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The European Bulletin of Himalayan Research (EBHR) was founded by the late Richard Burghart in 1991 and has appeared twice yearly ever since. It is a product of collaboration and edited on a rotating basis between France (CNRS), Germany (South Asia Institute) and the UK (SOAS). Since October 2002 onwards, the German editorship has been run as a collective, presently including William S. Sax (managing editor), Martin Gaenzle, Elvira Graner, András Höfer, Axel Michaels, Joanna Pfaff-Czarnecka, Mona Schrempf and Claus Peter Zoller.

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Address for correspondence and submissions:

European Bulletin of Himalayan Research, c/o Dept. of Anthropology
South Asia Institute, Heidelberg University
Im Neuenheimer Feld 330 D-69120 Heidelberg / Germany
e-mail: Hanser-Cole@urz.uni-heidelberg.de; fax: (+49) 6221 54 8898

For subscription details (see: <http://ebhr.sai.uni-heidelberg.de>)
or contact by e-mail: egraner@sai.uni-heidelberg.de

Contributing editors:

France:

Marie Lecomte-Tilouine, Pascale Dollfus, Anne de Sales
Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, UPR 299
7, rue Guy Môquet 94801 Villejuif cedex France
e-mail: mlecomte@pop.vjf.cnrs.fr

Great Britain:

Michael Hutt, David Gellner, Ben Campbell
School of Oriental and African Studies
Thornhaugh Street, Russell Square London WC1H 0XG U.K.
e-mail: mh8@soas.ac.uk

Netherlands:

Mark Turin
Himalayan Languages Project, Silodam 355
1013 AW Amsterdam Netherlands
e-mail: mt272@cornell.edu

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Editorial

In a previous editorial I took the opportunity to thank Martin Gaenszle for his assistance in editing the EBHR. In this issue, I would like to thank Mark Turin, who has tirelessly supported the *Bulletin* for several years. It doesn't matter whether the *Bulletin* is being published in London, Paris, or Heidelberg – Dr. Turin is always urging good scholars to contribute, making valuable suggestions, and helping to review articles. Most recently, he has offered his considerable services in helping to digitalize and archive past issues. For his continuing efforts, we are very thankful.

In our last issue (no. 25/26: pp. 208-213) Ben Campbell reviewed Kathryn S. March's *If Each Comes Halfway* and Brigitte Steinmann's *Les Enfants du Singe et de la Démone*. Unfortunately, the reference to the second book has been omitted on p. 2 of the table of contents of the same issue. We apologize.

William S. Sax

Managing Editor

Notes on Contributors

Sienna Craig is a Ph.D. candidate in cultural and medical anthropology at Cornell University. She has conducted fieldwork in Nepal and Tibet since 1993, and is also the co-founder of a non-profit organization, Drokpa (www.drokpa.org), that funds grassroots development initiatives in the Himalaya and Tibet. Her dissertation research focuses on issues of professionalization and identity among practitioners of Tibetan medicine in Nepal and the Tibet Autonomous Region, China.

Francis Khek Gee Lim recently completed his Ph.D. in anthropology at SOAS, London. His principal research interests include anthropological aspects of modernization, tourism, AIDS, and Christian communities in the Himalaya. He conducted fieldwork in Nepal on the cultural conceptions of the “good life” and is now embarking on a two-year research project on the theme “religion and globalization” at the Asia Research Institute of the National University of Singapore.

Kiyoko Ogura is a freelance journalist living in Nepal since 1993. Nepalese politics and history, with particular emphasis on the Maoist movement, have been her principal interests. After having worked as a magazine editor in Tokyo, she came to Nepal to write a book on the 1990 people’s movement. It was published in Japanese, Nepali and English (*Kathmandu Spring*. Lalitpur: Himal Books 2001. ISBN 99933-13-09-2). She also lists numerous articles in Japanese newspapers, magazines and websites.

Working with Buddhists

Alexander W. Macdonald

Editorial note. – Alexander William Macdonald is a doyen of Tibetan and Nepalese studies. Since 1949 he has been living in France where he held, until his retirement, the positions of a *directeur de recherche* at the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique and professor at the Laboratoire d'Ethnologie et de Sociologie Comparative of the Université de Paris in Nanterre. Both as the author of an impressive number of publications and as an influential teacher, Macdonald was and still is a rich source of inspiration and encouragement for many of his younger colleagues in and outside France. Educating a new generation of scientists who have successfully combined anthropology with philological studies is just one of his lasting accomplishments. The following article is an extract from a draft of his autobiography.

A Sikh friend in Delhi, who is active in the entourage of H.H. the Dalai Lama, asked me to explain to her how it happened that I became interested in and involved with Buddhism. This was my answer:

I was born in Scotland, near Dundee, in 1923. Up till the age of 18, I had practically no contact with Buddhists or Buddhism. On Sundays my parents attended fairly regularly the local Presbyterian Church and were friends of the minister. Around the age of 13, I was sent as a boarder to a Public School in England and there I attended the Church of England chapel services daily. At the age of 15 or so, it was customary to be "confirmed"; this little ceremony entitled one to participate later in Holy Communion. Both in England and in Scotland I refused to be "confirmed" despite some parental pressure. The mythological aspects of Christian theology were to me most distasteful and if, at that stage in my life, I had acquired any beliefs these seemed to change almost every week.

Since September 1939 Britain had been at war with Germany. As soon as I was old enough, I volunteered for service in the Indian Army. I wanted to travel and from what I had read, India seemed to be a fascinating country: I wanted to experience at first hand other forms of warfare than those which consisted in being bombed in Britain by Germans.

So, in 1942, I was sent to India as an officer cadet at Bangalore. There we were worked very hard physically and had little leisure in which to speculate on Man's place in the Universe. We had little contact with Indian civilians

outside the cantonment; but we had Urdu lessons with a munshi (teacher) at 6.30 a.m. several days a week. I began to read whatever I could find concerning contemporary Indian politics and was fascinated by the activities of Dr. Ambedkar.

After six months' intensive training at Bangalore, I became, in January 1943, a Second Lieutenant in the 10th Gurkha Rifles whose Regimental Centre was, in those days, situated at Alhilal in the Kangra Valley. I found this part of India very beautiful and liked the climate. As we were foot-soldiers there were long training marches across the countryside and through its villages and gradually I came to know more about the functioning of local Indian society. There were also daily lessons in Nepali (Khaskura); sometimes it was the British Colonel commanding the centre who taught the classes. Our recruits were mainly Rais and Limbus, hill peasants from eastern Nepal. In time I began to find their conversation more interesting than that of my fellow-officers. The only Indian officer in the centre was the Medical Doctor. A month's leave in July in Lahul brought me in contact near Kyelang with the first Tibetans I had ever seen.

In September I was sent to Burma. The 4th battalion of 10 G.R. was part of the 20th Indian Division which was then in the Kabaw Valley. From the time when the Japanese at Kalewa started their advance on Imphal up till the day on which the Kohima Road was re-opened I was actively involved in the fighting; on that day I was flown out of Imphal to hospitals at Comilla, then to Dacca. I was very ill and had been slightly wounded but the war in the jungle had not provoked in me any religious change of heart.

After sick-leave in Kashmir and a spell in "V" Force¹, again in Burma, where I shared the company of Nagas, Kachins, Chins, Shans among others, I transferred to Force 136. From April to September 1945, I was the military advisor to a group of partisans of Aung San's Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League (AFPFL) operating north of Toungoo in Southern Burma. These partisans were Burmese Buddhists, plainmen for the most part with a sprinkling of ex-students of Rangoon University who had been exposed to Marxist ideology. I was the only foreigner among hundreds of Burmese and as I lived and fought alongside them during some months we naturally talked together a lot and not only about the local political and military situation.

My previous attempts to know what "my" Rais and Limbus thought about the war had always turned short. Their Jemadars and Subedars were also as uptight if not more so than their men. All Gurkhas were mercenaries: life in highland Nepal was hard and poverty widespread. So service with the British whether in Italy, North Africa or Burma provided regular food, reasonable pay and the opportunity to see something of the world outside

¹ "V" Force operated fighting patrols and collected intelligence deep in enemy territory.

Nepal. Gurkhas submitted to discipline and encadrement with good grace for they knew that after demobilization and their return to their hill-villages their pensions would be paid by the British. The fights and wrongs of British Imperialists were not of much interest to them. They were fairly relaxed Hindus with a distinct liking for blood-sacrifices which manifested itself in particular at Dasher. The Burmese were much less belligerent and did not share the Gurkha passion for rum. They were not mercenaries paid by the British to help prop up the Raj. They were nationalists, fighting for the future political independence of their country. At the start of the war many Burmese had hoped that the Japanese would help them to rid their country of the British. The leader of the AFPFL, Aung San, had at first collaborated with the Japanese, accompanying their troops when they entered Burma in January 1942. However the Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere in which the Japanese attempted to enrol by force large areas of South East Asia was rapidly revealed to be a sinister political fiction. Moreover, Japanese brutality in Burma had already aroused hatred among many elements of the population. So my first real contact with Buddhism occurred in a situation of conflict and violence: Burmese Buddhists were fighting against Japanese Shintoists and Buddhists. Zen also, as an Australian author has recently put it, was at war. The first lesson I therefore learnt about Buddhism was that it is not necessarily non-violent nor pacifist. On the 19th July, 1947 Aung San having achieved independence for his country was assassinated by political rivals.

In 1973 in Nepal I met Aung San's daughter in a former Rana Palace at Jawalakhel. Suu Kyi and her husband Michael Aris rapidly became good friends for me and whenever I visited Oxford I used to stay with them. The last time I saw Suu Kyi was at Oxford in March 1988. She had just heard on the phone that her mother had had an attack and she had decided to return to Rangoon to take care of her. We walked together across Oxford, Suu pushing her bicycle alongside her, and arguing about the political merits of Mahatma Gandhi's policy of non-violence. I remember saying laughingly to Suu that if she needed help in raising the hill areas in her favour and mobilising them against the Burmese military junta, I was a volunteer for the job who was not lacking in experience. I told her that I thought that non-violence could only be successful against relatively well-mannered people like the British.

When I went to Kalimpong in September 1958 I had spent nearly ten years in Paris studying under teachers such as Paul Mus, Paul Lévy, Rolf Stein, Louis Renou, Jean Filliozat, Louis Hambis. I had a fairly good knowledge of the names of Tibetan authors and book-titles. Marcelle Lalou, another of my mentors, did not speak Tibetan and in those days there were no Tibetans in Paris from whom I could learn the spoken language. I went to Kalimpong (West Bengal) with the intention of studying a Buddhist monastery and how it functioned and maintained itself economically. Three

months after my arrival in Kalimpong, the local situation changed dramatically. The Chinese colonialists intensified their military pressure on Tibet; Lhasa rose against them; the Dalai Lama fled to India, followed by nearly 100,000 Tibetans. These dramatic events forced me to change my projects. I had brought with me to India a photocopy of a Tibetan manuscript of the *ro-sgrung*, "The Stories of the Corpse", and I found locally another hand-written manuscript of these tales in the form of a long scroll. One day, in Kalimpong I had the chance to meet an illiterate storyteller and singer of the Tibetan *Gesar* epic from eastern Tibet, who agreed to my recording "his" oral version of the *ro-sgrung*. We worked together for eleven months and it was in this manner that I learned to speak Tibetan. I also became very good at spellings as I had to consult dictionaries intensively. Several years later I published two volumes in French containing translations and analyses of some of these stories.²

I think I succeeded in showing that they are not just translations of fragments of the Indian *vetālapañcaviṃśati* as had been previously supposed. Another personality who arrived in Kalimpong around this time was Don-brgyud Nyi-ma, the 8th Khams-sprul Rin-po-che. He set to work at once with his entourage to build a stupa on Durpin Dhara, a hill some distance outside the town. When I first met him, he asked me if there were any stupas or monasteries in France and whether the head of the state (at that time General de Gaulle) was a Buddhist. Shortly afterwards I learnt that this large and learned lama was the author of a recently composed chapter of the *Gesar* epic entitled 'Jar-gling. It had been inspired by rumours of the British war against Germany ('Jar) which had filtered into Tibet during the Second World War. I still possess a manuscript of this chapter written for me at my request, in *dbu-med*, by some of his 'Brug-pa Bka'-rgyud-pa monks. The Rin-po-che rapidly became my "root lama" (*mül-guru*). I was to meet him again several years later when he had moved to the Kangra Valley with his community and before he died in 1980. Later with the help of Dvags-po Rin-po-che, I translated into French the *Guide to the Holy Places of Nepal*, composed by the 4th Khams-sprul, Bstan-'dzin Chos-kyi Nyi-ma (1730-1779). My French translation was later translated into English and is still consulted, I am told, by Newar guides conducting western tourists around Nepal Valley.

I have always considered that academic cooperation should not be restricted to Asian assistants helping western lecturers and professors to understand and to translate Asian texts into European languages. Moreover, the published results of cooperation, in the course of fieldwork, between anthropologists and informants from among the population they choose to study, are seldom read by any members of the population concerned. In an attempt to improve communications between the studying and the studied,

² *Matériaux pour l'Etude de la Littérature Populaire Tibétaine*, vols. 1 and 2. Nanterre: Société d'Ethnologie 1990 (2nd edition).

a Sherpa lama, Sangs-rgyas bstan-'dzin, and I decided to compose conjointly in Tibetan a short history of Buddhism (*Chos-byung*) in the Sherpa area of Nepal and a summary of the history of the Sherpa clans (*mes-rabs*). I also persuaded Sangs-rgyas bstan-'dzin to join his own autobiography (*rnam-thar*) to these two texts. The volume in question was reproduced photographically at Delhi and 200 copies in Tibetan format were donated to Serlog dgon-pa, at Junbesi, in Nepal. The book³ has since been used for the instruction of young pupils at the *dgon-pa* and for the teaching of Tibetan at the Ecole Nationale des Langues et Civilisations Orientales in Paris.

After Sangs-rgyas bstan-'dzin's death in 1990, my German friend and colleague Franz-Karl Ehrhard, who had also studied with him, and I, edited a posthumous work in Tibetan by our teacher entitled *Snowlight of Everest* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner 1992). Along with a short account of the Sherpas this work includes remarks on their behaviour-patterns (*spyod-lam*), marriage rituals (*bag-ma gtang-len*) and death ceremonies.

Some months after the initial exodus of refugees from Tibet, the Rockefeller Foundation in the U.S.A. generously donated funds so as to enable a limited number of Tibetans to go from India and Nepal to several countries in Europe – France, Germany, Holland, Italy (I have no note of the exact list) as well as to the U.K. and the U.S.A. in order to collaborate with western scholars in taking stock of the Tibetan holdings in their libraries. As far as I remember, the expenses of the Tibetans during their first one or two years abroad were also to be met by the Foundation. I became actively involved in the realization of this project. I saw a great deal of the Sa-skyapa family of Phun-tshogs pho-brang with whom I lived at certain periods in Darjeeling. We became close friends and many years after their move to Seattle we remained in contact.⁴ At the request of Princess Sgrol-ma, the Sa-skya Bdag-mo, I once took her to listen to Mouloudji singing at the Echelle de Jacob in Paris.

Dvags-po Rin-po-che and Thub-bstan ("Thaupten") Phun-tshogs lived for some time in "my" house at Kalimpong and when they were chosen to come to France by Professor Stein, I accompanied them to Dharamsala so as to obtain the blessing of H.H. the Dalai Lama on their projected journey to the west. Both Dvags-po Rin-po-che and Thub-bstan Phun-tshogs have since published in French accounts of their lives in France. The Rin-po-che is now retired, after teaching for many years in Paris, and lives near Fontainebleau.

³ *Documents pour l'Etude de la Religion et de l'Organisation Sociale des Sherpa*. Junbesi, Nanterre 1971. A curiously oblique reference to this work is to be found in S. B. Ortner: *Life and Death on Mt Everest*. Princeton: Princeton University Press 1999, p. 369.

⁴ Jamyang Sakya and Julie Emery: *Princess from the Land of Snows*. Boston: Shambhala 1990.

A big step forward in the mutual cooperation of foreign students of Buddhism was taken in 1976 through the impetus given by Professor A.K. Narain who was then at the University of Wisconsin, Madison. He succeeded in founding the International Association of Buddhist Studies. This association is truly international. It publishes a Journal twice a year and holds meetings periodically in different continents. For instance, I attended those held at Nalanda (India) and at Bologna (Italy). In 1990, I was elected General Secretary and organized the conferences held in Paris (France-UNESCO) in 1991 and in Mexico City in 1994 before handing over to Professor Oskar von Hinüber of the University of Freiburg. We have little or no money. The journal is kept going by subscribers but for the organization of larger and larger meetings we have to depend on generous invitations. In this context I would like to reiterate my thanks to Ananda W.P. Guruge who was in 1990 the Ambassador of Sri Lanka to France and to UNESCO; without his financial and material aid the 1991 meeting could never have taken place, nor the conference proceedings be published rapidly in 1992 in Colombo in English.⁵

Throughout my working life with Buddhists, I have always been impressed by the manner in which they helped one another. In conclusion I would like to draw attention to a few examples of this behaviour, less spectacular perhaps than the help Ananda Guruge gave me but nonetheless significant. When I was expelled from Kalimpong⁶ by the Indian authorities and was separated temporarily from my wife and two children who continued to live in Kalimpong, Phun-tshogs pho-brang, learning of my dilemma, immediately sent a superb Khampa to Kalimpong to give my wife all the help she needed. When I was faced with the problem of sending a complete set of the *Rin-chen Gter-mdzod* to Paris from Bodnath, the Cinia Lama sent a monk (who did not speak Hindi or English) with the load of books down to a friend of mine in Calcutta. On another occasion, a high Indian official with authority at Delhi airport put me on an overbooked plane to Patna (and took an Indian off it!), because, as he said: "You are working for the Buddha and I must help you".⁷ These remarks will be amplified in my *rnam-thar* which is in preparation.

⁵ *Buddhist Studies, Present and Future*. Colombo: Karunaratna and Sons 1997.

⁶ During the period in question (1958-1960) Kalimpong was declared by Pandit Nehru to be "a nest of spies". Perhaps I was one of the birds suspected. Whatever may have been the case, my "crimes" were so terrible or so obscure that they never could be formulated orally or in writing in response to my questions. Presumably, my "sin" was to spend my day working with an illiterate, drunken Tibetan storyteller, a refugee from Khams. No one could understand why I did not seek to play bridge with the Indian Politicals and the Tibetan aristos.

⁷ My own bibliography is in Samten Karmay and P. Sagant (eds.): *Les Habitants du Toit du Monde. Hommage à Alexander W. Macdonald*. Nanterre: Société d'Ethnologie 1996, pp. 27-30.

A Tale of Two Temples: Culture, Capital, and Community in Mustang, Nepal

Sienna Craig

Introduction

This article focuses on two religious and community institutions. The first, Thubchen Lhakhang, is a 15th century temple located in the remote walled city of Lo Monthang, Mustang District, