

Skepseis

The Political Science and Sociology Programme Newsletter

Tenzing Lamsang delivers inaugural Skepseis Lecture



The editor in chief of the weekly newspaper, The Bhutanese, Tenzing Lamsang delivered the first Skepseis lecture this semester. He talked about mass regional tourism in Bhutan and its negative impacts. Tourism in Bhutan started with the long-term sustainable goal of 'High value, Low impact.' However, with newly elected governments pledging to increase revenues and employment, mass regional

tourism was permitted and resulted in an influx of low-budget regional tourists from India, Nepal and the Maldives.

The speaker highlighted that the ill effects of mass regional tourism overshadows the benefits of the same. He pointed out that irresponsible waste disposal and increasing housing problems for the locals – as residential areas are being converted to hotels for the increasing number of tourists – are two major concerns. Traffic congestion and crowding of religious sites are adding onto the problems for the locals. In addition, people are taking loans to set up hotels, which are not necessarily filled and the loans left unpaid. All these issues have impacted the high end foreign tourism as Bhutan is no longer seen as an exclusive tourist destination, rather a crowded and noisy place and not worth the \$250 a day price, he stated.

Lamsang also pointed out that there is some hope in tackling the issue through regulations and understanding from the Indian government. He claimed that the problem and the solution should come from the same place, which are the border towns. Fees and permit regulations, mandating the use of local vehicles, compulsory Bhutanese tour guides even for regional tourists, while monitoring hotel pricing, were some of the solutions Lamsang proposed.

The lecture ended with an interactive question and answer session where many thoughts were exchanged about the in-flow of regional tourists.

— Tshering Choden, Year III

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Editorial

One of the most important skills to acquire while in college is to learn the art of asking good questions. This art of asking 'good questions,' although to a certain extent stems from the pursuit of knowledge, must be approached as a conscious exert of the mind. The bare act of just absorbing knowledge in the classroom or outside of it does not necessarily promote one to an 'asking questions phase.' The art of asking questions should rather be exercised early on. In fact, some of the most trying philosophical questions come from children who cannot even pronounce the word philosophy.

'In a world deluged by irrelevant information,' Harari noted, in his book *21 Lessons for the 21st Century*, 'clarity is power.' He then discusses how in modern days censorship operates 'not by blocking the flow of information,' but rather 'by flooding people with *disinformation* and *distractions*.' Positing some pressing questions pertaining to our 21st century modern society, Harari laments our inability to investigate these questions, because we have 'more pressing things to do.'

Very early on Socrates already offered this very profound insight. Socrates foresaw the problem with our philosophers and politicians today: they do not make the distinction between *opinion* and *knowledge*. Consequently, they define reality and govern society based on what appears – and appeals – to them rather than what is true and right in light of *public interrogation*. Thus, when Socrates insisted that reality and government should be organised according to knowledge, he was rejecting this preferential ('opinionated') way of defining society and reality. And this meant that, an ideal society's worldview and community must be submitted to the challenging task of *questioning* opinions, *testing* their credibility with evidence, and *abandoning* them when they are only what appears/appeals to individuals or a self-interested group.

In short, Socrates's elementary distinction between 'opinion' and 'knowledge' ignited the engine of *analysis*, *critique*, and *reform*. Opinions that cannot stand the test of knowledge must be abandoned and replaced. And thus, those who are not willing to move from opinion to argument are exposed as sophists and dictators. They are people who do not want what is true and good, but manipulators who enforce what appears and appeals to their preferences.

At its best, knowledge and the task of education as a whole is *critical power* for the sake of truth and justice against opinion and oppression. If our teachers are not challenging us to move from opinion to argument, and to knowledge, they are not educating us but indoctrinating us.

— Roderick Wijunamai, Editor

From the Desk of the Programme Leader

Originally conceived of as a semester-wise newsletter of the Political Science and Sociology Programme, Skepseis is rapidly turning into a platform that aims to promote critical thinking and engagement of and about issues related to our discipline.

