

Doing and Undoing Child Marriage in Nepal

An Exploratory Study Using Institutional Ethnography

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This master's thesis is carried out as a part of the education at the University of Agder and is therefore approved as a part of this education. However, this does not imply that the University answers for the methods that are used or the conclusions that are drawn.

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“Experience: that most brutal of teachers. But you learn, my God do you learn.” – C.S Lewis



For the strong, beautiful girls of Nepal. Thank you for sharing your stories with me.

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Abstract

Child marriage is a practice that occurs across regions, cultures and religions. Every year approximately 15 million girls under the age of eighteen get married. The practice often has serious impacts on the lives of the girls themselves, and child marriage threatens the progress in six out of eight development goals related to education, health, poverty and gender equality. The main drivers have been identified as tradition, poverty, gender norms, security and weak law enforcement, but despite available research a lot more remains to be understood about child marriage. The thesis does not theorise about why it happens, but explores the actualities of the doing and ‘undoing’ of child marriage in two districts of Nepal, Surkhet and Kapilvastu. The study is inspired by a method of inquiry called institutional ethnography (IE), which challenges how mainstream sociology clamps a theoretical framework over any inquiry, and how this determines how the actual world will be attended to. IE promotes a different understanding of the social as people’s coordinated activities, and the research starts out in lived life instead of theory. The thesis is a discovery into social research itself and seeks to explore what an alternative sociology might add to the understanding of child marriage. Using an IE perspective creates an understanding and appreciation of the complexity of people’s experiences. What I found is that the reality is much more complex than what an understanding of child marriage as the result of poverty, tradition or gender norms offers. Using so-called work knowledge as data gives a more detailed account of what the practice of child marriage actually entails for the people involved. It opens up for descriptions of activities that might otherwise not have been included. Further, the aim of IE is to explore how people’s activities are embedded in and shaped by trans-local relations. Not viewing child marriage as socially organised risks assigning causality or agency to concepts such as gender norms or tradition, which obscures what actually goes on. Additionally it risks blaming the practice on people and their characteristics, which maintains typologies and stereotypes.

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Abbreviations

CBO.....	Community Based Organisation
IE.....	Institutional Ethnography
IGA.....	Income Generating Activity
M&E.....	Monitoring and Evaluation
NGO.....	Non Governmental Organisation
RBM.....	Results-Based Management
SF.....	Strømme Foundation
SST.....	SAMVAD Support Team
VDC.....	Village Development Committee

INTRODUCTION

During my studies of international development I have been introduced to a range of development subjects, but I have always found those related to social injustice the most interesting. Child marriage is a social practice that affects 15 million girls each year, and threatens the progress in six out of eight development goals related to education, health, poverty and gender equality. It is on the international development agenda as an important issue to address, however I knew very little about the practice and wanted to use my thesis to learn more about the actualities of child marriage. I wanted to learn from the lived life of those who experience it, and knew about a project in Nepal aimed at empowering girls who are vulnerable to child marriage. SAMVAD, meaning ‘dialogue’ in Nepali, is run by the international development organisation Strømme Foundation, and it was through them I got access to informants.

Background

Child marriage is a practice that occurs across regions, cultures and religions. It is defined internationally by UNICEF (2014) as a formal marriage or informal union before the age of eighteen. It affects both boys and girls; however, girls are disproportionately affected by this practice. Every year approximately 15 million girls under the age of eighteen get married. In developing countries one in three girls get married before they reach eighteen, and one in nine before they reach fifteen (UNFPA 2012a:6). If current trends continue, another 142 million girls will marry before adulthood within this decade (UNFPA 2012a:44). The highest prevalence rates are documented in South Asia and West and Central Africa, where two out of five girls are child brides (UNFPA 2012a:27). Child marriage is rooted in gender inequality and is considered a human rights violation in the international development discourse, which denies girls their choice and participation. It is claimed to be caused by a combination of tradition, poverty, gender roles, security concerns and weak law enforcement (Lemmon 2014, Girls not Brides 2015a, World Vision 2013).

The practice of child marriage has serious impacts on the lives of the girls themselves and on the development of their communities and nations. It often has severe implications for girls’ physical and emotional health, as marriage forces them into adulthood before they are emotionally or

physically mature. Girl brides are extra vulnerable to HIV-infection, pregnancy- and childbirth complications and domestic violence, compared to girls who marry when they are twenty or older. Their children are also at greater risk of infant mortality and morbidity. Additionally, shortened education is both a cause and effect of child marriage (CFR 2013, Girls not Brides 2015a, World Vision 2013:30). The practice can thus perpetuate poverty, given the effect lack of education has on income earning possibilities and health indicators. The countries with the highest prevalence of child marriage tend to be among the world's poorest and least stable. For instance, nine out of the ten countries with the highest prevalence of child marriage are on the OECD list of fragile states (Lemmon 2014:1). Child marriage is not the cause of fragile states, but since child marriage reinforces poverty, limits girls' education and have negative health impacts it contributes to further instability (Lemmon 2014:3). According to World Vision (2013:6) fragile contexts include "those in which communities are under greater stress caused by natural disasters, acute and slow onset emergencies, civil and political conflict and insecurity" (World Vision 2013:6). In sum, child marriage contributes to inhibit progress in six out of eight development goals related to poverty, education, health and gender equality. Consequently, in the proposed sustainable development goals, which will succeed the millennium development goals, child marriage and gender based violence are emphasized as focus areas. Goal number five is to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. One of the sub goals, 5.3 reads "eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation" (UN 2014:14).

Nepal is rated by the UN as one of the least developed countries (UNCTAD 2014:xiii), and is also ranked in the alert group of Fund for Peace's fragile states index (FFP 2015:5). The legal age for marriage has since 2010 been 20, or 18 with parental consent (Girls not Brides 2015b). Currently the Ministry of Women, Children and Social Welfare is developing Nepal's first national strategy on child marriage, and the government has committed to strive to end the practice of child marriage by 2020. However due to the recent earthquake of 2015, it is unclear when the strategy will be implemented (Travers 2015:5). Nepal has one of the highest prevalence rates of child marriage in the world, with 41 % of girls married before the age of eighteen. This translates to two out of five girls. It is the western districts, Mid-western Region (51 %) and Far-western Region (48 %) that have the highest rates, followed by the Central Region (40 %) (UNFPA 2012b). The rates are higher in rural areas than urban areas, and in certain ethnic

groups the rate of marriage before fifteen years of age can reach 83 % (Girls not Brides 2015b). If current trends continue, the prevalence rate is projected to increase 19 % by 2030, compared with the 2010 estimate of married girls (UNFPA 2012b). The main drivers of child marriage in Nepal are identified as tradition, gender norms and lack of education. Additionally lower caste girls and Dalit girls seem to be under greater pressure to marry young. According to Girls not Brides (2015b) the least educated, poorest and rural girls constitute the highest risk groups.

Purpose of thesis

As the practice of child marriage often severely affects the girls involved and affects the development of their communities, it is an important topic within development management and has been put on the international development agenda through the sustainable development goals. The background account above however, does not say much about the actualities of child marriage. The main drivers have been identified as tradition, poverty, gender norms, security and weak law enforcement, but despite available research a lot more remains to be understood about child marriage. The purpose of this thesis is to explore the doing and ‘undoing’ of child marriage starting out in the experience of those who are involved. Who is involved, what do they actually do and how is their work coordinated? The purpose is not to theorise about why it happens and apply theoretical concepts as explanation of the social, but to explore by starting out in lived life. The thesis aims to develop an understanding of the complexity of people’s experiences. My decision to start out in lived life instead of in theory, and explore the social as people’s activities, is inspired by a method of inquiry called institutional ethnography (IE). IE departs from conventional social research and promotes a different understanding of the social as people’s coordinated activities. The purpose of this thesis is also to see what doing research inspired by IE might add to the understanding of child marriage. The founder of IE, Dorothy E. Smith, describes the method of inquiry as a paradigm shift. She explains that it took her twenty-five years to develop IE and make this shift, and I have tried to make it in seven months. Thus, I do not claim to have understood institutional ethnography fully, and I am certain parts of my thesis are still coloured by the sociological conventions I have been taught and become so familiar with during my time in academia. Even so, I have no doubt learned more by studying my topic in this manner than I otherwise would have done. Smith promotes research as discovery, rather than

explaining the social through theoretical concepts. My thesis has turned out to be a discovery into the actualities of child marriage in two districts of Nepal. Moreover, it is a discovery into social research itself, a discovery of an alternative way of understanding the social. Because of this emphasis on research as discovery, the reader will also find that my reflections are not concentrated in a separate paragraph or chapter dedicated to reflexivity. Rather, they permeate the whole thesis and are located where they belong either in relation to methodology, theory, ontology or analysis. Again, I would like to point out that the discovery is by no means finished, and I acknowledge that there is still a lot more to understand about IE, child marriage and about the social research undertaking. Although a thesis is the final assignment of a master's degree, my thesis has actually become more of a starting point. I consider it the beginning of a commitment to learn from actuality, either in terms of further research or in terms of development work. Summed up, the purpose of my thesis is twofold:

- 1) Learn more about IE as an alternative way to explore and understand the social.
- 2) Explore the doing and undoing of child marriage in two Nepali districts using an IE perspective, to see what an alternative sociology might add to the understanding of child marriage, which I might not have discovered using a more conventional approach.

My research has been open-ended and I have not operated with clearly defined problem statements, because one of the principles in IE is to let what you discover in actuality guide your research instead of predetermined research questions. However, the research has been guided by my initial interest in exploring the actualities of child marriage and also look into the activities involved in changing this social practice, what I have called the undoing of child marriage. My research has been conducted within a development project aimed at stopping child marriage, and I wanted to explore also that work.

Before proceeding, a few clarifications are in order. Within IE there is a focus on people's so-called 'work'. This is not to be equated with paid labour, but is used in a much more generous sense meaning people's everyday activities that take time and effort. In IE the social is thought to exist as our activities, and that is why the thesis is focused on the 'doing' and 'undoing' of child marriage. The starting point of an institutional ethnography is to generate so-called work knowledge together with informants; to describe the activities they do, what they feel and think

about those activities and how their activities are coordinated with other people's doings. However, beyond this the aim is eventually to build on and extend this knowledge and explore how people's local activities might be connected and shaped by trans-local or institutional relations, where texts and discourses often are involved in a coordination across time and space. IE is developed to explore social organisation in so-called modern societies where institutions such as academia, government bureaucracies, mass media, corporations and organisations are interconnected in complex ways and impact people's local activities (Smith 2005:10). Villages in Nepal, and the family as the social relations I start my study of child marriage in, are not formalised institutions of this kind. This implies that the activities I have been exploring are probably more diffusely coordinated through texts and discourses. Part of the analysis is thus more focused on the local coordination, and only a few institutional relations have been explored a little bit further. However, the presence of NGOs and social media makes textual and discursive social organisation an element of everyday activities also in the context of Nepali villages, and doing a study inspired by IE has provided me with interesting findings also here.

Into the field: context of the study

I remember the evening I arrived in Kathmandu very well. I had never been to Nepal before, but looking out the window from my taxi I recognised many of the things I had seen before in other so-called developing countries. Busy streets with loads of people, street vendors, stray dogs, potholes in the road, markets and crazy traffic. It was very dark and not many streetlights on, and I quickly noticed how cold it was inside. It was January, and winter in Nepal, with the temperature creeping down towards zero in the evening, sometimes below. The combination of uninsulated brick houses and lack of electricity made it extremely cold. I put on all the layers of wool I had brought, and remained in those layers for at least half my stay. In the hall of the guest house there was a sheet of paper with 'load shedding' written on it; a term I would become very familiar with the next few weeks. It listed the few hours each day when electricity would be available. This rationing scheme explained why it was so cold, the electricity was not enough for heating and it often meant cold showers and weak internet access. During my fieldwork the power cuts went from eight to twelve hours a day. You got used to having frost breath inside and walking around with a constantly runny nose. Everybody was coughing. The places that used

solar power were slightly better off. That first night I woke up because my bed started shifting. It did not last long, and being tired from the journey I fell asleep again without giving it much thought. The following morning I learned that it was an aftershock. Walking around in Kathmandu you could still see the impact of the 7.3 earthquake on 25th of April 2015. 8 500 casualties were reported. There are cracks in many of the buildings, historical temples are in ruins and piles of bricks that once used to be walls lay around. Construction work is ongoing, and slowly the city is being rebuilt. However, many people in the nearby villages that were levelled with the ground, have still not received much help. Their livelihoods have been ruined and they sleep in tents and makeshift shacks trying to survive the winter. For those who lived through the earthquake, the aftershocks can be quite traumatic as they trigger memories of what was lost and create worry that it might happen again.

A blockade of the India-Nepal border created a difficult situation for the people of Nepal. It had been going on for about three months when I arrived, and continued until the beginning of February. Many of the people I came in touch with explained that times were hard right now. Groups opposed to the new constitution had imposed the blockade. The need for a new constitution was advanced in the aftermath of the ten-year civil war led by Maoist rebels, ending in 2006. Two years later the monarchy, which had lasted 240 years, was abolished. It took years however to agree on a new constitution, and it was not until September 20th 2015 that the constitution was passed. The republic of Nepal will become federal, consisting of seven states. Federalism has been proposed due to the diversity of the country. More than one hundred languages are spoken, and the people are divided along lines such as caste, religion, gender, and ethnic divides between hill ethnicities and lowland ethnicities (Haviland 2015). I will not go deep into the political turmoil regarding the constitution, I merely want to point out that marginalised groups fearing the constitution will still work against them were protesting, and that the blockade resulted in hardships for most Nepalis, including many of my informants. It also had implications for where I could collect data, as the security situation had to be considered. The reconstruction after the earthquake has been delayed and people have suffered due to shortages of electricity, gas, petrol and medicines. I noticed queues of cars, buses and motorbikes that were more than 400 meters long. They could be parked in the queue alongside the road for days, waiting for a small share of petrol. Other days I walked past an endless queue of women with empty gas tanks, waiting patiently and hoping they might get hold of more gas for cooking. I

passed them on my way to the office. On my way home eight hours later I saw some of the same women still standing in line. Certain meals that took long to cook were one by one being scrapped from the menus in restaurants. Parks were being converted into big piles of firewood for fuel, putting pressure on the forest resources. Finally, the prices for transport and basic food items increased. Food shortages were experienced in some of the villages, due to the increased prices in combination with lack of rain resulting in poor crops. This was the context I entered into for my data collection. Times were hard, yet people hardly complained and maintained a positive spirit by joking about it and helping each other in any way they could. The inscription on the micro taxis in Kathmandu were “no power, no gas, no petrol – no problem!”

Strømme Foundation and the SAMVAD project

My research was conducted within a development project operated by Strømme Foundation (SF), an international development organisation. Its head office is located in Kristiansand, Norway, and the four regional offices are located in Uganda, Peru, Mali and Sri-Lanka. SF’s mission is to “eradicate poverty” and the methods used are microfinance, education and a rights-based approach. SF operates according to the ‘help for self-help’ principle, meaning that they believe in empowering people with opportunities to help themselves out of poverty. Their conceptualisation of development is not fulfilment of basic needs, but the realisation of human rights. Human dignity is highlighted by SF as the most important human right, from which all other fundamental rights are derived. Development is according to SF achieved when people’s rights are respected and protected. SF works in 13 countries through local partners (Strømme Foundation 2016).

Strømme Foundation started working in Nepal in 1999, but decided to phase out in 2004 to re-strategize the development approach to suit the Nepali context. In 2011 SF started working in Nepal again, so the country office in Kathmandu is relatively new. The work they do in Nepal targets socially excluded and marginalised groups, including Dalits who are outside the caste system and treated as untouchable by higher castes. The focus has also been on adolescents with little or no formal education, who are vulnerable to trafficking and child marriage. The projects in Nepal are implemented in cooperation with ten local partner organisations.

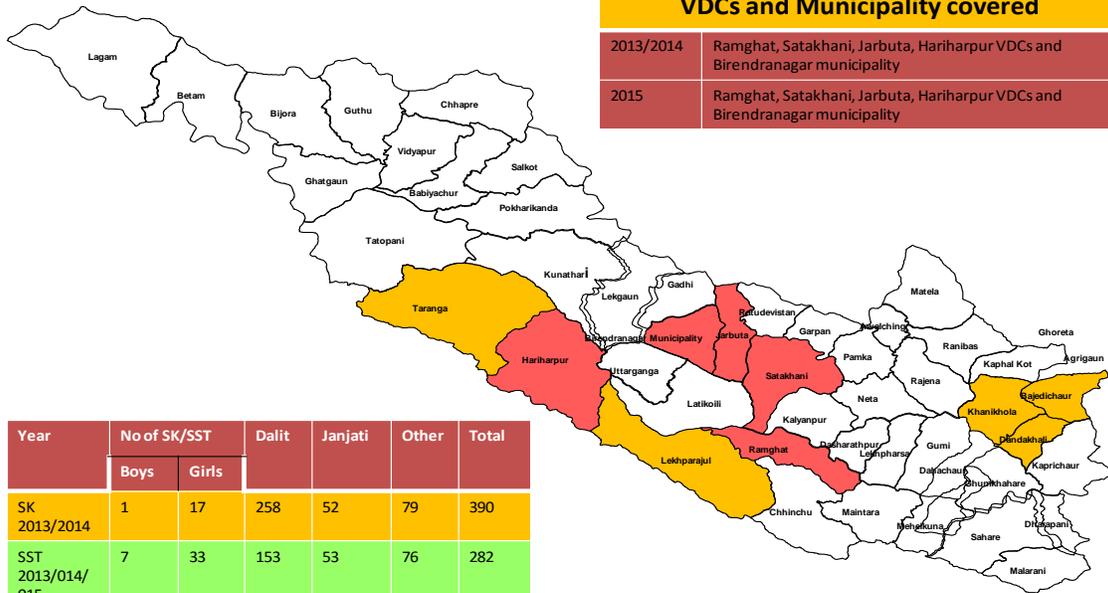
SAMVAD was initiated to empower adolescents through life skills education, literacy training and vocational training. The programme also exists for boys, but the majority of the SAMVAD centres are for girls. SAMVAD means ‘dialogue’ in Nepali and is a one-year informal, community based, education programme for girls in the age group 11-19. Girls from poor and marginalised families who have dropped out of school are prioritised. However, the groups are often a mix of girls from different castes, although the majority are Dalits and low-caste. The girls are both married and unmarried, literate and illiterate. Each SAMVAD centre has an animator who is responsible for teaching and motivating the girls. She is selected and trained by the local partner organisation and is usually just a few years older than the girls. Each group consist of about twenty girls who gather every day for two to three hours with the animator. Before a SAMVAD centre is established in a village, a support team (SST) is selected. It consist of between five and seven members who are guardians, parents, social workers and local elites. The team assists the animator if necessary and helps to ensure that the programme runs smoothly. The SST motivates the parents to send their girls to SAMVAD, assists in finding a place for the centre and informs the community about the programme. The SAMVAD year is divided into three phases. During the first three months the girls are introduced to the programme, what they will learn, the benefits and how the topics are taught. The focus is also on getting to know each other and establish trust in the group so it becomes comfortable for the girls to share their experiences. The teaching is based on participatory education and the subjects are taught by using creative methods such as drama, games and music. The girls are not instructed in correct answers, but encouraged to participate in discussions where they talk about and learn from their own experiences. For each topic they draw on personal experiences and situations they have observed in their families or communities. The goal is to learn analytical and critical thinking, and discuss how they individually or as a group can address some of the issues they identify. During this first phase basic literacy lessons are also given, which continues into the second phase. During the second phase the girls discuss topics such as the adolescence period, reproductive health, personal hygiene, family planning, education, environmental challenges, gender discrimination, caste discrimination and untouchability, trafficking and child marriage. They are made aware of their rights and oriented on different service institutions that might be available in their community. They learn how to access services from institutions as health clinics, microfinance institutions or community based organisations (CBOs). The remaining

three months they discuss possible income generating activities (IGAs). They also engage in advocacy, where they inform the rest of their community about the topics they have discussed through street dramas, rallies and the like. Today SAMVAD runs across seven districts in Nepal, and my fieldwork was conducted in Surkhet and Kapilvastu.

