

7 A SKAD ethnography of educational knowledge discourses

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Introduction

The topic of higher education (HE), particularly in international development, has always been contentious and multi-faceted because it lies at the convergence of a wide array of discourses and, furthermore, often serves as a political arena. Indeed, as the World Bank (2005: 64) has suggested, HE is “linked more directly to the emergence of a broad development vision for the society”, which suggests that there is a strong parallel relationship between HE and social and political development. In responding to this dynamic, analysis has often defaulted to topics such as the relationship between the labour market and HE, quality of instruction, accreditation and internationalisation, and the university as a place of social learning. Although somewhat less mainstream, the *political dimension* of HE has also turned out to be a salient discourse for various social sciences, directing debates toward topics such as peace-building, reconstruction, and economic growth (Kohoutek, 2013). Here, common issues include the politics of curriculum development, selection of language of instruction, accessibility of education, culture of extra-curricular activities, and inclusion of minority sects/ethnicities (Tomlinson and Benefield, 2005). Since the 1990s, however, these various dimensions of HE have been joined increasingly by a discourse surrounding the term *knowledge*. The popularity and dynamism of this term has allowed it to achieve the status of something one might call a *super-discourse*, because it is easily injected into pre-existing discourses and can easily come to dominate them. In fact, the influence of *discourses of knowledge* as captured under the notions of *knowledge society*, *knowledge hubs* or *knowledge for development* quickly outgrew academia and – even though their popularity has subsequently decreased – they continue to guide policy-making all over the world. The enthusiasm behind these discourses of knowledge has perhaps even allowed for a false sense of global unity despite the fact that contestation over HE persists unabated (Hornidge, 2014a, 2014b). This contribution outlines how a number of individual studies of the emerging discourses conducted by the authors eventually came to use the Sociology

of Knowledge Approach to Discourse (SKAD) to inform and combine these analyses.

While the studies that we drew into the broader SKAD analysis were carried out over a period extending from 2005 to 2014 by different groups of scientists (always involving at least one of the two co-authors of this chapter) and cover a range of alternate forms of these *knowledge* discourses, they shared a number of overlapping trends: the context of a steady globalisation of western/northern academy, an increasingly technology-based shaping of social reality, and a regional focus on Southeast Asia. Individually, the study foci range from ideals of human resource-driven development and national adaptation to the global competition in HE (Evers and Hornidge, 2007; Feuer and Hornidge, 2015; Hornidge, 2007, 2010) to the normative, factual and hegemonic character-traits of globally communicated images of knowledge-based futures visible in policy-making in Southeast Asia (Hornidge, 2014a, 2014b).

In many respects, this research has grown with, and alongside, the development and fine-tuning of SKAD as an analytical and methodological framework. While our earlier work was more grounded in Berger and Luckmann's (1966) original treatise on the sociology of knowledge and, to some degree, on its later offspring (e.g. Knoblauch, 1995, 2001b; Law, 1986), our convergence in methods and analysis coincided discretely with the further elaboration of SKAD by Reiner Keller (2011a, 2011b, 2013). Thematically, we also developed our ideas to match trends in education research, which have included methodological concerns in critical ethnography (Rogers, 2011), historical-evolutionary views on education (Ricken, 2006) and the question of internal learning or reflexivity in education (Wrana, 2006). The result is, in many ways, a guided tour or lesson in how SKAD can be incorporated into ongoing studies and (with some limitations) retroactively applied to past data sets and modes of analysis. In this sense, this chapter is useful for both readers hoping to gain the benefit of a more tailored approach to studying discourse, and for readers revisiting pre-existing work from a more cutting-edge perspective. We elaborate the development of our SKAD methods and framework for studying discourses of knowledge using an unfolding narrative approach that highlights those elements that we identified as having evolved our approach. In the next section, we open with the current positioning of SKAD in our research on HE and, in subsequent sections, trace the experiences that progressively filled out our approach.