This semester witnessed the Skepseis inaugural lecture, which was delivered by Mr. Tenzing Lamsang, the editor of The Bhutanese, on the theme of society and tourism in Bhutan. His lecture was both revealing and provocative and the debate and discussion that followed spilled over from the Executive Centre, where the lecture was held, and into our classrooms in the days following. This semester also witnessed the first Skepseis movie screening, which was followed by a student-led discussion that sought to deconstruct the move from political science and sociology angles.

As the pages that follow illustrate, this semester has been a rather eventful one with, besides our regular classes, a large variety of guest-lectures, workshops, field-visits and other extra-curricular activities, and which added flesh to the bones of the theoretical and conceptual underpinnings of our modules.

This semester also witnessed plenty of mobility with some of our students traveling to Japan, Indonesia, Nepal, United States, and Thailand for various programmes and a member of the faculty spending some time at the Szent István University as part of the Erasmus Exchange programme. With some of our students and faculty being selected for various exchange programmes this fall, this mobility will continue, in the upshot strengthening and enriching our department.

This second issue of Skepseis includes a wide variety of entries, ranging from reports and essays to an alumni spotlight and poetry, and I thank the editorial team for their dedication and ingenuity in putting this together. I wish you all a happy reading.

— Dr. Jelle JP Wouters, Programme Leader

Learning from The Big Screen

With the idea to leave people thinking about a multitude of aspects, the Oscar-winning movie, *The Help*, was screened by the Skepseis team in May. Since only a few minds were stirred on the day the movie was screened, we decided to decode some elements of the movie here. Remember, tutors are perpetually dissatisfied with how far and wide the students' thinking process goes. We push further, from the farthest point they have reached. So, allow me to use this space. Let me begin with the fun part. Sitting at the end of the hall, I noticed that the students had a good laugh at many places in the film.

Contd.. (in Page 7)

Is Reality a Myth?: Yuval Noah Harari on How Myths Shape Human Society

Cambridge Dictionary defines myth as “a usually traditional story of ostensibly historical events that serves to unfold part of the world view of a people or explain a practice, belief, or natural phenomenon.” This resonates with Israeli historian Yuval Noah Harari’s interpretation of the term. Harari posits that human society is but a consequence of myths: as hunter-gatherers transitioned into organized agrarian societies and civilization advanced, objective facts were increasingly substituted by subjective views. According to Harari the state, religion, or even the idea of liberty is a myth. The pervasive acceptance of myths as objective realities sustains social relations of power and the existing social order.

The emergence of myths can be traced to the great ancient empires that were primarily sustained by fictional stories. Harari describes two historical myths, which included the story of Hammurabi of 1776 BC in ancient Babylon, and the American Declaration of Independence in AD 1776. King Hammurabi of Babylonia established a common legal code of conduct, which began with a story of how the deities had chosen him to bring about justice. However, the text laid out discriminatory punishments for certain crimes based on whether the crime was committed against a ‘commoner’ or a ‘superior man’. Then in AD 1776, the 13 British colonies in North America declared their independence by claiming that all men are equal and that the American God bestowed the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness to all individuals. Harari points out the paradox here i.e. a majority of the people that signed the American Declaration of Independence were white men that considered women, Native Americans, and Blacks as lesser beings.

Despite the apparent internal contradictions within the widely entrenched systems of beliefs and myths, people continue to subscribe and grow attached to these fictional social constructs. The modern nation states, ideas of liberty and equality, or even the codified legal systems are myths that are viewed as objective realities. Harari presents a compelling argument about how such fictitious conceptions disseminate and promulgate to sustain the societal order and power relations. In a TED conference at London in 2015, Harari spoke about how the human ability to cooperate collectively distinguished them from other animals, and this was possible because of their imagination. Only humans can create and proliferate fictional stories that have the power to convince millions to conform. Prior to Harari, Joseph Campbell conceptualized this idea. He claimed that myths help human minds in connecting with the meanings of their experiences. They reveal the inner potential of people for knowledge and experience and are a point of commonality for humankind. Campbell believed that myths were a response to the existence of a numen or the presence of a divine power. He stated that myths accorded meaning to human life and harmonized the world through their manifestations as stories. These postulations are a testament to the central position that myths occupy in human society. People innovate stories based on subjective experiences that eventually spread and become widely acknowledged as objective realities. Ideologies such as capitalism, religion, nationality and etc. that determine relations of power stems from myths.