Surkhet district

We travelled by air for one hour from Kathmandu to Nepalgunj airport. Then from there we drove about four hours, through the Langtang National Park to get to the valley of Surkhet. Nepal is geographically divided into three belts: the mountain region, the hill region and the terai region. Surkhet is a hill district located in the mid-western region of Nepal, with a population of approximately 350 000. It has one municipality called Birendranagar which I refer to as the Surkhet city area in my analysis. Surkhet has 50 Village Development Committees (VDCs), which is the lower tier of local governance in Nepal. They facilitate partnership between the community and the public sector to improve service delivery, and cooperate with the various NGOs active in the district (Sharma 2016:12). SF Nepal implements the SAMVAD programme in Surkhet through two partners, KIRDARC and SAC. During my fieldwork I talked with representatives from both the partner organisations, but I only got to visit SAMVAD centres run by SAC. The map below shows where in Surkhet SAC runs SAMVAD centres. One of the centres was located in the municipality and the other was located far into a village nearby Ramghat. I stayed in the village three nights in the home where one of last year's SAMVAD groups was held. It was a nice clay house that belonged to a Dalit family. My host mother had four daughters and one son, her husband was working in Saudi Arabia. The oldest daughter was married and had moved to another village, and the second daughter was an animator, so she was mostly busy working but dropped by one evening. The other three were still home and attending the village school. It was a very peaceful village where most people's livelihood consisted of farming. Many men were also working abroad to sustain their families, as my host mother's husband. It was about one hours drive to the nearest town, the villagers fetched water from a nearby river and spent a few hours each day collecting fodder in the jungle for their cattle and goats.

Geographical Coverage



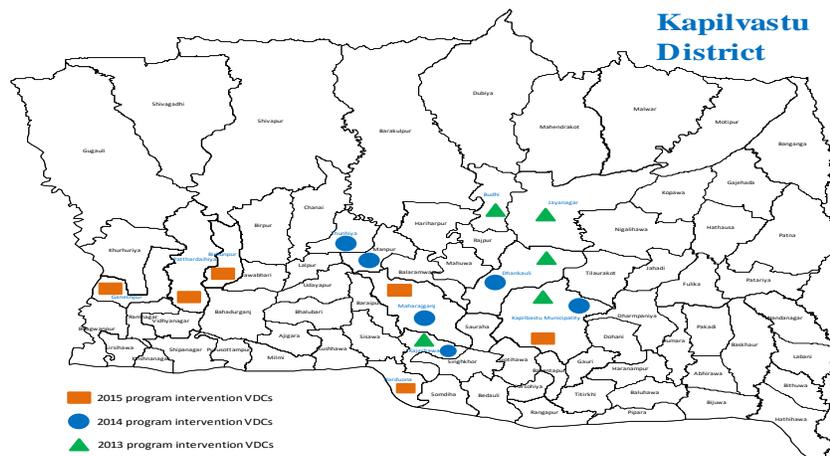
VDCs and Municipality covered

2013/2014	Ramghat, Satakhani, Jarbuta, Hariharpur VDCs and Birendranagar municipality
2015	Ramghat, Satakhani, Jarbuta, Hariharpur VDCs and Birendranagar municipality

Year	No of SK/SST		Dalit	Janjati	Other	Total
	Boys	Girls				
SK 2013/2014	1	17	258	52	79	390
SST 2013/014/015	7	33	153	53	76	282
SK 2015	6	16	224	120	139	482
Total	7	33	635	225	294	1154

Kapilvastu district

Although I could have taken the bus, I ended up going by plane to Kapilvastu as well, and then took the night bus back. The airport was about one hour from Kapilvastu municipality, so the local SAMVAD coordinator and my interpreter picked me up. We stopped in Lumbini, which is claimed to be the birthplace of Buddha and on UNESCO's World Heritage List. It is a Buddhist pilgrimage site with ruins of ancient monasteries, and several countries have built Buddhist monasteries in different architectural styles in the surrounding area. In Kapilvastu the local partner was NNDSWO, a Dalit social welfare organisation working to end caste discrimination. In the map below you see the VDCs where SAMVAD centres have been established. Kapilvastu is located in the geographical terai region and the Western Development Region, and borders India to the south. The population is approximately 570 000, whereby 17 % are Dalits (Sharma 2016:12). Terai is a plain region and most of the population depends on agriculture. Paddy rice is one of the main crops and we drove through huge fields of mustard crops when visiting the villages. There are 77 VDCs and one municipality called Kapilvastu municipality. My fieldwork in Kapilvastu was conducted in six small villages in and around the municipality. One day we visited a village right on the boarder to India. Due to the ongoing blockade the boarder was closed, but usually people travel easily across the boarder. I was informed that culturally the people in Kapilvastu have more similarities with the people of northern India than with the people of the hill region of Nepal.



Thesis structure

The thesis consists of three main chapters, the literature review, methodology and analysis. In the literature review the focus is upon the ontology of institutional ethnography and how it contrasts with conventional sociology. The emphasis is on the paradox of a gap between the social as written and the social as lived and experienced. Within IE, the researcher does not theorise social reality, but she looks at the social in a theorised way. Smith has developed some notions for studying the social and I explain my current understanding of them in the literature review. They include ‘work knowledge’, ‘social relations’, ‘social organisation’ and ‘ruling relations’. The literature review also includes my use and understanding of ‘gender’ in the analysis.

An account of the methodology employed is a mandatory part of any thesis. Your choice of methodology reflects your ontological position as a social science researcher, and it informs your research design, data collection and analysis. I have chosen to give a relatively detailed account of my methodology because it is not conventional and I cannot expect the reader to have much prior knowledge of it. In order for readers to follow my line of thought and make the same sense of my analysis, I rendered a detailed account necessary. The methodology chapter gives an account of the methodological implications the use of IE had for my research, and it explains how I conducted my fieldwork.

The final chapter is the analysis, which consists of five parts. In the first two I give an account of my informants’ doing of child marriage, first in Surkhet and then in Kapilvastu. Their work knowledge is fitted together, which brings into view the local coordination of their activities. In part three, the social organisation of child marriage, I build on this work knowledge and explore a little further how my informants’ activities might be connected and shaped by trans-local relations. In part four I give an account of the ‘undoing’ of child marriage, meaning some of the work involved in stopping child marriage. The focus is upon the SAMVAD project and some of the challenges my informants faced when trying to activate new texts brought into their social relations by the project. Conducting research within a development project led me to discover parts of the ruling relations of development, and this is briefly explored in the final part of the analysis, before concluding remarks are given.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Within the social sciences, the link between theory and research is an important matter of discussion. Most research is conducted to test theory or to build theory. Either way, data is most commonly collected in relation to theory (Bryman 2012:19). In the university guidelines for writing a master thesis within my department, it is written that in a literature review it is common to give an overview of theoretical perspectives and contributions the researcher finds relevant for the problem statement. It further explains that the relevance of the study method depends heavily on the problem statement, and that the literature review should be prepared before discussing the study method (UIA 2015:5-6). This implies that it is the problem statement, which you choose prior to data collection, that guides and determines your choice of theory to apply and your choice of methods. It also somehow suggests that regardless of your ontological and epistemological position, you will end up with a problem statement, and attached theoretical concepts, that determine the rest of your research. A research inquiry will always start in theory if you follow this guideline and the sociological conventions it is based on. Within sociological theory there are theories with a high level of abstraction. For instance structuration theory or symbolic interactionism. According to the sociologist Merton (1967, cited in Bryman 2012:21), such grand theories offer few indications to researchers on how they might guide the data collection. Their level of abstractness is likely to be so great that the researcher would find it difficult to make necessary links with the real world. I have been on the verge of discovering this contradiction during my master's course, however I have never been able to comprehend it fully. I have written critical essays about the gap between social reality and the concepts and categories we use to understand the social, for instance about 'empowerment' being solely understood in terms of the indicators developed for it, and consequently how that practice renders the concept unable to capture the complexities of lived reality. I have also discussed how many development projects have failed because they operate according to a top-down approach based on theories and ideas about the social, which may not reflect the reality of the context the project is meant to operate in. There is a paradox here, highlighted by Bryman (2012:21) when he points out that even highly abstract ideas must have some connection with an external reality. This paradox is in many ways what led me to discover an alternative method of inquiry. Institutional ethnography provides a new way to study and understand the social that addresses the paradox of the gap between social reality and social theory. An inquiry into IE has been a process of learning the

difference between theorising social reality and looking at the social in a theorised way. It seems like a slight distinction, yet it has major implications for the connections you make between ontology and epistemology, and consequently what data you collect and what sense you make of it. In the following I describe and discuss the ontology of IE, as I have come to understand it at this point. It is this understanding my methods and analysis is based on.

The gap between the social as written and the social as experienced

IE was developed by the Canadian sociologist Dorothy E. Smith in the 1980s, as an alternative to what she considered a sociology that writes the social from a ruler's perspective (Widerberg 2008:311). According to Smith, there is a gap between the social as written and the social as lived and experienced (Widerberg 2008:315). She is pointing to the same paradox that Bryman highlights by referencing Merton. However, where Merton (1967:39, in Bryman 2012:21) suggests that middle range theories are better suited to make research connections between theory and social reality, Smith suggests a complete departure from the way theory has been used in social research. IE is a sociology, not only a methodology. It is not just another way to implement sociological research strategies that begin in theory (Smith 2005:2). I have come to understand that if you try to implement IE as just a method, you subordinate your inquiry to the very same sociological conventions that IE was developed as a critique of. That is why the research process proposed in the university guidelines became difficult for me to follow after discovering IE. I ended up not having a problem statement that guided my choice of theory and methods. IE's ontology led me to start my inquiry in lived life instead of theory. My research questions emerged out of what I learned from people's experiences rather than being determined prior to data collection. Campbell & Gregor (2002:11) explain that newcomers to IE must learn to look at their research topic rather differently, than if they were doing conventional research. This implies challenging accepted practices of knowing. Smith (2005:2) herself describes IE as a paradigm shift. This means that IE involves an alternative way to create knowledge about the social that is not based on reification and does not depict the social as an entity existing over and above people.

Bryman (2012:21) writes that the paradox is that even highly abstract ideas must have a connection with an external reality, in that they are likely to have been generated out of reading

research or reflection upon a particular reality or other's writings on it. Why then is this connection often so difficult to establish? As I understand Smith, she proposes that it is the conventional research process, and how we conventionally write the social, which itself produces the gap. Much of Smith's critique of the mainstream sociological discourse revolves around what she claims is a disappearance of subjects (Widerberg 2008:315). She describes it as a "blob-ontology", where for every concept there is taken to be a something out there corresponding to it. She suggests that the conceptual replaces the actual, and that concepts and abstractions are treated as agents. They can be assigned a determining role in human behaviour without claiming an empirical reference. People and their activities vanish from most sociological accounts (Smith 2005:54, 56). This is for instance done through nominalisation of verbs, where verbs expressing action is made into nouns such as social structure or power, whereby the social agents disappear from the text. As Widerberg (2008:315) explains it, the subjects are first taken out of the research accounts, then after some theorising put back in as an illustration of the theoretical categories. Such a process results in a selective representation of the actual as it conforms to the conceptual (Smith 2005:54). By doing library research and applying theories to the social, the researcher remains in the established theory (Campbell & Gregor 2002:11). She reconstitutes themes, categories and concepts. Now, it is a requirement in scholarly research to connect new knowledge to the discourse in which the topic is already known. A thesis writer will be evaluated partly based on his or her ability to discover what is already known, and demonstrate how their findings relate to established literature and ideas. However, by starting an inquiry in theory and literature, the researcher risks being the subject of 'institutional capture' (Smith 2005:225). I use this term in two ways. One relates to the use of professional language in the interview setting, which can obscure the actualities of people's doings. I elaborate on it in the methodology chapter. However, I also find it a useful term to describe the practice of uncritically adopting concepts and dominant perspectives into one's thinking about the research setting from the literature. If you do so you will find yourself standing with the view of the world and the research subjects as it is represented in the literature. What is written however, might not match the lived experience. I found a good example of this in Magnussen's (2015:39) Ph.D. on connections between men's breadwinning responsibility and how they attend to their health. Her conceptualised connection was derived from literature, where findings indicated that men's breadwinning responsibility kept them going despite of illness. Early on in her analysis however,

she encountered difficulties demonstrating this connection. If she still meant it was there she would have to argue it, as she could not show it empirically in her data. This example shows how research risks remaining in the conceptual world from the literature without establishing empirical connections. The gap between experience and theory becomes reinforced.

I can also include examples from my own research. To get an overview of what was known about child marriage I started reading reports and articles. As I study development management, it was natural to start with the international development discourse to establish the relevance of my topic. I began conceptualising child marriage as tradition, connected it to ignorance, lack of education and deep rooted gender norms or patriarchy. I got the impression that parents pushed their girls into it, often for security reasons, and that the girls themselves had no say. I read how child marriage has major health implications and contributes to perpetuate poverty. It was labelled a human rights violation and framed as an evil. Awareness, empowerment and norm change were the necessary efforts to eliminate the practice of child marriage. I adopted these concepts, and it was not until my supervisor reminded me that I was a researcher, not an activist, that I realised what had happened. I had mostly read NGO reports and research conducted by UN bodies. I tapped into the international development discourse, and started to use concepts with assumptions that come from the work of administering international aid; concepts that frame how agencies understand development matters. Working for an NGO with a focus on international projects myself, I was prone to letting the concepts in the discourse decide what I was able to see. This could obscure my understanding of what was actually happening in people's lived reality. Due to this risk of importing dominant perspectives, a literature review becomes a somewhat different undertaking within IE than in conventional sociology. An institutional ethnographer reads for conventional reasons, to discover the scope of what is known about a chosen topic, but also for a particular reason related to positioning.

Positionality

The interest at the heart of the literature review in IE is how the written sociological accounts have been constructed as factual and objective, and how this objectivity depends on the writer's standpoint disappearing from the final version (Campbell & Gregor 2002:52). Both Smith and Bourdieu demand that the position of the researcher should be the object of the same kind of critical analysis we employ when investigating other objects. Sociology and its praxis has to be understood in the context of relations and positions within the academic field (Widerberg 2008:316). Smith problematizes the relations in which sociology has developed and in which it is practiced today. She criticises the objectivist accounts sociology produces through the mechanisms mentioned above. Nichols (2016:5) explains that in IE the social is not "out there" to be objectified through research; the social is happening in and through the coordinated activities of people, including the activities of researchers, who have traditionally positioned themselves outside the social relations they study. Smith consequently proposes a position from within, rather than one from above, meaning a position in the everyday world. Bryman (2012:393) explains that this reflexive attitude is highly critical of the researcher as someone who extracts knowledge from observations and interviews and then transmits knowledge to an audience. The central point as I understand it is that research commits the researcher to a social relation, where the researcher herself participates in the production of knowledge. Knowledge from a reflexive position is always a reflection of a researcher's location in time and social space (Bryman 2012:393). This view contrasts with treating the presence of the researcher as a problem of bias. Further, the researcher starting out in the everyday world of experience is crucial to IE being a sociology *for* people. In institutional ethnography, people are understood as experts of the work they do, and their coordination of this work with the work of others. Informants and researcher together producing knowledge about this socially coordinated work, so-called work knowledge, is the starting point for doing an institutional ethnography. This means that people as such are not the object of investigation, but rather what happens in the social relations they engage in. Doing IE, one starts out exploring what happens in people's so-called local social relations, but eventually aims to extend this knowledge and explore how people's activities are shaped by so-called trans-local or institutional relations. More specifically, the aim is to show how what happens in local social relations is hooked up in things going on trans-locally, simultaneously shaping what is going on in multiple local sites. These are often

difficult to see from one single person's standpoint. Bringing these links into view can help people understand – and change – what is going on locally, and this is why IE is called a sociology *for* people, and not *about* people. Widerberg (2008:314) explains that it is what is conventionally often called the 'structure' and functioning of society that should be made visible, but from a position *within* everyday life. Smith is, however, very sceptical towards writing about the social in ways that implies that it transcends human action. Using the concept of trans-local relations instead makes it very clear that also what is often called 'social systems' are actually human action being done in social relations. I explain this understanding of the social further below.

The social as reifications

The ontology of IE is a theory of how the social exists and is real. A researcher explores in real time, real locations and real people in the actual world (Smith 2005:52). The goal is always to explain how the everyday life is put together. To understand how the social is real it is useful to contrast it with the social as reifications. Before discovering IE, I started to look into different social theories I thought might be relevant to my analysis. My interest in why and how child marriage occurs, and also how it changes led me into the topic of social transformation. It is one of the great themes of classical social theory, and the concepts agency and structure are central (Karp 1986:134). Common to many of the most influential social theorists is the understanding that failure to consider agency in the context of structure, and structure in the context of agency, impoverishes both (see eg. Sahlins 1981, Karp 1986, Giddens 1991, Bourdieu 1972). Such theories can be viewed as attempts to overcome the opposition between objectivism and subjectivism. They are modifications of earlier conceptualisations of the social, such as Durkheim's (1966) notion of 'social facts' that exist outside the individual and determine behaviour. Here the social becomes an object existing above people that can be studied as its own entity without considering social subjects. According to Giddens (1984:114), what he calls 'social systems' do not reproduce themselves, they require the active production and reproduction by human subjects. The concept 'structuration', where the social structure is a becoming rather than a being, connects with Sahlins' understanding of 'the practice of structure and the structure of practice' (Karp 1986:131, 135). Giddens (1984:185) understands social

structure as “rules and resources...recursively implicated in the reproduction of social systems.” Similarly, Bourdieu has developed an analytical toolbox consisting of the concepts ‘habitus’, ‘capital’, ‘field’ and ‘doxa’, meant to integrate social structure and social agents. A social field is conceptualised as a sphere of life, such as religion or politics, which forms its own system of rules and forms of authority. It is further envisioned as a structured space of positions; a ‘force field’ imposing specific determinations, and a ‘battlefield’ where subjects use different types of capital to compete for higher positions. Finally, fields are thought of as historical constellations that arise and can change shape over time. Habitus becomes an almost unconscious lens through which we perceive and act in the world. It is an internalisation of external constraints and possibilities. Habitus according to Bourdieu, is the product of structure, but also the producer of practice and reproducer of structure. Just as habitus informs practice from within, a field structures action and representation from without. Both need to be included in analysis, as neither habitus nor field (structure) has the capacity to determine social action alone. This close fit between the subjective categories of habitus and the objective structures of the social setting in which people act, results in each field developing its own doxa, as a set of shared opinions and unquestioned beliefs (Wacquant 2008:266-270). This notion of doxa resonates with Parsons’ (1937, in Smith 2005:64) claim that the very existence of society depends on shared norms and values, which create an order or social pattern.

