

**Being Nepali Part-time:
Inquiring Identities among 'Nepali Diaspora'**

By

Ramakanta Tiwari

Submitted to

CENTRAL EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY
Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology

In partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Arts

Supervisor: Professor Prem Kumar Rajaram
Second reader: Professor Alexandra Kowalski

Budapest Hungary
2007

Acknowledgements

To my supervisors Prem and Alexandra, who provided me with a continued support in my study and theoretical navigations,

To Ayse, who helped me grapple with the theories of my study, and showed me a way of dealing with my findings more academically and less cynically,

To the Department and Research Grant Committee, without whose help it would have been difficult for me to think about and action out my research in my new topic and new field,

To my informants of Belgium, who supported me with logistics and information that I sought, and let me interfere in their routines,

To my friends of Thesis Writing Workshop and other colleagues who furnished their comments on my paper, and helped me in technical formatting of the paper,

And to Sheila, who always stood as my constant source of inspiration and perseverance in my academic endeavors.

Abstract

There is almost a consensual understanding in social science literatures that identity is context-bound and relational. The unprecedented movement of people from one place to another and thereby subsequent changes in individuals' life contexts in the present world has raised issues about human identity and belonging. It has raised questions like: how should one's identity be defined? Is it what one claims to be or is it what one does? This paper is one of the efforts in looking into the meaning of diasporic identity in these grounds of perception and performance. It inquires into the stretches of discourses and practices of identity among the population in Belgium, which identifies itself as Nepali diaspora, and situates this lacuna between their discourses and practices of belonging to incite questions about the adequacy of two prevailing paradigms in international migration: diasporism and transnationalism.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	ii
Abstract	iii
1. INTRODUCTION	1
2. LITERATURE REVIEW	7
2.1 Placing the movers and movements between diasporism and transnationalism	7
2.2 Diaspora and ‘long-distanced nationalities’	9
2.3 Identity as performance: back and front stage	10
2.4 Identity, nation, diaspora and narratives	11
3. METHODOLOGICAL STRATEGIES AND ISSUES	16
3.1 Field and sources of information	16
3.2 My positionality, ethical dilemmas, and limitations.....	20
4. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS	22
4.1 Migration of Nepalis abroad: traces and trends.....	22
4.2 Being at new home: new faces, new meanings	25
4.2.1 From face lost to face found: refugees, immigrants, NRNs and diaspora.....	25
4.2.2 ‘We love Nepal, but our way of love is different’: front stage performances.....	29
4.2.3 The back stage engagements.....	32
4.2.4 ‘Even if I get twenty citizenship cards of Belgium...’: seeing oneself among others.....	33
4.3 Issues in locating identities: paradigms and parameters.....	35
4.4 Relativity in back and front stages: being Nepali part-time	38
5. CONCLUSIONS	40
References	43

1. INTRODUCTION

With time, the term ‘diaspora’ has shed off its conventional reference to transnational flow of Jews, Greek or Armenians. In the rapidly changing world today, the broader relevance of this term allows us to talk about the movements of people from one place to another across different places and periods. Diaspora means more now; as Braziel and Mannur (2003:2) put vividly: it ‘speaks to diverse groups of displaced persons and communities moving across the globe- from Kuala Lumpur to Sydney, Harare to Toronto, Paris to Marrakesh, Budapest to Santo Domingo, or even Calcutta to Tijuana.’ However, the effect of the ‘unprecedented porosity’ (Sheffer 2003:22 in Brubaker 2004:119) of borders which the world has seen today does not only have empirical consequences; it also calls for a rethinking about the prevailing notions of nation, loyalties and identities that shift with time and context.

The literatures on population movement rest on quite pronounced debates on referring to such cross-border movement as diasporic or transmigrational (Brettel 2007:4; Braziel and Mannur 2003:2-12). In such movements, people do not only move to relocate themselves to other destinations, but they also exhibit a assertion of their previous belongings after they resettle in new places. They seek their roots and a sense of nationalist togetherness among themselves. This is the point where the notion of diaspora, classically meaning to population settled in a certain territory of the host state and having a form of ‘ideal homeland’ (Laitin 2000; Brubaker 2005) meets the essentially deterritorialized concepts of nation and nationalism (Anderson 1991).

The causes of this movement of people as diaspora or as mere transnational bodies can be delineated often with factors that lie outside the prevailing schema of forced-or-voluntary. It can be combined, which this paper argues about. Some socio-political conditions may force people to leave their home and settle in new places. But after realizing better life prospects in those new places, they may not want to come back even after conditions back home improve. They become diasporic for economic reasons. This is what an analysis of Nepali diaspora shows.

The earliest traces of mass population movement in Nepal are of Gurkha soldiers and *Lahures* in the nineteenth century, where because of the misery of mid-mountains, many able-bodied young men were forced to migrate for work, which primarily meant bearing arms in foreign armies, especially in the neighboring country--the then British India. Later on, this recruitment in army stood out as a lucrative option for many Nepali youths in the hills (Lal 2003). And with the end of Second World War, another mass exodus of Nepali took place to Burma and adjoining Indian states of Nepal. Then with a pause for some decades, people's movement across state borders restarted with the establishment of multi-party democracy in 1990, and with it the opening of many channels—political, social and economic. Arguably, this can be considered as the demarcation line of present phase in Nepali diasporic movement. But particularly, when the Maoist insurgency started in 1996, people found the 'unfavorable conditions' at home as a cause of leaving the country. And this time, unlike before, people spotted refuges in European countries like Belgium which showed sympathy to the people of Maoist-insurgency-hit society. This shift in destinations in the latter period of Nepalese history was apparently what

Gonzalez (1989, in Brettell 2000) calls ‘conflict migration’: a population movement that is stimulated by violent conflict in the home society. Almost all of the Nepalis living in Belgium justify their being abroad as a necessity or compulsion buttressed by the ‘unfavorable conditions back home’.

Since the Maoist insurgency started from the hilly rural northern belt of the country in 1996, socio-political turmoils started to appear on the surface. It cost 13000 lives in a decade’s time, not to mention the destruction of infrastructure and other economic losses. So as it started augmenting in intensity and influence, the government of Nepal tagged this insurgency as a terrorist movement, and banned it legally in 2001. Then with this, those who supported the Maoist movement remained underground or fled to India. But some of those tried to couple this reason of insecurity to leave country and ask for refuge in far-off shores and new countries of Europe. While most of the leaders of the Maoist insurgency stayed in India commanding their movement against the Nepalese government, those who stepped into Belgium pleaded for refuge and security of their lives with the Belgian government. Although political conditions back home was not supportive of Maoists, it is intriguing to observe why some of them had to go this far to seek refuge, while many of their leaders and supporters were living in India without any apparent threat. And more, they used this ‘perceived threat’ to show that they loved their nation and had to fear life when fighting against the feudalist government of Nepal. They produced documents showing that they were politically active population of Nepal fighting for the benefit of general Nepalis. In this way, as many as 4500 Nepalis, have got

their refuge particularly on humanitarian grounds. This population believed that it is the chunk of concerned, political Nepali nationals having had to stay in Belgium.

So, for them their reason to be in Belgium was directly related to political climate at home. But let's have a look at this in the context of recent political changes in Nepal. Lately, the socio-political changes in Nepal took quick leaps, and bought the erstwhile 'terrorist' insurgent Maoist groups to peace processes in 2006. With the Historic Peace Agreement in November of the same year, a decade long Maoist Insurgency came to a formal closure.¹ The Maoists and the Government did not only declare a ceasefire, but the Maoists were given a status of legal political party of Nepal, occupying second largest number of Member of Representatives in the Parliament. And at present, the Maoists are an important part of the Government, and hence occupying an important legal political status. So principally there is no threat to any supporter of a group or political parties in Nepal now. The threat is gone.

