of my own tension dealing with household issues ... you understand it right?' I think she felt guilty for being mean to me because I didn't say anything back in response.

Kala describes her mother-in-law's perseverance in dealing with her own husband and how she managed to raise her one son and two daughters despite all difficulties. Her in-laws had difficulties in their relationship as a couple, her father-in-law often getting drunk and mother-in-law having to put up with abuse at the hands of her husband.

Kala didn't face any problems in attending the third workshop. Once she completed the workshop she realized she could use the skills of mediation she learnt at the workshop in resolving local conflicts in the community. She quickly gained popularity within her community and she realized she could not do the work alone. She approached the 26 community groups in the village and organized 2 day training programs to transfer her skills and knowledge to members in those groups.

Since then, Kala has been active in the community mostly working as a peace mediator. She says there was a time when the others in the village would say to her mother-in-law, 'what kind of a daughter-in-law you have? She is not going to give you any comfort in life, she is nothing but trouble ... she will step on your head'. Now she says her mother-in-law wonders that same people are not able to say anything now and she hears nothing but praise for her daughter-in-law in the village, how did this change happen?

Kala says there has been a change in how she understands relationships:

I used to be so arrogant and an angry person. I was already working outside in the community but over time as I participated in different workshops and

got more and more involved in the community, I came to realise that I have to do the work at home first. I have to establish peace inside my own home, within my mind and with those in my family. How can one do big talks about peace in the community when there is conflict inside your own home, your own mind? I realized that it's not appropriate as a community leader to dominate the women in your own home, your mother-in-law or your sisters-in-law and then go out in the community and talk peace. One has to be a role model in your own home first. Only with the support of the family have I been to do whatever I have done so far in the community. That has been my learning from this experience.

The relationships Kala has with her in-laws were evident when I visited her. At first, I was a bit surprised by Kala's father-in-laws act of offering to make dinner the evening I stayed over at her place. I brought that up with her later, asking if he often cooked. She says everything is based on sharing in the household, and each one does what they can to help another. Whenever Kala learns something new outside, she comes home and talks about her experiences with her in-laws. She says her in-laws' reactions, whether they agree or disagree with the new ideas, gives her more substance to develop her understanding. For instance, there has been some activism in the community to end caste-based discrimination and Kala has been trying to convince her conservative (on caste) in-laws on the topic. But she says, she respects their wish and tries not to do anything that would offend them. Whenever there is a program in the village, Kala gets invited. She volunteers working for an old-age home, does what she can to raise money for them. She tells me stories of young women in the village coming to her seeking advice; stories about the women she has helped and supported to become independent. Kala does all her community work as a volunteer and she aims to make it into a profession and earn her own money. She has finished her studies till year 12. When I ask her about her aspirations, she replies:

I don't think I am an empowered person. There is so much more I could do but haven't been able to do. Like I want to apply for the Loksewa⁴² exam but my husband would not let me. He says that I can only work if I get a job in my village, near home. There are no job opportunities in this village and for me working means moving to town. With kids and old in-laws to look after, that does not seem possible. I guess not all your wishes get fulfilled in life. Living is always a struggle, you get one thing and you want another. It's never ending.

Beena's story

I met Beena through my professional connections. I had sent out an email with the information sheet of my research to a group of professional friends, requesting

⁴² Loksewa exam or the public service commission exam is the government commissioned exam to become eligible to enter civil service in Nepal.

interested candidates to participate in this research to contact me. That is how I came in touch with Beena. Prior to our meeting for this research, I had met her once at an airport in 2010 during one of my fieldwork visits in the eastern part of Nepal. She was a senior staff member in the client organisation I was working for and we were travelling to the capital Kathmandu on the same plane. Beena had recently completed her PhD from a University in Europe on studying the phenomenon of social exclusion and I had just applied for my PhD at UTS. My conversation with her was stimulating and very inspiring. So I was thrilled when she responded to my request showing interest to participate in my research. I had one long intense conversational interview with her that lasted a few hours.

Beena offered to share her story by starting from the beginning, her early days as a child:

We were 5 sisters and when I was about 12 my mother passed away. I have wondered and analysed why my mother passed away so young; she was only 40. We used to live in a village in Gorkha, a very conservative village of Bahuns and Chhetris. You know how it is right? Boys and girls were treated differently, boys preferred over girls. And we were five daughters. My parents were relatively open-minded but the community was different. When my mother passed away, the perspective of the villagers towards my father changed. This man's wife passed away leaving behind five girls ... what a misfortune ... his life is gone now. The society started looking down on him.

My parents used to be well off but my father made bad decisions and wasted most of the money and property they had. My mother had to struggle and I think she might have died early because of the stress. I had two sisters above me. I was the middle one. The eldest one was already married. A week before my mother died, she sat my second eldest sister and me down and told me that I should study and she told my sister to look after all the younger ones. After the death of my mother, my two younger sisters could not handle the situation and stopped going to school. I remember our neighbours coming to our place and saying 'Poor things, unfortunate ones ... and their dad lost all his property and his wife and is stuck with five girls'. I used to think what was so bad about having girls? Why do they keep saying things like that to us? So what if he has only daughters and no sons?

I was in class 5 then and I remembered what my mother told me so I continued going to school. I always came first in class and maintained that till the 7th grade. The village school was a lower secondary school, so in order to keep on studying I had to leave the village. I told my father that I wanted to continue studying and asked him to look for a high school for me in the district. My father agreed. He got me enrolled in high school in the nearest town and made arrangements for me to live with a local family there. I used to work for the family; they were business owners and ran a local convenient store. Mornings and evenings, I would work in the store and also help in the house when I could. They treated me very nicely as if I

was a member of their family. So that's how I completed my high school education.

In those days, most girls had the notion that being a girl, even if you go to school, sooner or later you had to get married off and focus on your domestic life. All my sisters and cousins were like that, almost every girl I knew around me had that kind of thinking. I think because I saw how my mother suffered, I didn't think like that. I used to discuss with my sisters and always talked about studying as much as I could.

Beena emphasizes her focus on studies while growing up. In those days, it was the norm in Nepal that only boys would be allowed to go to school. Even if girls were sent to school, their education was not taken seriously and it was only a matter of enhancing their eligibility as potential homemakers in the future. It was the same in urban areas too. I could relate to this very much as I feel I had similar orientation towards studies. It appears that for Beena studying and having an education was the most important thing for her. When I ask her about her focus on education, she responds:

Somehow I always had this thought that studies are very important. I would carry my books everywhere with me. I think the idea was partly implanted in me by one of my cousin brothers. When I was in class 1 and started going to school, I used to follow my cousins to school. I couldn't say the word 'kitaab' properly and used to call my book 'kipaat'. Once one of my cousins heard me say kipaata and he got angry and hit me saying, 'What's the use of your studying when you can't even say kitaab properly?' But he would also teach me, he made me say kitaab over and over again properly on my way to school. That left an impression on my mind and I thought studying is important; books are important things.

Once she finished year 10, Beena is confronted with the problem of financing her studies. There was no income in the family. They had a family meeting to come up with finding a way to her continuing her studies. Along with her father and elder sisters, they decided to move the whole family to the nearest town area, rent a place and run a tea shop for income. From there, it was much more feasible for Beena to continue her education. Beena says she wanted to study medicine but with the financial circumstances of the family, it was not possible. Beena says, 'it wasn't a matter of what I wanted to study, but where and what subject I could afford to study or where they would offer me to study for free'. For Beena, continuing her education by any means was the focus.

Beena was loved by all her teachers; she says especially because she was hardworking and always at the top of her class although she was from the village. She comes to know about the possibility of getting a full scholarship at the forestry college in Hetauda from one of her teacher's spouse. After some inquiries and making it through the competitive entrance exam, she gets the opportunity to study forestry where she finished intermediate level in forestry (which is equivalent to doing year 12). According to Beena, the field of forestry was quite male dominated with very few women studying it in those days. After finishing her studies, she sits

for the lok sewa exam so she can qualify to apply for government service. Beena says, being a woman the expectation is that even if you do get a job, it should be close by within your own village or town. When she applied for a job, she told the government authorities that it did not matter to her where she would be posted for a job within the country.

She was posted for her first job in the district of Pokhara, in the west from her home district. When she shared the news of her employment to her family, she says she remembers that her elder sister said, 'Now we'll survive'. That was in 1988, and she says that was the beginning of her new role as the caretaker of the family. She says it was a role that was not imposed on her, but that simply came to her as she was the only educated person in the family with earning capacity. Ever since then, her whole focus has been on how to help her father and sisters. She never considered a life separate from them, a life of her own where she would get married and settle down. At 46 now, Beena continues to live with her elderly father and one of her sisters who got divorced.