According to Smith (2005:56), these theoretical devices, despite trying to incorporate individual subjects, assign agency to concepts that lack empirical reference. They are so-called reifications of the social. Take for instance the sentence about habitus as a producer and reproducer of structure. The agency is given to the concept habitus and not the social agents. While the social structure of society is held to be a product of rules, norms or habitus and so on, these rules cannot be found other than as inferences from observed structure (Smith 2005:65). Thus, one abstract noun is simply translated into another, both equally lacking determinate reference in the actual world (Smith 2005:54). As IE criticises this practice of imagining the social as an entity existing externally to people, Smith argues that IE “needs a solution that neither dispenses with individual subjects, their activities, and experience nor adopts the alternative reification of the social as system or structure or some ingenious combination of the two” (Smith 2005:59). The social cannot have a reality that can only be encountered in theory and not in actuality.

Institutional ethnographers believe that people and events are actually tied together in ways that

can make sense of abstractions such as power, culture, patriarchy, norms and so on (Campbell & Gregor 2002:17). IE works from the actualities of people's lives and experience to discover the social as it extends beyond experience. To accomplish this the inquiry needs a way to focus its ethnographic attention, and it is the ontology of IE which provides this focus. It is a theorised way of looking at the social, outlined below. In IE the social does not consist of reifications, it is considered to be happening.

The social as happening

The social in the context of IE, is to be understood as people's activities as they are coordinated with those of others. Two aspects are important. The first is the social that arises in people's doings. Institutional ethnographers generate accounts of people's experiences and activities, what Smith terms 'work knowledge'. She uses a very generous sense of work as anything done by people that takes time and effort, that they mean to do, that is done under definite conditions and with whatever means and tools (Smith 2005:151). It is not equated with paid labour. Thus, waiting in a line, being silent or having a conversation is considered no less work than filling a form, washing clothes or studying. It is our work, our actions, which produce everyday actuality according to IE.

The second important aspect is the notion of how people's doings are coordinated. The social is not simply people's activities; IE explores these activities in how they are coordinated and done in relation to other people's activities, both locally and translocally. The term 'social relations' is used to emphasise that people's activities are embedded in sequences of coordinated action (Smith 2005:228). From this, we understand that Smith uses social relations as a technical term and something more than relationships between people, such as that between mother and daughter. The social world is not chaotic, but organised by social relations to happen as it does. That is what Smith means by 'social organisation'. Furthermore, people often unknowingly participate in social relations as they act competently to coordinate their actions with professional standards or family expectations. This notion of embodied knowledge, means that we all enact the world we live in and know about. Thus, we all participate in creating the phenomena that seems to occur independently (Campbell & Gregor 2002:28). Smith furthermore

understands the social as process. The social world of people's coordinated activities is always considered to be in motion:

The social might be conceived as an ongoing historical process in which people's doings are caught up and responsive to what others are doing; what they are doing is responsive to and given by what has been going on; every next act, as it is coordinated with those of others, picks up and projects forward into the future (Smith 2005:65).

These understandings or terms might seem similar to the concepts habitus, field or structuration. There are similarities between the 'unconscious lens of habitus' and unknowingly participating in social relations. A field as a historical constellation that changes over time also resembles the social as a historical process. Importantly however, the coordination that IE focuses on is not reified as 'social structure,' it is not conceived as an isolated phenomenon that can be differentiated from people's activities. IE attends to phenomena of culture, norms, rules and the like as people's activities; they are actual, material and ongoing (Smith 2005:69). They are not understood as an external order governing behaviour. Instead, they exist as local practices. There are rules and there is organisation, but these are not separable as determinants of the ongoing historical process, they are integrated with it. Thus, there is no point where the social becomes objective or fixed as 'structure' or 'field' that imposes itself on social subjects. The aim then, is not to theorise everyday life, but to explore it. Further, the aim is not to generalise from the experience of a group of people, but to describe generalising social processes that affect them (DeVault and McCoy 2006:18).

Doing gender

Here I find it useful to include some perspectives on gender and clarify my own use of it in analysis. Feminist sociologists have identified gender as an important analytic dimension in sociology. In the international development discourse child marriage is understood as rooted in gender inequality, and gender roles and norms are promoted as contributing causal factors. Gender becomes an important aspect to include when exploring the actualities of child marriage. Within IE however, causality would not be given to the concepts gender norms or roles. We need to 'unpack' also these concepts and study them as work. West & Zimmerman (1987) coined the notion of doing gender in their article with the same name. They promoted a theoretical

reconceptualization of gender by introducing distinctions among sex, sex category and gender. My intention by introducing the perspective of doing gender is not to import a gender theory into my thesis. Rather the analysis relies on a theorised way of exploring gender as people's organised activities. Although the aim of West & Zimmerman was theoretical and mine is not, I still find some of their notions to be compatible with an IE perspective. They understand gender as an accomplishment embedded in everyday interaction, and claim there is relational work involved in being a gendered person in society. This work can be explored by producing work knowledge with informants. Further, West & Zimmerman emphasise that the notion of gender as a role obscures the work involved in producing gender in everyday activities. "We contend that the "doing" of gender is undertaken by women and men whose competence as members of society is hostage to its production. Doing gender involves a complex of socially guided perceptual, interactional and micropolitical activities..." (West & Zimmerman 1987:126). Being 'hostage to its production' is a formulation that can give associations to an imposing social structure that determines behaviour. That is not the understanding I operate with in the analysis. In line with IE, I see gender as something we do in social relations, which both men and women competently, and often unknowingly, participate in. Gender as an accomplishment shifts the attention from matters internal to the individual and focuses on interactional and ultimately institutional arenas. Individuals do gender, but it is a situated doing carried out in the presence of others (West & Zimmerman 1987:126). Gender in this context is understood as practice, and this practice is situated in local and trans-local relations as described above. Gender exists as coordinated action done in relation to what others do and have been doing. Gender is also to be understood as experience. Smith's book "Institutional Ethnography, A Sociology for People (2005)" is part of a 'gender lens' series. The intention of this series is to work to make gender visible in social phenomena (Smith 2005:x). This work starts in actuality, in experience. Importantly, the aim is not to theorise the category woman. My intent in this thesis is not to generalise from the experience of a group of adolescent girls. Rather, it is to discover and describe generalising social processes that affect their work.

Texts, discourse and ruling relations

According to Smith, texts have come to be integral to social organisation in so-called modern societies. IE is designed to reveal the organizing power of texts, making visible how local activities are coordinated and managed trans-locally (DeVault 2006:295). The term ‘textually-mediated social organisation’ refers to how people’s engagement with texts coordinates their actions (Campbell & Gregor 2002:29). Texts of various kinds such as school enrolment charts, bus tickets, project descriptions, medical journals, news articles, organisational rules and so forth are embedded in, and potentially shape what happens in the social relations we are part of. Smith uses the term text as material in a form that can be replicated such as print, film or electronic. This is important because the capacity to coordinate people’s actions across sites, depends on the text as a material thing (Smith 2005:228). The text itself however, does not have coordinating power, but if people handle and use it, they “activate” the text. This central notion is presented in the figure below. When introducing texts in institutional ethnographies researchers are encouraged to hold on to this foundational model, but other than that explore the various ways in which texts are integrated in local, coordinated action (Smith 2006:87). During my own fieldwork, I discovered different types of text, and in the analysis I attempt to show how they were embedded in the experience and actions of my informants.

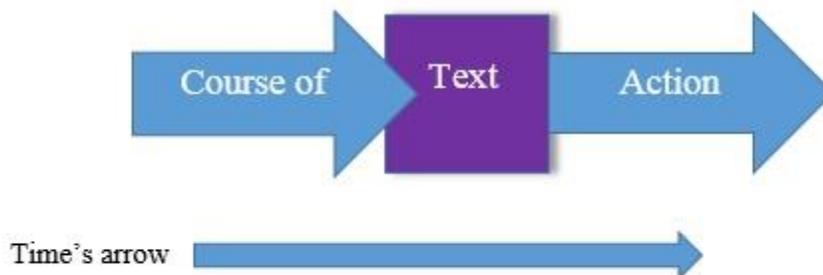


Figure x.x

Conceptualising texts in action: The act-text-act sequence.

Source: Smith, D. E. (Ed.). (2006). *Institutional Ethnography as Practice*.
Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.

Smith uses the concept ruling relations for the socially organised exercise of power that shape people’s actions through text and discourse. As explored above, sociological texts can create objectified forms of knowledge. Smith thus criticises conventional sociology as part of the ruling relations. However, ruling relations are more than imposition of rules or social facts, they rely on

people knowing how to activate the texts and use them in the appropriate manner. Discourse then, according to Smith, is more than just texts and their inter-textual conversation. There is also a text-reader conversation, which includes the activities of people (Smith 2005:228). This notion of discourse never loses the presence of the subject who activates the text. People act discursively as they carry out their everyday lives. Sometimes this ruling occurs through legally binding discourses, other times it is less explicit as people act on their own understanding of dominant discourses (Campbell & Gregor 2002:40). DeVault (2006:295) points out that life outside formal organizational sites, such as in households or families, is more diffusely and unevenly coordinated through texts and discourses.

Social organisation and ruling relations are not imposed as theoretical concept on social reality, where ethnographic data is selectively used as examples or illustrations. Rather, these notions are meant to guide the inquiry and remind the researcher to look beyond a single experience and map how it is coordinated with other people's activities both locally and trans-locally. The accounts of different work knowledges are not to be reinterpreted in the analysis, they are fitted together so that the social organisation emerges (Smith 2005:159). This act of fitting pieces together brings us to another aspect of the study of the social within IE, namely that it does not claim universality. In contrast with grounded theory that aims at abstraction by creating concepts, categories and eventually theory based on so-called theoretical saturation (Bryman 2012:421), IE does not produce a uniform representation that supersedes diverging experiences (Smith 2005:62). It does not aim to generalise the individual experience. Rather, it is claimed that people are differently positioned and have different work knowledges of a social process (Smith 2005:159). In my setting, I learned that the adolescent girls have different experiences from the boys, and they in turn have different experiences than their parents. Additionally, teachers, government officials and development workers have their work knowledge. Even within these groups the experiences can vary widely, for instance among the girls. However, all the various work knowledges can be pieced together to discover how child marriage is socially organised and also how the practice changes at a certain time and place. To assemble a social process, as it is known by those who participate in it, does not displace the experiential knowledge. Campbell & Gregor (2002:89) explain that generalisability in IE relies instead on discovery of how ruling or institutional relations actually shape what happens across many local sites.

On conclusion of this chapter, it is important to point out that IE does not refrain from drawing on the theoretical thinking of predecessors. It challenges how mainstream sociology clamps a theoretical and conceptual framework over any inquiry, and how this determines how the actual world will be attended to (Smith 2005:50). The point then, as I have come to understand it, is not to ban the use of concepts altogether. Rather, the aim of IE is to expose the conceptual to the discipline of the actualities. The researcher is encouraged to always check the conceptual against what she has learned and is learning from the actual world. Of course, there can be no guarantees that preconceptions will be exposed or that the implicit grounding of concepts in social relations will be uncovered, but there is a commitment to the actual rather than the conceptual (Smith 2005:57). The interest in analysis is thus materialist and empirical, not abstract:

The findings of an inquiry are in and of the same world that the inquiry investigates. Its discoveries and analyses depend, as maps do, on the actuality in which they originated. The project of an inquiry is the discovery of and learning from actualities (Smith 2005:52).

METHODOLOGY

Wait. Let's stop at the stumbling. Wouldn't you think that's the way an ethnography should develop? You aren't able to previsualise what it is you are going to do, or what you are going to discover. Isn't stumbling around integral to the process? (Diamond 2006:46).

During a conversation about the different methodological strategies that had gone into an institutional ethnography, Diamond admitted that he had stumbled around for quite some time in the research design. Quoted above is Dorothy E. Smith's reply. When my supervisor advised me to look into IE, I had never heard of it before. It was all very new to me, and it took a while to grasp what it was about. I too stumbled around. However, it was interesting to try something new and see where it would take me. At first, I understood IE solely as a methodology. I tried to figure out how to implement it in my research proposal and how to apply it practically in the field. It was not until later that I realised IE is a distinct sociology that departs with the sociological conventions I have learned. This revelation helped explain my stumbling. The ontology of IE is presented in the literature review. In this chapter, I give a detailed account of my journey from conventional sociology to institutional ethnography, in terms of the methodological implications it had for my research.

Defining a topic and problematic

From the outset, choosing a topic and defining a research problematic has been difficult. I am interested in many things, so I did not have one topic that stood out as the clear choice for my thesis. It took six months to decide, and during that time I went from thinking about Rom-beggars in Norwegian streets, to human trafficking to child marriage, the only common denominator being an overall topic of social injustice. It is still hard to pinpoint what exactly made me choose child marriage, but it was a process of considering what I was passionate about, possible study areas in relation to each topic and practical considerations such as security and field contacts. Child marriage turned out to be a topic I grew more and more interested in as I read about it, and I saw that it would be feasible for me to conduct research on it. The next challenge was to define a problematic within my chosen topic. My university had provided some basic rules to consider when writing a master thesis. You needed to concentrate on one clearly defined and concrete issue. Your research questions were supposed to guide your research in the

right direction, and if clearly defined it would help you structure your presentation. The research had to be feasible in terms of scope, methods, theoretical approach, economic means and time frame. Additionally, your research should make a small but important contribution to your field of study, in my case to the social sciences and development management. With this in mind I wrote my final thesis proposal.

Due to having a part time job I set the time frame for my field work to five weeks. Being away from work longer would make it very difficult to catch up when returning home. Additionally, I figured the write up would take longer and wanted enough time for it after data collection. Therefore, the fieldwork was set for January, giving me about four months for the write up. I am a perfectionist and usually a very structured and disciplined person. I like to see where I am going and have always worked with detailed dispositions when writing academic essays. Before even starting I have outlined what my main arguments will be, what literature I will use and what concepts to include in my theoretical framework. When embarking on my master thesis, my biggest academic project, I felt it was more important than ever to have a very clear idea about what I was doing and how I would do it. I did not want to start something that would end up in a dead end, or that I would not be able to finish. So I started to read literature to get an idea of what was known about child marriage and what was lacking; where could I make a small contribution? I came across a report by Greene (2014), on behalf of the Ford Foundation, about what research is needed to end child marriage. At this point, my understanding of research making a contribution was in the lines of it serving a practical purpose and not just a theoretical one. The gap between theory and practice has turned up in discussions many times during my studies, and I genuinely wanted my research to shed light on social and developmental challenges as a foundation for possible solutions. I wanted my research to be relevant for practitioners working to end what in the literature was termed a harmful practice. Within the realm of norm change I found a research gap. Questions were being raised as to why some people were able to go against the tradition of child marriage while faced by the same contextual challenges as their peers. I uncritically adopted this concept of positive deviance. I was going to conduct a comparative study of the people arranging child marriages and those in the same community who were not. I believed this data could lay the foundation for theorising around how social transformation can occur, and thus be useful in the quest to end child marriage. My research objective was twofold:

- 1) Identify enabling factors, beliefs and strategies used by positive deviants that allow them to delay early marriage of girls.
- 2) Conduct a comparative analysis at the girl and family level of those who marry their daughters young and those who do not, in terms of socioeconomic status, beliefs, education level, conceptualisation of child marriage and its consequences and view of women.

I also started gathering information for my theoretical framework. As stated in the literature review I looked into concepts such as social structure, agency and habitus. I did not finish my theoretical framework and only listed ideas of what I thought might be of relevance. I planned to finish it later on after I had read more. Finally, I was interested in the locals' perspectives and their own conceptualisation of the practice of child marriage. I hold the ontological position of constructivism, which means I assert that social phenomena and their meanings are not external to social actors but accomplished by them (Bryman 2012:33). Thus, I wanted the research to reflect the locals' voice and their own understanding, and I was going to use qualitative interviews to gather this information. When I handed in my proposal, I remember feeling that my research plan still had many holes and uncertainties. Despite having clear objectives, I could not quite see how it would all come together in the end. I was not convinced by my own project. Was what I had put together so far logical, and was there consistency between theory and methodology? Even though it was a good start, something was not quite right. Then my supervisor read my proposal and encouraged me to go through my objectives and research questions again. "Ask yourself if the theory, concepts and questions lock your research or not", she asked. I was warned against becoming captured by my own preunderstanding.

The X-factor

As a student of the social sciences, I have been taught to validate knowledge by referencing the existing literature. New findings must be built up from and refer back to concepts and theories already established in the literature. I am so used to writing a theoretical framework before collecting and analysing data that I have never really questioned this practice. In retrospect, I see that the unease I felt towards my research proposal was connected to the missing empirical data. In most of the previous research I have done, I have worked with existing data. The findings have already been known to me, and I have seen from the outset which findings connect with

which concepts. This time around however, there was a major X-factor; I could not predict what I would find in the field and how that would conform or not with my theoretical concepts. Of course, many would say that is the point of research. To study theory, then collect data and in turn see how it connects with established theory. I also wrote this in my proposal. "Theory will be used to adjust my focus and understand my findings. Hopefully, my findings will to some extent confirm existing theory, but also to some extent feed new information and perspectives into it. Thus my research will likely be in between an inductive and deductive study". Yet, putting together a theoretical framework for a field I knew practically nothing about turned out to be very difficult. I lacked the overview I was used to having when I did not have any empirical data yet.

At this point I started to explore IE, and it gave me new perspectives and ideas. One thing was to feel uneasy because my uncollected data made me lose the overall control of my research project. I was still planning to get my theoretical frame in order before going into the field, I just assumed it would take some more time. Quite another perspective was to see this procedure as a process that results in a selective representation of the actual as it conforms to the conceptual. I started to realise that up until now that was mostly what I had done. By doing library research I have remained in the abstract, discussing different concepts and found suitable case studies to illustrate them. The process of finding illustrative cases implies that I have been selective when connecting the actual with the conceptual. My position has been that of a bird, viewing the social from above and connecting it in ways that make up good analytical arguments. Smith proposes a very different standpoint. She argues that researchers should start in the everyday world instead of in theory, and learn from the actualities of people's lives. As I gradually reflected more upon my research stance and my view of the social, I started to see that the unease towards my research plan went beyond the missing piece of data. To hold a constructivist ontological stance, which I claimed to have, and still let theory determine how the social world is attended to is contradictory. Within IE the research process follows the shape of the problematic in the everyday world, not the shape of a plan developed prior to undertaking the inquiry (Campbell & Gregor 2002:56). This made me more comfortable with the X-factor of my empirical data. Instead of worrying about how it would fit in with the theoretical frame, the data could determine the direction of my research. For a perfectionist and someone who enjoys structure, applying the principles of IE meant a process of learning to let go. I could still not see exactly what I was

going to do or what I would find, but within IE I found good reasons for why it should be so. You explore what is happening in a local setting as people know and live it there. DeVault and McCoy (2002:755) describe it this way:

“IE investigations are rarely planned out fully in advance...Instead, the process of inquiry is rather like grabbing a ball of string, finding a thread, and then pulling it out; that is why it is difficult to specify in advance exactly what the research will consist of. The researcher knows what she wants to explain, but only step by step does she know who she needs to interview, or what texts and discourses she needs to examine.”

Altering my research

It may sound as if I abandoned the whole thesis proposal and conducted a random research. That was not the case. My research was not random, it just did not have a predetermined outcome. I decided to set my theoretical work aside and try to go into the field more open-minded. Child marriage was still my overall topic. I wanted to explore how it is done in a particular setting. Who is involved, what do they do and how is their work coordinated? The experience of being married young or being vulnerable to child marriage is what I was seeking to generate an account of. I was also still interested in social transformation and wanted to explore how change comes about. However, I moved away from my first categorisation of people into those practicing child marriage and those who do not. I started to suspect that it was artificial and that I would not find a reality dichotomised that way. That turned out to be right. Categorising people into ‘positive deviants’ and ‘those holding onto tradition’ would have been impossible, too many of my informants would not have fit in one or the other. Instead of clearly defined research questions, I kept my topic and aimed to generate descriptions of what people do in their everyday lives in relation to it. As I have mentioned earlier this so-called ‘work knowledge’ includes what people actually do, how they do it, and can also include what they think and feel in relation to it. I brought along Campbell & Gregor’s (2002) book “Mapping Social Relations, A Primer in Doing Institutional Ethnography” which includes much useful advice about what to look for and how to collect data for an institutional ethnography. I used it as a guide during my fieldwork and decided to go into the field with a ‘learning by doing spirit’!

Fieldwork

Establishing field contacts

I was very aware that five weeks to collect data was little time, and I wanted to establish field contacts before going into the field. That way I could start collecting data straight away and not spend time trying to get access to informants. I have read several methodological accounts where researchers struggled to get access and spent a lot of time waiting for permissions and trying to find people who were willing to do interviews. Methods books have also pointed out the importance of setting aside enough time to get research access, as it often is more difficult and time consuming than you think. In my case, establishing research contacts and getting access to informants went very smoothly. I chose my study area based on my access to contacts, and had no intention of going into the field before these things were in order.

I contacted Strømme Foundation and presented my research in broad terms. I knew of this NGO from before, as I had attended a one-year exchange programme organised by them and done volunteer work on their behalf after that year as well. Therefore, they knew who I was and trusted me, which made gaining research access easy. I was aware that they had a project in Nepal focusing on child marriage among other topics, so I contacted them to see if it would be possible for me to conduct my fieldwork within their project. This was interesting to them and they set me in contact with the SF Nepal office.

The staff in Nepal have been crucial for my fieldwork. They warmly received me and have done their utmost to assist me in any way necessary. SF Nepal and their work is presented elsewhere in this thesis, so here I primarily want to point out their role in relation to my research. My fieldwork went very smoothly without any major challenges, mostly due to the friendly cooperation from SF Nepal. We had a meeting my first day where I was introduced to most of the staff. I presented my research topic and shared why I had chosen it and why I wanted to do fieldwork in Nepal. They provided me with an office to work from, with access to internet. I was free to come and go as I pleased, and whenever I was there I was included in morning tea meetings and lunch. They also provided me with a mobile phone and local sim card. Due to the electricity situation in Nepal, having an older phone with a longer lasting battery was very helpful.

Planning the fieldwork

In terms of planning the fieldwork, a few challenges occurred. One was that it was difficult for me to know exactly who and how many I would need to interview, due to the method I now was using. However, as a start I knew it would be relevant for me to talk with some of the adolescent girls participating in the project to get their experiences. I also said talking to some parents would be interesting. Additionally, it would be good to have variation in terms of marital status, education level, religion, caste and so forth. I was told that this would be no problem to arrange. The central office in Kathmandu explained that the districts they were based in were culturally very different. Thus, it would be interesting for me to visit two of them to experience this difference. We agreed that two field stays would be feasible for me and started planning the practicalities. My stay in the districts had to be coordinated according to the capacity of the local partners. I was very explicit about not wanting to be in the way, and that I was flexible and could adapt according to their time and activities. All decisions regarding the field stays were taken in close collaboration with both the central SF office and the local partners. My fieldwork consisted of five phases in the end, described below.

Phase one: introduction

The first phase consisted of five days and revolved around settling down, introducing myself to the SF staff, familiarising myself with the project and plan the field stays.

Phase two: the first field stay

At the time I was there, mid-term evaluations of the project was going on. Because of this the project coordinator was going with an external evaluation team to Surkhet district, and they organised for me and my interpreter to join them. That way he could introduce me to the local partners and I could observe the evaluations before starting my interviews.

We arrived on a Friday and the first week-end I only observed the evaluations and joined the team for meetings with partner NGOs, the village development committee, project participants, parents and local schools. The programme was very tight and we did not spend much time with each group of informants. However, it gave me an overview of the project, who was involved and some personal stories from the adolescent girls we met. When the week-end was over, the evaluation team and project coordinator returned to Kathmandu and I remained in Surkhet with my interpreter. We arranged with one of the local partners, SAC, to go into the village and stay

for a few days to interview some of the girls. Unfortunately, I got sick and the village stay got postponed, but only for one day. Then we spent four days in the village, where we lived with a local family, before we returned to the city area of Surkhet.

Originally, we had talked about visiting another village after this where the second local partner, KIRDARC, had SAMVAD centres. However, we figured out it would require one day of travelling from the city area to get there, and another to return. I concluded that this would be too much time spent only on travelling, and wanted to talk more with some of the girls we had met during the evaluations. I already had some background information on them and some of their experiences, but I wanted to follow up with some more questions. By now we had only done interviews with girls involved in SAMVAD, and SAMVAD played different roles in their experiences. If it was possible I wanted to talk with some girls external to SAMVAD to see what their experiences in relation to child marriage was. The local partner managed to arrange a group interview with four girls. We ended up spending two days in the city area, before we took the seventeen-hour long night bus ride back to Kathmandu. Altogether, we spent ten days in Surkhet.

Phase three: debrief

I planned to stay one week back in Kathmandu, resting up, transcribing and getting an overview of what I had so far. During this phase we also planned my second field stay. Before I came to Nepal, the SF office in Kathmandu had chosen Kapilvastu district as a suitable place for me to conduct research. However, I was informed upon arriving that the security situation in Kapilvastu was fragile due to the blockade of the Indian border. Therefore, Bara, a different district had been chosen as an alternative. The project coordinator had worked on getting hold of a local interpreter and organising my stay while I was in Surkhet. Unfortunately, the security situation in Bara worsened while I was back in Kathmandu. Again they made the decision to cancel this trip and send me to Kapilvastu instead, where things now seemed to be safer. Due to this, my second field stay got postponed two days.

Phase four: the second field stay

I spent six days in Kapilvastu. I had a meeting with the local partner upon arriving, where we discussed my research and who I wanted to interview. With the experience I had gained from my previous field stay in Surkhet, I now had a better idea of what to do. However, I kept in mind that this was a different setting and that the experiences would probably also be different. I could

not simply follow the leads from my interviews in Surkhet. To be true to the method, I wanted to start with an account of the girl's experiences here as well. I quickly understood that the customs here were quite different, the actualities could even differ from one village to the other within the same area.

In Kapilvastu we were a team of four travelling around to the villages together. Two boys from the local partner, with good connections in the villages, drove me and my interpreter around on motorbikes. The first day was mostly introduction and planning. The four following days we visited villages and conducted interviews. I also met with the whole staff of the local partner. My three new friends wanted to show me around in the area, so we went sightseeing in the afternoons. The last day the local partner was arranging a girl's animator training. This would go on for ten days, and I joined them for the opening day and met the girls who would be animators at the different SAMVAD centres this year. I did not do any interviews, but observed the training and talked with the girls and local partner staff during breaks.

Phase five: finishing up

The last phase consisted of finishing up and saying good bye. I had five days left for this. I made sure I had all the documents I thought would be relevant for my analysis, such as project descriptions, statistics and the mid-term evaluation report. By now it was also very interesting to discuss some of my findings with the staff, although my head was full of information and impressions I had not managed to sort out properly yet.

Challenges

As already mentioned the fieldwork mostly went smoothly and as planned, with the exception of a few delays due to sickness and security challenges. The cooperation with the SF staff in Kathmandu and with the staff of local partner organisations was very good, which made getting access to informants easy. The challenge was more in terms of figuring out how much data I would need and to learn how to generate work knowledge with my informants. Surkhet and Kapilvastu are different contexts and collecting data from two settings increased the interview material, which resulted in a lot of work with transcribing and also made the analysis quite overwhelming. In Surkhet I was both in a village and in the city area, and in Kapilvastu I visited

six villages. I ended up with 11 interviews from Surkhet, 9 individual with girls and two parents, and 2 group interviews. In Kapilvastu I did 14 individual, of which two were with boys, and 7 group interviews. The group interviews were with SAMVAD girls together, some with mother and daughter, one interview with a married couple and one with two SST members. In total, I conducted 32 interviews. Concentrating on one setting could have reduced my work, however seeing how the doing of child marriage differed between districts and even between villages in the same area was an interesting complexity. Additionally, work knowledge from two sites connected by the operation of the SAMVAD project gave me an opportunity to explore parts of a ruling relation. In retrospect, I see that it would have been better to do fewer interviews in Kapilvastu. The plan was not to conduct so many, and when I arrived I told the staff that a few, maybe around three, would be more than enough for a day. The first day however, we ended up doing 11 interviews. It was very interesting talking with my informants and I found it difficult to draw a line. Opportunities also arose along the way, so when two SST members suddenly were around I talked with them, and then a newly married couple was there and we talked with them and so on. Doing many interviews in a row affected my ability to focus, as I got tired and there were many impressions to process. Many villagers also gathered to watch. They quietly observed so it did not affect the voice recording, but if the observing crowd got too big the girls got shy and generating work knowledge became difficult. Based on these experiences from the first day I told the people helping me that it would be better to do fewer interviews each day, and try to find places where less people would gather to watch. The next days went much better, and I was able to concentrate more and go in depth, which is the point of a qualitative interview.

Ethical evaluations

I have done my utmost to follow the ethical principal of ‘doing no harm’. Child marriage is a sensitive topic and I wanted to respect that I was dealing with lived life. To generate work knowledge with my informants would imply going into the details of their experiences, including what they thought and felt. I was aware that this might evoke emotions, and explained to all my informants that they could chose not to answer if they did not want to, and stop the interview at any time. There were two situations where a girl started crying during the interview. It happened one time during an individual interview and another time during a group interview. When this

happened I explained to the girls that I understood this was difficult for them and that they did not have to continue talking. However, they both told me that they wanted to share their story and appreciated that I had come to listen. I therefore chose to continue the interviews. We took our time and the girls explained as much as they wanted. I met the girl from the individual interview again in the evening and she was then dancing and laughing which assured me that she was doing okay. The group interview was with girls from the same SAMVAD group, they were friends and had discussed these things with each other before, so in that case the others comforted the girl and she was not left alone after the interview. In two other cases I decided to cut the interview short, because the girl was very shy and quiet and I did not want to push them into answering. Who I am and my intentions with the interviews was always presented. I made it clear that I was an independent student and did not work for Strømme Foundation or the partner organisations. All informants voluntarily agreed to participate and consented to the use of a voice recorder. I also ensured them that they would be kept anonymous.

About interviewing

Interviewing is a skill, and I was nervous about the interview setting before going to the field. I have very little experience, and the times I have been involved in interviewing it has always been in groups with other students to lean on. This time I would be on my own.

Talking to people

According to DeVault and McCoy (2002:756), interviewing might better be called “talking to people.” It can consist of scheduled interviews or just opportunities that arise along the way. In my case it was a good mix of both. I had scheduled interviews, where the villagers were informed beforehand that I was coming to talk with some of them. For these interviews I used a tape recorder. Typically, I would start by introducing myself, explain that I was a student from Norway interested in child marriage and how it happens in Nepal. The interpreter also presented herself and her role. We always spent some time talking casually and trying to make the informant comfortable. For most of my informants this setting was completely new to them and

very foreign. We explained that it was like a conversation, that I was interested in their story and their experience. It was important to me to emphasise that I was there to learn from them. We explained how the tape recorder works and that it was only for my personal use to remember the things they said. Everyone gave their consent to use the recorder. I also explained that they would be anonymous, and could feel free and safe to share openly. During the interviews I gave them information about myself, and explained that they could ask me questions as well to create a sense of mutuality. The interviews had a very informal character, and were a mix of both individual interviews and group interviews. Most often they were conducted outside people's homes, and sometimes in the centre where the village SAMVAD group used to gather.

Given my inexperience with interviewing I wanted something to lean on and jotted down some topics and possible questions as a semi-structured interview guide. The questions were based on the understanding I had gained so far from reading project descriptions and talking with SF staff. I wanted some background information, was interested in the girl's everyday activities and responsibilities, their experience in relation to school and education, how SAMVAD worked and their experience when it comes to marriage. While in Nepal I read and reflected more on ruling relations, and came to understand that texts play a vital role in ruling. I started to see how my actions as a student were organised by my own activation of both the university guidelines and SF policy documents for conducting research within their projects. I aligned my activities with the standards and expectations written in these documents. For instance, I applied the principle of anonymity of informants, and in line with the SF policy I revealed the purpose of the research to my informants. I did this almost unconsciously because they are research principles I am used to, and being respectful in the field is standard research etiquette. I just had not thought of it as being implicated in a ruling relation before, as acting discursively in line with social research discourse. Then I started reflecting on my own use of an interview guide. Would my activation of this text carry aspects of a ruling relation into the interaction with my informants? Would the text organise my interest towards certain information and render information outside the scope of the guide irrelevant? This would go against the principle of letting the research questions emerge out of what you encounter in actuality. Then again, so long it does not lock your research to a specific line of questions, such a guide functions as a starting point and reflects your initial understanding and presumptions. It would not determine my research, but reflect my current notions that needed to be checked with the experts, the informants, so I decided to use it. Some

of my presumptions were proven wrong quickly, others were confirmed, but this I discuss further in the analysis. I had the interview guide with me for the first three interviews and ended up not using it after that. I experienced that my informants enjoyed the opportunity to share their story. Some were a little shy, but most of them talked openly about their different experiences and their everyday life in a Nepali village. Some of them explained to me that they had become more confident after participating in the SAMVAD programme, and that was why they dared talk with me. A year ago, they would not even think about doing such a thing, especially not talking with a foreigner, but after discussing experiences with other girls in SAMVAD every day for a year their self-confidence had increased. Finally, not consulting a piece of paper created a more casual, conversational setting and I felt that I connected better with my informants without the interview guide.

Besides this, many opportunities arose along the way and these unplanned talks have also become part of my empirical data. I spent a lot of time with my interpreters for instance and got information through informal talk during lunch or in between other interviews. It has been very valuable for me to be able to check my understanding with them. My second interpreter was from a village in Kapilvastu, and thus she was an expert of the actualities in that setting. During my time in Surkhet I also got to talk with the evaluation team during dinners and in the car travelling from one place to the next. This gave me information from their position as part of the government participating in a ruling relation with the NGO and the project beneficiaries. Then there is all the talk I participated in at the central office in Kathmandu, since I had my own desk and often worked there. Finally, I can add small chats I have had with people on the streets or during bus rides. I have come to talk with parents, teachers and adolescents this way, as they were wondering who I was and what I was up to. When they heard I was studying child marriage they often shared some of their perspectives, and these small pieces of information here and there I have noted down.

Use of interpreter

Before arriving in Kathmandu I had informed the project coordinator that I would need an interpreter for the fieldwork. As I would be talking to girls mostly and knew the subject could be sensitive, I wanted a female interpreter. Already the first day SF had arranged for me to meet with two potential interpreters. They had gotten in touch with them through a university in

Kathmandu. After talking with the first one, I remember being slightly worried, as her English was not fluent and we struggled to understand each other. Luckily, this was not the case with the second woman. Her English was good, a necessity if I was going to make any sense of the interviews, and she had a lot of experience with other students and research. Despite being quite costly, I decided to hire her for the first field stay. For the second field stay the local partner managed to get in touch with a local girl who worked as a teacher. I had a good relationship with both my interpreters and informed them about the research before the interviews. I explained that I was interested in generating an account of the girls' experiences with a special focus on their everyday activities. Using an interpreter was also a learning process. At first I addressed the questions to the interpreter as the girls did not understand English, for instance "is she married?" After a few interviews I felt it would be better to address the girls directly, "are you married?" which created a better connection between us despite having to use interpretation. I have already mentioned how the presence of a researcher in IE is not treated as a source of bias. Rather it is claimed that she participates in the production of knowledge. Consequently, I also treated my interpreters as participators and not sources of bias. Often they ended up being informants as I commented above. Language is still a challenge. McCoy (2007:118) describes language as a phenomenon of interface between the embodied experience and the institutional relations. Having to go through an interpreter might have caused parts of the language or the words the informants used to be lost in translation. However, I informed my interpreters that the words the informants use are important and I believe we did get the major essence, despite language being a challenge. The way I kept checking my understanding with the informants might have also limited the impact of language confusion.

Insider language

The aim of interviewing in the context of IE is to generate accounts of what actually happens. Insider language is a challenge in this regard. Campbell & Gregor (2002:72) point out how insider language or professional language can obscure what people actually do. When talking about your everyday life there are many things you take for granted, as you are a competent knower of your setting. An example from my own life is for instance how I reply "I am writing my thesis" when asked about what I do as a master student. I am using professional language,

expecting people to know what this entails. Of course, many fellow students or people who have written a thesis can easily imagine what it means or draw on their own knowledge of it. However, this insider account obscures the work actually involved. It does not include for instance: my walking to and from the university library every day, my reading and searching for literature, my falling asleep at the couch in the middle of the day out of exhaustion, my endless thinking back and forth, my writing and rewriting of drafts, my phone calls with my supervisor or my travelling to Nepal and talking with various informants. Neither does it include my urge to lie down and cry because the task seems impossible to finish on time nor my not doing so because it would disrupt all the other students trying to work! Yet, if you were to understand something about the coordinated work that constitutes the university institution from the point of view of a student, these actualities would have to be included. Using only the insider account “writing a thesis” would be an example of institutional capture.