But how would the previous 'potentially threatened' population living abroad react to these socio-political changes back home? How would they interpret their identities after that? Would they return to their country when it generally looked as if there were no such threats to return back home? These are some of the pertinent questions that I aim to discuss in my paper. The population that has resettled in Belgium just because of Maoist movement in Nepal is now engaged in constructing new explanations for their prolonged stay abroad. Thereby, when their status of political immigrants is gone, there are new

¹ The Comprehensive Peace Agreement between the Government of Nepal and Maoists was held in November 8, 2006. For English version of the Agreement see <http://www.cffn.ca/historicdocs/061108-HistoricPeaceAgreement-en.php>

discourses that have surfaced up. There are new interpretations of their identities. In this study, I will inquire into the discourses and practices among Nepali diaspora about their identities. I will see if their discursive constructs are some myths they created in order to get an easy access to new-found destinations like Belgium. I will see if and how the Maoist movement and its impact was a ready-made answer for finding ways to enter in Belgium, earn in Euros and settle down there. In this study, I focus on the Nepali diaspora in Belgium and how they have been living there within their narratives of being concerned nationals of Nepal which they loved and fought for, but were forced to leave it because of 'hard-time home'. I will analyze how they try to legitimize their stay abroad, while at the same time demonstrating their 'love of homeland'. I will make an ethnographic study of the diaspora, and especially their performance of Nepali identities on the backdrop that many of them have acquired legal documents to settle down in Belgium permanently, and are in the process of acquiring Belgian citizenship.

As the Nepali diaspora is a recent phenomenon, this is also a fairly understudied topic. The role of such diaspora, often referred to as Non-Resident Nepalis (NRN), has been talked about more in economic terms². It was especially after first NRN conference in 2003 that the diaspora has tried to find its place in social-political happenings of the country, unlike economic before. There have been writings on Nepali global diaspora but not ethnographically. I take this ethnographic vein to look at this unlooked or overlooked aspect of creating and maintaining Nepali identities abroad, and by this contribute to an understanding of identities vis-à-vis their intentions to stay abroad or return home. Apart

² See Nepali Times Issue 165, October 10-16, 2003, and David Sheddon in <http://www.migrationinformation.org/Profiles/display.cfm?ID=277>

from this, my study will navigate through the meanings and relevance of identity as merely an ideational construct or performative social facts. The actions that are seen in the ‘front stage’ and what goes in the ‘back stage’ among the Nepali diaspora will be seen with Goffmanian eyes, and this will be extended to see the coherence of discourse and actual practices. This study of identity in Nepali immigrants will also be located amid the existing paradigms of diasporism and transnationalism.

The following chapter is a review of literatures that bring into light the issues concerning diasporism and transnationalism, and performance of identities corresponding to discourses of nation-making. Then the following chapter mentions and discusses what methodologies I have employed and what techniques I have used to conduct my study. This includes also the limitations incurred in doing research and my positionality. The fourth chapter is about the findings of the research study. Here, I explain and put forward the findings of how Nepalis in Belgium situate their identities along with the narratives of nation-building and being national (Nepalis). Finally, the concluding chapter makes a brief synopsis of my arguments.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 *Placing the movers and movements between diasporism and transnationalism*

Theorizing diaspora has assumed multifarious divergences. There apparently lacks a singular understanding of diasporism as a process of people's movement, and the nature and intention of such movements. Placing it in the historic context, Braziel and Mannur (2003: 2-7) associate it to the migrations and displacements which occurred in massive scales in the second half of the twentieth century. They further state that this could be particularly in reference to independence movements in formerly colonized areas, waves of refugees fleeing war-torn states, and fluxes of economic migration in the post-world war II era. So, at this stage, the term 'diaspora' sheds off its classical coinage referring to the massive transnational flow of Jews, Greek or Armenians. And gradually after this, the term has been disassociated from the implicit or explicit understanding as people's exilic or nostalgic dislocation from their homelands. Sheffer (2003: 22) puts it with the importance of such departure as: "It is now widely accepted that diasporas are made and unmade as a result of both voluntary and forced migration, shifting borders and the formation and collapse of the states." Such views are found in other literatures too (Sheffer 1986; Cohen 1997; Van Hear 1998; Brubaker 1999). This is a departure from the traditional simplistic view that, essentially, all diasporas are 'exilic communities'. This departure is important since it facilitates the understanding not only of diaspora's emergence but also the unmaking of these entries.

Yet, this meaning of diaspora and diasporism has to be distinguished from yet another growing approach of international migration, known as transnationalism, where the immigrants are viewed as transmigrants. The focus of such approach is the involved permeability of two or more borders and transnational connections. Here, transmigrants are regarded as those who have connections and interconnections across international borders and those whose identities are configured in relationship to more than one nation-state (Glick Schiller et al.1992: ix; Basch et al 1994). The connections that they make with their home countries is not unidirectional but rather reciprocal in that they ‘take actions, make decisions, and feel concerns, and develop identities within social networks that connect them to two or more societies simultaneously (ibid, 2)

In this way as seen above, diasporism characteristically differs from transnationalism mainly on this particular ground: though it incorporates the process of massive flux of population, it does not necessarily refer to the causes of such movements and the connections that are established between the sending and host society. It is more about people and less about impersonal connections that can be established between societies. And as will be seen in the findings of my research, the scale of migration of Nepalis in Belgium and their intention to stay there permanently, and the continued breaking of their ties with the homeland allows me to question their identities as diasporics or transmigrants. In addition, they can be regarded as migrants-turned-diaspora where ‘by definition, members of diasporas intend to stay indefinitely in their host countries’

(Sheffer, 2003: 23). This way of looking at diaspora is important to see how Nepali diaspora does not want to return home, and with what explanations.

2.2 *Diaspora and 'long-distanced nationalities'*

On the other hand, nation is thought to be an unbound and deterritorialised entity, a matter of imaginative affiliation. And hence in this line, diasporics, wherever relocated, have in their minds a sense of nation, a sort of affiliation to their left homelands. So, in the very terms of Anderson (1991), nation is 'imagined': it is *imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion (p.9, emphasis original). This is seen as collective shared sentiment in a level of imagination, while at the same time having a demarcation of its spatial and demographic extent. This typification of 'long-distanced nationalists'—the ones having their involvement in homeland politics (Anderson, 1992: 12) does not however suggest the answer of why they do so, i.e. why the diaspora cherishes the value of nation even after it cross-borders the nation's spatial contours: the state.. Whatever so, as surfaced in my study, the diaspora may stick to the idea of nation and citizenship to gain its immediate economic pursuits, and yet define their belonging to home countries differently. They may have certain sets of discourses about being Nepali or the Nepali diaspora, but their practices may suggest different directions. Such an approach of looking at the gap between the discourses and practices will be helpful in analyzing the claims of Nepali identity among Nepali diaspora.

2.3 *Identity as performance: back and front stage*

The processes of locating and narrating themselves in the backdrop of European (Belgian) host society can be observed with a type of interpretative analysis, much in line with Goffman's version of understanding self. Such an application of Goffman's theory of self can help us emphasize and recognize the expressive/depictive part of perceiving their (the diaspora) identity, and how it is shown in the front stage in different settings and in front of different individuals. As Goffman puts,

When an individual plays a part he implicitly requests his observers to take seriously the impression that is fostered before them. They are asked to believe that the character they see actually possess, that the task he performs will have the consequences that are implicitly claimed for it, and that, in general matters are what they appear to be (Goffman (1997: 95).

An individual makes preparations at the back-stage and tries to present himself on the front stage, in a different setting, in front of different audience. The 'performance' made by the individuals (in my case, the individuals who are *also* diasporas) to a certain set of observers, comes only after a rehearsal at the back stage. The performance he mentions, refers to "all activity of an individual which occurs during a period marked by his continuous presence before a particular set of observers and which has some influence on the observers."

Relating it to the case of Nepali diaspora, these front stage and back stages come interchangeably. For instance, in the state level discourses (Nepal and Belgium states), they are seen as political immigrants. The front stage performance of immigrants here is of political nature. But such performances on the front-stage are possible because of the

back-stage preparations in Belgium, where they are working, earning money, buying homes. Had they not been in Belgium, this would not have been possible.

