

***Unbecoming Citizens: Culture, nationhood, and the flight of refugees from Bhutan* by Michael Hutt. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2003. ISBN 019 566205 9, 2 maps, 15 illustrations (6 of them in colour), appendix, bibliography, index, xx + 308 pp.**

Reviewed by Karl-Heinz Krämer, Bad Honnef

In the early 1990s, about 100.000 persons of Nepalese origin were expelled from southern Bhutan. The majority have been living in refugee camps in southeastern Nepal since that time. In 1990, the interim prime minister of Nepal, Krishna Prasad Bhattarai, declined to comment on the situation and said that it should be dealt by the government that was to be elected in May 1991. When this government took up office, the refugee issue had already become a widely known problem in Nepal. Since then, the UNHCR and some other international humanitarian organizations have tried to ensure the basic needs of the refugees. At the same time, the often-changing Nepalese governments had numerous rounds of negotiations with the Bhutanese government about the status of these refugees, as well as the possibility of their return to Bhutan. As a matter of fact, the Nepalese side never could compete with the Bhutanese negotiators. A major shortcoming was their lack of familiarity with modern Bhutanese history, especially with respect to the immigration, integration and legal status of the numerous settlers of Nepalese descent in southern Bhutan.

A number of books, reports and articles were published on this subject during the 1990s, but never before has the Bhutanese refugee problem been so thoroughly discussed as in this book by Michael Hutt. The historical development of the refugee problem is a central theme in his monograph. Hutt confronts traditional historiography, as it is presented by the Bhutanese state, with numerous reports and statements of officials, going back to the British colonial period. Unlike the Bhutanese state historiography, these documents provide helpful instruments to take a closer look at the number of Nepalese in southern Bhutan at the time. Together with the numerous myths, narrations, reports, statements and documents that Hutt has collected from refugees, we get a picture of the immigration history that is free from the purpose-oriented constraints of both the Bhutanese state and the refugees, for “‘real’ life and ‘real’ history are inherently more complex than any myth can allow, regardless of whether it is propagated by a nation-state or by dispossessed refugees” (p. 57).

The detailed knowledge with which Hutt describes the often-changing settlement and administration policies applied in southern Bhutan is indeed impressive. He elucidates the discrepancies in the treatment of the Lhotshampa, as the people of Nepalese origin in southern Bhutan are called,

on the one hand, and of the Bhutanese (Drukpa) population of the northern parts of the country, on the other. Documents of land ownership and receipts for tax payments have apparently been issued to the Lhotshampa for many years and in large numbers, and many of the refugees in the camps in Nepal are still in possession of them. This is a proof that this population group had been integrated in the Bhutanese state for decades. The Nepalese government has obviously failed to make this clear in its negotiations with the Bhutanese side concerning its categorization of the refugees.

Hutt's comments on the change of both states in their conceptions of the nationality of the Lhotshampa are particularly insightful. In about 1930, when Rana power was at its height, the Nepalese state regarded all emigrated ethnic Nepalese as the *rayat* ('tenant', 'subject', 'cultivator') of Nepal, whom it tried to lure back by various means, while the Bhutanese government of that time treated all ethnic Nepalese, who had settled and acquired land in southern Bhutan, as Bhutanese citizens. In other words, the opinions of Nepal and Bhutan at that time regarding the status and nationality of the Lhotshampa population were completely opposite to what they are today.

Another important aspect emerging from Hutt's research is that Lhotshampa cultural identity is embedded in a social context that differs in several respects from that of Nepal. For example, the system of social hierarchy seems to be less distinct than in Nepal. This may have to do with the fact that the inventors of this hierarchy, i.e. the Brahmans, were fewer in number among the Lhotshampa and also arrived in Bhutan later than members of other Nepalese groups. Nevertheless, Brahmans have acquired a special status among the Lhotshampa in recent decades. A further particularity mentioned by Hutt is the almost total absence of an independent Lhotshampa literature which developed only in recent years in the refugee camps of eastern Nepal.