— Yeshe Dema, Year III

Bhutan's Need for Contextualising Knowledge

There are three different reasons on why we should contextualize knowledge. The first moral can be drawn from the Tibetan invasion. When Zhabdrung arrived in Bhutan, Tibetan troops followed him here. The Tibetan troops marched unified under a single leader, they were well equipped and had the advantage in terms of troop numbers. However, the Tibetan troops did not factor in the natural environment to win the war. The Tibetan troops who had long and curly hair were intentionally led or had to pass through bushes and got their long hair tangled in the bushes and the Bhutanese troops overran them. At times, during one of the invasions which occurred during a winter in Punakha, Tibetan troops came running down the hills charging towards Punakha Dzong who unfortunately, lost their footing as the dried leaves fallen on the hills did not provide any friction.

The second reason is; taking advantage of the themes of the enlightened argument which emerged in other societies.

Numerous scholars have talked on various topics such as society, class divisions, democracy, reason and so on. Their arguments were informed by the circumstances they encountered. Thus, one is also correct to point out that “what works there might not work here”. Although, the settings in which those arguments were formed are quite different to our own present local settings but the themes of these arguments are quite relevant in Bhutan. At times, we are normalised with the ideas that what is going on in our society is customary. And application of those new perspectives will result in maintaining a balance and come out with an enlightened perspective on those customary practices.

The third reason; recognising that knowledge is permeable. Contextualising knowledge in my opinion also allows me to recognise that knowledge is permeable. Thus, knowledge in my opinion can be molded, chiseled or chipped off of its rough edges. This is where I believe we get the opportunity to contextualise knowledge which will best suit our own local settings.

Hence, contextualising knowledge allows learners to best understand new knowledge through the applications these new knowledge serves. Meanwhile, contextualising knowledge does not mean to render other arguments as “foreign” nor it’s an attempt to indoctrinate oneself in “knowledge nationalism.” It merely helps to recognize the permeability nature of knowledge.

— Tshering Wangchuk, Lecturer

Tshering Denkar

Tshering Denkar graduated from RTC in 2012, the first batch of students to graduate from the college. She currently works at Denkar's Getaway, where she provides tourists a glimpse into the rich tourist destinations in Bhutan. Right after graduating from RTC, she volunteered as a language teacher in Thailand. She speaks to the Skepseis team about her RTC experience!

Currently at:

I work for Denkar's Getaway and I am the first Bhutanese solo travel blogger and a vlogger. I travel around Bhutan hitchhiking, to unseen local destinations while trailing unbeaten routes and meeting indigenous communities of Bhutan. I try to capture every sight and sound. I unravel my travel odyssey through my blog Denkar's Getaway.

Role of RTC:

What I am doing today is not something I envisioned to do even in my wildest dream. Though I might sound clichéd, what I learned at RTC helps me even to this day. The one thing that I learned is how to conduct research. I learnt all the research methodology at RTC. Therefore I didn't face much difficulty while doing MA. Even today as a blogger, I have to conduct extensive research to inform my readers and viewers and the practices I picked up from RTC help.

Favourite RTC experience:

I was in the student government and also worked as a Resident Assistant, which was a great learning experience.

Favourite modules: Political science by Karma Dizzy and Anthropology by Jim Smith.

Memorable moments at RTC: I contested for the post of the president for the first Student Government and I remember making some insensible promises and pledges to fellow colleagues which made me look like a dirty politician. I feel that our time at RTC were golden days. It was a real heaven for learning.