On another level, if they are seen in the context of Belgian society, the meanings of front and back stage are different. They are economic immigrants. And their front stage performance of being economic immigrants is possible because of their continued back-stage preparations to present themselves as political immigrants on the back-stage. In other words, their being able to come to work would have been possible, had they not been able to ‘become’ political immigrants.

This Goffmanian approach is not only helpful in analyzing the coherence between back-stage preparations and front-stage performances, but it also raises questions about the dramatization of actors in different settings. This lends convenience to my inquiry of their identities as ‘dramatized’ in different settings such as their workplace, home, streets (like in protests and demonstrations), or in situations they met me, how they take me as a audience (a Nepali, or a student) and how they perform in front of me. A step further from this approach can help us link and see the associatedness between how individuals produce discourses and what they practice. The discourses they have produced about the Nepali identity and Nepali diaspora is what is seen in the front, but which may not correspond to what they practice in the backstage.

2.4 Identity, nation, diaspora and narratives

It can be arguably said that there is a significant single-voiced understanding of social identities as a processual one. In general such understandings of identities stress for general schemes of identity formation: diasporic or otherwise. Hall (2003) reflects on cultural identity, cultural practices and cultural production of immigrants on the new land, particularly focusing on the African and Indians of the Caribbean. He emphasizes that identities of the diasporic population assume two seemingly contradictory dispositions. The immigrants have to preserve their original identity in the new land, but at the same time the fact remains that any identity is subjected to changes of a particular time and space. Diasporic identities are thus in a dialogical interplay with attachment to past and movement towards future. The Nepali immigrant-turned-diaspora has lived a significant life in different socio-cultural and political set-up in Nepal. And now when they try to settle in newfound homelands, the process of assimilating to the new society and living with the previous cultural asset does not become easier. There arises a sort of tension between the lived but not loved past and un-lived but loved future. It is in such a tension that they situate themselves and interpret their identities.

A similar dialogic construction of immigrant identity is discussed by Radhakrishnan (2003). Aroused by his son's question of whether he is an Indian or an American, the writer puts forward the idea of the politics of proximity and the politics of distance in shaping an immigrants' identity in the new societies. The diasporic people have cultural linkages with their sending societies, but at the same time the distance they have walked from those societies will render differences in the immigrants' cultural practices at the receiving society. In this way, trying to relocate in another society, the 'authentic'

immigrant culture becomes in tension with the new cultural set up of the host society, and thereby changing the whole idea of being an immigrant and how they view themselves.

That processuality is the characteristic feature in the formation of social identities (obviously, including diasporic one) is evident in the writings of Brettell (2000). Here she sets out to show that identity (ethnic, immigrant or other) is situational, fluid and contingent. She argues that the notion of identity *per se* does not assume central concern for the immigrants in the initial phases. But it is only in later stages when their numbers increase that the immigrants view themselves as a group of immigrants, and in some instances raise to assert their group interests. This shows that the immigrants' understanding of their identity is temporal, processual and circumstantial, and importantly depending on numbers: how many they are to assert their collective identity.

Similarly, some writers see this idea of diasporic/immigrant collective identities vis-à-vis personal identities. Seth J. Schwartz, Marilyn J. Montgomery and Ervin Briones (2006) take one such look reiterating the fact that identities can be personal and/or social, and cultural identity is one special form of social identity. But in case of immigrants or diasporic groups, the writers theorize that, individualism and personal identity is less emphasized in favor of collective rights. The immigrants perceive that their attachment to collective identity renders them security and benefits than by laying bare their personal identities. Unlike many of the literatures mentioned earlier, this line of argument by the writers shows that the immigrant identity is less prone to change, or the time to

acculturate and accommodate to new receiving society is considerably longer. The formation of identity is processual, but in a remarkably slower rate.

One important understanding of identity can be borrowed from Brubaker (2000: 8), who tries to describe identity as a category of practice and analysis. He synthesizes how scholars have been using the term: “to highlight non-instrumental modes of action; to focus on self-understanding rather than self-interest; to designate sameness across persons or sameness over time; to capture allegedly core, foundational aspects of selfhood; to deny that such core, foundational aspects exist; to highlight the processual, interactive development of solidarity and collective self-understanding; and to stress the fragmented quality of the contemporary experience of the self, a self unstably patched together through shards of discourse and contingently “activated” in differing contexts.” According to him, although identities are a result of identification (this means there is a room for the identifier or categorizer), identity is more than this, a position and the process of such self-positioning.

However, social identities are not only created by others and badged to the individuals but are also about how individuals themselves interpret their position among other social actors of society. How diaspora view themselves and their group can be assessed by observing how they narrate and locate their identities. De Fina (2003) tries to show how immigration as a process entails a continuous definition and redefinition of one’s identity and one’s membership into larger communities. In it she mentions the development of the concept as conceptualized in social sciences in recent decades. Hers is an emphasis that

with the rise of postmodern ideas of human identity, the single term ‘identity’ has been replaced with formulations like ‘identities’ and new terms like ‘identification’—referring to a construction and process never completed that requires discursive work (Hall 2006: 16 in De Fina 2003: 16) have come into place. There is no single identity but rather ‘polyphonous’ identities which coexist within the same individual (p. 16). Such an understanding may lead us to consider Nepalis who went to Belgium, in whatever ways, as being Nepalis, Nepali diaspora, or Nepali-Belgian or a Belgian citizen, whatever comes in their discourses about their belonging.

This single understanding of belonging to a certain nation-state has been affected with the greater global flows of people, beliefs and their cultures. This process of migration has resulted in the fluidity of identity and its decoupling with territory. What shows one’s nation, or nationality is more a sense of feeling of belonging, like ‘imagined communities’ (like Anderson 1991). However, this takes us further towards the issue of the linkage or association between claims and performances of belonging. This can also raise questions in theorizing the immigrant identity in the prevailing theoretical camps of international migration: diasporism and transnationalism. When we consider some facts that the Nepali immigrants’ claims to be diasporic yet not continuing their longing towards home country, maintaining networks with families back home but for a short time (until after the family comes to Belgium), acquiring Belgian citizenship but identifying themselves as concerned nationals of Nepal, etc. are assessed in framework of nationalism, diasporism and transnationalism, it might reveal the inadequacy of a single paradigm in assessing such phenomenon.

3. METHODOLOGICAL STRATEGIES AND ISSUES

3.1 *Field and sources of information*

The study was primarily an ethnographic. As the aim of this ethnography was description and interpretation, and like in Geertz's words (1973: 20), 'what is it interpretive is of the flow of social discourse; and the interpreting involved consists in trying to rescue the 'said' of such discourse from its perishing occasions and fix in pursuable terms'. Along with this ethnographical observation, I tried to make look into the discourses that were produced concerning their identities and their perception of belonging (to previous homeland or the newfound land or both) 'Discourses' here mean social discourses on creating and positioning identities in social-cultural contexts, rather than a semiotic one. The label 'Nepali diaspora' is what they like to identify themselves as, and I will operationalize this term in the way they have been using to refer to all Nepali immigrants living in Belgium

As I wanted to see how the idea of Nepali identity was reflected among the informants, I decidedly wanted to observe it, at times without informing them my real intention of my being there or what I wanted to see there. In addition, for this purpose, I conducted some interviews with some diasporics and try to gauge their opinion.

The immigration of Nepalis (under the name of political immigrants) is a fairly recent phenomenon, beginning with the rise of Maoist Insurgency in Nepal in 1996. The peak of this insurgency was after 2001, where the Maoists were tagged as 'terrorist forces' and

the State of Emergency was declared in the country (see Thapa: 2003). This saw sweeping migration of people from Nepal to Europe and particularly Belgium. So Belgium was a typical site for me to make a case study of migration of Nepalis under the name of political immigration. And as it is the largest Nepali diaspora in Europe, it was another reason to find meet people from different backgrounds, purposes and motivations who came to Belgium. For this purpose, I followed the ‘royal way’ (Titscher et al 2000:92) of ethnography—the participatory observation method. This research was conducted on the last two weeks of April, 2007, and mainly based on three cities of Belgium: Brussels, Antwerp and Leuven, where the diaspora was concentrated. I made seven semi- structured interviews with people from different Nepali (political) support groups and five unstructured interviews with less-‘politically active’ people who had been engaging themselves in different jobs. As it was not always possible to find respondents and make them ready for my certain set of questions, I chose semi-structured and unstructured which allowed me to talk to them in informal situation and extract information I required. This informal setting was also helpful strategically because it allowed me to orientate my research towards its objectives despite political sensitivities attached to the research topic.

It was not an easy task for me to get into the field make contacts and meet the informants. I started this with a piece of information posted on an internet site about a Nepali political support group in Belgium, having an unstated but understandable affiliation to the Maoists of Nepal. I contacted the organization and asked them about my purposes and

what help I needed from them. And there was Mr. Suman³ aged about 40 who was ready to help me to meet the Nepali diasporics there. He invited me to stay with him for the period of my research. Therefore, he acted not only as a gate keeper for my research, but also provided me with an opportunity to see how and what sort of connections he managed to build with others, and what political activities mean to him and his peers, his future plans and opinions towards socio-political situation back home. It is with his assistance that I could contact with other Nepalis in the different cities of Belgium. Initially it was like a snowball sampling, as Suman introduced me to Narayan, and likewise Narayan to other Nepali diasporics. So in a way, it was apparent that I was into the risk of getting filtered information from the selected informants of the ‘Suman circle’. One another risk led from the Suman circle was the chances of the ‘masculinity’ of the research, as my key informant was a male and he introduced me to other males subsequently. Nevertheless, the biggest occasion to overcome the snowball effect of the Suman circle was one occasion organized by Belgian-Nepali business community in Leuven, where people from different places, political support groups and associations were invited.

In meetings and gatherings after that, I got along with ‘silent’ observation of what generally goes there. This method proved useful in gathering acquiring more and more required information without actually intruding their routines and readying them for interviews. This is how I learned their ways of living, what jobs they do, their place to stay, and how they were trying to show and ‘preserve’ their ‘Nepali’ identities. Not only where they lived, I also happened to attend other gathering places like Nepali shops

³ The names that have been used here and all along the report are not real names.

(shops named under Nepali names), where they joined together. And by way of it, I learned about the networks they made among themselves, what they bought for food, and what they ate, or in sum, how they tried to retain or maintain what they assume to be their Nepalianness.

Coupled with observation were the interviews that I conducted with my informants. The interviews often were often blurred in between semi-structured and unstructured. On occasions, where it was easy for me to attain information in a formal 'interview setting/sitting', I conducted semi-interviews and tape-recorded it. But at other occasions, when it was not possible for them to formally give me their time for interviews, or it was difficult for me to ask for it, I 'talked' to (and with) them, they often not asking me exactly what sort of information I was seeking.. This passive interviewing or silent probing not only helped me to manage the situation, but also to not introduce bias in answers by suggesting my expectations I had. So, my study was mainly based on the information that I collected through the methods mentioned above. I will analyze the discourses which they produced and relied on to what being Nepali meant to them, while at the same time to make a balance with the intention of leaving home (Nepal) permanently.

My research was also supported by some secondary sources. As there were a number of Nepali organizations/groups (political, economic and cultural) all over Belgium, I had an access to the discourses proliferating about themselves, Nepal and nationality. In this

way, I have gathered some written documents, publications, news about/by them in websites, etc.

3.2 *My positionality, ethical dilemmas, and limitations*

An ethnographic research can not be an autobiographical one (Schensul et al: 1999: 72). Even knowing so, during the interviews and observation, I often encountered the aspect of my position in the field. As the informants had the same language and cultural practices as mine, this might have made me difficult to distinguish what was purely diasporic and what was 'adidasporic' (i.e. mine). Besides, I felt that my own presumption about nation, nationality and citizenship did not fit along with theirs, and it was not easy for me to distance myself from getting the data in the field 'as it was'. Apart from myself being an adidasporic Nepali, I was a researcher in the field trying to gather information I needed for my own purposes. My respondents, who were affiliated to certain political ideologies and parties of Nepal, frequently asked why I was doing that. They were cautious of my background and why I was going to 'intervene' in their rites of life or sites of performance. This was, in a way a reluctant and a cautionary welcome, and so in the beginning phase, my effort of rapport building and 'entering the field' was not an easy accomplishment.

But at the same time, there was one the notable merit of my positionality in the field and the research. It is often presumed that native researcher's familiarity with the language and society/culture makes the research easier (Colic-Peisker 2004), because it provides

the researcher with a privilege to get more information (at times sensitive too) from the respondents. On this ground, I was better suited to do this job of the researcher than any other complete stranger of the ‘Nepali community’ would have been.

As discussed above, the limitations of my approach might arise in the form of intrusion of my opinion about Nepali political, social cultural analyses and opinions, which may vary from or be similar with the respondents’. But at the same time, it is not possible to avoid reactivity and subjectivity in process of getting information from the respondents; the claims of objectivity and authority once claimed to be a mantra of sociologists and anthropologists is challenged (and often refuted) now. Like Colic-Peisker (2000: 85) cites Okely and Callaway (1992: 1) that over the last few decades, disciplines like sociology and anthropology, have been “liberated...from any vestige of value-free scientism”.

But as I saw a few cases of Nepalis living in shanty conditions, but waiting for the regularization process to become permanent settlers, I often asked myself what my research work as an academic pursuit would benefit them. How ethical was it do ‘use’ them for my truly purposes (though truly academic), and for what return? And this might have put some impact in the coveted accuracy of data collection. This can be the limitation of the research, evoked from the role of the researcher.

4. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

4.1 *Migration of Nepalis abroad: traces and trends*

Writings on Nepali history say that the earliest traces of Nepalese migration can be found in the mid 19th century, where many Nepalis went to British India as soldiers and workers in Indian factories and government services. Nepal had a good relation with the Government of British India, it used to support the latter by providing its army to suppress the Independence movement. This later on took a form of permanent staging of one Nepali troop (popularly called Gurkha rifle) in British Indian Army, thus creating the first organized group of Nepali immigrants abroad. And when these soldiers came home better paid than their fellow Nepalis, this acted as an incentive to others and opened India as a new destination for economic pursuits. And many people went there, some with their families, some of them stayed there permanently, and thereby creating the first set of Nepali diaspora (Lal 2003).

But, after the fall of Rana regime, which ruled for 104 years starting from mid 19th century to the mid 20th century, a new democratic political was set up in 1950. This could have opened more doors to (e)migrate to countries other than India, but this democratic system was again curbed by King Mahendra in 1967, thus slapping a partyless political system till 1990. In this period, only the people from a high elite class could go for studies and much rarely for work abroad. It was with the establishment of a full-fledged democracy in 1990 and the political instability that followed it that stimulated people to find channels to leave their country for employment and education.

And when the Maoist insurgency began in 1996, this added fuel to fire. The migration now became what was seemingly a conflict or political migration. People now spotted new destinations in Europe, and found out ways to come there. When they arrive there, in one way or another, they sought for refuge citing political instability and ‘threat of their lives’ back home, thus making way to settle down in Belgium permanently. The influx of Nepalis grew abruptly after 2001, when Maoist insurgency was heading towards its peak, and the Government of Nepal declared the State of Emergency, labeling Maoists as terrorists.

As it was reported by the informants, the way of getting into Belgium was not an easy process though. Most of them, for the sake of getting into it, claimed to be attending an international seminar or conference in some of the Schengen⁴ countries as a way of entering there. And when they got visa to land in any of the Schengen countries, they would be meeting their ‘promised land’. And here, their past would stop, new stories would be invented, and new lives would begin.