How SKAD came to fit: chasing the dynamism of higher education

From the late 1980s and early 1990s (in the USA, European Union, and Japan), the power and scope of the discourses of knowledge have come to comprise a potent set of rules and practices for shaping and directing

(mostly technological) development while engendering a dual sense of enthusiasm and urgency for action. Various, these come under the banners of *knowledge society*, *higher education integration*, *internationalisation of higher education*, and other related formulations. These strands of discourse, especially for countries newly exposed to them (we reviewed, among others, Myanmar, Cambodia, as well as Malaysia and Singapore), have since become such dominant prevailing *realities* that excavating their basis requires a comprehensive set of methodologies. While the topical field of *knowledge*, as an evolving discourse in global education, is unrelated except by name to the *sociology of knowledge approach to discourse*, the analytical tools of SKAD have proven to be a useful anchoring point for the multi-level and multi-project education studies we have undertaken in the previous decade.

It is important to point out directly that the field of education is not new to discourse analysis of different stripes – quite the contrary. It has long been a pivotal field of study, with discourse analysts focusing on high-profile topics such as *human development*, censorship and curriculum control, (official) textbook narratives, education and innovation, and the debate over the priority of STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics). In many cases, and particularly in developing countries, various discourses of knowledge have subsumed these topic areas by repackaging politically sensitive issues in new, more palatable ways. For example, broad political support can be built around promoting a *knowledge society* or *innovation society* that would be difficult to achieve if the associated interventions, such as giving up sovereignty over HE content, providing secular instruction, or devaluing social sciences, were debated separately. The advent of a new *layer* of discourse on top of the predominant set of education discourses presented us with an analytical challenge that we incrementally, and eventually resolved by adopting a SKAD approach. This was facilitated by the fact that the relatively new discourses of knowledge often referred to initiatives with relatively little physical substance (in Keller’s terms, non-discursive practices), in contrast to the divisive, tangible issues they comprised (particularly the high-profile topics listed above). SKAD has thus been useful for structuring the ethnographic methods to help with both our ongoing analysis of the more superficial structure of ideas (such as *knowledge society*) as well as with excavating the discursive under-structures.

For ethnographically documenting, assessing and understanding the practices (both discursive, non-discursive and model) associated with meta-discourses such as *knowledge society*, it is important to draw upon the usual range of etic data sources (documents, speeches, reports, news, etc.) as well as to create viable circumstances for emic types of “discovery” (in the Grounded Theory tradition) (Strauss and Corbin, 1994). This need arises because education manifests simultaneously as a lay discourse (most people confidently relate what they believe education is and does) as well

as an expert, special discourse, encapsulating the governance, institutions, business orientation, and diplomacy of the sector at large. To understand what those who we study (i.e. the diversity of actors and their practices) are motivated by and what they can achieve in a given local context, Knorr-Cetina's (1999) suggests posing questions such as, "how do they know what they know?" and "how do the epistemic cultures of those under study reject, adopt, modify the two global discourses of knowledge studied?". Keeping these overarching questions in mind retains the focus on the actors' perspective, while reflecting on the actors' position in the relation to the discourses and other institutional structures. A useful feature of Knorr-Cetina's concept of "epistemic culture" is that local and scientific knowledge cannot be clearly separated, meaning that each epistemic culture is localised. The specific blend of explicit scientific knowledge and other forms of knowledge differs from one epistemic culture to another and has a lot to do with the history of each culture. An inclusive etic and emic approach to data gathering is a useful precedent for integrating such forms knowledge.

For studying actors and their embedding in, and co-construction of, various education sub-discourses, the sociology of knowledge approach to discourse has been useful for several reasons. First, unlike other forms of discourse analysis, SKAD does not encourage or discourage the adoption of any normative assumptions (Keller, 2012: 51), which leaves the researchers the space to tailor the starting point to the *audience* and the project – a useful tool when combining disparate project data or contributions. Second, SKAD is geared for assessing different discourses by looking at (1) their socio-historical embeddings; (2) their construction as normative, social imaginaries of a better future (here, revolving around the idea of *knowledge* and education as being increasingly crucial to development); (3) the social and material resources for action to be mobilised; as well as (4) some of the (un)intended power effects. In doing so, the focus is on both the actors guided by, and the actors determining the discourses, with emphasis on human, everyday practices – discursive, non-discursive, and model practices. The concept of model practices perhaps requires some elaboration here: they are activities positioned discursively to be intrinsic to a certain discourse. They differ from other types of practices outlined in SKAD, such as discursive practices (employed to maintain discursive coherence) and non-discursive practices (everyday institutional and economic processes). The integrated focus on discursive, non-discursive and model practices turned out to be important in data gathering as – especially in non-Western, (semi-)authoritarian contexts – non-discursive practices play a key role in constituting the social processing of a discourse, while model practices (i.e. templates for action) are strongly formulated and communicated in and through discourse.