Getting a clear account of how things work and not exclude what people take for granted can be difficult. Sometimes when informants say “you know” it can be tempting to put in pieces of your own knowing. I especially felt this urge if I wanted to avoid feeling embarrassed. As an institutional ethnographer, you have to ask “dumb” questions sometimes, asking people to explain things that to them is very obvious. However, it is important that you do, otherwise you might end up getting a professional or ideological account and not what actually happens (Campbell & Gregor 2002:77). For instance, when some of the girls simply said they “do household work,” I could easily imagine what that meant; both based on my own notion of it and based on my growing understanding of how things worked in their setting. Then again, my notion of what household work actually entails might be very different from theirs, so I kept on asking them to describe and explain in more detail what they do when they do household work, how long it takes and so on. That is how I got accounts of household work meaning cooking dinner for the whole family and then eat after everyone else is served, fetching water, washing clothes by hand, collecting fodder in the jungle for the animals, cleaning utensils and so forth. Generating work knowledge then, is something the researcher and informants do together. Smith (2005:123-126) actually points out that experience only becomes available as empirical data when it is spoken. However, actuality will always include more than what can be spoken, and in my case I have also mentioned how parts of the work knowledge probably got lost in translation.

The ideal you aim towards as an institutional ethnographer is still to get informants to talk about as much of their experience as possible.

Being an outsider to the setting might have been an advantage. The way marriages are arranged and the daily lives of the girls I spoke with are so different from my own context, and naturally there were many terms and customs I did not understand. For example some of them would say “then I got *sindoor*” or “I am married, my *gauna* was last month,” and then move on to the rest of the story as if this was common knowledge. To me as an outsider however, I did not understand what they meant and kept asking them to explain step by step what it entails and who was involved. Often I also had to check with my informants that I was understanding them correctly. I repeated or summed up to confirm my current understanding of the events. “So after the wedding ceremony, you stayed with your parents for three years, and one month ago you had *gauna*, which means you moved in with your husband, is that right?”

Transcribing

My plan was to transcribe as quickly as possible after the interviews, when they were still fresh in mind. This would have given me an overview, and time to start analysing what I understood so far, where information was lacking and who might be relevant to interview next. However, due to ‘load shedding’ and electricity shortage, transcribing while in the village was difficult. Additionally, my days in the field were very long and intense so in the evenings I did not have the energy to transcribe, even if there was electricity. Therefore, I decided to transcribe my interviews from Surkhet when I was back in Kathmandu, and the ones from Kapilvastu I transcribed back home in Norway. I ended up with a vast material; 107 pages and a word count of about 40 000. Most, but not all, interviews were transcribed in full. To avoid large and unmanageable documents I grouped the interviews according to place and date.

Observations

My second source of data has been observations. I took detailed field notes along the way. I had a daily journal where I wrote what happened each day and my thoughts and reflections. I also took notes where I described the villages I visited and wrote observations from interviews such as who

were present, where we were and what the atmosphere was like. During group interviews, I observed either how the girls interacted with each other or how a mother and daughter interacted. I noted who talked the most, if there were questions the girls would not answer in front of their parents and so forth. Sometimes I ended up chatting with the girls or other villagers after an interview when the voice recorder was not on. Observations and comments from these casual talks were written down as soon as possible, usually during lunch or in the evening. I also wrote down activities that I observed such as girls washing clothes during school hours. While I lived in the village in Surkhet I got to observe the daily life of the family I stayed with. I noted down when my host sisters were in school, the activities they did before and after school and the like. As already mentioned I observed the mid-term evaluations and how that was done, and the first day of the girls' animator training in Kapilvastu.

Texts as data

My third and final source of data has been texts. As presented in the literature review texts have a central place in an IE analysis. They are implicated in the ruling relations and when people manage and process the same texts their actions potentially become coordinated across time and space. Texts can, especially in formal institutional sites such as an NGO, play an important part in social organisation and I therefore looked for references to texts during my fieldwork. Doing research within a development project introduced me to a range of texts. Already the first week I got hold of project descriptions and annual reports. I was given access to the mid-term evaluation report conducted while we were in Surkhet and different assessment forms used to monitor the progress of the SAMVAD project. In the SAMVAD centres there were also different texts such as enrolment charts, community development plans developed by the girls, rules for how to behave in the group and so forth. I took pictures of these posters to remember. During the analysis I revisited these different documents and tried to explore how they were connected with and shaping the activities of my informants.

Analysis and selection of informants

The analysis work started in the field. The aim is to explain how the everyday world is put together, and part of that analysis started during interviews as I kept checking my understanding with informants. As I have mentioned before, an IE uses two levels of data. Entry-level data, which is the work knowledge produced by the researcher and informants together, and so-called second level data, which is used to illuminate the local experience and expose parts of the trans-local relations the local activities are embedded in. My data collection did not progress in this particular order however. As you see from the phases of my fieldwork you will find that I started with some level-two data. I talked with the SF staff, read some project descriptions and so forth. Then I had my first field stay and started generating work knowledge with my informants. I transcribed these interviews in Katmandu and tried to see if I could find connections in what I had so far. Finally, I went to Kapilvastu and generated more entry-level data, before I went back to the SF office again. This going back and forth between the local and trans-local was the beginning of the analysis. Then after transcribing the rest of the interviews from Kapilvastu, I started to go through my material and ask questions. What is the work my informants are describing? What does the doing of child marriage involve for them? How is their work coordinated with the work of others? Based on that I tried to fit the work knowledges together and give an account of the actualities in Surkhet and in Kapilvastu. I did this same process regarding the work of 'undoing' child marriage. As I have mentioned I ended up with a vast interview material and could not use all of it in my thesis. As work knowledge is used as the basis for further analysis, I made a selection based on which informants I had managed to produce much work knowledge with. All my informants have been kept anonymous in the analysis and the names I have used are not theirs. Then, from the accounts of the actualities I started to go through the material again to look for intersections in the work my informants did in their social relations. I understood reoccurring activities as pointing to social organisation.

ANALYSIS

In the analysis I first give an account of people's doing of child marriage in a particular setting. I focus on what my informants actually do, how they do it and also what they think and feel regarding their work. Further, I emphasise how their activities are coordinated with what others do and have been doing, which situates their activities in a local historical process. Two main accounts are given; first one from Surkhet and then one from Kapilvastu. Note that these two accounts are not intended to be representative of these two areas. Rather, they are accounts of how my informants live and know the actualities of their local setting. The intention is to develop an understanding of their embodied experience. Afterwards their work knowledge is used as a springboard into how child marriage is socially organised. In their experiences there are traces of institutional relations, and the analysis seeks to explore some of these further to expose the social organisation their activities are implicated in. The analysis then gives an account of the undoing of child marriage, meaning some of the work involved in stopping the practice of child marriage. The focus here is upon some of the challenges my informants faced when trying to activate new texts brought into their social relations by the SAMVAD project. Finally, conducting research within a development project led me to discover parts of the ruling relations of development management. This is further explored in the last section of the analysis.

“I fell in love, I really liked the guy”: when girls choose themselves

One of the presumptions I had was that the parents arranged the marriages, and that the girls had little or no choice in the matter. An excerpt from my first interview shows both my presumption and the girl's answer, which explained an experience I had not expected. I have named the girl Nirmala.

Me: *You are married right? Was it at 15?* (Nirmala had come to talk to us in our room the same morning, and had shared parts of her story then).

Nirmala: *I got married when I was 17.*

Me: *Can you explain how it happened? Did you have a say of your own or was it your parents wish?*

Nirmala: *At the time I fell in love with my husband, it was actually at the beginning of CDMA in the village.*

Me: *CDMA?*

Interpreter (after consulting Nirmala): *CDMA is a telephone line. It was the beginning of CDMA here. A landline actually, but it does not have that wire connection, it's just like mobile you know? You can use that everywhere, but it does have a big telephone set. It is not small like mobile, but it is kind of a mobile telephone.*

Nirmala: *My friend had fallen in love with a guy, and I used to accompany her as a friend when they met. Another guy also used to come with her boyfriend, and that is the guy I fell in love with. Friends of friends you know?*

I did not know! I had gone into the field as open-minded as possible, but I still rather strongly believed that it was the parents who arranged the marriages and not the girls who chose themselves to get married young. Smith points out that there is no guarantee that preconceptions will be exposed, yet here one of mine was disrupted during the very first interview. From the international development discourse, SF project descriptions and from talking with the project staff I had the impression that child marriage was basically the same as forced marriage. The notion 'victim of child marriage', which carries the association of force, occurs several times in reports. The sustainable development goals list child and forced marriage in the same sentence (UN 2014:14), and the literature and project descriptions included success stories of girls being empowered to stand up against their early marriage. Once again, I had been institutionally captured, and Nirmala's experience taught me otherwise. By exploring the everyday lives and activities of some of these girls and a few parents, a more complex landscape emerged.

Nirmala: *I don't even know how I ended up going with those boys! One day the two boys just informed me that they would be coming for the Teej festival in my village. I had no idea they were planning to take me with them back to their place. I thought they were coming for fun and for the dancing. They did say they were coming with a strong decision, but I didn't know what they meant. They came, and we all met in my friend's home. That's where they told me they wanted to take me home with them after the festival, for marriage. They said they had already informed their parents and that their parents would be very unhappy if I did not go with them. The whole thing made me very confused because I was not prepared for it.*

The Teej festival I was informed is a grand festival celebrated by Hindu women, where they dress in red and sing, dance, fast and pray. Married women pray for the well-being of their spouse while unmarried girls pray for future marriage. In light of this, it does not seem like a coincidence that the boys chose this particular day for their visit. I did not get their account of the events, however we can see from this excerpt that the boy had already informed his parents, gotten their blessing and came to the festival with a clear intention of bringing Nirmala back with

him. What followed after this was hours of thinking work from Nirmala's side, where she considered possible ways of responding to the boy's 'strong decision'.

Nirmala: Then I thought, I will go home, pretending that I have to get some clothes and I will stay there and not go with the boys. I sort of wanted to go, but thought I shouldn't do it this way. So I went home, and had told them I would come back, but in my heart I did not want to go like this. At home I actually dozed off on my bed for half an hour. When I woke up I thought they must have gone already from my friend's house. But, that was not the case. In front of my house there was a lot of trees. So the two boys had climbed a tree and could see me through the window in my room.

Me: Were you home alone?

Nirmala: I was alone in the room. I have one younger brother and two younger sisters. My husband's friend was signalling me to come by waving his hand. He wanted me to get ready quickly. At that time I started to get ready. I was worried about what would happen if my parents saw us acting like this. I am sure they would beat me, for having a relationship with a boy like this outside of marriage.

But, my siblings were so young at that time, like this (pointing to a four year old), and seeing them made me very confused. I started thinking about how my mother would manage everything with them, without me around to help. This thought made me cry, and my mind kept going back and forth between staying and going. For about one hour I kept crying and trying to figure out what to do.

Earlier on in the interview, Nirmala commented that she was not even sure how she ended up going with the boys. Yet from these excerpts, it becomes clear how her actions at this time were implicated in social relations. Her work is not random and chaotic, but involves thinking back and forth on how to proceed. Furthermore, going back and forth between staying and going points to an interface between two possible social relations to participate in. If she stays, she abides with family expectations. If she goes, she enacts choice and aligns her actions with the boy's expectations. In such a case both of them would be acting discursively according to a love marriage discourse, produced externally to their local village setting. I return to tracing this ruling relation later on, but first focus more on Nirmala's consideration of staying with her parents. She is drawing on her own knowledge of what her parents want and expect her to do. She sees her younger siblings in the other room and is reminded of her responsibilities towards them. Will her mother manage on her own if she goes? She is also reluctant to "go like this," which refers to running away during night-time to get married. When asked about why she did not inform her parents she replied:

I was afraid to tell them. I was afraid they would beat me. If I told my parents, they would advise me to wait with marriage until I was older. Child marriage is prevalent in the village, but my parents would want me to wait and finish my studies. But I loved him so much and wanted to go with him.

Consulting her parents would mean a definite no, thus Nirmala is aligning her actions according to this knowledge. She refers to how having a relationship outside of marriage is unacceptable, and thus how these relationships happen in hiding. She also points out that child marriage is prevalent in the village, she indicates that she knew it was happening and that other girls had done what she was now considering. Her parents want her to wait and finish her studies first, but Nirmala failed in grade five one year before this. She told me that she got discouraged because of it and did not want to continue school. Getting married would in her case not mean leaving school, as she had already dropped out. Ruling out the possibility of informing her parents, she decided to call a friend instead for advice:

I then called my friend at her home to get some advice on what to do. She came over, and asked me if I wanted to go. I said I was still very confused. Then the boys came and said we should go, we have to go now. My friend then told me to go. "It will not be the same as your parents' home, it will be different and a new home for you. A new life for you, but you can do better there maybe." She advised me to go with him, since I liked him a lot. Then my friends said, knowing that my parents knew we were good friends: "they will probably ask me where you are. But you just go, and I will take care of your parents," she said to me.

This excerpt also shows a piece of coordinated action, where one friend calls and the other comes over as she realises the seriousness of the matter. The boys coordinate their actions with the conversation they see is going on in Nirmala's room, and join in to convince Nirmala to come. Understanding that Nirmala is worried about her parents' reaction, her friend responds that she will take care of the situation that is bound to occur the next day. At 3 a.m. she left with the boy to his village. Today Nirmala is 24 years old and still married to the same boy, but the journey has been very difficult which I will return to.

Running away to get married turned out to be a common thing among my informants in Surkhet. The same day I met Nirmala I interviewed three other girls from the same village who explained that they got married by choice when they were sixteen. Shanti, who is now 25 years old and have two daughters who are seven and four, got convinced by her mother in-law:

We were not in love, or I was not in love with him. We hardly spoke to each other. But he liked me, and so my current mother in-law used to talk to me about him. She would say

my son is good, if you marry him he will make you happy. Such things. She would approach me for example when we were both collecting fodder in the jungle.

Shanti did not inform her parents about this, she explained that “I sort of liked that she came, it was exciting. I was more playful at that time. I was immature too, and wasn’t really sure if I should tell them or not, but I kept it to myself.” Gradually she started to like the boy, and they met to talk. Three months later she decided to move to his house to get married. Mira, now 20 years old, met her husband at school:

We got married while in grade 9. We started to like each other and fell in love. One year after we got married. I got pregnant shortly after, and so that’s why it was difficult to pass my studies (Mira failed in grade 10). I have two children now. This is the youngest (she was breastfeeding her), and I have another daughter in nursery.

Kamala, also from the same village had yet a different story, as she had a wedding ritual performed when she was only four years old. I spoke with both Kamala and her mother in separate interviews, and came to understand that the ritual had been performed in relation to a superstitious belief. Kamala’s mother had suffered three miscarriages and ended up seeking witchcraft for advise on what to do. Performing a marriage ritual, where her daughter Kamala was promised to a boy of a neighbouring family was the advise given:

I went to hospital and so many places to make it stop, but it didn’t happen. I continued to have miscarriages. So in the end I sought witchcraft, and he advised that we have a ritual for our girl with the boy. After that it stopped, and I even had four more children. By handing her over, the other children survived.

‘Handing over’ in this case meant that the boy and the girl were set aside for each other for marriage later on. However, it was not mandatory and they could reject the relationship when they got older. Note her reference to the hospital, it is a trace of institutional relations. It shows that she was aware of health services available to her, and that she by consulting several doctors participated in the discourse of modern medicine. Only when this did not bring the wanted results did she seek witchcraft as a final recourse. Such a sequence of coordinated action complicates the assumption of a clear divide between tradition and modernity that can be bridged by providing awareness. The mother’s intention was to wait until Kamala was about 20 years old for the formal wedding ceremony to take place:

I don’t agree with the ways girls in this village elope. It’s not good. They just get into more trouble by doing it. They get tortured and cannot even tolerate it because they are immature. Both physically and mentally, they cannot handle the pressure. They are not

ready for what they have to face in the boy's home after marriage. They don't listen and then they regret. It is much wiser to wait and get married in your twenties, 22 is a good age. You are more mature and more able to stand up against violence and other social problems in the in-laws home.

She talks from experience as her own daughter Kamala ended up going to the boy's home at age sixteen, before the planned wedding ceremony and without informing her parents. When she was thirteen, she found out from her parents and other villagers that the boy was meant for her. From then on she explains, she started to like the boy. Kamala's mother was not happy about it, as she wanted her to finish school and complete grade twelve. Instead, Kamala dropped out of school in grade seven and got married. Her mother explained that they did not go after her to convince her otherwise because they knew they would "let her marry that same guy later anyway." Other parents responded differently to their daughter's choice. One father we spoke with explained that all his five daughters went on their own, but he was especially worried about his second daughter who was seventeen when she ran away. The others had turned eighteen. About his second daughter he explained:

At that time she was in 9th grade, and I wanted her to study more. I tried to convince her she should study. But, she went. When she went again after I took her back, there was nothing I could do. Also, other villagers said I should let her be there if she is happy. So I dropped the case. It's been 11 years now that she's been married.

His own marriage was arranged when he was eighteen. Stressing the importance of education for his daughters is an action that is responsive to what has been going on, as both him and his wife had gone to school. It is also responsive to what others are doing, as many of these villagers sent both their boys and girls to the local school. His actions are in and of the ongoing historical process. However, sending his girls to school did not go exactly as intended. He said he tried to "convince them to stay in school and focus on their grades. But, they met in school, and some met through friends and they went on their own". From the excerpt above you see that the daughter went twice. This was because her father came and took her back with him, but a few days later she ran away again and that is when other villagers convinced him to let her go. The family's livelihood was farming, and I wondered if he had to pay dowry for all his girls and how that worked. Here my presumption was that expensive dowry might impact when the girls get married. Of course this was based on the idea of parents arranging these marriages, which was not the case right now, but I still wondered and the dialogue revealed something interesting about dowry practice:

Father: *Sindoor ceremony was held in our presence and I gave her some dowry to take.*

Me: *For her to take, not for the husband or in-laws?*

Interpreter: *Dowry is actually not, in some parts of Nepal you know dowry is paid to the husband of the daughter. But, here in the hill area it is just the opposite, it is given to her, for the sake of her. Here it is called offerings.*

After living in east Africa for some time I was made aware of the custom of bride wealth, but in south-Asian countries I assumed dowry was the most common practice. Later I would see that dowry was practiced in the Terai area, but it was interesting to see that it was different here in the hill area. ‘Sindoor’ is a red coloured powder put in the parting of the hair. I was told that there usually is a ceremony with different rituals, and after it is performed the girl is allowed to put ‘sindoor’ to signal that she is married. Shanti recalled how her parents too came to the boy’s house and tried to take her back with them:

Actually, what happened is that my parents came the day after I had gone. We had a discussion, hot discussion. They could not believe that I had done such a thing, without informing them and getting their consent. They felt it was not really my decision, but that I had been misguided by someone else. They disagreed, and it took a long time to convince them that I was now married. Even others got involved to convince them to accept the situation. Eventually they accepted it, because I would lose social status if I went back home after being with him. People would know.

I had found it very puzzling how simply going to the boy’s house would make you married. As Shanti explains here, she tried to convince her parents that she was married now, one day after she had gone to the boy’s house. My host mother in the village helped explain this to me. “It takes time some times to put the ‘sindoor’. Without it, the society does not accept the marriage. But, at home they accept it, for instance the in-laws. So it is as if they are married, but it’s not formal yet.” Thus, by agreeing to move in with the boy’s family the girl is by the villagers considered married, even before the union is made formal through a ‘sindoor ceremony’. In the account given by Shanti and by the village father further up we see how other villagers got involved. People knew when these things happened, and taking the girls back after others assumed they had been with a boy would damage her opportunity to get married later on. Thus, these parents are coordinating their actions with the involvement of other villagers and eventually accept the situation. In Mira’s case the parents were less confrontational with her:

His parents did not know either, that we were planning to get married. But they knew we had an affair. Two-three days after I moved to his house my mother and my dad’s friend

came over to look for me. My mother wanted to negotiate with his parents, and actually they talked very nicely. She told his parents to look after me very carefully, as I was still young. She didn't discuss my further studies, but she said she wanted me to be happy in my grooms home.