Once their being in Schengen, they found their ways to get into countries which had softer attitudes towards the immigrants and refugees. And for many of them, Belgium was one such country where they could get an easy access. In this ways, about 4,500

⁴ Schengen countries include Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain and Sweden. <http://www.schengen.com/>

Nepalis had found their abode in Belgium, half of them (around 2500) already with Belgian citizenship and the other with permanent residence card or temporary one.⁵

But entering into Belgium and settling down there was not possible without a proper knowledge of how to arrange an entry to Belgium and what circumstances they had to bear after entering. It was seen that many Nepalis were mainly from three districts of Nepal: Kaski, Morang and Baglung. This is also an indication that those who first saw the route to Belgium had paved ways for others from their home/city in Nepal. This is a chain migration taking place through social networks: the first comers acting like ‘the experts’ and encouraging this ways to others. Social network as very evident among the process of migration of Nepalis, as Levitt (2001:8) puts,

Once begun, migration spreads through social networks. Social networks are the sets of cross-border interpersonal ties connecting migrants, return migrants, and non-migrants through friendship and attachment to a shared place of origin. Once a network is in place, it becomes more likely that additional migration will occur. The risks and costs of movement for subsequent migrants are lower because there is a group of “experts” already in the receiving country to greet newcomer and serve as their guides.

Like Levitt mentions above, the experts show the newcomers how to start everything anew in the new land, undergoing a long process of transformation of identities from deterritorialized refugees to new citizens of Belgian state. The cost that they had to bear this transformation was a risk whether the Belgian officials knew their ‘real intention’ of coming there: their claims of being political intentions and potentially underlying economic intentions. These networks maintained by the first comers and the new

⁵ There was no official data about the exact total number of Nepalis in Belgium, but many of whom I talked to told me that this figure could be around 4500, including all ‘types’ of Nepalis (see Panta 2006: 6 for instance)

immigrants were evident in their concentrated settlement in Belgium. Many Nepalis lived in three main cities of Belgium: Brussels, Antwerp and Leuven. After their being in Belgium, they would start their activities of organizing themselves to show Belgian officials that conditions in Nepal has been worsened, and they still had ‘strong’ reasons to settle in Belgium and pursue their ends. Therefore, their being in Belgium depended on in their ability to show how much they were impacted with the ‘difficult’ socio-political scenario in Nepal.

4.2 *Being at new home: new faces, new meanings*

4.2.1 From face lost to face found: refugees, immigrants, NRNs and diaspora

The image of a refugee is as Rajaram (2002: 1) puts, “a person displaced from the protective confines of territoriality, and unfortunate creature stuck in purgatorial circumstances’. So, the ritual of transformation from the state of ‘deterritorialized and faceless’ refugee to a part of ‘significant’ Nepali diaspora was not an easy one. First for this, they had to prove themselves that they were the political refugees, who were Nepalis actively involved in politics in Nepal, and fighting for a good cause in Nepal. They had to justify how grave was their reason which forced them to seek refuge in faraway land like Belgium. As they told me, they had to produce newspaper cuttings from Nepal showing that political situation in Nepal was seriously threatening and their lives in Nepal were under real danger. They had to raise voice asking for consideration based on humanitarian grounds with the Belgian government. Some of the Nepalis capitalized on

more-widely known issues and conditions of Bhutanese and Tibetan refugees, and presented themselves as Bhutanese or Tibetan refugees. As Dhiraj told me, this proved to be easier and more effective way to get asylum, papers and eventually citizenship cards of Belgium:

The issue of Tibetan refugee is a very-well known story across the world. I have a friend who comes from Tibetan-looking Mongoloid ethnic group in Nepal. I did not look like him, because I am a Brahmin. We came together, and he applied as Tibetan refugee, I as Nepali one. He just had to wait for three months to get papers, while I got them after 13 months only.

Dhiraj claimed that there are about 150 such cases where Nepalis had claimed to be Bhutanese and Tibetan refugees, but did not want me to meet them for sake of security reasons. It can be argued that one possible way to attract them to become refugees faraway from their homes is the monthly sum of 650 Euros, which they would get on probationary periods (the period they are put in refugee camps and till they get their papers).

So until the immigrants would get their legal resident papers to stay in Belgium, they were often referred to as *sans-papiers*, and till this stage, they did not want to identify themselves as immigrants or Nepali diaspora. But after the acquisition of legal papers to stay in Belgium, the rhetoric of their status, position and power would change. They were immigrants but they would like to identify themselves as Non-Resident Nepalis, or Nepali diaspora in general. In almost all of the publications, website postings, posters or pamphlets, the term ‘immigrant’ did not have its place; they were either an active part of global Non-Resident Nepali Organisation or global Nepali diaspora. Being immigrants carried different meaning, while being NRNs or Nepali diaspora was an altogether

different avatar. It seemed as if in being an immigrant, one would lose a moral power to talk about the social-political affairs of home country because there were seen as someone who fled the country on *their own* will (nothing to do with their country). And with diasporic avatar acquired, they would get legitimacy to get concerned about their ‘homeland’, blame ‘Nepalis in Nepal’ (as contrasted to Nepalis abroad—the diaspora) for wrong socio-political happenings. There were about 31 diasporic political associations, social organizations and cultural groups concerned towards socio-political affairs of Nepal, and nation-building. For Rajan, who leads the umbrella organization of Nepali diasporics in Belgium:

We have always prayed for the betterment of Nepal. There are many bad things happenings in the country. Political parties are not acting properly. They should be more careful and every citizen should rise from the level of individual and think about the nation first. Nation is the most important thing. Though we can’t go to Nepal now, I, on the behalf of Nepali diaspor,a pray for prosperity of Nepal.⁶

Raja’s such ‘concern’ towards Nepal was echoed by many speakers in a gathering of representatives from many diasporic associations in Belgium. Remarkably, the discourses of ‘love of Nepal’ were balanced with their discourses of struggles on being Belgian. Narayan, the president of the Struggle Committee said:

It is not so easy for us to operate now, as it was before. The number of people like us is not big now. As soon as someone gets the papers, they leave the committee, and hence there has been no stability in the committee. But the most difficult thing for us now is the changed political situation in Nepal, which has snatched our grounds to ask for political asylum. There are fewer hopes, and we have not lost them. Our love for Nepal remains intact, but we won’t give up the fight for papers [papers to settle down there permanently].

⁶ All of the interviews were conducted in Nepali, and the transcriptions as presented in this study are my translations of what they said.

Narayan had been living in Belgium since 2002. He worked part-time in a construction company, and told me that as he had not received papers, he could not get good and full-time jobs. But he also reported that it was not a problem for him, because he could get a regular monthly support of 650 Euros from the government. The Committee which he led, was formed of those who were yet to receive papers from the government. He told me that its main aim was to pressurize the Belgian government to provide them papers without much lingering and hassle. But as the political situation in back home country had changed dramatically and had put Maoists into government, there seemed to be an apparent loss of threat to anyone with any political faiths in Nepal. This had impacted in the Committee's efforts to produce valid justifications in seeking political refuge now.

But it was seen that the diaspora was not a single uniform body with similar political affiliations. A number of political associations were working like sister organizations of political parties of Nepal. For instance, Nepal Progressive People's Forum did not blatantly say that it was an association affiliated to Communist Party of Nepal (Maoists), but it contained links, posters of Nepali Maoist leaders and the Maoist party in its site.⁷ Similarly, Nepal Janasamparka Samiti was affiliated to Nepali Congress Party of Nepal, Nepal Democratic Forum to Communist Party of Nepal (UML), and so on. Despite this, they were found to be grouped together under the name of Nepali Diaspora or Non-Resident Nepalis Association.

⁷ For instance see www.nppf.be

4.2.2 “We love Nepal, but our way of love is different”: front stage performances

The Nepali diaspora presented itself to be an important and unignorable part in Nepalese social- political affairs. The diasporics stressed that they loved their nation, ‘wherever they were’, and were concerned about whatever happened in Nepal. Suman, with whom I lived for some time, used to wake up early in the morning and go straight to computer to surf the news of Nepal. After his work, he used to come back and look into the news again. He wanted to know what I think of politics in Nepal and what I would do when I would go back home:

You youths have to be careful about what happens in Nepal. I was involved in politics from my college years. But politics, politics and politics did not give me anything. It could not feed myself. I could not earn money or anything. I had to search for other options. After I came here, my interest in it has again resumed.