Biggest academic challenge at RTC: Learning Dzongkha and lack of Bhutanese authored literature.

Advice for current students: Follow your passion! Recognise your field of interest and make it happen!

**Ugyen Wangchuk**

Ugyen Wangchuk graduated from RTC in 2016. Currently working at Nazhoen Lamtoen Civil Society Organisation, he shares that RTC has played a huge role in succeeding at the current job. Working for a non-profit has been his dream. Prior to this, he also volunteered at Jangsam Animal Saving Trust, Happy Club and Feeding Love. The course has shaped his understanding a great deal, he shares with the Skepseis team!

Nature of job:

My organisation works to provide after care services to children in conflict with law and also supports vulnerable and destitute children. A normal working day for me is very satisfying because we work for children and youth in need of support.

Role of RTC: RTC has prepared me mentally and physically. The guidance from lecturers is still helpful. I feel lucky to be working in a field which is relevant to the courses I took at RTC.

Favourite RTC experience:

I had a full bunch of positive classmates and very genuine and hard working teachers who were always there for us. It has helped me grow mentally.

Favourite module: My favourite module is Sociology, Psychology, and Youth and Society taught by Madam Dolma Roder and Sir Jelle Wouters.

Memorable Moments: All those three years have been full of memories for me and I got all the support and love from my lecturer and mates.

Biggest academic challenge at RTC: Learning statistics.

Advice for current students: Grab the opportunity while you can learn from resourceful lecturers. Avail the facilities the college provides. Never be afraid to seek help and support when you have the opportunity.

Wheaton Experience

Our visit to Wheaton College in the United States, as part of the exchange programme was a great learning experience. Seven of us, including one faculty member started our journey. Upon our arrival at Boston, we received a warm welcome from the Wheaton team.

The gender-neutral dorms were a cultural shock for all of us, where males and females shared bathrooms and all other facilities. That is when I realised, the aim of such exchange programmes was to bring cultures together, share knowledge, and respect other's culture, if not to at least be tolerant. During the two weeks, we presented traditional Bhutanese dance and songs to the little young learners from the Head Start program and we also attended various classes and on-campus activities.

We also visited Providence, New Port, New York, Harvard University, Boston and Cambridge. The trip ended with a small gathering with students who had visited RTC during the fall semester. We departed with tears in our eyes but unforgettable memories in our hearts. A short experience like this one has made me more confident, taught me what it feels to be a foreigner and to be a global citizen.

— Sonam Yoezer, Year - III



A Week in Bali

Bali had long been in my to do list, and I was finally able to visit. I attended the Asia International Model United Nations 2019 (BAIMUN) as a delegate of UNESCO representing Bhutan, along with two others from RTC. BAIMUN was an engaging conference with future leaders. Besides this, we also had a great experience visiting various places in Bali. It gave us the vibe of paradise with clear seas, beaches, kind people, and of course gorgeous hotels and resorts. It was like a mini vacation. The hardest part was choosing the places we wanted to visit during the short while. Our driver, Komang who took us to Ubud temple, a fancy beach restaurant, nightclubs and Bali Swing solved this problem for us. The most interesting experience was trying Luwak coffee, made from coffee beans which are digested, fermented within and then excreted by luwak, the animal. The three of us, skeptical at first, loved the coffee as soon as we tried it. Overall, it was a great experience.

— Rigsel Samphelma Yargay, Year II

Cultural Exchange Program (SEISA Japan)

The Cultural Exchange Program in Japan, in January, was a fun experience. Fourteen of us from RTC went on this programme. Though our travel time was long, we were rewarded with abundance of love and great hospitality at the destination.

We visited many different places and also shopped a lot. We were fortunate to meet the founder of SEISA Master Miyazawa in person, as he is inspiring and motivating. Wearing the Kimono was the most exciting moment for us. Eating various Japanese food was also an interesting experience.