This mother's concern for her daughter is not so visible in victimising accounts of child marriage. However, this piece of work, of going to the in-laws house to negotiate on her daughter's behalf is part of the reality. Late one evening I wrote down an observational note about a similar situation:

It is 10 p.m. and my host mother, her daughter and another mother is in our room chatting. The mother is concerned for her daughter because she likes a boy a lot and wants to be with him. The mother suspects she might run away any day now. The mother describes how her daughter gets seizures sometimes (sound like epilepsy), and it makes her even more worried about how she will be taken care of in the boy's house. It's interesting, and nice to see the parents concern. I sort of expected them to be the ones pushing for marriage (12.01.16).

This mother had come to my village host mother to discuss her concern and see if there was anything she could do to help. My host mother had let the girls have their SAMVAD sessions in her house, and so they agreed that some of the girls from last year's SAMVAD group would visit this daughter and try to convince her to wait with marriage. The consequences of the work of choice conducted by my informants were quite severe, and many of them explained how they did not realise what it would involve at the time. Having learned from their experience, many of these girls were now involved in SAMVAD to inform other girls. Shanti said she learned the hard way:

I didn't know what I was doing at that time, and girls need to be informed. Marrying young was very hard for me. I wasn't aware it would be that hard, I was only focusing on how fun it was that some boy liked me. I wasn't thinking ahead of that. The tension I felt due to my mother in-law was horrible. At one point I even thought of suicide. The abuse by my mother in-law became too much, so in the end my parents contacted higher people of the village on my behalf. They were invited to decide if I could have a divorce or not. I wanted to divorce because of my mother in-law, but my husband did not want that. The case failed because my husband did not agree. I was not allowed to divorce. Then I moved back to my parents, because I could not take it anymore.

So now I recommend my younger brothers and sisters to wait, and also other girls in the village. I have learned a lot of things you know. My husband is three years older than me, so the age difference is not too high. Our relationship is good actually, we don't have heavy discussions and disagreements. The tension was not caused by him, but his mother. I realized the hard way some of the challenges caused by young marriage, even before

joining these programs. But through the programs I now have a wider network of people to campaign with.

Also Nirmala and Kamala shared their experiences of having a difficult time at the in-laws' house. Nirmala said she was always compared with her sister in-law and that her mother in-law gave her a hard time because she could not perform the same heavy tasks. Kamala too explained how she got scolded for not working hard enough in the house and not being able to carry the same heavy loads of fodder from the jungle as the others. All three of them ended up going back to their own parents house for a while. Kamala regretted getting married and explained how she uses her experience to warn other girls:

I regretted it, it was a big mistake to get married that young. As my parents wished I would at least pass SLC (School Level Certificate, grade 10) or plus two (year 11 and 12), then I would have been more independent and able to work. Maybe I would have gotten less complaints and scolding from my mother in-law. These days I say to my younger sisters that they should not marry young but wait until their twenties. They should study first, and get a job before they settle down.

All the work these girls were doing after going to the boy's house – collecting fodder in the jungle, fetching water, bringing up children, cleaning the house, helping out with crops and so forth – can be regarded as ways of doing gender. They were doing this type of work before getting married as well, but now they were being judged by a mother in-law on how well they performed the work. Nirmala was the only one of the girls without children. She told me stories about how she used to be blamed and scolded for being barren. However, a visit to the doctors proved that the issue was with her husband and since then she has not been hassled about it. They were all trying to live up to the mother in-law's expectations. For many of them the 'sindoor ceremony' was delayed for up to a year or even two because the mother in-law was dissatisfied. In many ways then, 'sindoor' can be understood to symbolise the accomplishment of being as a respected wife and daughter in-law. It means that you manage the work involved in the performance of gender in this context. Being a girl or a woman in this context is hard work. Collecting fodder in the jungle for instance takes up to three hours every day in this village, and they carry the heavy load in a basket strapped to their heads. Through their participation in this work the girls are hooking into a local gender discourse.

By fitting the work knowledge of my informants together, an account of the actualities in a village in Surkhet is starting to emerge. Focusing on work in the generous sense promoted by

Smith opens up for descriptions of activities that might otherwise not have been included, such as the thinking work involved, the parents stressing the importance of studying and some of them trying to get their daughters back after eloping. Calling a friend for advice or holding back information from parents might seem insignificant activities, yet I see them as activities integral to 'doing child marriage'. We see how parents respond to their daughters running away and in turn how they coordinate their actions with what other villagers are saying and doing. Then we see what practicing choice actually entailed for some of the girls. The hard household work involved, the scolding, moving back home and dealing with more scolding from parents and so forth. It brings into view the doing of gender as an accomplishment. The account generated of lived life in social relations creates an understanding and appreciation of embodied experience. The various activities of these girls, the parents and others bring the social into being. I will explore how this sequence of coordinated action might be embedded in social organisation that goes beyond each of these work knowledges. First however, I give an account of the actualities I encountered in Kapilvastu.

“We worry about the wrong track”: when parents control their girls

In the village in Surkhet my informants came to the house where I was staying. In the city area we gathered in one of the SAMVAD kendras. In Kapilvastu, we drove around on motorbikes to visit the girls and their parents in their home. Most of the interviews were done just outside the home, with at least half the village observing this very strange and new situation. Many of them had never seen a foreigner before. I quickly noticed that the context and how things worked in Kapilvastu was very different from the actualities in Surkhet. Below you see an excerpt of a conversation with two girls, who were aunt and niece but both the age of sixteen. They lived in the same house and their mothers and a few aunts were present and joined in the conversation. We were in a nearby village area of Kapilvastu municipality. It turned into a very interesting and funny conversation, where the phenomenon of me and my interpreter moving around freely as unmarried girls evoked astonishment:

Me: Is child marriage a common issue around here?

Mother/aunts: It is not an issue in this village. When they are adults and mature, we marry them, maybe around their 20s. We don't practice gauna anymore. It used to be common before, but it is very expensive to first have a marriage ceremony and then spend money on the gauna as well. It is better to have the one wedding ceremony and send the daughter straight, it saves expenses.

[Talk about how and what challenges the girls discussed in SAMVAD]

Me: Are you still in contact with the other girls?

Niece: Once in a while, just meeting informally, but not often.

Mothers/aunts: We don't like them moving around together. If the two move together and meet with some of the others, they might go in the wrong track. One can impact the others to go the wrong way. We don't trust them when they group together.

Me: So you don't really trust your girls? But you still allowed them to go to SAMVAD, that's a group?

Mothers/aunts: It is different. SAMVAD was organised and the animator controlled the topics they discussed and looked after them.

The women find it very strange that me and my interpreter, both 24, are still unmarried but moving around freely. I explain that it is very different where I am from. Even if it is strange that I move around alone in a foreign country, they tell me they understand that I am from a different culture and excuse me. However, it is especially strange that my interpreter moves around they

think, as she is from a nearby village and belongs to the same culture. She explains that her parents let her take higher education, and once she is finished they will find her a husband.

Interpreter: *They are saying if you move around with a boy, or talk with him, people will assume you have a physical relation to that boy. They think you have a love affair.*

Me: *If that happens, is it difficult to get the girls married?*

Mothers/aunts: *Yes, that will not be any good. When trying to find a husband for her, other villagers will say to the boy's family that she is not good, she has gone in the wrong track. So that is why we keep the girls inside the house, for security.*

When I joke and say that even if I am allowed to travel my mother has told me not to find a boyfriend this far away from home, they all burst into laughter!

Mothers/aunts: *We are looking for a husband, so she (the niece) will get married soon.*

Me: *Now, at 16?*

Interpreter: *Maybe at 17.*

Me: *So do you want to get married soon? Can you girls come with any wishes in the choice of husband?*

Mother: *She has no right to speak about this topic in front of us. If we don't get her married soon, we worry she might run away.* (The girls are silent, not saying anything).

Me: *So what type of boy are you looking for, for the girls?*

The women: *Farmers, because we are a farming family.*

I found several things interesting about this interview. One is that the women first explain that child marriage is not an issue in the village and that they will wait to marry their daughters until their 20s, only to later explain how they are currently looking for a husband for their sixteen-year-old girls. It seems that they are first giving me an account that fits the development discourse about child marriage, which is later uncovered when their actual activities are exposed. This shows some of the value of generating descriptions of work knowledge. However, the contradiction might not be as big as I first thought. It seems that they first might be hooking into the institutional development discourse the girls have been introduced to in SAMVAD. The girls explained earlier in the interview how they share some of the things they learn with their mothers and sisters. Thus, the mothers have picked up on a discourse of child marriage, and when I ask the girls about it they intervene to share their awareness. They are aligning their language according to development discourse saying that child marriage results in a negative impact. Further into the interview we see that they are not activating this discourse. Now, the term child

marriage was very common in the field. Before I went, I was considering using ‘marrying young’ if child marriage might be sensitive, but many of my informants used it and I quickly learned the nepali word ‘baalbibah’ for child marriage. When it becomes common speech, it is easy to forget that ‘child marriage’ is itself an institutional capture. It comes from the development discourse that defines it as a union before the age of 18. Implicated in this definition is the notion of a child as anyone under the age of 18. What becomes clear in this interview however, is how the women are pointing out that they will marry their girls when they are adults and mature, “maybe around their 20s.” The age is not so important. Some of my other informants from these village areas did not know exactly how old they were, neither did their mothers. The girls from this interview are considered to be mature enough soon, despite being sixteen. Thus, the contradiction in what they are saying and doing is not so big after all, if they are acting on their own understanding of the discourse. They use a term from the development discourse, but the content of it is different and therefore they say that child marriage is not an issue in the village. However, this is more an assumption from my side and I would need even more work knowledge to establish this empirically.

Another reference in the interview is to the practice of ‘gauna’. To understand what this was all about took some time, but my interpreter and a girl I have named Mina guided me through this practice:

Mina: I got married five years ago.

Me: Ah, ok, then you were how old?

Mina: I was 13.

Me: Can you explain to me step by step how it happens? How do you get married in this community?

Girl: It is tradition to get married in very early age.

Me: Ok, so was it your parents that wanted you to marry?

Girl: Yes it was my parents.

Me: Ok, so they suggested someone, or? What happened?

Interpreter: No one has suggested, they themselves found and let her marry.

Me: She herself found?

Interpreter: No, no, no her parents found!

Me: *And then they get introduced or?*

Mina: *I did not get to see my husband. Both our families met, or our parents, and then I had to get married without seeing the boy.*

Me: *What did you think, did you want to get married?*

Girl: *I was very young, I didn't have any idea about marriage.*

Me: *Was there a ceremony?*

Mina: *Yes*

Me: *How was the ceremony?*

Mina: *The husband's family came here, and my family had organized a ceremony program. We got married and the boy's family went home and left me here. After five to six years, the gauna will be arranged and that's when I have to go to my husband's house.*

Me: *So you have a marriage ceremony with rituals, and you are officially married, but then you stay in separate homes?*

Interpreter: *Um, yea...*

Me: *For some years...*

Interpreter: *For some years, in the separate home. Girl stays in her home and the boy in his home.*

Me: *And when do you move to your husband's home?*

Interpreter: *It's the parent's choice, and they are thinking that when she is 20 they will give gauna and she will go to his home.*

Me: *What does it mean to give gauna?*

Interpreter: *It means that the boy's family comes to the girl's family, and there will be a small ceremony. Then after they take her with them to his home.*

Part of the work involved in getting married in this context is first for the parents to find what they think is a suitable boy for their daughter. Then the two families negotiate and a wedding ceremony is held, often around the age of thirteen. Many of the girls I spoke with explained how they during the ceremony had their face covered with a veil and was not allowed to see their future husband. However, the experiences did vary, even within the same village. For instance in a village about thirty minutes away from Kapilvastu municipality a thirteen-year-old girl explained that "my parents decided, they went to the boy's parents and talked with them and then arranged the marriage ceremony. I did not get to see the boy". She was still living in her parent's home and the 'gauna' had not taken place yet. When asked about how she felt about the practice

she said “there should at least be one formal meeting where I get to see the boy I am going to marry.” Another girl from the same village was allowed to see the boy when she got married at age sixteen, but not talk with him: “my parents arranged it. The boy’s family came and had a meeting with my parents. I was allowed to see him, but not talk with him.” This girl was now twenty years old and her ‘gauna’ was not expected to take place in another two or three years. I was curious about why this process took longer for her than what seemed to be common in the villages around. She said she “had to wait until my brothers and sisters were married, so it took some time and my marriage delayed.” She had four sisters and two brothers. A seventeen-year-old girl, whom I have named Laxmi, had her wedding ceremony when she was thirteen. At the time of the interview it was nine months since ‘gauna’ and she had moved in with her husband. Laxmi explained that “I had seen him before gauna. Even we talked on the phone a few times before I moved in”. We see that the details of what it entails to get married in these villages are slightly different. The parents are coordinating their work according to their conditions, such as how many children they have to marry and when they have the economic means for marriage. In the interview first quoted we see how in that village they had stopped with ‘gauna’. Whether it was the whole village or mostly that particular family I do not know. Their explanation was that having a wedding ceremony first and then a ‘gauna ceremony’ later was very expensive. The father of one of the girls was dead, and so the family income was affected by his passing. Going straight for a marriage ceremony and excluding the ‘gauna’ practice is one way they adapt to the situation. The work they are doing is as Smith (2005:151) proposes, “done under definite conditions and with whatever means and tools.” What makes it expensive is the dowry. Unlike Surkhet, my informants in Kapilvastu explained that the girl’s family was expected to pay dowry to the boy’s family. Here my initial presumption about the dowry practice influencing what goes on was right, and in Kapilvastu my informants taught me through their own way of knowing the setting. One mother in a village about thirty minutes away from Kapilvastu municipality explained:

We have to give dowry in the marriage ceremony. Then for the gauna the expenses will be for the food and for whatever we give to our daughter, like a saree. The gauna is less expensive, the dowry is given during the first wedding ceremony. The expenses are increasing day by day here so that is a challenge. The dowry system, the demand will increase when the boy is older. He might have a job or more education by then, and the dowry will increase. In these difficult times we were worried about not being able to pay, and we wanted to secure her future.

The practice of dowry is a sequence of coordinated action between the girl's parents and the boy's parents. This mother experiences how the price increases day by day. What she meant was that their situation made the dowry price difficult to manage. Their situation was affected by the blockade of the Indian border, which was just a few minute's drive from this village. As explained in the introduction chapter the blockade affected the food prices. Additionally, this family as many other families in this area, sustained themselves with subsistence farming. However, this year was extra difficult because lack of rain resulted in fewer crops than expected. The conditions thus influence their actions, and the mother was planning to get Ramita married because she worried they would not be able to pay the dowry demand. Calling it a demand refers to how it is the boy's parents who decide the appropriate price. This price increases when the boy is older, Ramita's mother explained. Some further questions with other informants as well taught me that it is not the age as such, but the boy's qualifications or his ability to provide for a wife that sets the price. When he is older, he is likely to have more education or even a job and the dowry demand increases. The girls' parents then, prefer to marry their daughters young, as the boys will also be younger and less qualified, which in turn decreases the dowry demand. As another mother explained: "If we marry them then we get free from that responsibility, and we don't have to go and think about the dowry and finding a boy. Then we can start thinking for the next daughter". Ramita's mother further refers to dowry as a system, and we see how it organises what goes on in the setting. Instead of assigning agency to the concept 'dowry system' however, dowry can be understood as human action being done in social relations. As it is done in a similar manner across time and space, it can further be understood as human action being done in a trans-local or ruling relation. Dowry cannot be separated from human action as an entity in itself determining behaviour, rather dowry exists as practice integrated in the local historical process. The dowry practice in Kapilvastu can be seen as a practice done in relation to what people are and have been doing just across the border to India. The activity is responsive to what people have been doing in this area, which differs from people's practices in Surkhet. However, by using the concept trans-local relation it becomes clear that what we conventionally often call 'social system' is human action done in social relations. How the dowry practice works and organises is not fixed, it comes into being through people's activities:

But now we understand that it is beneficial for her to wait. Even if the dowry increases, we just have to manage somehow, because the most important for us is her health and safety. If getting married young can be bad for her health, we will wait and find a way to manage dowry.

In SAMVAD Ramita had been introduced to a different discourse where the disadvantages of getting married young had been discussed. She had shared this with her mother and her mother was now activating this discourse and postponing the marriage. As we see it will have consequences for the dowry price, but it becomes clear that the ‘dowry system’ is not determining her activities. The work of ‘undoing’ child marriage will be attended to later, first I explore further some of the other activities involved in the practice of child marriage.

The same mother who talked about the responsibility of getting their girls married also said about her daughter Tika that “she is not allowed to move around much, but sometimes she can go but not far. Just to the neighbours”. The work of keeping girls inside recurred in many interviews. As the mothers and aunts of the first interview quoted explained, they do it to secure their girls’ future. By this they mean that keeping them inside makes sure they do not go in the ‘wrong track’. Having an affair or a love marriage is considered the ‘wrong track’ and several mothers and girls explained this to me. The work of choice did occur here as well, as it did in Surkhet, and I even got to speak with a recently married couple. They met at a wedding ceremony when they were fifteen. They managed to meet once after that, but otherwise stayed in touch on the phone. After having a love affair for one year, they got married:

Me: How did you get married?

Boy: We married within the same caste, but it was love marriage. So at the time we got married, her parents did not agree with it. So we ran away and got married. Now her parents have accepted it. My parents accepted it from the start. Or, at the time of marriage I told them, but not before that. Having a love affair is not really accepted.

Me: Why did your parents not accept?

Girl: I never told them, I worried about what they would say. So I just ran away. I knew they would not accept it, as love marriage is not common here and the concept of love is limited. It was better to run away.

The couple decided to get married because the girl’s parents started looking for a husband. She knew once they picked one she would not have any choice, so they both decided to run away. It was the only option to stay together. Mostly however, my informants were silent in relation to their parents’ marriage plans. When I asked them about the time of marriage or the type of

husband they might want, the girls kept silent. It is not accepted for them to have an opinion, or at least not to voice it in front of their parents, as we saw. During many of the interviews family was present and it ended up being an interview with both a girl and her mother. It was interesting to see this work of silence in practice, as they were careful about what they shared. If you got to speak to them alone however, the silence was broken and the girls had many thoughts and opinions. Below is an excerpt from a group interview with four unmarried sixteen-year-old girls, who had attended the same SAMVAD group. We were in the centre where SAMVAD used to be and no parents or grown-ups were present:

Me: *So when do you think you will get married?*

One girl: *I am thinking around 20, then it will be comfortable to get married.* (The others nod in agreement).