As can be seen in what Suman narration, politics alone did not render him anything. His interest in student politics declined until he found an economically secure way (working in Belgium). Suman’s gesture suggested that his association was a strong political association in Belgium. The other associations had also been showing concerns towards Nepali politics. In past, they carried out demonstrations and protesting against the “dictatorship” of King Gyanendra. Some associations also carried shouted slogans for the downfall of “American imperialism.”⁸ This is similar to what Kearney (1995) mentions about the re-creation of migrants’ community abroad to fight for their interests, for instance like rebelling against global capital or dictatorship.

⁸ See for instance Nepali Aawaz. March 24, 2006 issue p.4

In the similar vein, the Nepali diaspora in Belgium had also been expressing their concern towards their homeland they once left. They expressed their wish to see stable society back home and progressive socio- political changes in Nepal. In one of the joint appeal⁹ sent to Prime Minister of Nepal:

[We demand for] the voting rights of the Nepali Diaspora, establishment of federal government with guarantee of self-determination, announcement of the date for constituent assembly polls, publishing of the Rayamajhi commission report and actions against the persons recommended by the commission, end of the foreign interference and exemption of the agriculture loans of the farmers.

In addition, in their eyes their role towards Nepal had also changed when they had been a part of global diaspora. They were divided into two nations, and hence they could not work as much as those who lived in Nepal did. Their status had changed, and so had their roles. Birman, an active member of NRN Belgium, mentioned this when he told me to study well and take care of my nation more than them (i.e. the NRN):

You have to study well, and do for *your* country. As we have got citizenship and other documents to permanent settle down here, we have become Belgians more than Nepalis. Now we need visa to go and do anything to Nepal. Our association is mainly concerned in lobbying for the Nepalese government to provide an easy access for people like us. We are lobbying hard for the provision of dual citizenship. We want to help Nepal, we love it.

Birman owned two shops in Leuven and employed one Nepali lady in his shop. His family was arriving from Nepal soon to live there permanently. He claimed to have faced opposing prospects of being diasporic (i.e., Belgian-Nepali) and his sustained ‘love of homeland’. But beyond that particular reading of his words, there was another contradiction in such discourses and practices/reality. It could be seen how people leave Nepal in all ways they could assume the role of political immigrants, and made ways for

⁹ <http://www.nepalnews.com.np/archive/2007/may/may20/news09.php>

economic ends in Belgium. After the shift of their identities from immigrants to diaspora, this latter status carried a different aura in the whole socio-political grounds of Nepal. When they were diaspora, they emerged as stakeholders of nation-building. They claimed that they were desperate to work in Nepal, but the conditions—socio-political and legal (like the lack of the provision of dual citizenship) was not suitable to work in Nepal.

So with difficulties in adjustment in the new culture on the one hand, and the improved political condition back home on the other, what was stopping them to go back home? Their answer: they had to face new problems if they return home. And such new problems they referred to were of displacement and re-placement. Once they left their homes and stayed abroad for all these years, it would be hard for them to go back and re-place themselves again in previous homes. In addition to it, there were some fundamental problems in Nepali society and politics, which discouraged them to go home. Dhiraj who came from Terai, narrated:

I come from a fairly sound financial background. And all of my family members were in good positions back home. When in Nepal, I worked hard, but in later days I could not bear the unstable state policy level, and I had to bear a big loss in my business. The country is in the grasp of certain high-class elites who are powerful than politicians. This is why I was displaced. There is nothing I can do now in Nepal. If I go to Nepal, I will have a problem of being established again. You know, once displaced, it's hard to get re-placed in the same previous position, home and place. So I don't have a home there, I have it here instead.

Previous claims of insecurity were gone, but those new had emerged. Similarly, previous discourses of immigration were lost, but those new of re-placement had surfaced.

4.2.3 The back stage engagements

The back stage engagements were the economic activities which made them settle there and perform front-stage performance of being Nepali diaspora. Many of the diasporics had already sold or were in the process of selling their properties of Nepal and many had brought their families to live altogether in Belgium. The kids had begun attending primary schools and were learning in Dutch or French. In one informant's home, the kid was reciting her lessons in Dutch. When I was talking to her mother in Nepali, the kid was asking her mother what we were talking about, and asking her to tell it in Dutch. She had to explain things in Dutch, before the kid nodded the head suggesting 'oh, now I understand what you mean'. Not only so, the elders were enrolled in daily language lessons provided by the Flanders government (in Antwerp and Leuven). Netra narrated that learning language was not only interesting, but also very important to live in Belgium:

It's very important to learn language if you intend to do something like business and later settle here. You can't speak Nepali with other people. In our family, we practice Dutch so that we can speak it like other local people. You can't live without it. You have to live.

Netra had also sold his properties in Nepal altogether and bought a house and car in Leuven. He said that not only him, but others have done like him, with a view to settling permanently in Belgium. He introduced me to his friend Pukar, who was married to Belgian woman, and already had children from her. Pukar 'had not thought' about going to Nepal anytime soon: "why should I go to Nepal, for what sake? Nothing is good there". Some of the diasporics owned restaurants under Nepali name, and served Nepali dishes too. I also saw separate Nepali groceries –Nepali because of its name—where two

people were buying *gundruk* (a typical Nepali vegetable item made up of dried spinach). This suggested that there must have been a network of such supplies had started, and ethnic entrepreneurship had begun.

In their homes, I heard them speaking Nepali too. They served me typical Nepali food *bhaat, daal, tarkaari* (rice, lentil and vegetables), and said that this was their regular meal. They ate with their hands (a la Nepali dining). Though such ‘Nepali ways’ of eating or speaking could be described as their continued attachment to Nepali culture, it could also be interpreted that they were doing so because it was difficult to give up previous cultural practices altogether and assimilate in the local culture. Their nostalgia towards previous homes had gone, but they were not immersed in the cultural practices of the host society. This characteristic is one which puts them in an ambiguous position between diasporics and transimmigrants. As Salih (2002: 51) captures this feature of transnationalism:

Transnationalism allows an understanding of migrants as no longer caught in the trap between either assimilation or nostalgia and the ‘myth of the return’.

4.2.4 “Even if I get twenty citizenship cards of Belgium....”: seeing onself among others

“Even if I get twenty citizenship cards of Belgium, I will never be a first-class citizen of Belgium”, Keshab told me when asked how he thought about his being a Nepali-turned-Belgian. The number ‘twenty’ was suggesting how hard it was to be a truly Belgian citizen, after having had come from countries like Nepal. He said that Nepalis, like

Africans, Moroccans and Turks were considered as different citizens than the ‘white Belgians’ who had been living there longer than them. The immigrants’ were a criminalized picture among the white Belgians, as he said. So, there was a constant vigilance to their activities and they would be the first suspect of any criminal activity taking place in cities. In this aspect and such cases, their aura of being diasporics would be shed off and altogether replaced by enmeshed and diluted population of the immigrants.

However, they asserted that it was easy for them to get jobs in because Nepalis had better image than the other immigrants. They said that inasmuch as the employers got Nepalis to hire, they would not hire others. Many of the respondents had jobs in restaurants, supermarket and shops. They had been always working in such expectations of the employers so that their image has still been preserved intact. So it was in the workplaces that their Nepali (and not diasporic) identity would again come on surface; their Nepali identity had been paying a comparative benefit over their co-workers.

Some of the diasporics had given up their ‘respectable’ jobs back home and came there to do any kind of job. Binod used to be high ranked police officer in Nepal, and his new job in Belgium was a cook in a restaurant. He said gave up his job in Nepal because “there was no good my future in it”. Shreedhar was an Advocate in Nepal and had years of experience working for the Government of Nepal. His job in the newland was a salesman in a supermarket owned by a Pakistani. This was very obvious when they were not inclined to disclose me what they were working then. They are aware that their new jobs

were ‘low-profiled’ than their previous ones. They had a clear sense and distinction of their social image of their jobs of they were doing there. They wanted to present themselves better in others eyes though. As Shreedhar said,

Bhai (brother), you should not always say what you see in your report. I worked to prepare many reports when in Nepal, and I used change data. I have many such experiences. So, in your report you should say that Nepalis have a very good position in Belgium. I can not work here as an advocate. Though that work in Nepal had bigger prestige and esteem, this work now is giving me money that I need. Now I feel that work is work, no matter you’re an advocate or a salesman. But you can always tell other people that Nepalis do not have bad status in Belgium. They are paid well, and have a good reputation.