An additional useful, but less explicit, component of the SKAD vocabulary that we put to use in our running analysis is the concept of *infrastructures*

of discourse production (what Keller (2011a) refers to as “dispositifs”), which are established by social actors in order to resolve or guide a particular situation. Discourses of knowledge can be understood as *dispositifs of discourse production*, in that they constitute strong framing infrastructure for recruitment into a discourse, while underlying debates, such as those about STEM, can be considered *dispositifs from a discourse* (in this case, the discourses about the productivity of science and positivism in education performance). Defined in this way, it is easier for analysts to explore the basis upon which discourses are created *and maintained*. Keller (2005: 6) suggests how more specifically, noting that dispositif structures typically offer (1) normative orientations and rules for saying things; (2) rules of attesting to the constitution of meaning; and (3) social and material resources for action. With these dimensions in mind, progressing a few steps in a discourse analysis of knowledge is relatively straightforward. For example, the term *knowledge* aggressively applies a positive connotation to anything it is attached to, sidesteps critiques of component practices, and suggests its indispensability for governments wishing for economic growth and higher education institutions striving for recognition.

Assembling a SKAD ethnography

While it is important to recognise that SKAD is not a method (Keller, 2011a, 2011b), there are various tools and methods that are likely to prove useful in gathering data in preparation for SKAD’s mode of analysis and those that, in our case, coincidentally fit in hindsight. As an overall guiding point of the research framework, it is therefore helpful to return to Berger and Luckmann’s distinction between *subjective* and *objective reality* and Foucault’s conceptual development of the exigencies of power, which have spawned considerable methodological treatment concerning how to excavate layers of discourse and render power relations more visible. It would also be advisable to add to this overarching framework research methods developed within the field of study itself (here, comparative education, development, and globalisation). In our case, as the research field itself evolved rapidly over the preceding decade of the research, we shifted research priorities to match at each step. The research adopted a case study approach, yet without aiming for a direct micro-level comparative analysis between the different projects from Malaysia, Indonesia and Singapore, Myanmar and Cambodia.

The projects, which were conducted over a period of a decade, represented a sequential investigation into the nature and evolution of *knowledge* discourses in Southeast Asia. In each case, the general topic of *glocal* accommodation to multi-lateral HE governance was situated both domestically (development, reconstruction, censorship, etc.) and regionally (trade integration, cultural exchange, economic inequalities, competitiveness, etc.). The range of methods, both before and after integrating SKAD,

drew largely from the ethnographic toolbox: fieldwork with a case-study approach that applied methods suited to the degree of complexity (generally, the more complex, the more embedded types of fieldwork). The “focused ethnographies” (Knoblauch, 2001a) approach was particularly useful for the assessment of the reciprocal interdependence between dispositifs of discourse production and everyday practices (Keller, 2003; Wundrak, 2016; in line with this, suggests a Sociology of Knowledge Approach to Discourse Ethnography. As SKAD became more of a central feature of the research orientation, both data gathering and analysis were geared to track up and down SKAD’s discursive hierarchy (see Figure 7.1), and, in abstract terms, lock together constellations of dispositifs and different types of practice with various discursively relevant findings.

More precisely, and as elaborated further in Hornidge (2013), in researching the *knowledge society* dispositif with its mainstream international presence, representational discourse mapping included secondary sources (in SKAD terms, *discourse fragments*), such as academic and pseudo-academic publications, conference/event papers and talks from the wider international community, strategy papers, policy briefs, event documentation from international and multi-lateral financial/donor institutions, as well as national level action plans, and strategic plans from individual countries of interest. Primary data collection of a qualitative nature was aimed precisely at the issue of *local activities and consequences*, and included semi-structured interviews with national level policy-makers and implementers, participant observation, surveying of physical infrastructure (transect walks), as well as focus group discussions with interactive exercises. Quantitative data gathering methods in support of the qualitative SKAD data aimed at capturing the nature of global discursive communication with the method of tracking: usage of key utterances in secondary literature (newspaper and academic) of terms such as *knowledge society*, *information society*, *knowledge-based economy*, *creative industries*, *cultural industries*, *knowledge for development*, *innovation development*. Quantitative data on