Me: *And do your parents agree with this?*

Girls: *We think after 20 is good, but next year her parents are thinking of finding a husband for her. You know parents move on their own thinking, while we have another thinking.*

Me: *Do you discuss any of this with your parents?*

Girls: *They threaten us. If they don't find a husband in the right age, then they don't feel secure. They are not secure that we will not go in the wrong track, like find our own husband and run away. So they don't feel secure and that is why they threaten us and say we have to get married when they find a husband for us.*

Me: *How do you deal with that? Are you able to communicate with your parents that you would like to wait with marriage for later?*

Girls: *We used to try to talk, but sometimes they listen and sometimes they don't listen. They ignore what we say.*

Me: *Is it easier to talk to your mother than your father for example?*

Girls: *It is much easier to talk with our mothers. We feel shy talking to our fathers.*

Me: *What about after SAMVAD, has it changed anything for you? Are you more able to communicate what you want?*

Girls: *It has had an impact. We are more frank now than we were before. We are a little more confident discussing different matters with our parents.*

Me: *How do your parents react when you speak up?*

Girls: *Our father can become quite angry, because usually it is thought that girls should not speak in front of the parents, girls don't have the right to speak in family matters. But our mothers are more polite and they usually listen.*

Me: So that is what you are taught while growing up, that you should not speak? Why aren't girls able to voice their opinions? Who says so? Do you learn it from a young age?

Girls: It is because of fear of the community, and also it is a tradition that girls cannot speak in front of the parents and in front of our father. We should feel shy, we have to follow this tradition, we are taught to keep silent.

Me: Do you spend most of your time in the house?

Girls: Yes! (in unison again). There is so much household work (one of the girls exclaim frustrated and the others laugh). There is this concept that girls are only meant for household work, we have to clean the clothes, clean the utensils, cook food, look after the cattle, look after younger siblings...that is for the girls...

Me: And what is for the boys? What do they do?

Girls: Ha, well they generally get the chance to go to school, take higher education. For us we drop out because the household work takes too much time. Boys have freedom, they can go anywhere and do whatever they like.

Me: Do you agree with this system?

Girl: No! But, we don't really have a choice. Boys and girls are born by the same womb of the mother, so why is there discrimination in our society?

Me: That is a good question! Do you have any thoughts about why it is like this?

Girls: They think that by going to school, if any girl starts going in the wrong track they think the whole girl will end up in the wrong track. So for security they just try to keep the girls inside the home. If they don't let them out they will not go in the wrong track either. And also they don't see the point of high education for girls when they are going to another house anyway, they are only made for the household work. Such concepts and thinking keeps the discrimination between boys and girls. The boy has to stay in his home to look after the family, have to provide support for the future for his mother and father. This thinking by our parents has given discrimination in our society.

These girls were raising questions based on their own experience. From this experience they were starting to discover how the everyday life of their community was put together. They were referencing the dominating gender discourse in their community. The girls themselves participate in gender discrimination as they coordinate their actions with the expectations of their parents. They do all the different types of household work and they mostly keep silent about matters not meant for them to speak about. Although these girls were saying they tried talking with their parents and had some success getting their mother to listen. The boys too participate in the gender discourse, as one eighteen-year-old boy told me:

We have discrimination in the sense that people think boys should get the opportunity of higher education but girls are for the household work, so why should they invest in their education. Also boys have more freedom, we can move around but the girls stay inside mostly. Our grandparents and the elders in the community tell us it should be this way.

He was now in grade 10 and would continue with higher education to become a teacher. When it comes to marriage he had convinced his parents to wait until he was finished with his education, and even though it would be an arranged marriage he had clear opinions: “I will interfere! She can either be a working wife or a house wife, both are accepted in my family. But, I want to find someone who has education like me”. The boys were practicing freedom, choice and influence, which the girls found very difficult to practice without being scolded. They first obey their parents, and after marriage they have to obey their in-laws. The interview with the couple who got married by choice had to be held inside the home, because the girl was not allowed to move outside. She had her face covered with a veil. She explained to me that girls had to cover their face after marriage, as a sign of respect for the in-laws. Laxmi who also recently married was not covered when I talked with her, but she was wearing a beautiful yellow saree, make-up and lots of jewellery. She explained however, that because she was in her mother’s house she was not covering her face, but at her husband’s place she always did:

Laxmi: In my husbands home I have to stay inside the whole time, since we just got married. The bride cannot simply go outside, I have to cover my face.

Me: For how long?

Laxmi: Up until four or five years...

Me: Four to five years??

Laxmi: Yes. But if my in-laws allow, I can uncover my face, but only with their permission.

Me: But now you are outside the house? And your face is not covered.

Laxmi: Yes, because now I’m in my mother’s house. I can move freely, and I don’t have to cover my face. It is only in my husband’s house. I cannot move outside there, but stay inside the house.

Me: Can you come to your mother’s house whenever you like?

Laxmi: No, I cannot come by my own will. Only if I get permission from my in-laws can I come here.

Me: What happens if you don’t cover your face?

Girl: Ha, my mother in-law will scold me! And the society will scold as well, it is not accepted to not cover after marriage.

Another woman: They will scold the whole family, say that his wife is not good, his daughter in-law is not good.

Doing gender in this context was hard work just as it was in Surkhet. Unlike Surkhet though, many of these parents were not stressing the importance of education and it was more common to take their girls out of school. Time was one issue. In one of the villages, the local school went up to grade five and after that going to school would take at least half an hour by foot. Due to these conditions many of the girls there dropped after grade five. Mina, whom I have quoted earlier, said she dropped out not only because of the household work, but because her teachers used to beat her when she did not know the answer. A thirteen-year-old girl explained how she had dropped out of school, but then re-enrolled after the SAMVAD program. She was now juggling her time to make it work:

I get up 6 a.m. in the morning. Me and my sister complete the household work together, prepare breakfast for the family. Then I go to school, and after I have to continue with the household work to prepare dinner and clean. In the week-ends and if there is any free time I also have to help out with the farming. They gradually got convinced to let me re-enroll. But the agreement is that if there is too much household work and I cannot finish in time, I have to stay home and take care of it instead of going to school.

Ramita's mother said to my interpreter:

Your parents were doing good by sending you to school. Because of family challenges we could not send our daughter anymore. She had to drop because of the household work. I needed help to look after the younger ones and take care of the household work, while her father was working in the farm and I was trying to get some labour work in other villages. At that time we also did not have her sister in-law here to help out.

Discrimination is an abstraction that does not tell much about what is actually taking place. Exploring everyday life and activities gives it empirical content, and shows how different practices participate in the production of discrimination. What I encountered in villages in Kapilvastu was girls, boys and parents coordinating their everyday activities according to material conditions. While parents work to scrap together a livelihood for their families, boys are sent to school as an investment in his ability to take care of and provide for his parents and a future wife. Girls are taken out of school once they know the basics, not only to take care of the household work but also as a preparation for being a housewife. Some of the parents explained to me that they needed help at home to make ends meet, however they also felt it was more

important for the girls to practice good household work. They explained how their girls would meet challenges in the in-law's house if they did not know how to cook and clean and so forth. They would receive beatings and scolding. Then we also saw how keeping the girls inside is an action meant to protect them from 'the wrong track' and secure their future prospects for marriage. The dowry system in turn exists as a ruling relation organising parents to marry their daughters young to be able to manage the expenses. It is part of the social organisation of child marriage, at least in Kapilvastu. However, in the work described above there are more institutional references. Some have been touched upon already, but in the following I explore the social organisation of child marriage a little further and attempt to trace some of the references to the institutions that produce them.

The social organisation of child marriage

A common way of understanding everyday life is through typologies and categories. If this mental process transferred into systematic analysis in research however, we can lose sight of the institutional relations involved in shaping the local experience (McCoy 2006:114). Categories sort information for us. Having done a number of interviews a researcher often starts grouping informants into types or identify recurring words or events that in turn are coded to reference certain meanings. The focus then shifts to individuals and their characteristics as explanation instead of keeping it at social organisation. If I had followed my initial thesis proposal that is what I would have done. I would have grouped my informants into positive deviants acting against the tradition of child marriage and those holding on to tradition. I would then seek to analyse what characterises the different groups and likely argue in line with what is presented in literature and statistics, that child marriage is caused by being poor, low-caste, traditional and uneducated. This is the account presented in the background chapter of this thesis. Child marriage becomes a property of being Dalit or low-caste, of being from a rural village, because the places where prevalence is high is the rural places where Dalits reside and where education levels are low. The girls are understood as victims of a backward tradition and they need to be empowered. A pattern or structure of child marriage is observed, held to be the product of norms. However, how all of this actually exists and comes into being is never truly problematized in

such accounts. Additionally, the complexity of experiences will never materialise in these generalised, objectivist accounts.

When I discovered IE I got interested in exploring what such a perspective might add to the understanding of child marriage. By researching it from the standpoint of those who know and live it, and by piecing their work knowledge together, child marriage becomes a product of processes that extend far beyond the local. It is not a property of my informants being Dalit or poor, neither is it a property of the community they reside in. The actualities in Surkhet were very different from the actualities in Kapilvastu. The local, historical process in which people's doings are situated differs between the two settings. It is two different contexts, with different cultural customs and different conditions under which activities are done. However, the aim of analysis in IE is not agreement among different informants, but the intersections and complementarities of the work they do in different social relations. A recurring phenomenon was how the girls move to the boy's house. Whether it was by choice or arranged by parents we see in the accounts that the girls move to the boy's family. Before this they are trained in household work, and when they are at their in-laws they are judged on their performance of this work. For many of them the practice involves dropping out of school. These activities occur across local sites, they are part of the actualities in both Surkhet and Kapilvastu. In IE something that recurs is thought to be socially organised to recur. All these activities are sequences of coordinated action that are embedded in ruling relations. Smith (2005:225) uses the term institution or institutional to identify complexes embedded in ruling relations that are organised around a distinctive function, such as education or health care. When it comes to life outside formal organisational sites, such as in families, it is more diffusely coordinated and the institutional can be more difficult to see. However, what we see here is how the everyday life of my informants is connected and coordinated based on the boy as the economic provider. The ruling relations people participate in through their activities, organise their everyday life in accordance with the boy's distinctive function as the one who provides for his parents, family and wife. He is the breadwinner, and in Kapilvastu we see how the ruling relation of dowry practice connects with this discourse, as the demand is decided based on the boy's qualifications. I remember noting down how a villager in Kapilvastu commented that the lack of nursing homes made it the boy's responsibility to take care of his parents. It made me think how it might also be the absence of institutions that organise our lives. For instance, many of the girls described dropping out of

school as an easy process, and none of them described any intervention from the school's side. Poverty and education levels are factors that contribute and affect the practice of child marriage. However, even these conditions are socially organised and underpinned by institutional discourse of caste. What we begin to understand is that there is a complex set of relations at play in producing child marriage and also the livelihood conditions my informants were experiencing. An even better understanding of the coordinating mechanisms would require further interviews with representatives of institutions such as school management, village development committees, social assistance and so forth.

Another institutional trace is found in how it is the informants talk about their experiences. In both Surkhet and Kapilvastu they describe falling in love, a limited concept of love and use terms such as love affair and to elope. I have previously referenced McCoy (2006:118) describing language as a phenomenon of interface between embodied experience and the institutional. To elope and have a love marriage is discursive activity connected to a different discourse than that of arranged marriage, which was the dominating one in these settings. Practicing choice occurred across settings, implying a ruling relation. This particular ruling relation can be traced back to texts that were being activated by my informants' engagement with them. What were these texts and how were my informants introduced to them? One reference is in Nirmala's interview. She referred to how she fell in love at the beginning of 'CDMA'. From the dialogue, we see that 'CDMA' was a telephone service, and she and her friend kept in touch with the boys through it. The couple interviewed in Kapilvastu also referred to using a mobile phone to stay in touch. The phones it turned out, were the devices through which both the girls and boys hooked into a love marriage discourse. They are also tools which makes it easier to stay in touch without parents noticing. They accessed various types of text on their phone. For instance they had Facebook in these villages. I am in touch with several of my informants through Facebook, which brings a different dimension to conducting ethnography today. Participating in that network myself, I know that Facebook is full of references to a discourse of love and choice. In Surkhet one animator mentioned how girls in her village come in touch with boys through Facebook. The boys promise them different things such as taking them to new places, buying them new clothes and so forth. Some of the girls end up eloping with them. Other texts, also accessed through phones, are Korean dramas, Hindi soap operas, music videos and various love songs. All these often include dramatic love stories of young couples eloping. I

watched several of the music videos as they usually put them on during bus rides. This love marriage discourse is at play in both settings, but interestingly it coordinates action differently depending on how people interact with the discourse. In Surkhet it organises child marriage as a result of the girls activation of the love marriage discourse. In Kapilvastu, although eloping occurs there as well, it is also the parents who arrange child marriages to avoid this discursive activity and protect their girls from the ‘wrong track’.

The result is the same as child marriage occurs both places, however the difference in how this comes to be would not be visible unless work knowledges was my data. Not viewing child marriage as socially organised risks assigning causality or agency to concepts such as gender norms or tradition, which obscures what actually goes on. Additionally it risks blaming the practice on people and their characteristics, which maintains typologies and stereotypes. The stories of Nirmala, Shanti, Mira and Kamala, who participated in child marriage by choice, complicates the assumption of a clear divide between backwards tradition and progressive modernity. The reality is much more complex. The possibility of improving the lives of girls who get married young lies in understanding how the local doing of child marriage might be hooked up in trans-local relations, starting from the ways in which it is known by the girls and their families themselves. That is the valuable contribution of doing an institutional ethnography.

The undoing of child marriage

Up until now I have focused on the social organisation of child marriage and the coordinated work involved from different participants in bringing it into being. Another type of work I encountered was that of stopping child marriage. Most of my informants were involved in the SAMVAD project, and some of their experiences were organised through their participation in SAMVAD. In the following, I use a group interview from the Surkhet city area and a few other interview excerpts to explore the social relations in which the work of social change is being done.

As mentioned before, we met girls from two SAMVAD centres during the mid-term evaluations in Surkhet. I only observed at that time, but remembered that the girls from one of the groups were very open and seemed to be involved in many activities to make a change in their community. I wanted to visit them again and do a group interview with the girls. It was during this interview I came to know Ashmita's story, and it was through the work knowledge of these girls I found some interesting signs that their actions were "hooked into" activities that involve representatives from trans-local organisations. Ashmita got forcefully married when she was only thirteen, to an eighteen-year-old boy: "It was very forcefully. I did not want to marry, but my parents caned me, kicked me, my mother even pulled my hair out. When I refused, my father dragged me out in the kitchen garden, in the backyard..." I wondered what the circumstances were and she explained:

They forced me for two reasons. We are a big family, 7 sisters and brothers. Another is that when a proposal came they thought it would be good, whoever comes and demands. My father suffered from cancer, so our economic situation was very poor. We even suffered from food shortage. So my parents thought they had to marry the girls to whoever proposed first. My older sisters were already married, so then it was my turn. They married at 17 or 18, some time before this.

Her father knew he was dying and desperately tried to secure the future of his daughters in time. However, his efforts would have severe consequences for Ashmita. At the time of this interview it was 45 days since he died. Ashmita had to leave with the boy and his family. They did not have a wedding, and after two months her husband started drinking and beating her. She explained that she got abused, and ended up pregnant:

I told him, my husband, that he married me when I was too young, only 13. I told him that he was now ruining me and my life, and my child's life. I informed them that I would go

back to my parents' home. Nobody stopped me. I left before I gave birth. I had my baby here. I left about 8 to 9 months in the marriage.

Ashmita is now almost sixteen and has lived at her parents' house the past two years. Actually, she stays with her step-mother, her father's second wife, and her mother lives with a sister. Her step-mother unfortunately does not treat her well either. She scolds her and beats her son, so she still describes her situation as difficult despite not being with her husband anymore. Her son is two years old and she tries to take care of him by doing any work she can find, such as selling firewood or low-paid labour work as crushing stones into pebbles. They are nine altogether, living in a small one-room house. At the time Ashmita's parents got her proposal she was not involved in SAMVAD, but came to know about it through friends:

His people came here with the proposal to my parents. I heard about it, and did not want to marry at that time. This was before I got involved in SAMVAD, but some friends of mine suggested that I should contact some of the girls from the SAMVAD centre and talk with them. I told them about the proposal and my situation, and asked what to do. Then some of the girls from the centre came to my home to try to convince my parents not to marry me away so early, even when I was not part of the group they did this. And my parents agreed, they said they would not marry me at 13. But that same night they arranged for the marriage to happen.

The girls' attempt to cancel Ashmita's marriage failed. However, they were now actively involved in various activities to stop other child marriages in their community, Ashmita included:

Girls: After SAMVAD started here, these kind of cases have been reduced. With the help of us some cases have also been cancelled or stopped. We do door-to-door campaigns and street dramas. In particular cases we go to the home and try to convince the parents, make them aware of the facts. We also warn them and threaten them that we will file their case to the police if they don't listen. We also talk with our friends and sisters about these things. Especially we share what we learn in SAMVAD, individually and in groups, in our free-time.

Me: You go to the police with these cases?

Girls: Yes, they also help sometimes. One girl who got married before being 18 for example is now back with her parents because the police got involved. They got separated and the marriage was cancelled.

One of the girls, Gita who is fifteen years old, then explained how she got her own marriage stopped just a few months back:

A few months ago my parents got a proposal for me at the house. When I heard this I told my mother that I wanted to continue my studies and not marry yet. But the proposal was still there. I do not have good communication with my father, we can fight about the smallest things so I didn't talk with him. But I told my brother, and he also talked with my mother in front of the family that proposed. He discussed with her, that if I wanted my education first I should get to finish school first. Then they both, my mother and brother, talked with my father and discussed with him. Eventually the family with the proposal left and my marriage was not arranged.

Girls: Because of poverty and ignorance girl child marriage occurs. People should get employed. Once they earn themselves, become self-dependent, it is not so necessary to marry away the girls so early. Also if we ourselves get skills, study well, then we can earn a little bit and not depend on our fathers and future husbands for everything. That will also improve the situation.

All the girls were in school and talked eagerly about their plans to become lawyers, nurses, social workers, professional singers and teachers.

Girls: We have been in SAMVAD two years now and have done a lot of activities. We have gone to municipalities, government offices. With the help of government agencies and the police we are doing things. That is why, seemingly there is a change in people's minds and they are moving away from stereotypical attitudes about girls.

SAMVAD officially runs for one year, but these girls had continued to gather on their own after the program. The interview is full of institutional references. By pointing out that the girls who get married are below the age of eighteen, they are referencing the international development discourse and the definition of child marriage it operates with. The act of involving the police means that they are hooking into the legally binding discourse of Nepal's marriage law. By law, you have to be 20 years old to get married in Nepal, or 18 with parental consent (Girls not Brides 2015b). These girls were activating this text, and demanding that the police help them do so. They were involved in an income generating activity, and made leaf-bowls to save money for education. They are making connections between child marriage, girl's lack of education, poverty and consequently girl's dependence on their fathers, brothers and husbands. They were not using the language of social organisation and social relations, but in essence they were exploring parts of the social organisation of child marriage. They were also using this knowledge to try to make a change in their own lives. They had started to see how their own embodied experience was shaped by what happens in various local and trans-local relations, and from that realisation they were involving other people at work in these relations such as brothers, police or government representatives. From analysing this interview I started to see how the teaching in

SAMVAD in many ways was organised based on the same principles as institutional ethnography itself. By exploring it further and drawing on some of my own experiential knowledge, I was able to trace this ruling relation back to the texts and discourses coordinating this similarity.