Shreedhar’s words suggest how he liked to present himself in a better position than his pervious job in Nepal. His words combine the preferred image of Nepali (including) him in the outer world (as my research report would present), and the derived satisfaction from the job he had got. Money had replaced the esteem he used to have in his previous job.

4.3 *Issues in locating identities: paradigms and parameters*

After discussing about their perceptions about their place and status, how should their identity be interpreted? What is the parameter to conceptualize them theoritically, and on which paradigms? Were they the real diasporas (as they claimed) or transnational immigrants? As mentioned earlier, traditionally the term ‘diaspora’ referred to those who were forcibly expelled in their homelands and thus remaining as marginal in the host society, but the people longing their return to their homeland. This classical reference to Jews, Greek or Armenians goes further in the modern academia. There are different meanings and types of diaspora used by scholars. Levitt (2001) sums this as,

Of late, the researchers have begun using this term more broadly, defining those “dwelling in the diaspora” as individuals who have been exiled or displaced to a number of different nation-states by a variety of economic, political and social forces (Tololyan 1998). Laguerre describes these individuals as residing “outside the formal boundaries of their states of origin but inside the reterritorialized space of the dispersed nation (1998, 8). Cohen suggests types of diasporas, distinguishing among those who are victimized, form part of imperialistic projects, seek to trade or labor, or “form part of a cultural diaspora, cemented as much as literature, political ideas, religious convictions, music and lifestyles as by permanent migration (1997, xii)

Among the defining characteristics of diaspora as mentioned above, the notion of dispersed nation is the most apparent in the Nepali immigrants living in Belgium. They were not being forced or exiled by other political or cultural-ethnic group, but they showed others that they are indeed forced to migrate. Their insistence to refer themselves as diaspora rather than an immigrant group is an effort to present themselves as a part of dispersed nation. In one or more ways, they demonstrate this, but never longing to go back home.

On the other hand, scholars of transnationalism (Glick Schiller et al. 1999: 30) have tried to emphasize the conceptualization of transnationalism and difference of transnationals from others. They put the basic premises of this paradigm as:

- 1) bounded social science concepts such as tribe, ethnic group, nation, society, or culture can limit the ability of researchers to first perceive, and then analyze, the phenomenon of transnationalism; 2) the development of the transnational migrant experience is inextricably linked to the changing conditions of global capitalism, and must be analysed within that world context; 3) transnationalism is grounded in the daily lives, activities, and social relationships of migrants; 4) transnational migrants, although predominantly workers, live in a complex existence that forces them to confront, draw upon, and rework different identity constructs—national, ethnic and racial; 5) the fluid and complex existence of transnational migrants compels us to reconceptualize the categories of nationalism, ethnicity, and race, theoretical work that can contribute to reformulating our understanding of culture, class and society; and 6) transmigrants deal with and confront a

number of hegemonic contexts, both global and national. These hegemonic contexts have an impact on the transmigrant's consciousness, but at the same time transmigrants reshape these contexts by their interactions and resistance. (p.30)

As seen above the formation of networks, institutions of connections across borders are what essentially define transnational migrants. But in the study among the Nepali immigrants in Belgium, this formation of cross-border ties was only a feature beginning phases of migration. Once they had been able to bring back their family to Belgium and settle there permanently, their networks back home would decrease, as would their affiliation and belonging to the left home society. Their involvement in political activism in Belgium would change *from* fighting (and involved in home politics) like an insider *to* observing Nepali politics and sympathizing as outsider. Looking at this, it could be speculated that their detachment would continue as long as they get fully engaged with economic activities and business pursuits without any connection back home. And in the long turn, it can be also be hypothesized that, if this process goes on, the longing of home will die down, and they become immersed in the local Belgian culture.

In sum, the gap between their discourses and practices of being Nepali (and diaspora) is a marker showing that that their identity somewhere in between or outside the paradigms of diasporism and transnationalism, in between Nepali and Belgian citizenship. But this still does not answer what identity is, whether it is what is said, or what it is done. What can be agreed for the time being is that they are immigrants, but not only so.

4.4 *Relativity in back and front stages: being Nepali part-time*

It is worthwhile to consider the fact that the front and back stages are relative, and not absolute typification of social context. It is audience-dependent. When it is the audience of Belgian and Nepali government and international politics, the political performances of the Nepali diaspora is the front stage. In such audience, they want to have an impression that they are ‘genuine’ political immigrants, forced to seek refuge and live in Belgium. There, the back stage performances like being immersed in the local culture, doing business, buying houses, quitting Nepali citizenship and acquiring Belgian one, etc do not come under limelight. On the other hand, in the eyes of themselves, their family, friends and co-workers at their workplaces their front-stage performance is of economic immigrants working hard to earn money and settle down in Belgium. And for this, their constant back-stage engagement in political activities is necessary. They have to be able to show that there are still sufferers of non-conducive socio-political conditions in Nepal, and hence there no chances of going back to Nepal once they have come to Belgium. Among themselves, they know that they are in the Belgium for economic purposes than anything else.

Let me mention one incident of my visit to a ‘Nepali gathering’ in Leuven. After recognizing a new face in their group, one person approached me and asked who I was. I told him that I had been there for a research and I wanted to interview some Nepali political immigrants who were present in the gathering. He smirked at me and said:

Almost ninety-nine percent of Nepalis who have come here in Belgium are all economic immigrants, so I don't know how you'll find Nepalis who are real political immigrants. If you want to do a real research on Nepali political immigrants, it's a hard thing. First thing you have to know this fact in advance: all Nepalis came here for economic ends. Their intention is to earn as much money as they can, and settle here permanently. What you see here in this gathering as being Nepalis is their part-time affair. They are here for refreshment. All are part-time Nepalis now.

So as seen and discussed above, the identity of my subjects was multilayered and multifaceted. When it comes to achieving economic ends, whether asking for political asylum or after getting the asylum and then jobs, they use their Nepali affiliation. But once they get their permanent residence papers and other documents to settle down, their affiliation to Nepali homeland goes down. They engage themselves in works, jobs, and find times for what they call 'a Nepali gathering' like the one mentioned just earlier. Most of their time is spent on being or trying to be Belgian, and some of it on being Nepalis. They become Nepalis, albeit part-time Nepalis.

5. CONCLUSIONS

There is a consensual understanding that identity is contextual and relative. It has been seen as “constructed, multi-faceted, negotiated, situational, or according to some (scholars) fragmented (Benmayor, Skotnes 2005: 9). It is a processual building and this process spreads across both spatial and temporal sheets. An individual identity forms from the situation the individuals are located. There is ‘out something’ that always impacts on us, and thus justifies our being social beings. We can have mental constructs of how we are, but in this is often made vis-à-vis position of others. So, from the camp of constructivist understanding to that of cognitive one, the outer context is always a defining, if not determining aspect of our identities.

The inquiry into the identity of Nepali immigrants living in Belgium draws into attention both the discursive and performative aspects of identity and belonging. This is in parallel with the cognitive (what is said, what is thought) and constructivist (what is done, what is seen from the contexts). The immigrants define themselves as Nepali diaspora, but their longing towards their homeland, is little in imagination much less in action. They want to assume to be transmigrants, carrying out ‘political activities’ abroad so as to put impact on home politics. But the impact of their transnational politics is less felt, or it is early to see impacts of such transnational politics. They claim themselves to be political immigrants and show their concern towards the homeland politics, but their lives passes on working, earning money, building houses, acquiring Belgian citizenship and settling down in Belgium. They say that they have strong affiliations with Nepal, but they have

used given up or hidden Nepali nationality (for instance in the name of Bhutanese and Tibetan refugees), and do not see any possibilities of going back to Nepal in future. They have started saying that their new homeland is in making.