— Kunzang Choden, Year - III



Dream come true at Hard Rock Cafe, Pattaya

Being a musician and performing outside Bhutan would be a dream for all Bhutanese musicians. Our band, O'Strangers did not expect, but the opportunity came to us to perform at Hard Rock Café, Pattaya. It was a dream come true as The Hard Rock Cafe is a platform for bands and people from all around the world. We were given the opportunity to perform at Hard Rock Hotel & Cafe from 2nd of January till the 5th of March, 2019, on a two month contract. It was a great learning experience, where we also met a lot of musicians from different countries who encourage us to be better musicians.

— Bijay Bajgai, Year - II

Bhutan Democracy Forum 2019

On the 30th of April, the final year students attended the Democracy Forum and the theme this year forum was – ‘Democracy: a path to Good Governance’. There were two panels discussing the aspects of good governance. Bhutan is in its 11th year of democracy. Are we fully democratic or had the vision of good governance been achieved?

The first panel consisted of four political party members, each representing a different party. The panelists mainly expressed their roles as politicians in promoting good governance. The members were asked if Bhutan was on the right track to good governance and they opined that Bhutan’s democracy is only a decade old and still needs time to gain complete trust of the people.

They also expressed that Bhutanese people do not trust politicians fully yet. The members suggested creating awareness among people, rectify past mistakes and to avoid populist party promises. Encouraging public discourse, forums and more dialogue were also recommended by the panelists to encourage people’s participation that will eventually lead to Good Governance. The second panelists consisted an international relations manager, member of the National Council, Managing editor of Kuensel and a Gup from Trongsa. They too discussed how to promote Good Governance and the role and importance media, local government, civil society organisations and public forums. However, freedom of media, restrictive laws and limited education of local leaders and people were perceived as challenges to good governance. — Tshering Choden, Year III



An Interactive Session with the British High Commissioner to India

The visit of British High commissioner to India Sir Dominic Asquith (K.C.M.G) was one of the memorable visits to our college, especially to us as students of Political Science and Sociology because we get to hear about the diplomatic relations of the UK with other nations including our own country. His Excellency asked us what we want to do in the future.

He was particularly appreciative of the response from a female student of Bsc. Environmental Management who shared that she wants to be an environmentalist because of her genuine love for the nature and mother earth. His Excellency highlighted the importance of environment and need for people to take initiatives to take care of the mother earth before it is torn apart or destroyed completely. He added how it is important for youth to pursue such careers. The British High commissioner was not only interested in finding ways to collaborate with the multiple governments for the purposes of trading relations and security, but also equally concerned about the environment. — Kunzang Choden, Year III



Environment-Development Debate in India and Beyond

Noted Indian historian, Ramachandra Guha, delivered a talk, highlighting issues of how we forsake our environment in the name of development. He pointed out that we cause so much environmental damage, which is mostly irreversible, for profit and short-term gains. Although our lives improve with employment in an industrialised society, its negative impacts are far greater, he said.

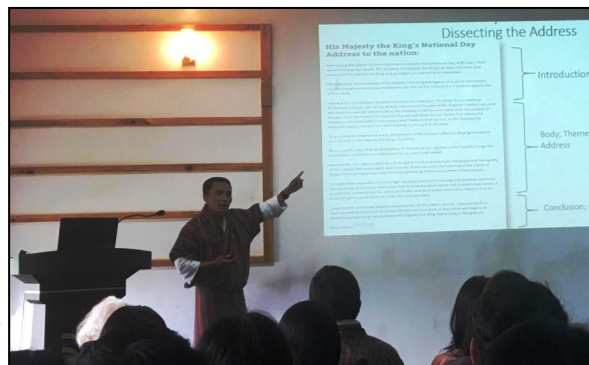
He also addressed the importance of environmental movements in order to protect the natural resources of the planet. Talking about how to achieve development without forsaking the future, he said, was through political decentralization where village governments are made powerful. People, mainly villagers, should be environmentally

literate. It is their land we often take away in the name of development and building infrastructure, he said. Secondly by having a brave, courageous and free press. The media should be able to address issues on misusing of environment or power by leaders that lead to environmental destruction. — Tashi Paldon, Year II

Change in style and vocabularies of His Majesty's National Day Addresses (2006-2018)

Mr. Tshering Wangchuk's presentation at the Insights, the transition and evolution in His Majesty's National Day Addresses delivered since 2006 till 2018. His unit of analysis in documenting this transition was based on delivery styles employed by His Majesty and the usage of varied 'vocabularies'. He argued that the transition was influenced by changing local and global forces, which are political, social, economic or cultural in nature.