The girls I spoke with were being taught the same topics in the same way. In the village in Surkhet, Shanti and the others were sharing their experiences to inform other girls. When I was there, the animator gathered the girls from last year's group and conducted a session with them so I could observe. They started with the national song, presented themselves and then the animator led in a song about child marriage and its different consequences. Afterwards she asked questions and all the girls joined in a discussion where they shared their thoughts and experiences. In the same manner as the group in the city area, they were doing door-to-door campaigns, rallies and village dramas. Both in Surkhet and Kapilvastu the SAMVAD centres were operating the same way. There was a group of around twenty girls, gathering every day for two to three hours with an animator to discuss and share experiences. At what time the groups gathered varied, depending on when the girls in a specific village would be available. A girl from Kapilvastu explained a difference she had noted between how she was taught in school and how she was taught in SAMVAD:

There is not such teaching in school. Or we have the health subject, but it is not taught as in SAMVAD. It has less impact, we are just taught the right answers to do well on tests, but we don't really discuss them. In SAMVAD we were discussing and sharing our own experiences, so I learned more from that.

She is referring to health subjects such as personal hygiene and puberty, which is part of what they teach in SAMVAD. However, it is the teaching through articulating and sharing experience I am interested in here, as that was the approach independent of the subject taught. IE is inspired by literacy work, and both Smith (2005) and Campbell & Gregor (2002) reference the work of Richard Darville. His process for teaching literacy is instructive for IE (Campbell & Gregor 2002:12). He emphasises the importance of experience in instruction, but argues that "narrative" where students learn to find meaning in a sequence of events they experience is not the final aim. Literacy instruction should according to Darville, guide students toward making sense of everyday lives that are embedded in organisational literacy (Campbell & Gregor 2002:12). IE makes the same claim for research. It attempts to make the world more understandable - and

thereby changeable - to people. As explained earlier it is named a sociology *for* people because it starts out in a position within the social and explores actual interface between embodied experience and the institutional relations contributing towards shaping the experience. People can use such an understanding to resist domination, just as the girls in Surkhet were trying to do. From my own experience with Strømme Foundation I know that their work is inspired by the literacy instructor Paulo Freire and his *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1972). I have travelled around to different schools on behalf of SF, and taught Norwegian students about Freire and the difference between 'banking' education and 'problem-posing' education. The girl from Kapilvastu quoted above describes this difference, where 'banking' is passively learning facts and 'problem-posing' is bringing your own experience into the learning process. Education according to a Freire model is typically done in small groups, where interaction and creative teaching through music and games is emphasised. SAMVAD is socially organised according to these principles, and the learning process in SAMVAD and IE resemble each other because they process and are inspired by the same type of texts. These texts are the products of literacy work, which has a long history of commitment to the empowerment of the oppressed (Campbell & Gregor 2002:12).

I have realised along the way that the context I was doing research in was an intersection. People were participating in different local and trans-local relations and it was all a complex interweaving of action and texts. The texts and discourses I discovered references to in interviews often had contradictory messages, and could be used by people to compete over shaping people's actions. It made me wonder what determines the coordinating power of one text over another. Often we go about our daily activities without much thought. We are competent knowers of our own social settings. When we read new texts or are introduced to the message of new texts however, we can become conscious of textual and discursive organisation (Campbell & Gregor 2002:30). We start asking questions. When the new text of IE was introduced to me by my supervisor, I became conscious of research activities and practices I had taken for granted. I started to ask questions and tried to figure out how to activate this new text of IE in doing my research. The difference between the discourse of love marriage and arranged marriage contributed to evoke Nirmala's thinking work, referenced earlier. She went back and forth between options, asking questions. The girls' activation of the love marriage discourse in turn results in a response from the parent's side. Initially, they are not quite sure how to respond.

Some parents try to get their girls back, but other villagers get involved and they all enter into the work of deciding upon what the next course of action should be. In much the same way, the work of stopping child marriages is the result of new texts being brought into these social relations. Participating in a social relation in which new texts are introduced can make the coordination of everyday activities less automatic or taken for granted. Explicit instructions has to be given for the “proper compliance” to be enacted. In my study, this instruction process of becoming a skilled, literate activator of new texts takes place in SAMVAD. To actually activate the new texts in everyday life though, can be challenging. Earlier I quoted a thirteen-year-old girl explaining how she had to get up six in the morning to finish the household work in time for school. If she could not manage everything, she would have to drop out of school again. Going to school and doing the work expected of a girl in her community results in a heavy workload in her case. During an interview with two mothers who were part of the SAMVAD Support Team (SST) in one of the villages in Kapilvastu, other challenges also emerged:

Mother 1: I used to motivate them (other parents) to send their daughters to the SAMVAD centre. After my encouragement, many of them would start sending their girls.

Me: So you found that they usually listen?

Mother 1: Yes some of them. But some would become angry with me, saying “why are you forcing this much?” But I just tried my best to convince them. For one year we were just running around in the community, to make sure the girls went to SAMVAD. We also used to go to the office (of the SF local partner), if we could not solve things on our own, we went there to get support.

Mother 2: There have also been family challenges. My husband have not been supportive, but I have tried my best.

Mother 1: Our husbands would scold us. We went to the office early in the morning and came back late at night, they would yell and say “why did you just go there, what did you get?” “Where is your salary from this?” You know the SST is volunteer work, we get no salary, and our husbands can become angry about that because of all the time we spent on it.

Me: So husbands can be a challenge. What do you say to them?

Mothers: We just pretended we were doing something else, that we needed to get something from the market, but then we went to the office.

When asked about why they do this type of work, they replied:

This will make it better for our children, that is a good achievement. We want to improve the situation for girls in our society. If the girls are offered any opportunity like this, then we will agree to let them go. We had no opportunities like this. It is a surprise for us. We are from

the backward caste, we get no opportunities. If any programs come to the village, the leaders take over and we get no chance to say our views and needs. The low castes did not get to participate. So now that we got the chance to be in the SST, it was great for us. There has not been caste discrimination in this programme, both higher and lower castes have been included.

The mothers also explained how they sometimes would observe the sessions, and the way they talked was full of references to the institutional discourse of caste- and gender equality taught in SAMVAD:

Untouchability system is still in this community. High caste people cannot come to our home, cannot eat with us or drink from same cup. The high caste people don't want to make us equal, they want us to remain low caste, for us to remain separate in our own places away from them. But now we understand we are not really low caste people, we are equal, all people are equal. We want to do something about this problem. Caste system should not matter, we are equal and should be treated equally.

We see from this excerpt how activating new texts is challenged by the prevailing discourse in the community. The mothers have to convince other parents about the importance of letting the girls go to SAMVAD and learn new skills. This takes time and their husbands consequently react because all the work they do is not generating any money. These mothers ended up sneaking behind their husbands' backs. In an interview with one of the animators in Kapilvastu we see how convincing parents not to practice child marriage requires that the girls, the animator and the SST members coordinate their work:

Animator: Of the 20-22 girls in the centre, some of them were already married. But after SAMVAD they learned about the disadvantages, they became more aware. Even we had one case where the parents of one girl started to organize for her marriage but we managed to stop that.

Me: How did you manage that, what did you do?

Animator: When we were discussing about child marriage, I was teaching them about different disadvantages and the girls were also sharing their thoughts and views. Then one of the girls openly shared that her parents were now arranging for her to get married, and finding her a husband. I told her to first speak with her parents herself, and she did but they did not agree with her. So we grouped and went to the house. We gathered some of the members, and we tried to talk with and convince the parents. Eventually they got convinced.

Me: Is it difficult to convince the parents?

Animator: Yes, it can be very difficult. The first time we spoke with them they did not become convinced. But we came again and again until we managed to convince them.

Me: *How many times did you have to talk with them?*

Animator: *About four times. First we went five to six girls and they did not agree. Then we went eight to nine girls until they agreed.*

Me: *So they didn't become angry with you for coming and getting involved?*

Animator: *Yes they were at first, they scolded us. But after knowing the problems his own daughter would face after marriage in this early age, finally he got convinced.*

Me: *Did you get any support from the SST?*

Animator: *Yes they were very supportive.*

Me: *Did they also try to convince?*

Animator: *Yes, when the parents would not listen to us the first times, I went to inform the SST and they got involved as well.*

Me: *What type of disadvantages of child marriage do you teach?*

Animator: *Physical disadvantages, they often drop out of school and then they will lack education, if she goes to the husband's home very early she will face physical challenges with him and can also become pregnant very early, early pregnancy can cause many health complications for the girl and the baby. There is also a lot of pressure on the girl as she has to take care of all the household work at her in-laws house, the responsibility is heavy.*

All this work implies that awareness is not enough. Campbell & Gregor (2002:33) claim that the capacity to rule depends upon carrying messages across sites. In this case it means carrying the message from the international development discourse, to NGOs, to local partners, to the animators, and then to the girls and from the girls to their families. If the new texts about gender equality, caste equality, girl's education, the disadvantages of child marriage is to be activated people need to learn skills on how to do so. From here it could be easy to let the analysis fall back on focusing on people and their characteristics. Not all the girls and parents had the same success activating the discourse taught in SAMVAD. Depending on the setting some still practice silence, drop out of school to do household work, marry young despite being aware of the implications it can have for their health and so forth. However, to focus on the girls' characteristics to theorise about why it is that some are able to activate the discourse from SAMVAD while others are not, puts a lot of responsibility on the girls alone. Such an inquiry already implies that the failure to produce social change is solely connected to matters internal to the girls or their parents. This again would lose sight of the institutional. People's activities are situated doings done under definite conditions. For instance, poverty, food shortage and sickness

in Ashmita's case were conditions beyond the girls' control and influence. However, as I have touched upon before even these conditions are socially organised and can be understood by exploring and mapping the social relations. I previously discussed how similar the learning process in SAMVAD is to the research process in institutional ethnography, a similarity coordinated by processing the same literacy texts. The potential for an institutional ethnography to be a resource *for* people to create change in their everyday lives depends on the second level of analysis. It depends on the analysis going beyond work knowledge and towards mapping the institutional relations contributing to shape the local experiences. In the same way, the potential for SAMVAD to be a resource *for* the girls and their families depends on going beyond the work knowledge the girls produce with their animator, and towards making sense of how their experience is hooked into and shaped by institutional relations. DeVault (2006:295) emphasises that an IE research of course will not bring solutions or change without political work, it is only a "map" of some of the complex ways the everyday world is put together. In the same way, exploring some of the institutional relations by starting out in the work knowledge of the girls in SAMVAD only offers a map of connections, but political work from activists, NGOs and government representatives is needed to create the change.

The ruling relation of development management

The aim of IE is not to generalise from the experience of a group of people, but rather to discover generalising social processes that affect their lives. One such generalising social process is the conventional research undertaking. Another, which operates in a similar manner, is development management. I set out with the intention of learning something about child marriage, understanding more of the actualities of this social practice. Doing it within the context of a development project however, led me to discover more than the social relations implicated in the phenomena of child marriage. I ended up discovering part of the ruling relations of development management, which I myself will enter into as a practitioner after my master's degree. Exploring IE helped me understand that research engages the researcher in a social relation, where she participates in the production of knowledge in a more fundamental manner than I have thought of earlier. Another discovery in relation to this is that development management engages the

practitioner in a ruling relation, where the practitioner also participates in the production of knowledge.

The work of development management is pervaded by texts. During my fieldwork I both observed and got access to some of these texts. While I was in the village in Surkhet I observed how the animators were preparing for this year's SAMVAD programme. My host sister was an animator and one evening she came home from work with a notebook and started discussing with two other animators who were there. I asked what they were doing and they showed me that part of their job as an animator was to register information about the girls who would participate in SAMVAD. In the notebook they wrote down the names, age, marital status, whether they went to school or not, caste and so forth. On the walls in the SAMVAD centres I visited, there were participation charts. Certain types of data and information had to be registered and reported to the local project coordinator. I also got access to other texts such as project descriptions, annual reports, evaluation reports, baseline data, logical frameworks (logframes) and performance assessment guidelines. Working with and processing these texts coordinates the monitoring and evaluation of SAMVAD. In one of the project descriptions it is explained that SAMVAD is monitored according to Results-Based Management (RBM) and uses a so-called logframe approach to drive results. I did not observe the work involved in creating a logframe during my fieldwork, but I have my own personal experience of working with logframes. During my bachelor's degree, I had a semester at the University of East Anglia in England, and in a course called "Development in Practice" we learned how to design a logframe. During my master's course at the University of Agder we also had a management subject where we designed a logframe. That means that two different universities, located in two different countries, were using the exact same model. SF Nepal was also using this model. The logframe has in other words become a standardised management tool within development work. It consists of four hierarchical levels and you always start at the top and work your way downwards. You start with an overall goal, which is informed by the mission. In SF's case, the mission is "to eradicate poverty". From there a purpose is formulated which is going to contribute to achieving the mission. During the project period of SAMVAD the purpose is to empower adolescent girls in terms of self-esteem, awareness of rights, economic activity, education, life skills and so forth. The next step revolves around establishing outputs, which describe in more practical terms what needs to be achieved for the purpose to be fulfilled. For example, it can be improved livelihood

opportunities of the adolescents or increased awareness about discrimination. Finally, the activities needed to achieve the outputs are formulated, such as selecting and training animators and establishing SAMVAD centres.

The logframe is a framework for understanding and justifying the operational logic of the project design. Following the steps will in turn result in fulfilling the purpose. Each level of results in the logframe has separate performance indicators. In order to measure the progress of the project these indicators have to be objectively verifiable. It can be number of animators trained, number of child marriages stopped or level of self-esteem measured from 1 to 10. The M&E accounts thus reduce the work and the social changes involved in the projects to numbers or cases. In some of the evaluation reports success stories are included as illustrations of achieved results, but mostly people and their activities disappear from the accounts. What goes on in the project is understood in terms of the indicators developed to measure it, meaning that the M&E assessment forms and the logframe decide what is considered relevant to know and what becomes visible. The knowledge produced in these accounts constitute the foundation on which leaders in the organisation decide for instance funding.

Now, many of the project coordinators and the staff of the local partners know the project participants as real people, and not only as texts or numbers. The animators especially, as they interact with the girls almost on a daily basis. However, they also know their project participants objects of developmental attention represented as texts and numbers. The animators, local project coordinators and national project coordinators participate in M&E as they register information according to the set indicators. Development practitioners thus participate in a ruling relation, where they convert project participants' accounts of their experience into institutional texts and discourse. This makes people and their activities objects of managerial knowledge. This is not a process in SF alone. Rather, it is a widely shared managerial way of measuring and knowing within the international development discourse, underpinned by values of transparency, aid effectiveness and accountability. NGOs are accountable to their donors and to the government of the countries they operate in. They have to show that they are doing what they have stated in their objectives and project descriptions. The M&E system many NGOs operate with is again related to the discourse of results-based funding, where they have to show results in order to get financial support for their projects.

The paradox is that the accounts upon which decisions are made only selectively represent the complex actualities of people's socially coordinated doings. Thus, I have discovered that the paradox of a gap between the social as written and the social as lived and experienced exists both in conventional research and in development management. The work knowledge of the girls and their parents does not materialise in the written evaluation reports. This contradiction can be compared with using IE in research solely as a method and not as a distinct sociology. It subordinates the research inquiry to the same conventions IE was developed as a critique of. Similarly, applying SAMVAD as a method for producing work knowledge with the girls, but within the ruling relation of development management, subordinates the participants to an objectifying process *at the same time* as working to empower the participants to resist domination.

CONCLUSION

One of my research objectives was to learn about and use a method of inquiry that was new to me. Discovering and using an alternative sociology has been hard work, and I have gone from understanding institutional ethnography as a method to realise that it is a distinct sociology. From this realisation followed a lot of critical thinking about the sociological conventions I have been taught compared with this alternative way of understanding and studying the social. The gap between the social as written and the social as experienced is a paradox, and I see now that the conventional research process starts out in theory and selectively represents the actual as it conforms to the conceptual. Smith therefore proposes to start out in people's lived actuality, and further explore how people's activities are embedded in and shaped by trans-local relations. I wondered what difference it would make to the understanding of child marriage to draw on the knowledge of those who experience it. What I found is that the reality is much more complex than what an understanding of child marriage as the result of poverty, tradition or gender norms offers. Using work knowledge as data gives a more detailed account of what the practice of child marriage actually entails for the people involved. It opens up for descriptions of activities that might otherwise not have been included, such as choice, parents stressing the importance of education and worrying about their daughters, keeping girls inside to avoid 'the wrong track', different dowry practices, the work of silence and so forth. Furthermore, by fitting the work knowledges together, child marriage becomes a product of processes that extend beyond the local. Not viewing child marriage as socially organised risks assigning causality or agency to concepts such as gender norms or tradition, which obscures what actually goes on. Additionally it risks blaming the practice on people and their characteristics, which maintains typologies and stereotypes. The stories of Nirmala, Shanti, Mira and Kamala, who participated in child marriage by choice, complicates the assumption of a clear divide between backwards tradition and progressive modernity. Practicing choice occurred across the local sites, and can be understood as an activity hooked up in a love marriage discourse accessed through their mobile phones. Interestingly the love marriage discourse coordinated action differently depending on how people interacted with the discourse. In Surkhet it organised child marriage as a result of the girls activation of the love marriage discourse. In Kapilvastu, although eloping occurred there as well, it was also the parents who arranged child marriages to avoid this discursive activity and protect

their girls from the ‘wrong track’. Such distinctions becomes available due to the use of work knowledge as data.

When it comes to the ‘undoing’ of child marriage, using IE also in this case exposes the coordinated work involved by project staff, animators, SST members, parents and the girls. Exploring their work further gave insight into some of the challenges involved in activating new texts and discourses introduced by SAMVAD. In the interview with the girls from Surkhet I learned from their work knowledge that they were making connections between child marriage, girl’s lack of education, poverty and consequently girl’s dependence on their fathers, brothers and husbands. While not using the language of social organisation, in essence they were still exploring parts of the social organisation of child marriage. They were also using this knowledge to try to make a change in their own lives. Thus, I discovered how the way SAMVAD operates is similar to an institutional ethnography. The girls in SAMVAD gather every day to discuss their experiences; they produce work knowledge with their animator. However, the potential for an IE to be a resource *for* people to create change in their everyday lives depends on the analysis going beyond work knowledge and towards mapping the institutional relations contributing to shape the local experiences. In the same way, the potential for SAMVAD to be a resource *for* the girls depends on learning the analytic skill of going beyond the work knowledge the girls produce with their animator, and towards making sense of how their experience is hooked into and shaped by institutional relations. The possibility of improving the lives of girls who get married young lies in understanding how the local doing of child marriage might be hooked up in trans-local relations, starting from the ways in which it is known by the girls and their families themselves.

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