On the bigger picture, in the level of Belgian and Nepalese state, their effort is to show their status of political beings. Their entry into Belgium, as asylum seekers began with the rhetoric of citing the unstable, 'life-threatening' political situation in Nepal and appealing for humanitarian consideration and shelter abroad. And along with the process of acquiring legal documents of temporary and permanent stay, they tried to show their political allegiances intact. With this, after getting permanent residency or citizenship, they tried to present themselves as an important part of global Nepali diaspora wishing for a prosperous socio-political situation in Nepal. Further, as soon as the political situation improved in Nepal, their previously perceived life-threats are no more and they now live with the discourses of once-displaced-hard-to-be-replaced.

They are more engaged in jobs, business, and economic pursuits in the newfound land. Being able to present themselves as political Nepali identity is what helped them reached Belgium and realize their economic aspirations. And even after so, this same claim to belonging is maintaining their legitimacy to stay in the new land. A well-balanced dramatization (as Goffman would say) of their act and role-play has eased them to oscillate in between the supposed two poles of political and economic immigrants.

The part-time engagement in performance of Nepali identities has helped them earn their full-time place in Belgian workforce and Belgian citizenry. The front stage performance as Nepalis of political immigrants is part-time presentation, while the back stage full-time engagement is on being as Belgian as possible. Yet, there is an aspect of temporality; this can transform with time, and they may want to return home country. But as seen today, no marker indicates that they will return home. Now, their way of being Nepalis is what one informant called ‘part-time affair’, or they are Nepalis part-time.

But by saying that, there are no grounds to question their authenticity of identities. There are no answers where that legitimacy comes from and to whom. Else, their claims of being Nepali and Nepali diaspora might be hold water if the identity is thought to be multi-layered, more in discourses and less in action. They are Nepali diapora, because they think so, although it is not apparent what exists beyond their merely mental construction which shows their being Nepali. My study bases itself on the blatant lacuna between the discourses and practices in their being Nepali. It stands on the obvious incoherence between the discourses and practices, thought and action, and what goes on back-stage preparation and front-stage performance. There are rooms open for further researches into this aspect of identity in general and diasporic identity in particular. It can be further explored what identity is: whether it is what one thinks, or what one does.

References

- Anderson, Benedict, 1992. The New World Disorder. *New Left Review* 193: 2- 13
- Anderson, Benedict. 1991 (1983) *Imagined Communities: Reflections of the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. ed. London: Verso
- Benmayor, Rina and Andor Skotnes. 2005. "Some reflections on Migration and Identity" in *Migration and Identity*, eds., Rina Benmayor and Andor Skotnes. New Jersey: Transaction
- Braziel, J.E and A. Mannur. 2003. "Nation, Migration, Globalization: Points of Contention in Diaspora Studies" in *Theorizing Diaspora* edited by Jana Evans Braziel and Anita Mannur. Blackwell Publishing
- Bretell, C. 2000. "Theorizing Migration in Anthropology. The Social Construction of Networks, Identities, Communities, and Globalscapes". In C.B. Bretell and J. F. Hollifield. *Migration Theory*. New York: Routledge, Pp.: 97-136
- Brettell, C. 2007. "Introduction: Global Spaces/Local Places: Transnationalism, Diaspora, and the Meaning of Home". *Identities*. 13:3, 327 – 334. Retrieved from URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10702890600837987>
- Brubaker, Rogers and Frederick Cooper. 2000. "Beyond Identity" *Theory and Practice* 29: 1-47, 2000
- Brubaker, Rogers. 2004. "In the Name of Nation: Reflections on Nationalism and Patriotism" *Citizenship Studies* Vol.8, No. 2, June 2004, 115-127
- Brubaker, Rogers. 2005. "The 'Diaspora' Diaspora" in *Ethnic and Racial Studies*. Vol.28. No.1 January 2005. pp. 1-19
- Cohen Robin. 1997. *Global Diasporas: An Introduction*. Seattle: University of Washington Press
- Colic-Peisker Val. 2004. "Doing Ethnography in "One's Own Ethnic Community": The Experience of an Awkward Insider", in Lynne Hume and Jane Mulcock eds. *Anthropologist in the field: Cases in Participant Observation*. New York: Columbia University Press
- De Fina, Anna. 2003. *Identity in Narrative: A Study of Immigrant Discourse*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins
- Geertz, Clifford. 1973. *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*. New York : Basic Books

- Glick Schiller, Linda Basch, and Cristina Blanc-Szanton. 1992. "Transnationalism: A new analytic framework for understanding migration" in *Towards a transnational perspective on migration: Race, class, ethnicity, and nationalism reconsidered*. ed Nina Glick Schiller, Linda Basch and Cristina Blanc-Szanton. New York: New York Academy of Sciences
- Goffman, Erving 1997. "The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life" *The Goffman Reader* eds. Charles Lemert and Ann Branaman. Cambridge Mass.: Blackwell
- Gonzalez, N. 1989. "Conflict Migration and the Expression of Ethnicity: Introduction" in Nancie Gonzalez and Carolyn S. McCommon, eds., *Conflict, Migration and the Expression of Ethnicity*, pp. 1-9 Boulder, Colo.: Westlaw Press
- Hall Stuart. 2003. 'Cultural Identity and Diaspora' *Theorizing Diaspora: a Reader* edited by Jana Evans Braziel and Anita Mannur, Malden: Blackwell
- Kearney, Michael . 1995. "The Local and the Global: The Anthropology of Globalization and Transnationalism" *Annual Review of Anthropology* 24:547-65
- Laguerre Michel S. 1998. *Diasporic Citizenship: Haitian Americans in Transnational America*. New York: St. Martin's Press
- Laitin, David D. 2000. "Identity in Formation: the Russian-speaking Nationality in the Post-soviet diaspora" in Steven Vertovec and Robin Cohen eds. *Migration, Diasporas and Transnationalism*. An Elgar Reference
- Lal, CK. 2003. "Homecoming" in *Nepali Times* 10 - 16 October 2003 #165
- Levitt Peggy. 2001. *The Transnational Villagers*. Berkeley: University of California Press
- Okely, J. and Callaway, H. (eds.) (1992) *Anthropology and Autobiography*. London: Routledge
- Panta, Liladhar. 2006. "Belgium, Sharanarathi ra Nepali (Belgium, Refugees and Nepalis)" *Solidarity* October Vol.6. No.6.
- Radhakrishnan R. 2003. "Ethnicity in an Age of Diaspora" *Theorizing Diaspora: a Reader* ed. Jana Evans Braziel and Anita Mannur. Malden: Blackwell
- Rajaram, Prem Kumar. 2002. "Humanitarianism and Representation of the Refugee" *Journal of Refugee Studies* Vol. 15, No 3

- Salih, Ruba. 2002. "Shifting Meanings of Home". *New Approaches to Migration? Transnational Communities and the Transformation of Home*. Nadje Ali-Ali and Khalid Koser eds. London: Routledge
- Schensul, Stephen L., Jean J. Schensul, Margaret D. LeCompte. 1999. *Essential Ethnographic Methods : Observations, Interviews, and Questionnaires*. Walnut Creek, Calif.: AltaMira Press
- Schwartz Seth J., Marilyn J. Montgomery, Ervin Briones. 2006. "The Role of Identity in Acculturation among Immigrant People: Theoretical Propositions, Empirical Questions, and Applied Recommendations" *Human Development* 49:1–30
- Sheffer, G. 2003. *Diaspora Politics: At Home Abroad*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Sheffer, G. 2003. "From Diasporas to Migrants-from Migrants to Diasporas" in Rainer Munz and Rainer Ohliger eds., *Diasporas and Ethnic Migrants*. Frank Crass: London
- Thapa, Deepak, B. Sijapati. 2003. "Understanding the Causes of 'People's War'" *A Kingdom under Siege, Nepal's Maoist Insurgency, 1996 to 2003*. Kathmandu: The Printhouse
- Titscher Stefan, Michael Meyer, Ruth Wodak and Eva Vetter. 2000. *Methods of Text and Discourse Analysis*, translated by Bryan Jenner. London : Sage
- Tololyan, Khachig. 1998. "Thinking Diasporas: Stateless Power at the Transnational Moment" *Diaspora* 5 (1): 3-37