Beena talks about her early days of working as a forester in a place dominated by men:

In Pokhara, we had a team of 27 staff in the forestry department and I was the only woman. Now the culture of that workplace is very distinctive. Working in forestry is more like policing work focusing on protecting and maintaining the forest areas. The forestry department is infamous for the corruption and bribery practices. So it is a difficult place to work as a role model with ethical standards for anyone, man or woman. The government had just started implementing the practice of community practice with heavy technical and financial support from donor agencies. There were people who would exploit the situation, making double claims than what was actually required. I never did such things and my seniors used to ridicule me as being naïve.

I was posted as a ranger outside the head office area. As a woman I could have asked to be posted in the head office but I thought if my other male colleagues are going out in the field and doing work, I could do it too. It took me about two years to really understand the system and how work was done there. In the first year, I was excluded from certain work activities. All my male colleagues were assigned projects with certain discretionary budgets mostly involving plantation or building nurseries with the communities. I was interested in such kind of work but was never offered the opportunity. The first year, I thought it was because I was new and needed some time to learn how the work was done. When the same trend continued in the second year, I talked to some of my male colleagues about it. How did they happen to get involved in those activities whereas I was never asked. They said it was just part of the job and perhaps I should consult with the main boss, the district forest officer (DFO). So I did. The DFO called a meeting with his associates and then also assigned me projects.

Beena thinks the reason behind this discrimination was partly due to her gender, her being a woman, she feels she was constantly undermined. But when she came forward and was assertive, she says she never faced any resistance from her teammates. Everyone in her team, including the DFO was always ready and eager to support her. But she also thinks that part of the exclusion had to do with the highly networked corruption practices that was possible to be maintained only through mutual cooperation and acceptance of the practice. As a woman, she suspects that there was this assumption that her inclusion in those work activities would disrupt the practice and make it difficult for others to continue doing what they were doing.

Beena made the decision not to interfere with the system while work in her own way without being involved in the practice of corruption. She said it was a choice she made to survive in the workplace. She enjoyed her work and soon became a model staff and the communities in which she worked became exemplary case studies of successful forestry work. She would often receive visitors from all around the country, both from the government and the donor partners who wanted to learn and replicate her successful model of working with the community. Whenever she received an influential guest in her district, she would always share her desire for higher studies with them, hoping that someday somehow if the opportunity came she would get a university degree. Feeling that she needed to focus on studies while still young, after three years of working she resigned from work and used whatever savings she had to do her Bachelor degree in forestry. Once she finished, she struggled to find employment. After doing odd jobs in different non-profit organisations, she applied for a forest officer position in a donor funded program and got accepted. She says that was not an easy process and she had to work hard to prove herself worthy for the position.

The position was advertised as 'forest officer' but when I was offered the job, the team leader told me that due to my lack of experience in the field, I would be offered the position of 'junior forest officer'. I was desperate for a job, so anything was acceptable as long as it was in my field of study. Once I started working, I started wondering why I was attached with the title of 'junior' and deemed less qualified to be a full officer. I came across other male colleagues who came from very similar backgrounds as myself with similar work experience but working as officers. I raised this issue with my team leader who was an expatriate but who spoke really good Nepali. They offered a probationary period of six months after which they promised an assessment of my work performance and a promotion to the officer level. It didn't take them even the full six months to realise my capacity, and after six months I became a forest officer like my other colleagues.

Beena talks about her experiences of discrimination against women in the work place and continuous struggle to prove oneself as worthy of being in the position. After three years of working as a forest officer, she once again starts looking for funded opportunities to do a master's degree in forestry. She gets the opportunity to study in Norway for her master's degree. She made financial arrangements for her father and sisters while she was gone as they were all dependent on her. She was

offered a position with the same organisation when she completed her studies. This was a much senior leadership position based in the eastern part of the Nepal. She was the first female to take up this position and was a very challenging position given the escalating political conflict at the time. She had other colleagues she had known from her previous position that had also been promoted to senior positions. Through informal channels, she found out that although they all had been upgraded in terms of positions within the organisational hierarchy, while her male colleagues had received substantial increment in salary, hers was relatively less. She was not happy with this and shared her concerns with seniors. She was told that being positioned in a leadership position and the opportunity to learn from that experience was the incentive given to her. She says there was nothing more she could say or do with that response so she accepted the challenging position.

Despite the conflict and potential risk in the community because of the conflict, she worked to establish a good relationship between the community and her team. During the conflict phase, her team had managed to gain complete trust of the community. So when in need, the community would approach them for any support. There were regular curfews imposed when all outdoor movement was restricted and regular firing from both sides of the conflict, the Nepalese Army and the Maoists. She says their transparency and openness won them support from the community and made it possible to work there amidst the conflict. As a representative of her organisation in a leadership position, how she dealt with local leaders, on both sides was also important. Beena took the strategy of taking a neutral position in local politics avoiding specifics places and occasions. When the conflict intensified in 2003, communication within and beyond the district became difficult and Beena had already started corresponding with potential universities for her doctoral studies. With her dreams to pursue higher studies, Beena sought employment in Kathmandu so she could work on her application for her doctoral studies. She received a full scholarship to study abroad and achieve her dream of completing her higher studies with a PhD.

Beena has chosen to stay single and she often gets comments from colleagues and friends, sometimes even her close female friends that she has made a mistake by choosing to remain single. She says:

You know Amina, how it is in our society, a woman's success in life is usually measured by her marital life. How well she's settled with her husband and husband's family and how well she raises her kids. I don't have that so sometimes I get feedback that I have ruined my life. Even some of my friends who studied in B.Sc. with me have said that. They are married and settled and perhaps from where they stand, that is what life should be like. But from my situation, my focus was always on looking after my dad and sisters, so in my context I think I've done well and made the right choices. Sometimes I challenge their beliefs that it is necessary to be married and have a family for a woman to be happy in life. I am happy. I work hard, I get satisfaction and happiness from doing my work. Professionally and socially I have changed a lot through my own efforts. I am first in my family to get higher education. I am the first woman from my district to get a PhD.

In the forestry sector and in development sector, I think I am a role model for other women. From where I come from, what all I have done may look like big achievements, but I don't feel that way. Yes, it has helped me in my work, it has given me recognition but I feel it is not a big thing that I have done.

Beena says she never got any pressure from her father or sisters to get married either. Her father always said she is wise and capable enough to make decisions about her life. Beena does not have specific story of personal transformation; like some other participants, she does not have a definite story about 'I was like this before and now I am like this'. Her story centres on her desire for education and to become educated. Throughout her story telling, her sharing also focuses on the topic of her interest, which is social exclusion. I sense that her narrative in this interview is very much developed through her own theoretical and philosophical understanding of social exclusion and her own experience of feeling excluded because of her gender. But she also points out how what she's done and how her life has turned out also comes from a specific historical and social condition. She wonders if her life would have been the same if her mother had not died, she speculates it may have been very different and perhaps she might not have the zeal and passion she has had influenced by the death of her mother.

Shanta's story

I met Shanta after one of my community presentations about my research requesting interested individuals to participate in my research, she came to me giving me her contacts. After a few weeks of that first contact, I organised to meet her. After a 12 hour bus travel through some dangerously winding roads, I got to her place. She invited me to stay over at her place. I had several conversations with Shanta over a 2 day stay at her place. Most of these conversations took place during everyday chores; cooking, herding goats, going to the nearby forest etc.

Shanta was brought up in a village hill district. She says she had a relatively easy childhood. Her father being a school teacher, she was sent to school and finished year 10 at the age of 16. Her family started getting marriage proposals for her earlier on and by the time she turned 17, she got married to her now husband through an arranged marriage. Her husband was 19 and also graduated from high school. Right after their marriage, her husband left home to pursue college education in the southern part of the country.

Shanta gives a detail account of her life as a daughter-in-law in the earlier days after her marriage. She grew up in a relatively comfortable way, as the only daughter and says she did not feel restricted in life before marriage. After becoming married, her life was different. Her husband being the eldest and she the only daughter-in-law at the time, had to bear the main burden of running the household. There were particular standards and practices for her exclusively, while another set of standards for the rest in the family. For instance, she would have to cook rice for the rest of the family members and separately cook grits for herself. She was not allowed to eat rice, ghee, meat, milk; basically any food item that was perceived a

luxury food in the hill village. Her everyday diet consisted of grit porridge with mohi (mix of yogurt with water).

Shanta was one of the few educated women in the village, so when the adult literacy program was about to be implemented in her village, she was approached by the village development council officers to become a teacher in the program. She was required to attend a 7 day training after which she would have to run evening literary classes for five months of the women in the village. Her father-in-law did not allow her to go saying he would instead give her the money they would pay her. She said she argued with her father-in-law saying she was not doing it for the money. She wanted to do it for the opportunity to meet people and learn new skills. She consulted with her husband who encouraged her and told her to attend the training anyhow. So despite the prohibitions from her in-laws, she attends the training, returns home and starts conducting the literacy classes in the evenings. During that time, she became pregnant but continued running the classes. The classes would run late in the evening and by the time she got home, dinner would be over. Gradually, after a while grits stopped cooking in the kitchen which would be her dinner. If there was any leftover rice, that would be packed away. But the pile of dirty dishes would be sitting there for her. It would be too late to cook dinner for her, so she would finish the dishes and sleep without eating. This continued for three months.

After her five months of literacy work, Shanta applies and gets selected to become a female community health volunteer (FCHV). For the training she travels to the south while five months pregnant. Again, her in-laws were not happy with her decision. She calls her husband who was posted as a teacher in another town to accompany her. Once again she leaves home against her in-laws wishes to attend the training in another town. The training focused on maternal health and during the training Shanta comes to learn many things related to the topic. Like she learns about the vaccines she should take as a pregnant woman. She had hidden her pregnancy from the training organizers for the fear of not being accepted into the training program. To maintain her secret, she goes out to a nearby clinic to get all the vaccines she needs. She also gets training on how to administer vaccines and child delivery. She finishes the training and completes all exams to get certified as a community health volunteer.

Once her training is over, her husband comes to take her home. She knew her in-laws would still be unhappy about the way she came for the training. Her father-in-law sent her a message prior to that saying that she would be allowed back into the home only if her husband was willing to accept her otherwise she need not come back home at all. Being late into her pregnancy, Shanta decides to stay back in the town to deliver her first born, a daughter. Upon coming back, she immediately got posted to the role of FCHV in her village. Since the village didn't even have a health post, her first job was to establish the sub-health post. She said she inaugurated the first sub health post in her village. She continues to live in the same house with her in-laws and family.

According to Shanta, a turning point comes in her life during a casual conversation:

One day my younger brother-in-law raised the issue of his marriage and asked for expenses for his wedding ceremony. I knew he had already brought a wife and had kept her for the last four months without marriage. So I just said, 'I know he has already got a wife, so basically cost would be to make it formal'. As soon as I had said it, my father-in-law started yelling at me that how dare I speak in front of the elders and speak in matters of the family. He told me that I had no place in the house and that I should go live separately. In that moment I told him, 'Okay I will. I am a person not an animal. In this house I never got treated as a human being. If you wish that we leave this family, then so be it, I don't think it will make much difference to me'. When I was talking, meanwhile my husband kept saying that it will be hard for us to make a living on our own without the family's support. Then I said, 'I have worked so hard in this house, for this family. If they are still not happy with me and think I don't deserve to be in this house, I don't want to be here. I cannot keep on taking this burden anymore. I do not expect anything from the family, if they chose to give, I will take it. If they don't I will go and live under a tree. I am not saying this because I have a job now, I can survive without a job as well. I will do whatever it takes but I don't want to stay here anymore'. I don't think what happened to me in that moment, where the courage came from. But I felt that I hadn't said anything wrong, and it wasn't fair for them to say things like that to me.

I asked Shanta if her husband said or did anything while this happened. She said he kept quiet afterwards and does not speak much in front of the parents. He was very worried about their future and their ability to manage on their own. After the incident they built a house nearby in a plot of land they received from the family and started living separately from the family.

Over the years, Shanta gathered experience working as a community health volunteer. She got the idea of setting up a women's network in her village after she came to know about setting up networks and how they function during her educational visits sponsored by her employers. In collaboration with the local health management committee, she led a group of 26 local mothers to form a mothers' group, herself as the president of the group. Once the group got institutionalised, Shanta got busy in the managing and organising of the group. She travelled around the village regularly, organising meetings with the communities. Her father-in-law had political aspirations and was the head of the village committee. Both her in-laws were against her community involvement, particularly because the villagers started accusing Shanta of misleading the women of the village and were openly critical of anything she did in the village and said she was trying to compete against her father-in-law for local leadership. But the women were completely behind her. They would say, 'Till this day Shanta has done nothing but help the women here, so we will always support her ... even if our families and husbands stop us, we won't stay behind'.

Shanta's narration illustrates how she came to become a community worker in the face of resistance and criticism from her family and also the community members. She says that is the biggest transformation in her:

There was a time when I was living under very oppressive conditions, as a daughter-in-law. I remember feeling helpless and wondered if life will always be like this. But now, I know that I can survive anywhere, under any conditions. I can always find a way to earn a living for myself and I don't have to be dependent or put up with anybody's oppression anymore. I would like to carry on as a leader in society, as long as I could; as long as I have the trust and faith of the society.

I asked her, what makes her feel or think that she can survive anywhere:

Now I have the strength inside me, I have confidence in myself. I have understood about rights. I used to wonder, who is the one who gives us rights? Or how do we claim it? Now I have come to understand that no one can give you your rights. We achieve it in using it, it's within us and in how we use it. We just didn't know how to use our rights. I understand how society changes, how family changes, how your neighbourhood changes and all that starts with changes in yourself. You have to be open to change yourself first. Change does not happen quickly, it takes time and a lot of patience. And to achieve something, you have to be ready to give up as well. If you want love and acceptance from others, you have to know how to give it as well and respect others. That is why I practiced patience for four years; I gave my in-laws respect. I did everything that was expected of me.

Shanta attributes her transformation to her mobility outside her house. She says the other important thing is money. Her travels and movement within her village and beyond, her interactions with people gave her new ideas of things that could be done, her ability to imagine possibilities as a community health worker. It also gave her insights into what she could do and be in the community. She says she always felt lighter when she had the opportunity to share with her husband and she thought, 'perhaps I am not the only one who has problems and suffering, maybe there are others like me who also need someone to share their stories with'. That thought led her to go and talk and share in the community with other women. She modelled the way of sharing and soon the women started coming to her to talk about their own problems and share their stories. That was the beginning of her community engagement and how she managed to build community support.

Shanta is in her late 30s now and has three kids. She served as the first president of the mother's group network that she helped to set up. After she finished her first term of three years' she got re-elected for her second term and was serving as the president at the time of our interview. When I asked about her current challenges and future plans, she says there is still a lot to do. One of the challenges the women's groups and networks continue to face is the misappropriation of the local government budget allocated exclusively for women. She plays a key role as an advocate/watchdog to ensure fiscal transparency at the local level and also ensuring that the budget allocation for women does get allocated for women related projects and activities in the village. As a result she continues to face animosity and criticism from certain groups.

Kabita's story

Kabita, a woman in her early 30s, works in a town in mid-western Nepal. Her work involves mobilising communities to form saving cooperatives. She's been married 15 years and lives with her husband and two children. Kabita says she got married when she was studying in the 7th grade. She was brought up in a relatively poor family with 7 children and she was the eldest. She says at the age of 16 she decided to get married herself, in a way she adds to lessen the burden of her parents. She had her two kids earlier on in her marriage. She was mostly busy with her household chores, getting fodder for the animals and working in the small piece of land they owned. She remembers that she didn't have any particular notion of life being hard or anything like that. 'I felt life was supposed to be like that in villages for all' she says. About 7 years after her marriage, members of a new organisation that worked in social mobilisation and setting up groups in the villages entered her village. This led to a break in Kabita's routine life:

Many women and men in our village gathered. I didn't think to join at first. And one day I was walking to the forest to get fodder, they saw me and called me. At that time, I was very shy of strangers and these were men ... it was hard for me to speak with men. But I went along with them and sat at their meeting. I wasn't even that interested, but when I heard them talk I found it very interesting, and I liked what they were saying ... they talked about the importance of organizing. They said by organizing and discussing together we could solve our problems. I didn't even understand what they meant by organizing or solving problems.

I asked Kabita if she had problems then:

Of course I did. My husband wasn't doing any work. He used to waste money on alcohol and gamble all day. In fact there was a problem of men gambling and drinking too much in our community. We used to get food to eat from the farming, but there was no other income, no cash for other things. And my husband didn't really care or worry about it. It was difficult for me but I used to think that's just the way things were. Our family (extended) used to ignore us too ... so no support from there too. My in-law didn't approve of my husband marrying me so we lived separately.

I wondered, is it possible ... may be something good will come out of going to these meetings. I was the most educated among the women and I enjoyed the meetings a lot, the talking and discussing things ... even when the sirs didn't come, we used to organize meeting ourselves and talk – that's how much we enjoyed those gatherings ... I was mostly bound to my domestic life before that so that was another world for me.

The interactions in the group and her exposure to community groups and discussions created a big shift in Kabita and her world view including her sense of self. Prior to this, she says she never saw herself as a capable person or someone who could provide for the family. She her way of being was the normal way to be, that's just how it is. But attending the meetings made her think that maybe she has something in her. She heard the facilitators say, 'everyone has capacity inside, it

may just be suppressed but it can be uncovered and utilised'. This experience led her to think about going back to school:

When I heard that everyone has capacity inside, I thought of course! I have so many thoughts and ideas inside me but who would listen to me? I also felt how can I expect my husband to improve to listen to me if I am not capable myself ... if I was somebody then I could tell my husband ... I felt I had to change ... do something ... that's how I decided to go back to school.

Kabita enrolls herself in 8th grade 8 years after leaving school. She was 25 then. In another part of our conversation, Kabita gives another reason that influenced her decision to go back to school.

I became very involved in the community work but it was difficult for me to get paid employment. I had my household, my kids. My husband was also unemployed and stayed home all day wasting little money we had on alcohol. There was no income ... and I was walking around every day working for the community as a volunteer and I really enjoyed that work. I didn't enjoy working at home or in the farm anymore. It's like I got addicted to this kind of work. With my involvement in the community work, I didn't have time to work in the farm anymore. And then I realised, if I had been educated, I could make a living doing this kind of work ... so I got enrolled in class 8. I guess there was the assumption that once you re-enrol in school or go back to school, you will complete it. So I managed to get employed even with my 7th grade certificate ... so then I got even more active and involved. I didn't even have to wait to complete high school to get a job.

Kabita on her experience of re-entering school as an adult:

I actually got my school uniform made. I started going to school with my two kids. Nowadays you see many women attending school, but back then you wouldn't see women like me going to school. Grown up married women just don't go to school right? But I had no choice, I had to go to school for my future. So people used to laugh at me when they saw me walk to school. Once I entered the classroom, I forgot everything and felt like one of them ... I guess I also looked like the girls wearing the uniform. When I went home, I would forget about school and focus on my kids and household.

At the time I met Kabita, she had completed year 11 and had been employed for almost four years. For Kabita, the way she sees transformation is through her sense of self and how she is seen in the community:

There have been many changes in me. I feel I can do anything now. I have confidence in me. I am more educated now. Many people in the village know me. There are many people who have come to talk to me, listen to me like you have done here. Who knew me back then? I was nobody. Now people know me as someone who can give good advice, I have many women who come to seek advice from me. So I have a certain identity in the community, people recognise me.

In our conversation, Kabita centres her stories around her role in the community, the many things she has done and achieved in the community and how she sees herself as an active and educated member of the society. It is obvious that this has been an important aspect of her transformation; her shift from seeing herself as an incapable person to someone with capacity. Her work, her interactions within the community and beyond with other stakeholders, partner organisations have contributed to establish her social identity as a capable community worker. In fact, it was this identity that led me to her for this interview in the first place. Many individuals had recommended her as someone who had 'transformed in life', fitting as potential candidate for my inquiry. I asked her how things might have changed or how her transformation impacted her domestic life if at all. Her relationship with her husband has improved and he is now very supportive of her work she says. At first, when she came to realise or see her husband's drinking and gambling habits differently and as a problem, she started feeling anger. She says she realised how bad the situation was for her and she speculates that was what gave her the courage. She contrasts herself with other women in her group who had similar life situations and problems but did not choose to act the way she did:

Perhaps they are afraid. Like for me, I got fed up with the problem of my husband playing cards with other men all the time. So I would go where he is playing with his friends and tear up the cards. I wasn't afraid of him, I didn't care even if he beat me later at home or tried to kill me. I had courage ... well either way the situation was bad anyways. I felt there wasn't much difference for me. In the evenings he would come home and scold me ... for shaming him in public.

Life got challenging in the earlier days for Kabita. There was a negative reaction from the villagers of anything she did or said. Her husband started getting ridiculed by others for being a 'joitingre' (something like being henpecked) and had stopped going places. Perhaps this also helped to curb his alcoholism and gambling habits. When he stopped showing up at the regular joints, people would say he cannot come because he was locked up at home by his wife. But things changed eventually she says:

There were also problems of drinking and gambling in other families. So I started gathering women to protest against drinking and gambling. I even started hearing rumours that some men even went to the forests to play cards in hiding. I took this step because I had experienced this problem in my own home. We talked to alcohol producers and sellers. I started speaking about the effects of gambling and alcoholism in the community. I had the support of all the women who also were struggling with the same problems. But my husband also started understanding my perspective. He slowly changed. When I started going to school, he offered to cook ride at home while the three of us went to school. He really supported me in everything I tried after that. I think I wouldn't have been able to do what I did without his help.

Shifts in relationships in a positive way have been one of the most salient features that has come up in this inquiry. While the participants go through their own personal transformation, it is also reflected in people around them, in the way they relate with them.

Kabita brings up the idea of 'courage' several times during our conversation. She attributes most of what she's done and acted to bring the transformation in her to *courage*. She thinks that some of the other women in her group have gained the same knowledge as she did by participating in the group. But she thinks there is a difference between knowing something and acting or doing something with what you know. In order to do or act, she thinks one needs something more than just the acquisition of explicit knowledge. She identifies it as courage and speculates that it is the absence of courage or presence of fear that makes the other ladies unable to act, given that they were facing the same conditions and problems as hers and also went through the same process as her in the group discussion.

When I asked her about her future plans, she says she does not have any specific plans about what exactly she will do. But she says this conversation has been useful as it was the first time she evaluated herself and it made her realise that she has done a lot and come a long way from where she was years ago. She has come to understand that there is no limit to what one can do but one has to try. The main thing is the doing she says, 'Whatever I am now, what I know now, it is only because of what I did ... I learnt from doing things'.

Rama's story

I met Rama at a district level workshop where she was a participant. When she heard about my research and request to become participant during my brief presentation at a forum, she had approached me. We arranged for a time and day and had a three hour long conversation about her life experiences. When I asked her about her experiences of personal transformation right at the start of our conversation she said, 'If I was the same person as before, I would not have volunteered like this and come forward myself to be interviewed by you. I wouldn't know how to speak and I wouldn't see myself as someone who knew anything to speak about but now I am different'. I asked her to elaborate on what she meant by that and how did she come to be different and what was different about her now. She starts her story from her early days.

Rama was born in the hills as the only daughter in a family of five children. She says she was 'put in her place as a girl' from earlier on. All her four brothers, even those younger than her went to school but she was not sent to school. She used to attend school without letting her family know as education was free in public school and the school was very close to where she lived. She completed her studies up to fifth grade like that. She left home with the excuse of gathering fodder or doing work in the fields, she would quickly finish the chores and enter school. Her friends helped her with offering her notebooks and pens she says. Around fifth grade at the age of 13, Rama got married. She says she did not know what was happening to her, she had no understanding of marriage or what it meant. In the first three years of her marriage, Rama says she faced a lot of hardship. Her father-in-law was a very strict

person and used to scold her a lot. She says, over time she learnt not to speak and what not to do to avoid being scolded.

After three years, Rama's in-laws decide to migrate to the Terai plains where they also owned land. As the youngest daughter-in-law, she had to accompany them she says. The others already had children to look after. Her life living in the plains was different. For instance she says it is relatively more difficult to collect fodder in the hills as one had to climb up steep slopes. Grass was more accessible and plenty in the terai. And there she made friends with whom she went to collect grass:

I would finish my chores early in the morning and then I would be off with my friends to collect grass. Once we made our bundles, we would sit under a makeshift shelter and talk. I used to be the entertainer, I would tell them stories, jokes and sometimes sing. When I came home, almost every day my father-in-law would scold me saying my bundle is not big enough. When I heard him yell at me, I didn't know whether I should eat or cry. But still I was very courageous. When alone I would cry and then convince myself to stop crying ... what good would crying do?

Rama says she always wore cotton saree back then. She had three pairs she received from her parents when she got married and had been managing with that since then. During the rainy season, she had to go plant the rice fields and her clothes would get muddy and dirty but she didn't have enough clean clothes to change into every day. So she would wash her clothes every night and wear damp clothes the next day. When it got too much for her, she goes to a local store that sells cloths. According to her, this was a big step for me but she was in desperate need of clothes.

I went to the store and said to the person there, 'Bua!' ... I addressed him as bua (father) and said, 'can you give me some clothes?' He asked, 'what kind would you like?' and I said, 'well I don't have much money, so give me the kind that a poor man's daughter can wear.' I used to be afraid to speak at home, mostly because of the scoldings but outside I used to speak clearly and without any fear. Also people loved me in the community so I wasn't afraid. I told him that I didn't have any money to pay and that I will pay when I could. He said to me, 'Now that you are like my daughter, you don't have to pay, just take the clothes'.

Although the shopkeeper told her that she need not pay, she said she carried the burden of it on her mind and always wondered how she would get the money to pay back. Then with the help of her friends, Rama collects leftover corn in the fields after harvesting. With the permission of her mother-in-law, she brings them home, sells it and earns Nepalese rupees 150 from it. She gives the money to the shopkeeper as her payment. Collecting leftovers in the fields became a usual practice in Rama's life. With her friends, they would roast the corn over open fires in the fields and eat. Returning home on a full stomach, Rama says she did not feel as affected by the scolding at home:

Now I would not be hungry. I would be full and I think I started becoming brave. I started getting courage. And then one day I came home and said to

my mother-in-law, 'I've been living in this house for all these years ... since I came here, I have not been given a single pair of clothes ... wouldn't that lower your reputation? Even your son hasn't bought a single thing for me till this day ... I'm the only daughter-in-law of yours here, I'm like your daughter'. I had never spoken at home like that before ... perhaps because I had earned money, I got the courage to speak. My mother-in-law spoke, 'What can be done? You know your father-in-law would get mad ... he wouldn't give, he would only scold.' I told her its ok and perhaps later in life I would somehow become able to buy clothes for myself. I said that to her without being angry or mean, with a smile ... she might have felt bad inside but that day I spilled the discomfort I felt inside. I felt light and cool after speaking. But she didn't respond, she couldn't say anything back to me.

Rama's story is about being able to speak. Her father-in-law being the most powerful in the family, she says even her husband used to be afraid and not able to speak in front of him. To appease the father, her husband often beat her if the in-laws felt she had done wrong or crossed the boundaries. Rama gave birth to three children, two sons and one daughter, the daughter being the middle child. Rama had big dreams for her daughter and wanted to give her every opportunity and all the love that she felt she never received. So she showered extra attention on her girl. Her world changed drastically when at the age of 10, her daughter suddenly dies. Rama lost her mental stability after this incident and it took her almost a year to become functional after the incident. After this incident and given her grieving state, the abuse she faced at home also stopped. Her in-laws and husband started treating her well and did all they could to make her comfortable and help her recover from the shock of suddenly losing her child.

As Rama's parents grow old, they start facing neglect and abuse from their four sons. They often visited Rama and get things off their chest. Rama's relationship with her parents got stronger than it had ever been. When she heard the stories of abuse her parents received from her brothers, she says she thought to herself, 'Oh they are supposedly the wise and educated ones'. She says this gave her some more courage:

I don't know why I said it ... or maybe I should not have said it but after listening to my parents talk about my brothers one day I told them, 'You both made a mistake. You treated sons and daughters differently. You gave them everything and perhaps it was a bit too much for them, that's why they are behaving in this crazy way. Now I want my share, I want you to give me my share of the inheritance from you.' Fed up with my brothers, my parents also readily agreed. They gave me a piece of land, I sold that land and got some money.

All these experiences including the death of her daughter, turned Rama into an advocate in the village. She started visiting homes, advising and convincing parents to send their daughters to school. She started talking to young girls and speaking about the importance of getting education. I asked her what made her do this. She says:

After my daughter died, I wandered about so many places. I cried so much, I thought about killing myself but I could not bring myself to do it. I came to realize, this is the reality and there is nothing I can do to change it, and I have to learn to live with it. But I thought the least I can do is help others, other suffering women like myself.

There were already mother's groups formed which were facilitated by female community health volunteers in Rama's village. She started going around with the health volunteers and supporting them in their work in whatever capacity she could. It was not easy for Rama to be doing this. She faced criticism and resistance from the villagers; they said that she was out to corrupt all the daughters in the village. She had also started advocating about other social issues that affected women, such as practices of gambling and alcoholism. Some villagers started spreading rumours that she was involved with the Maoist. This was during the period when the Maoists were still underground fighting against the then Monarchy regime all over Nepal. So being accused of being a Maoist was a very serious matter.

One day when Rama is out to cut grass for the cows, she is approached by a group of 40 men armed police force. They had brought her youngest son and her husband with them. They told her that she along with her husband and son were being held as Maoist suspects and for hiding bombs in their house. She tries to explain and refute the accusations but the police tell her to shut up and move along with them. She narrates this part of her experience in this manner:

They made us walk along with them all day long. When we arrived on top of the hill on the other side, they cooked meat and rice for themselves. Ever since my daughter passed away, I had developed a stomach ulcer and I couldn't stay hungry for long. So I said to them, 'I am hungry, can you give me something to eat too? My stomach is unwell and although I'm poor, I always eat from time to time even if it's just millet porridge ... so I need to eat something now'.

Then one of the officers said, 'You talk a lot, apparently you are one of the local leaders of the Maoists in this village?'

I said, 'Well if you are so convinced and you have evidence then why don't you shoot us right now, I heard that you get honoured and rewarded by the government?'

He said, 'How do you know? Who told you such things?'

I said, 'Well, we hear such things often these days now'.

He said, 'You speak a lot ... you must be a Maoist leader ... now shut up'. With that he gives me a pack of Army biscuits. I ate it with water ... The whole day, they keep abusing me verbally, accusing me of all kinds of things. I keep answering them trying to refute the accusations. On the way, they had picked up another woman whose husband was a Maoist militant. By night time, I was cold, hungry, exhausted and very angry. I didn't care for my life anymore. So I said to them, 'You were right, yes I am a Maoist. I

confess now that I did all the things you said I had done. Now you can kill me. But if you kill me, you must kill my son and my husband too. This will bring you honour; you will be rewarded by the government. Your wife and family will benefit, you will be able to send your children to a good school. We are poor people with no significancenot even as much as an ant, so it will not really matter at all. Just make sure you shoot us dead straight away, so we go easily without much suffering'. I broke down crying after saying this. The armed police gathered around me amused for a while. Then one of them spoke, 'Look sister, we had already guessed about you earlier. If you were really a Maoist, you would not have spoken to us like you did. But we couldn't let you go because there are many Maoist spies around here and if they had spotted you with us, then you would become their target.'

Rama is 'punished' for being outspoken and engaging within the community by being falsely accused of siding with the Maoist. Rama not only transgressed the norm of a 'woman' expressing herself in the community, she challenged the practices and ways of being of men in the community. Rama shares more stories of her activities in the community and the changes in the village through these activities. In most of these stories, her role of speaking comes up strongly. There are stories of confrontations, such as when she questions the village committee members about the funding for women, she organises local women attend council meetings to ensure fair process in the budget allocation for local development works and each time she senses unfair play, she speaks up. She emphasizes her speaking even when she summarises her life towards the end of our conversation:

I was uneducated and didn't know how to speak. I was in such a state in my earlier days of marriage ... and to be here today talking to you like this about myself, this is a big change in me. Even till now, my husband cannot speak in front of his own father. But I have no problem speaking to him or anyone. And I know how to speak to him, I always speak respectfully, smiling. Nowadays I talk to my father-in-law about old days, how things were, how I felt in those days, sometimes I can't help crying while talking about the past ... he just listens to me and lets me speak and then he says, 'I know but those were times when none of us knew any better, we hadn't seen much, we thought that is how things were supposed to be ... now we understand, now I know'. So I keep sharing with him.

Gita's story

Gita lives in a town in the far western part of Nepal. She introduces herself as a 'war-widow' and currently is the president of the single women's group in her district. Gita's narrative evolves around her experience of becoming a widow at a young age and how that experience transformed her and led her onto her journey in life. She got married by her parents when she was still in high school in grade 9. Her husband was a soldier in the Nepalese Army and it was during the days when the armed conflict had heightened in Nepal. She shares her story of her husband's death and her experience:

My husband died on the night before Teej in crossfire between the two conflicting parties. I had a daughter who was three at that time ... now she is 13 years old. When this happened I was barely 21. A woman who entered the house as the symbolic Laxmi (goddess of fortune and wealth) suddenly I became an *alakshina* (inauspicious) because my husband had died. As per the customs, I wore the white clothes as a widow for the first 13 days. But for the 13th day of the death rites when I had to change clothes, I tried to talk to my family in letting me wear normal clothes. I was concerned about my little girl and I didn't want her to see me in the white plain saree all the time, I thought it might have a stronger impact on her child mind. I said it does not have to be bright red but as long as it is not plain white. There is this practice that the clothes are sent from the maternal family of the widow so they sent me a brown saree with brown blouse. So I wore that, but there was this talk going around that I was making a fuss about clothes at such a time of grieving. I ignored those comments. I felt I need to do what I need to do.

Gita felt her world suddenly changed as she realized that she would have to be both a father and mother for her young daughter. She would also have to step into her husband's role of supporting her in-laws now that their son was no more with them. Her husband was the eldest in the family and had other younger siblings. She says her father-in-law used to comment often, 'Only if we had a grandson, it would've been a consolation for this old heart ... even if my son died, I could survive seeing my grandson'. In fact, not just him, there were others in the family who often made comments like that. This attitude Gita says made her feel bad, 'My daughter is also part of them, she is part of this family ... then I said to myself, I have to do something and prove myself to be greater than any son could ever be and raise my daughter in such a way that she can be greater than what a grandson could be'.

Gita had to gather all her strength and wit during this time of personal loss to organize the process of identification and claiming of her husband's remains from the Army including organizing the transport of it back to her hometown so that the last rites could be carried out. And as the wife, by protocol she was required to take initiatives in this aspect. She says the first few days she did not have the space to mourn properly. In those difficult days she received a lot of support from one of her husband's uncles (father-in-law's younger brother) and her own brother-in-law.

One of the challenges she encountered earlier on in this is she was told that she was required to pay the amount of 1 Lakh rupees (Approx. AUD 1000) in order to claim the body and get it transported by the Army for the cremation. She thought that as the widowed wife of a soldier who died in combat, she would instead receive some form of compensation. She did not have the means to pay this amount. Gita says she was tortured by the thought that she may never get to see her husband or offer him a respectful last rite. On the third day, her husband's uncle sat her down away from the rest of the family and talked to her. While trying to console her he also reminded her of her role, that she would be the only one who can do anything on the matter of bringing the body back and she needed to be strong for the rest of the family. Gita gave authority to him to bring the body back agreeing to the condition

of paying 1 Lakh rupees. She thought she would talk to the authorities in the army later and sort out the financial issues, it was more important for her complete the funeral first. The body was brought back and funeral took place on the fourth day. Right after the 13 days of rituals were finished Gita thought to sort out the financial issue:

On the 14 day, I went to see the head of the battalion under which my husband had fought. When I met him he expressed his condolences. I went straight to the point, 'somebody from this battalion had told my family that I need to pay 1 lakh rupees to claim my husband's body. I received his body and finished the funeral. Here we are the 21 year old widow and 3 year old daughter of that dead soldier, and I don't have the money to pay so do as you please with us to get your money'. Somehow, I was in a state where I didn't care about life or death anymore as in the last 13 days I had already been through so much. The head apologized on behalf of the army and informed me that what I was told or heard was not true. Perhaps someone was trying to extort money from me, trying to take advantage of me.

Gita reflects on how she came about to act in this manner during that ordeal in her life:

I think when you face pain and suffering in life, it either makes or breaks you. I had a good excuse to just give up on life and everything and just waste myself. It's either that or do what is the only other option – fight and just do what you have to do. My immediate family also did not make it easy for me during those times ... so that also pushed me to just move on. It was a very difficult time, the conflict was at its highest, still many people were being killed every other day and being related to a soldier, I felt my daughter and I were also in lot of danger.

Around this time, a group of journalists come to visit Gita. She says she was skeptical of anyone who would come to see her, wondering if they were spies and had come with plans to finish them off too. So she refused to sit for an interview. One of the members of this group turned out to be a leading female journalist who was covering stories of widows of the conflict. She told Gita about a lady who was a widow of an army personnel who was collecting data about widows in the conflict from both warring parties and asked if she would be interested in meeting her. Here Gita talks about her response to the journalists:

If the madam is interested in stories of widows like us, why is she there in the city? Why doesn't she come here to small town like ours and visit us? I am not interested in going there. I was sick and tired of all the journalists trying to get my story. I felt after all it is me myself who has to face my ordeal, and what benefit will I get from sharing my story to all these strangers? What do they care about my situation? The team of journalists went back to the madam told them about my response. Apparently she said that she has to meet someone with such strong remarks. So she finally came to see me at my home. When I met her, I connected with her immediately. And then I realised, that at that time I did need to share with somebody, I

needed somebody who could relate to my experience so that I could unburden myself. I cried so much with her and she hugged me and cried with me. I hadn't cried as much after the funeral ... I didn't even cry when I went to the barracks. I shared everything with her.

Gita gets information from the army authorities about the opening for sewing training for army widows in Kathmandu, the capital city. She wanted to take this opportunity because she felt the need to get out of the house to move forward. Her family was reluctant and there was a big debate in the family on the issue. Her daughter was barely in preschool. Gita says so she gathered all the five brothers of her father-in-law and the other men of the family and told them about her interest and asked for permission to go. Nobody spoke or responded. Finally her father-in-law told her if she wants to learn the skills she can do so in their own town and that she needn't go to the city for that. She consulted with one of the senior female relatives who advised her to go to build her own future. With blessings from at least one of the senior members of the family Gita leaves home with her daughter to go to the city for the training. She asked for help from one of her late husband's younger brother to accompany her to the city. But since all the elders had forbidden her to go, no one wanted to help her out. She decides to take the journey alone. Later one of the uncles and her brother in law arrive at the bus stop to go with her to the Kathmandu.

Gita attributes her transformation to her courage and ability to speak. 'One has to have the courage and the ability to speak up...you have to be able to ask ... what's the worst that could happen? And if you are already in a bad place, you have nothing to lose'. Right after the brief training in Kathmandu, Gita wanted to attend another advanced level training but she didn't have the means to fund it. She was living separately from the family with her daughter. Reporters, journalists and development workers continue to show up to interview her as she had gained a reputation for being outspoken. During one of her interviews she challenges one such person:

There was this sir from this community development organisation who wanted to cover my story. So I asked him, 'How many times do I have to cry like this? How many times do I have to share my story? If you are really here to help me, there are other ways too'. So then he asked me, 'Ok tell me, what can I do for you?' When the opportunity arises, one shouldn't shy away, so I told him in a straightforward manner, 'I need to go attend this training for six months but it costs Rs. 1500 per month for the bus fees. I only get Rs. 1800 in pension from the army so I don't have that kind of money. So if you can help me, it would be great if you can arrange your organisation to give me Rs. 1500 per month for six months. After that I'll open a tailoring store and show you the results'. But I also told them that I would accept the help if they are willing to help at least two of us. There was this other younger girl who also needed help and I wanted her to join me. The next day he invited me to his office and told me that they had decided to offer the help. Excited with this, then I took this friend with me to visit the training centre the very next day. They were receiving applications and I knew there would be a lot

of applicants. So I requested to meet one of the head trainers and then again I shared everything about myself and my plans to start a tailoring business to support myself and my child but also to create opportunity for other women like myself affected by the war. Somehow that sharing worked and we both got accepted into the training program.

Gita continues to share her stories of how she went about establishing herself as a successful businesswoman. After her training, she gathers a group of six women like herself and starts up a sewing business in one of the busy areas of the nearby town. Among the group of women working with her, some were widows of Maoists fighters. She also starts a community group of conflict affected women which becomes a forum for sharing stories from all sides and aspects of the conflict. As the conflict intensified and more families became affected adversely by the conflict, Gita expands her community work. She mobilises affected families to set up three other community groups and engages 15 other widowed women in the sewing business.

The following year, Gita spearheads a social event of 'wearing red' for about 117 widows in a public ceremony. One of the unique aspects of this ceremony, Gita insisted that each widow will be blessed with the red tika and red clothes by their own in-laws or immediate family elders. Gita believed that family acceptance was of utmost importance for this practice of widows wearing red to become socially acceptable. But prior to this event Gita had a major personal dilemma. She, being the president of this group of widows, had not been accepted by her own family and was living on her own. 'How could I preach about family values and family relations when I was estranged from my own family? Family is your greatest strength, if you have the support of your family, it's easier to fight with the society' says Gita. So she contacts her family, requesting them to allow her into the family. Her father-in-law came to pick her up and bring her home. Although reluctant at first, her family finally accepts her idea of blessing her with red tika on her forehead. Gita uses this experience to inspire other women in the group and eventually organizes the public ceremony.

Gita did face public resistance from society, there was media coverage the next day of the ceremony with headlines announcing the ceremony as a decay of the culture and tradition of the Nepalese society.

Gita reflects on transformation she has gone through and speculates that all that has happened would not have happened if she had not become a widow. She also says that perhaps if her family had made life comfortable and easy for her after her husband's death, she would have probably just continued to live her life at home, content with her domestic life. But she also acknowledges that then she would have missed some huge opportunities. According to her, being a widow and learning to survive in the society as a widow brought the biggest transformation in her. She also adds that being able to speak was a big contributor to that change. Like some other participants in this study, speaking was not an act that Gita learned to do or perform in her transformation. But speaking was the act through which her transformation became possible. I asked her then what is the transformation in her? She replies:

Ever since I became a widow, I think the biggest change in me is the self-confidence I have gained. I have discovered what I can do and everything I have tried, I feel I succeeded in it, although I might have had to suffer in the process. So now I have the confidence that I can handle anything in life. Through this process, I have managed to mend my relations with my family ... I am most happy that my daughter has a home now. I think that has been the most valuable outcome of this change ... I managed to regain my family that I had once lost.

Anju's story

I had met Anju once before this meeting. She offered her time to participate in my research in the similar manner as Beena, responding to my email sent out to my professional network. Anju is in her late 20s, born and raised in Kathmandu. She received her high school and university education in the city Kathmandu. Since her university days, Anju had been part of a youth environmental activist group. Once out of university, the group institutionalised to form an organisation through which Anju participated in many campaigns and projects related to environment management. She moved on to strengthen her career in youth activism working for a bigger organisation in the city and then had recently entered academia at a local university. When I met Anju for our conversation for my research, she had just been married a year ago. The marriage and how she came to get married was a process of major transformation for her. So throughout our conversation she chose to focus on her experience of getting married and how she had changed since in the last one year.

I ask Anju to start by sharing her childhood experiences. Her family of five, with three daughters lived within a larger joint family with her uncle who had two boys and her grandparents. Growing up in the same house together, Anju spent time playing with her male cousin who was the same age as hers. This was a critical time for her as shared in her narrative; this part of her childhood influenced her sense of self:

When I was young I used to play with my cousin brothers. We were very naughty. We used to climb trees, jump over the wall to go to the neighbours and play. Then I think perhaps a year before I got my periods, I started receiving comments from my family members, 'You are a girl, you should stop playing like that with your brothers'. I did not understand why they said that. It took me a while to understand why they were saying those things, but it made me angry and I asked 'why?'. I was smarter than them in class and always got better grades, so I never felt I was any less capable than them. Being good at studies, I felt I was entitled to do as I please and play as I liked. And then there were also another set of comments from people that would say I should have been born as a son. That confused me as well, why would they want me to be a boy? I thought being a daughter was just as good, what difference would it make if I were a son?

Around the same time, my mom got pregnant and everyone would ask me what I wished for. I would just say, 'I wish it to be a girl, I want a little

sister'. Then they would ask me, 'but wouldn't you want a little brother?' I already had my two cousin brothers to play with all this time, I just replied, 'I've already got brothers to play with ... I need a sister now'. Slowly I started getting ideas about the different values placed on daughters and sons in our society. I think the most defining moment for me happened when my father did not receive any share of the ancestral property as according to the extended family it was of no use since he had no sons. That is when I realized how society treats daughters differently and I felt my parents were treated as being less important for not producing sons. That's when my parents decided to move out and live separately from the larger family. The second thing that perhaps also had an impact on me was my mom usually would tell us three sisters, 'they (meaning the family) have always looked down on me because I am a mother of three daughters and I have no son ... so all three of you have to become something in life and prove them wrong'.

Anju says as she grew up and started reading, she got to know the notion of being a girl in the society. She started understanding why her parents did not receive property and the usual practice of leaving daughters out of inheritance with the assumption they go away to someone else's home. Anju says as she was growing up, whenever the topic of marriage came up, she would tell everyone that she would never get married. Whenever anyone questioned her statement, she would say she plans to stay with her parents and look after them in their old age. Without a son, she felt one of the children had that responsibility. At this point she says, 'Even until a few months before my wedding I used to argue about this and fought with anyone who would talk about getting me married'.

According to Anju around the age of 26, her mind started thinking otherwise. Some of her younger cousins got married and everywhere she went she was nagged about her being too old and not being married yet. She would hear things like, 'All your cousins and sisters will be married off, have children and have their own lives, and you'll be left alone, you will have to live the life of an old maiden'. Anju says this is the first time ever in her life she felt helpless:

You know how one can be empowered and disempowered at the same time. I felt like this successful person outside in my professional space, I felt I was this powerful person in my organisation. But then in my family life, it was very different. I hated going to family events and gatherings and slowly I started avoiding all family events. On the rare occasions that I did go, I also heard comments about my body. Some of my relatives would say, 'You're so fat, who would even marry you? You should lose weight so you'd find a husband'. I was very frustrated by this aspect of society and my family. My dad never pushed me to get married though. He even suggested that if I wanted to, I could go and live overseas, settle in another place where I could live in peace.

Anju eventually chose to get married, in fact when I met her, she had just been married a year. So how did she come to get married when she had so strongly been against it not too long ago, what changed? As she answers this question, I also get

some idea into Anju's perception of marriage and what it entails for a girl in our society and how that perception might have influenced her decisions for herself:

I still didn't want to marry even up until the day I was supposed to meet my future husband. I had no interest in meeting him but I received a lot of pressure from my parents. I was a bit sick that day and I also had to go out of town for a field visit for my research work the very next day. Last minute to appease my parents, I just decided to play along and meet him assuming he will see me, he will find out that I am fat and then he'll just reject me for the marriage. So I met him and went for my work the next day. But he called me the very next day and said to me, 'I know you are a career woman and if you have any concerns about what might happen to your career after marriage, I can assure you that you do not have to worry about that'. His response intrigued me because till then I had only heard and seen women having to sacrifice their interests and careers after marriage. So I told him, if you are willing to marry on my terms, then I will accept this proposal. Another thing happened perhaps 2 months before this ... my elder sister told me that now I think I might be ok with my parents around but there will come a time when they too will be no more and to consider life then and if I would be ok living alone. That also made me think. My social life was already shrinking rapidly as most of my friends had got married and were busy in their domestic lives. I had already begun to experience the loneliness my sister talked about.

So I had started considering the idea of having a partner to share life with. One thing I did have in mind very strongly was that I would not get married into a conservative family. So after talking to him, I felt that maybe this might work out. I finally said yes but inside I was thinking like, 'I'll give it a go, if it works fine, if it doesn't work, that's still ok'.

Anju's strong negative perception against marriage and what happens to a woman in marriage was constructed by the different experiences she came across mostly in her immediate family. She says perhaps the biggest influence was her own mother's experience of being utterly oppressed in her own home by her grandparents. Her mobility was highly restricted; she was not allowed to continue her education after marriage as she had married while still studying in her Bachelors. There were strict rules on what she could wear, including how short she could keep her hair or even when she could go to the hair salon. Anju says she has seen many other women receiving similar treatments in her extended family and the practice still exists even for the younger generation, like with her sisters-in-law in the family that are about the same age as hers. One of her younger cousin sisters who had recently got married shared her experiences of being a newlywed. According to Anju, she had to wear cotton sarees every day and was not allowed to wear any other clothes; she was required to cook meals for the whole family. Those stories caused a lot of stress and anxiety about the whole idea of marriage for Anju as she says, 'I didn't even know how to work the stove, let alone cook anything, I felt I just didn't fit into that kind of category'.

At this point in our conversation I wonder why the exposure Anju received or why her experiences led to a relatively negative impression about marriage. I felt Anju is probably not the only one to see these aspects of domestic life of women in Nepal and not every girl raised in this context comes to develop this kind of attitude towards marriage. But there is no simple way to answer this and I cannot expect Anju to give a clear answer explaining why she is the way she is or what makes her feel and think in those particular ways. I asked her to share her experiences after she got married and if it changed her in any way:

After marriage I felt I was lucky. On the very first day, after I entered the house, one of his aunts came to me and said, 'It must be very uncomfortable in that saree. We all just wear what we feel comfortable in, so change into this'. She had brought me a new pair of salwar set to wear. That immediately put me at ease. I don't know, perhaps I was making too big a deal than necessary about wearing sarees. But I started to notice simple gestures in everyone's behaviour there that aimed to make my transition to this new place much more comfortable and smoother. And I really appreciated that and warmed me towards the family. I felt like I needed to reciprocate this gesture. I was never required to cook. I say that household is not the typical kind, it is very different than what I had normally seen. My mother-in-law would say, 'You have to go to work, it'll be too much hassle for you'. So she did most of the cooking and housework and I did whatever I could do before I left for work in the mornings. I had never seen or heard about a mother-in-law doing all the housework and not expecting the daughter-in-law to do anything. Sometimes I used to wonder that perhaps she's doing this to maintain good relationships with her only son. I don't know, maybe she was genuinely being nice and loving towards me. But it really surprised me.

After two weeks of her marriage, Anju's husband gets transferred to another branch of his company out of the capital city. Anju stayed within Kathmandu for about a month. Her husband did not put any pressure on her to move or expressed any expectations about following him. Gradually Anju says she felt uncomfortable living alone with her in-laws. As a new daughter-in-law she says she was still learning how to be in that new role and she wasn't even sure how to do the role. She could not see herself moving back with her parents as she knew she would feel pressure there from relatives to behave in particular ways now that she was a married woman. So Anju says she felt 'like a refugee' so she decided to go and stay with her husband. She quit her job in Kathmandu and went to stay with her husband. For her friends, this move surprised them, it was so much unlike the Anju they had known her as. She says many of her friends questioned her decision given her professional image and personality as an independent working woman. Anju says she herself was somewhat confused with her decision at first, 'I always thought all my decisions or anything I did would be shaped by my career orientation, that was something I was very confident about – I never foresaw myself taking such a step in life, but I guess situations make you do things differently'. In fact Anju says she had never really seriously thought about her choice to quit her job and talking

about it during this conversation gave her some ideas about why she may have done so. She says she realizes that one's priorities and perspectives on things change as situations change in life. Her life before marriage was all about her career and she felt that is who she was and meant to be. She said she now realizes that priorities suddenly shifted as her family context changed and so she was making decisions from a very different situation, in which she says, 'there were so many other things to think about other than just my career'.

I ask her about her future and she says her next reason for anxiety is about having kids. She says she knows there will be expectations to have kids once you are married but at this stage, she does not see herself as having kids at all. In terms of her relationship with her husband, she feels comfortable. She says she has been able to speak openly and share with him. She says she feels equal in the relationship saying, 'I feel absolutely comfortable to tell him, 'I don't feel like cooking today, it's your turn today' and then he does not mind doing housework at all'. In terms of her adjustment to her new role as a married woman, she says she still struggles with many aspects of it, the expectations of it:

There are many issues that I still find hard to cope with being a married woman. Like the practice of touching the feet of the elderly; I have no problems with showing respect to elders but I question why these requirements are only for the women. Why doesn't he have to touch the feet of my parents and show his respect for them? Perhaps I am too influenced by gender discourses (laughs). I cannot help question all these practices and the reasons for them.

Listening to Anju, I get the sense that she is still undergoing (and it will go on) the transformation of becoming married, trying to figure out a place where she can fit among the many available positions she can take up. She is driven by conflicting desires; she has this desire to be nice and play the role of a good 'daughter-in-law' in gratitude for the way she has been received in her family. On the other hand, she also appears to have this desire to stay true to who she thinks she is, her values of equality and need to resist practices that go against those values.

Radha's story

Radha belongs to the Tharu indigenous community in the western part of Nepal. We agreed to meet and have our conversation at her home. When I arrived, she had just finished her morning chores. When I asked Radha to talk about her transformation, she says that her transformation started when she started attending the group meeting. Radha was married at 16. She says she never got the opportunity to go to school as she there were only her dad and her grandmother in the family, so she was responsible for looking after the cows and buffaloes. Radha never regrets not going to school, 'I was happy to support the family so that my younger brother and sisters could go to school, I wished somehow their lives could be improved'. When she was married at 16, she says her mother-in-law taught her

all the housework, like cooking and making jaand⁴³ at home. At 19, Radha conceived her first child but had a stillborn baby due to lack of medical attention at the time of birth. A year later she had a baby girl and then had recently given birth to her son when I met her. Radha starts sharing about her initial experience of being part of the community groups:

I used to hear all the women going to these 'meetings'. I had no idea what they meant. I used to wonder what does a meeting mean? How do they actually sit in meeting? Then in 2064 (AD 2007) some new sisters came to our village and said they would form a group for women. I had no interest in it. But my in-laws put my name down for it, they insisted that I should attend. They told me I need to go out, meet people, learn new things. In the first meeting, my mother-in-law went but then she told me I should go. So I did.

I was really scared ... I used to wonder what will they say to me, what will they ask me? Now I'm not sure if it was fear or shyness, perhaps it was shyness. I just couldn't speak. I remember the first meeting I attended was at the house of a community health volunteer's house. At the beginning, we all had to give our introductions. I was scared to even say my name. When my turn to speak was coming up, my inside was heated up like an engine ... I just could not speak, I quietly went and sat at the back. Later they insisted I should say something ... so I just told them my name.

Radha says she got used to being in the group and speaking as she continued going. She said she realised in order to understand all the new things they were talking about, she needed to attend the meetings regularly. They met every Sunday for two hours. Prior to her going to the meetings, she says she did not have any relations with the other women in her village. When she got married and came to her husband's home, she hardly went out as she was mostly busy at home with cleaning and cooking. Her in-laws did most of the work outside the home. Even when they had visitors at home, she was never interested and she hardly understood what they talked about. But once she started going to the meetings, she says she started going to other places, she got curious. Her mobility was a new experience for her and required to her to learn about things she never thought useful or interesting before:

One of the things I learnt being in the group was about mushroom farming ... I would have never known anything about it or how to even grow mushrooms. I found out from the group meetings about this and that an organisation in this nearby town Guleria was helping local farmers. So I went to this organisation in Guleria ... before that ... not even Guleria, I didn't even know the names of the nearby roads and villages. I just never needed to know these things. Now I know names of places and roads and I also know how to travel, take the bus and go to these places. So I learnt about mushroom farming and did that for over 2 years. With the money I

⁴³ Homemade liquor prevalent in the Tharu community

earned from it, I bought a tin sandook for my in-laws and a wall clock for home. Rest of the money was spent on things at home.

Radha says that without her in-laws, she would have never been able to change the ways she has. She would come home from meetings and share everything they talked about with her in-laws.

My in-laws never stopped me from going anywhere. I used to share everything with them and they would say, 'you have to go, don't worry about housework, we will handle it'. My husband doesn't live here and is overseas for work, but he also encourages me. He says as long as I take good care of his parents because he has left his old parents dependent on me. It is important to have this kind of support from home and family, otherwise it would have been so hard for me ... I don't think I would even try it without their encouragement.

Radha says in the earlier days, she had no idea of how she could manage her time and herself given that she was doing a lot more than she usually did. It took her a while to even get the concept of 'managing oneself'. She says she used to go to bed and wake up whenever she felt like it and then she would struggle to get everything done. Now she says she goes to bed early and wakes up early. On days when she knows she is going to be busy, she wakes up a bit earlier to get most of the housework done before heading out to do the community work. Although she did not know how to read or write, Radha was appointed the secretary of her group. She says as a result she had to learn to at least read and write names and basic numbers. She started learning how to read from her niece. It has become a regular habit for her to sit and watch the kids do their homework, browse through their school books and ask them questions so she can learn.

Radha senses a tremendous transformation in herself because for her, her everyday way of being has changed significantly for her. She is doing things that just a few years ago, she was not even aware of. As her engagement in activities beyond her domestic life increases, she is coming to see and learn about new things, new ways of doing things and a new way to engage in the world. What she is doing now may not appear as of major significance. What does matter here is that these changes are of major significance for her and it is through these experiences she is able to conceptualise her future. She is able to imagine the possibilities for ways of being and doing in her immediate future. I ask her at this point, what plans she might have for herself if any:

I am really thinking of learning sewing. If I can sew clothes for my kids and family members, that would be nice ... nowadays the sewing charge is greater than the cost of the cloth ... so if I know how to make clothes, I can bring the cloth from the market and make clothes whenever I can manage at home. If I manage to do sewing for others in the community, it might even be a way to earn some money and contribute to the family.

Radha's conversation is a bit different than the others as I felt that throughout the conversation, it was challenging for her to speak. My focus in the conversation was for her to speak about herself and her subjective experiences of personal

transformation. But there were frequent times during the conversation, she would shift the focus from herself and start talking in broader sense, her ideas of how 'a woman should be'. Some of these statements I felt were not her own but learnt perhaps from the discourse and conversations in the group meetings. A typical excerpt of such speak:

Women should not always be dependent on others I think ... among us women, some are educated, some are uneducated ... but even if we cannot read and write, we have our ears to listen with, eyes to see with ... we should use the truth we see through our own eyes and hear through our ears to move forward ... although we are uneducated, we sisters should stand on our own two feet ... and not expect everything from our husbands.

Such kind of talk was common in many of the other conversations where the participants chose to speak mostly on what they thought a woman should do and spoke little on their own personal experiences. I think in case of Radha, she is in transition between those two states. She is practising speaking through discourses but somewhere in the process is also learning to speak her own personal truths. ■

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