He argued by mentioning how His Majesty used local belief systems such as loyalty, unity, country as family and traditional quotes depending on the year of his address. His Majesty also implicitly mentioned global instances such as Charlie Hebdo Attack, China's aggressive maritime aggression and refugees crisis to gauge the internal scenario of Bhutan during the 2015 National Day Address. At the end, he used a mandala to help understand His Majesty's addresses and their evolution.



Lived experiences of women workers in Delhi

Ms. Jaja Kipgen's presentation was mainly focused on the women who were employed in the informal sector, particularly in beauty parlours and spas.

Among other findings, she found that these sectors were highly gendered. Moreover, women working in these informal sectors have low security. Women could not voice out their concerns which include irregular and unhealthy working conditions because they were mostly from rural areas and were pressed for financial stability. They were forced to go out from their villages in search of jobs in urban areas like Delhi in the hope of earning money to support themselves and their families back in their villages.

Learning from the big screen (contd. from Pg. 2)

Then there were some tasty snacks, which were served by the boys. One of the boys who served them talked about how there was no gendering of roles on the movie night, as opposed to what was showcased in the movie. Point taken. Good learning. Now let's get to another point we hoped would be driven home. The movie is set in Jackson, Mississippi in the United States, which has a dominant black population in 1963. It talks about the life of black maids working in influential white households, who also double up as mothers for the white children.

Like most Hollywood plots, *The Help* is also the story of a white lady who wants to write the story of maids who are mistreated and hence save them from their misery. These movies showcase that it is a white individual who has to save the blacks in distress. Critics have also stated that the real struggle of the black working class women during that time has been under represented.

Yes, a movie has its limitations, but one thing that cannot be sidelined when writers perpetuate stereotypes because they experience things differently from the characters they write. This can also be compared to stories that showcase gender oppression, where it is always men who save women in distress. The characters and plot lines are written in that way, to begin with. This does not, always, showcases the whole picture.

— Rajitha Sanaka, Lecturer



RTC goes to Hungary

Mr Rabibal Dhakal, faculty member of the department went on Erasmus+ Exchange Programme to Hungary and visited the Szent Istvan University. He shares that his interactions with the faculty members from 14 different countries was enriching.

He learnt about different education systems, and learning and teaching patterns from across the globe. Apart from this, it was a good opportunity, he said, to share and talk about RTC, which is Bhutan's first private and only A+ rated college.

Overall, it was a fun and educational experience, he said.

Verse Form..

NO, NAH, UH-UH

I should not mind,
It should not matter.
Going to pass with time,
Should trust what's coming later.

Soft as my skin is,
His touch is a matter-of -course.
Boss, is the title of his,
But is this my purpose?

I must voice, no, nah, uh-uh.

**Special mention to the top four performers
of the Undergraduate Research Project:**

**Yeshe Dema
Tshering Choden
Tshoki Lhamo
Pema Yangzom**

(Below: Research Projects on display)



This forced intimidation,
Cold, fiendish fingers through my calves.
Consumed with frustration,
Pitying my will slit in halves.

I must voice, no, nah, uh-uh.

He, she, gay and lesbian,
I am all and sit abused.

Roar it out!
NO, NAH, UH-UH!

— Vebaka Bhandari, Year II



Imagining Buddha by Jigme Dorji, Year III

The faculty and students of Political Science and Sociology Programme congratulate all graduating students. We wish you the best!