The reign of the third Bhutanese king, Jigme Dorji Wangchuck (1952-72), became the most important phase for the integration of the Lhotshampa into the Bhutanese state. The southern parts of Bhutan were more affiliated to the central administration, and Jigme Dorji introduced a number of reforms that led to a cautious democratization in which representatives of the Lhotshampa were also involved. Even more important was the formal conferral of Bhutanese citizenship on people of Nepalese origin who fulfilled special conditions, such as ten years' residence, land ownership, etc. The text of the Nationality Act of Bhutan of 1958 left no room for speculation that this law was limited to those Nepalese who already lived in the country in 1958. In other words, it was obviously also meant to be valid for people who would immigrate at a later time. The expansion of the number of schools in southern Bhutan had further positive effects; the children were taught in Nepali besides in Dzongkha, the language of the

Drukpa. Finally, Lhotshampa were also encouraged to settle in the sparsely populated southeastern districts of Bhutan.

During the reign of the current king, Jigme Singye Wangchuck, this positive form of integration was systematically revoked, even though Hutt nowhere accuses the king of having been personally behind the process. First, a new Citizenship Act was introduced in 1977 that contained stronger conditions for the acquisition of Bhutanese citizenship. The Marriage Act of 1980 further complicated such acquisition and suspended marriage to foreigners retroactive from 1977 onwards. These political acts were supported by censuses that served as a basis for issuing new citizenship cards. 1958 became a key year. All those who could not provide personal tax assessments for 1958 ran the risk of being labelled illegal immigrants; certificates of earlier or later years were regarded as insignificant. On the basis of the census of 1988, the Lhotshampa were grouped into seven categories (F1-F7), of which only those in F1 were classified genuine Bhutanese. The total population of the country, which had been calculated at more than one million some years before, was now reduced to 600,000 in the government statistics.

Chapter 11 of the book, where Hutt analyses the changing conceptions of identity and Bhutanese nationalism, is of central importance for understanding the refugee problem. According to the author, the treatment of the Lhotshampa can be divided into three phases. The first began in 1952 with Jigme Dorji's accession to the throne. Hutt terms the politics of this phase "loose territorial nationalism": The presence of the Lhotshampa is recognized from historical perspectives, but at the same time they are allowed only a limited role within the Bhutanese system of government. From 1980 onwards, the state adopted a "more essentialist ethnic vision": The Lhotshampa were faced with the decision either to adopt Drukpa customs actively and visibly, notwithstanding their subordinate status, or to forfeit the right to reside in Bhutan. From 1989 onwards, the Bhutanese state applied a "narrowly ethnicized philosophy", whose essential components were the adoption of Driglam Namzha ('way of conscious harmony', a kind of code of behaviour), the obligatory wearing of Drukpa dress, and the exclusive use of the Drukpa language (Dzongkha). The last aspect caused the greatest discontent among the Lhotshampa population. They saw "the removal of Nepali from the school curriculum as a highly symbolic and deliberately provocative part of a more generalized attack on their culture" (p. 185).

What followed has been described in contradictory fashion, depending on whether the source is Lhotshampa refugees or the Bhutanese authorities. The whole development must be seen against the background of events that took place in neighbouring Indian areas where population groups of Nepalese origin have played a special role, the most important of these events being the end of the Buddhist monarchy in Sikkim and the

Gorkhaland movement in the Darjeeling district. These events led Bhutanese government circles to fear that their country might face a similar fate as Sikkim in the near future. The repercussions of international events must also be taken into consideration. The collapse of the Eastern Bloc was followed by a worldwide wave of rise of people's awareness. With regard to South Asia, Nepal can be cited as an outstanding example: here the authoritarian panchayat system was literally washed away by a mass movement for democracy and human rights. The events in Bhutan followed almost immediately in 1990.