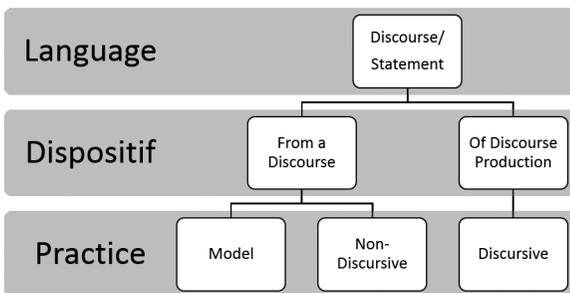


Figure 7.1 SKAD’s discursive hierarchy.

Source: figure made by authors.

national level non-discursive practices were also collected, including statistics on R&D budgets, research and science-industry staffing, high-tech product output, publication indices, conferences and exhibitions organised, and patent applications.

For assessing the *knowledge for development* dispositif, similar methodological ground was covered but the focus was shifted toward key actors and locations where the development perspective is more prominent, such as development agencies, poorer countries, and conflict areas. Discourse fragments came more often in the form of strategy papers, policy briefs and event documentations from multilateral institutions such as the World Bank, International Monetary fund (IMF), United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), and European Commission; this also included documents written on behalf of aid-receiving countries. Comparing these texts with those ostensibly prepared by national government committees provides a particularly fruitful area of research. Given the inherent power issues in the relationship between donors and recipients, we conducted participant observation at events where HE models are brokered internationally as well as events where relations are more equalised, such as Southeast Asia regional meetings. Researching local practices, in contrast, entailed more direct, often more embedded, approaches suited to some of the challenging fieldwork areas. While we generally aimed at implementing a broad set of qualitative methods, including semi-structured interviews and focus-group discussions, site visits and participant observation, as well as more unique methods such as *follow-the-innovation*, it must be stated up front that research access and censorship were not always simple, particularly in post-conflict and transition areas. This often necessitated longer visits with more extended and careful periods of building rapport, participant observation, and careful training of local staff. Quantitative data was gathered for understanding the flows of resources unique to the development aspect of the knowledge discourse, including various project funding arrangements, employments, R&D budgets with development goals, and other state activities organised under the banner *knowledge for development*. To some degree, quantitative data on the more general aspects of the knowledge discourse, such as the usage of key terms and coding of documents, were applicable to analyses of both the *knowledge society* and *knowledge for development* dispositifs.

As with most research scoping endeavours, deciding what methods to employ and how many resources to devote to the effort was an evolving process. Initially, the scope of the data gathering methods was connected to the potential prevalence of the discourse; planning requires an open and flexible view toward the functional boundaries of the studied discourse. A period of piloting is likely necessary in preparation for quantitative data collection, but we found that most qualitative approaches could be adjusted in an ad-hoc manner. As research progresses, a particular challenge in this type of research is to remain contemporary with

the shifting and fluid nature of various discourses. This is especially critical because it can lead to reflexive observations about the divergences between public discourses and special discourses nested within the public domain, as well as to help highlight strategic manoeuvring of actors and discourse coalitions. For example, model practices and discursive practices from within-EU initiatives about HE integration (corresponding to the specific discursive field) vary in important ways from the way the EU represents HE integration when dealing with different audiences in a diplomatic function abroad. Because the discursive field has been, and always is, in a constant state of flux, coding discourse fragments (texts, meeting minutes, legislation, etc.) by time and context is an essential element of excavating the storyline of a discourse and maintaining ongoing relevance. In general, steps to render data transparent across extended periods (of research) and between researchers is indispensable in maintaining and building up a strong discourse analysis.

Leveraging past and ongoing research from a range of projects

Research into the workings of a particular discourse is often part of a broader endeavour to understand a more general phenomenon. In our case, it was within the scope of a larger set of research projects, within which discourse analysis comprised only one of several components. Within such broader studies, non-discourse related research bears the potential to complement, substantiate, or contest discourses or underlying dispositifs using the toolbox of the respective qualitative research approach. Nevertheless, we found that discourse analytical training and the general openness for assessing the workings of the discourses in a particular research field became a central anchor for data gathering and analysis for most project components. Fortunately, because methods suitable for SKAD overlap with those of other qualitative approaches, they can be retroactively adapted even as late as the analysis stage of an existing project, although preferably earlier. Several of the research methods that we outlined above were therefore not chosen specifically with SKAD in mind; many methods, such as integrating stocks of natural data, and conducting open-ended interviews or embedded fieldwork, were basically employed because of their inherent transferability among techniques of organising data and conducting analysis. As the data were collected in the course of several different research projects and parts of projects, their analysis has taken – and continues to take – place in different steps, sometimes in isolation from the other data, sometimes interlinked. Nevertheless, each analysis explicitly or implicitly builds on the one before.

The data collected in these separate research projects capture the “real social practices” constituting a discourse (Keller, 2011b: 48). They comprise speech, text, discussion, visual images, and the use of symbols, as well

as modes of adherence to social norms and values. Data on social practices are complemented by data on the organisational, institutional and social consequences of their related discourses. Furthermore, these were data collected in several different countries, and thus in several different languages and cultural backgrounds. While a sizeable proportion of this body of data was translated into English, the emic perspective on particular concepts is crucial and often captured better in the terms of the local languages than in translations. This is of methodological relevance for studying processes of perceiving, attaching meaning to, and interpreting aspects of communicated discourses and sub-discourses.

The studied individual and collective actors ranged from representatives of Western academia, international organisations, and national governments to large-scale farmers under a state plan for cotton and wheat, small-scale subsistence farmers and water users, males and females, old and young, highly educated and illiterate, as well as those with strong state connections and those without, just to name some of the distinctions. Despite these vast differences, relevant as they all are for certain research questions, a commonality in their actions and practices can be traced to the global discourses on *knowledge* – for development and poverty alleviation, but also for the construction of knowledge societies.

The study of the duality of actors and institutional structures in non-Western contexts highlighted the need to reflect on the common distinction of *formal* (i.e. the status-quo; often but not always represented by the state) and *informal* (i.e. traditionally grown, customary) institutions in ordering and guiding everyday life. Especially in contexts of *weak* states with ambiguously implemented *formal* regulatory frameworks and institutions, the *informal* sphere, or more specifically the *rules of the game* developed over centuries, underlines that many more logics exist additional to those officially enacted by the state, which guide actors in their practices. The research from Indonesia, Cambodia and Myanmar illustrated how this layering of the institutional frameworks guiding actors' practices contributes to complexity. In addition, it pointed to the limitations of working with Western conceptual thought in non-Western contexts. For example, the common practice of working with strict typologies turns out to be too simplifying when patterns of society–state interaction are characterised by functional differentiation rather than segmentary and hierarchical differentiations along the lines of patron–client relationships, gender, age, state connections etc. In such a context, a strict framework can easily overlook important determinants of the system under study. Similarly, Keller's distinction of discursive, non-discursive and model practices of discourse production (2005, 2011b) does not readily match emic categorisations of practices, a problem we found particularly in Eastern Indonesia. Instead our experience suggests differentiating further by, for example, studying more in-depth how *non-discursive* practices follow institutional frameworks, rules and norms of behaviour. Nevertheless, it is

useful to keep in mind that even seemingly non-discursive *formal* and *strategic* practices, used often for ensuring access to resources or making oneself heard, can also be explicitly discursive (a reflexive expression of agency).¹

While it is generally true that a larger body of data and wider set of analytical frameworks are helpful in understanding a discourse's profile, forming long-term habits of data collection around the thorough documentation and organisation of data – or the implementation of reliable and well-systematised data collection policies – can optimise eventual analysis. A similar “organisational ethos” can be found in the literature surrounding the grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 2000) and other research-practice oriented academic discussions. These often not only articulate methodological toolkits, which can be readily (and non-exclusively) integrated into most social science research including SKAD, but also suggestions for data management. Particularly suitable are tools borrowed from research-practice oriented discussions on discourse research as well as ethnographic approaches of data analysis, as they are mainly employed to answer *why* and *how come* questions with regard to actors' behaviours. When aiming for the most direct analysis of an actual discourse constituting and communicating practices, the selection of documents, speech acts or visual images to be analysed requires substantial care. In particular, the discourse fragments to be included should be similar in type and substance. For example, a final report from a national-level committee after years of research and deliberation should not be directly compared with a newspaper blurb. Ensuring that the body of data contains discourse fragments of comparable stature, as well as covers the discourse both topically and over-time, is important.

However, it is also important to fill out the *interpretive repertoire* (in SKAD terms) of a discourse in an even manner so that the weight of the storyline does not shift in favour of, for example, the bulk of more easily accessible documents. This is particularly important when – and this is often the case – representative statements that more simply actualise the discourse are more readily available (and more succinct) than more substantial (and perhaps more subtle or abstract) document sources. Through a process of theoretical sampling not dissimilar to that of the Grounded Theory approach, some rigor can be added to the selection of data to be assessed. With the aim of identifying the outer borders as well as the inner structure of the discourse, maximal and minimal contrasting can be pursued. In this, weighing data that are widely contrasting in terms of the content of the discourse offers insight into the outer borders of a discourse. The comparison of quite similar data (again with regard to the content of the discourse) offers insights into the subtle differences and connotations within a (sub-)discourse. The analysis of the inner structures of the different sub-discourses, their borders and relationships to other

sub-discourses within one main discourse, offers insight into the phenomenological structure of the discourse. Each analysed discourse fragment offers a building block of the overall discourse and, with some retroactive organising of the data, can help build toward possible patterns of interpretation and fill out the main storyline of a discourse. The analysis of one (sub-)discourse is basically complete once the analysis of additional data contributing to it does not offer further insight (a SKAD version of data *saturation*).

Particularly for cases such as ours, in which SKAD was not chosen from the beginning of the research as a conceptual and methodological research framework, the stability of a conclusion from discourse analysis can be cross-checked by making use of the different analytical methods and data types at hand. In our case, this included verifying or discovering qualitative data through transect walks, network mapping, database searches, Q-Sort surveys, etc. Another way to validate data of unknown utility is to experiment with re-coding the data to see if conclusions are robust enough under different categorisation regimes. Additionally, discourse results can be substantiated or contextualised by linking them to quantitative data expressing background information of various types (demographic, sectoral, international, etc.). In general, the results of a SKAD-inspired analysis can benefit in terms of robustness and significance from a range of different research perspectives and, in turn, can help to corroborate or refute other analyses. For analysis at the micro-level, it is particularly important to be able to evaluate the applicability and scope of the results; this is the topic we turn to next.

Recognising *realities* and scoping strategically

For a researcher, the first sign of a pervasive discourse is that certain words or phrases that would otherwise be used more judiciously, become conspicuously present in documents, dialogue, and academic forums. In the nascent stages of the development of a discourse, terms such as *knowledge* are still employed with a certain measure of reflexivity, which is to say that everyday commentators are still aware of the phenomenological attribute of what they are saying (i.e. they bracket the word). The climax of a discourse is reached when not only a certain phrase, but also rules and pressures for employing that phrase, become taken for granted. In other words, the discourse becomes a lived reality, understood readily and freely employed to various ends. In line with Keller (2011b: 4), the discourses become “concrete and material” in character, shaped by and shaping subjective perceptions and framings, likewise influenced by and influencing organisations, institutions and (social) facts. Consequently, they also have to be assessed endogenously: as being shaped and at the same time shaping *realities*. Doing so requires data capturing the multitude of subjective realities and framings, as well as the objective realities and factual

effects. Yet, since not all discourses necessarily reach this climax, from a methodological perspective, it is important to determine the extent and pervasiveness of the studied discourse.

To this end, it is imperative to stake out a suitable field of discourse (Keller, 2013: 91) – one that is analytically robust (with high potential for cross-checking and triangulation) and discursively relevant (in terms of theoretical contribution). While the projects that we included in our SKAD analysis were all individually selected because of their contribution to an emerging discourse of knowledge, we had to revisit their scope and look for connections, divergences, and shared data for validation. In general, we followed Keller's (2005: 6) endogenous approach to scoping by explicitly addressing the capacity of our combined projects to: (1) analyse historical events in the sense of “emerging problematisations of established regimes of practices”; (2) consider these events “as unintended (power) effects of heterogeneous practices performed by social actors trying to solve concrete problems of everyday routine”; (3) assess the “heterogeneous and not necessarily connected fields of practices behind such surface effects in order to explain historical shifts of transformations of knowledge/power regimes”; and (4) elaborate theoretical concepts based on empirical data.

To begin with, we observed that the discourse under the notion of *knowledge society* has long reached its climax, and in fact, has proceeded through a number of further mutations meant to render it applicable to more domains than science-focused HE, information and communication technology (ICT), and research and development (R&D). Indeed, our most recent work (Feuer and Hornidge, 2015) outlines how dominant HE consortia are using the knowledge discourse to break down barriers of national sovereignty and exert hegemonic control over other regions and countries. This meant that we had to expand our scope considerably to cover an adequate field of discourse. However, this was also a lesson in evaluating relevance/significance so as not to overwhelm the data gathering. When encountering a discourse as pervasive as the range of different discourses of *knowledge* (captured under the notions of *knowledge society*, *knowledge hub*, but also *creative city* or *cultural industries*), it was important to strategically select case studies that were representative of the width (diversity) and depth (complexity) of the discourse. In the case of HE standing in as a representative for studying the globalisation of western/northern academy, for instance, case studies from Southeast Asia allow for the assessment of parallels between the Bologna process in Europe and standardisation attempts of HE within the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

Ideally one would select case studies that most efficiently unpack the discourse and help readers to make the intellectual leap into reflexivity and objectivity. In practice, however, one often sets out like we did, namely to study certain thematic issues (in our case, the construction of

knowledge societies, ICTs, innovation policy, cultural industry developments or post-conflict HE reconstruction) and only latently discovers the embeddedness of these issues in the dispositifs of the discourses. Subsequently, by tracing our way through the structure of the discourse (i.e. from practices on through dispositifs of discourse production), we began to see useful starting points from which to launch a more targeted analysis and presentation.

In our case, studying national-level responses to several globally communicated discourses of knowledge eventually led us to circle back to the non-discursive practices rooted at the national level (e.g. new policies, standardisation initiatives, infrastructure projects, etc.). To begin with, we found the highest churn and strategic deployment of readily “identifiable ensembles of cognitive and normative devices” (Keller, 2005: 7) at the level of multilateral HE consortia, although we also found shadows of power emanating from the expansionist policy of regional blocs (such as the EU, North America, Japan and Australia) (Figueroa, 2010; Naidoo, 2011). Although it became apparent that the international agents were the (latent) source of the most active innovation and aggressive translation of the knowledge discourse, the dispositifs and practices were being continuously reconfigured and disseminated by national agents (governments, universities, students/families) to accommodate and/or resist the internationalisation efforts of dominant HE domains (Feuer and Hornidge, 2015; Hornidge, 2013: 405; Shahjahan and Kezar, 2013). What remained constant was the seemingly unshakable normative view that initiatives attached to the word *knowledge* were good for society and the economy. As a container, *knowledge* operates as, in SKAD terms, a *discourse strategy*, serving to veil otherwise provocative combinations of practices from direct, individual scrutiny.

The mainstream prevalence of various dispositifs, such as *knowledge for development*, *knowledge society* and *knowledge-based economy* in Southeast Asia (and elsewhere), is an indicator that, methodologically speaking, the research sites with the greatest potential for highlighting strategic discursive shifts will be those in which rather normative views of *knowledge* (in SKAD terms, the audience, primarily from policy-makers) meet with powerful agents of discourse shaping (in SKAD terms, actors in a discourse coalition, primarily diplomats and HE emissaries/consortia) (Keller, 2013: 72–74). The discursive cachet of an initiative about *knowledge for development*, for example, can generate the necessary legitimacy for gathering university leaders and education ministry leaders to meet with European standard-setting agencies. The triad of cooperation, international exchange and standard-setting in HE lend themselves to good publicity, just as do infrastructure interventions (“knowledge hubs”) (Evers and Hornidge, 2007) that imply a linear movement towards a more technological future, often associated with being *more modern*.

Understanding interdependent and highly glocalised discourses of knowledge: concluding reflections

Over the course of more than a decade, and including many analytical and reflexive leaps among the evolving discourses of knowledge, the sociology of knowledge approach to discourse (Keller, 2013, 2011a, 2011b, 2005, 2003) has helped us in various ways to render transparent strategic manoeuvrings and shifts in HE and science and innovation policy. The studied discourses of knowledge were constituted and legitimised through the continuous communicative and instrumental action of individual and collective actors and their practices. Spanning numerous countries and research projects, our research eventually found a critical foundation on the question of whether the negotiations over the role of *knowledge* in society and development policy, which are usually rendered in an optimistic public discourse of global integration and technological modernity, are ultimately a veil over the power-laden special discourses that are present in the fraught negotiations between university consortia, national actors in science policy, multi-lateral development agencies, and other *knowledge* stakeholders.

In answering this on the basis of qualitative ethnographic research that was, at least initially, not explicitly targeted at this question, we discussed how SKAD can both guide research methods and become a heuristic tool in subsequent analysis. In this, we both draw upon and widen the SKAD tradition in regard to qualitative, ethnographic methods for long-term empirical field research, while also offering insights and guidance on how to analyse pre-existing data within the SKAD-frame and cross-validate findings by leveraging different components of project research. The primary lesson that we draw here is that the open-ended, explorative nature of general ethnographic inquiry can be complemented and enhanced by SKAD from the outset or integrated progressively or iteratively as the demand builds for critical social theory. In general, research projects or other initiatives with a wide scope, involving multiple researchers, locations, depths of field, and periods of data collection, can therefore work to integrate SKAD into their workflow and analysis if comparable approaches and data collection are already being employed. This allows for analysis that is both useful for project members in their individual capacities and for integrating findings in a manner suitable for cross-thematic critical analysis and theory building. To conclude on a practical note, a sample of such an integrated SKAD evaluation of this topic reads something like the text below.

Our findings highlight how the dominant dispositifs of discourse production centre around the optimistic conceptual progression of *integration* (i.e. the inevitability of globalisation), building a *knowledge society* (Western-oriented constellation of academic competition), and *reform* (i.e. the social imaginary of a better future inscribed in the dispositif *knowledge for development*). The arena of HE and science policy in the ASEAN is

(historically) populated by countries that variously prioritise certain discourses and domains that tendentially leverage certain discourses or have pre-existing structures of symbolic and practical power. The competitive atmosphere of higher education globally, however, is increasingly defined by struggles to re-arrange the existing symbolic order in Southeast Asia, especially in light of the increasing assertiveness of the European HE system. The different domains are equipped differently to manage these processes. Europe is highly centralised, ordered and transparent but the USA and Australia have, respectively, strongly anchored model practices (i.e. templates for action) and regional embeddedness. Achieving broader success in ASEAN means that both international and regional actors have to simultaneously tie the dominant discourse of internal (economic) integration and development to their practice of *external* (higher education) integration while avoiding the perception of effecting politically unpopular contradictions to national sovereignty.

The strident regionalist-culturalist discursive field in Southeast Asia complicates the typical *knowledge society* dispositif of implementing programs that align the region's model practices (e.g. credit system, exchange programs, patent protection, and innovation policy) with those of dominant actors. Actors such as university consortia, standardisation agencies, and historical trends in academic mobility are thereby re-cast as a continuation of an important type of international diplomacy (namely HE *integration*) that appears to naturally parallel globalisation and economic integration. However, integration has proven to be a far more contentious process, balanced around dual processes of building strategic partnerships and defending sovereignty. And yet, even as the hegemonic tendencies of the *knowledge* discourse, as deployed by powerful agents, becomes increasingly clear in practice, the discourse strategy of maintaining the unassailable normative position of furthering modernity, quality education, and economic growth remains strongly anchored as ever.

Note

1 A similar argument has been made with regard to practices in water management in Uzbekistan (see: Hornidge, Oberkircher and Kudryavtseva, 2013; Hornidge, 2017).

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