In early 1988, Tek Nath Rizal and Bidyapati Bhandari, the two Lhotshampa representatives in the Royal Advisory Council of Bhutan, approached King Jigme Singye with a petition to revise the new regulations because of the serious problems they caused the Lhotshampa population. Both leaders were accused of stirring up the Lhotshampa against the government, and were expelled from the Advisory Council. Rizal fled to Nepal in 1989, where he founded the People's Forum for Human Rights Bhutan and published pamphlets against the Bhutanese government. The Nepalese panchayat government handed him over to the Bhutanese authorities (refugee circles claim that he was kidnapped in Nepal by Bhutanese security personnel). Henceforth, Rizal became a symbol of the Lhotshampa resistance against the Bhutanese regime. Young activists founded the Bhutan People's Party (BPP) and started militant activities in southern Bhutan. The discontent soon developed into a mass movement. The Bhutanese government began to call the Lhotshampa activists Ngolop ('rebel', 'mutineer', or better 'anti-national'). Many of them were arrested and had to leave the country after their release. The term Ngolop was extended to the entire families of such activists. The discussion of the Ngolop issue became the almost exclusive theme of the debates of the National Assembly up to 1998. According to Hutt, King Jigme Singye had a moderating influence on the parties involved.

As a measure resulting from the annual censuses, the Lhotshampa, who had originally been classed F1, were now reclassified into lower categories, especially if one of their relatives had been identified as Ngolop. This was covered by article 6c of the Citizenship Act of 1985. Hutt mentions a number of witnesses who confirm that King Jigme Singye repeatedly visited southern Bhutan and tried to persuade the Lhotshampa not to leave the country. But once the king had left the villages, the army and police took his place. The people were harassed until they decided to leave Bhutan (p. 226 f.). They were pressed to sign documents written in Dzongkha, confirming that they had left Bhutan voluntarily. All these procedures are illustrated by the life history of Dil Maya, a refugee in Nepal, who was born in Bhutan in 1933 (chapter 14).

The tide of refugees from Bhutan started in 1990, reached its climax in 1992 and died away in the mid-1990s. This was the period when the author

gathered the bulk of the material that was to fill his book. The further events until October 2002 are summarized by Hutt in chapter 15 in a kind of postscript. It is also here that he discusses the refugees' not entirely successful endeavours at self-organization with all their shortcomings and inconsistencies, as well as the international commitment to the people in the refugee camps in Nepal. Finally, Hutt describes the longstanding efforts of the governments of Nepal and Bhutan to find a solution to the problem through bilateral talks, as well as India's reluctance to help in arriving at a settlement.

Michael Hutt's extremely well-founded study successfully analyses the Bhutanese refugee issue. He has not missed any aspect that could be important for a better understanding of the problem. The author knows how to write in an absorbing way despite the high scholarly standard of the book. He not only describes the refugee issue but, in passing, also provides a comprehensive insight into Bhutan's political system and its historical evolution in general. There is nothing negative to criticize; at best one could mention that a glossary of the numerous Nepalese and Bhutanese terms explained in the text would have been welcome at the end of the book.

***L'eau, Miroir d'une Société. Irrigation paysanne au Népal central* by Olivia Aubriot. Monde Indien, Sciences Sociales 15e-21e siècle. Paris: CNRS Editions 2004. Pp. 321, 29 figures, 14 maps, 14 tables, 22 plates. ISBN: 2-271-06204-7.**

Reviewed by Dietrich Schmidt-Vogt, Bangkok

The interaction of societies and water is a subject that has fascinated scientists since Karl Wittfogel's seminal speculations in his book *Oriental Despotism* on the emergence of centralized power within the "hydraulic" irrigation-based societies of tropical Asia. The contribution to this subject by Olivia Aubriot, who describes herself as an agronomist-anthropologist but whose leanings are obviously more strongly towards anthropology than towards agronomy, is a study of water management in a village of the Middle Hills of central Nepal that is largely based on the cultivation of irrigated rice. Aubriot is in the tradition of French studies on irrigation, which was initiated by Pierre Gourou, and for which today the prominent representative for High Asia is Corneille Jest. For Nepal, her studies supplement the work on irrigation and water management in the Middle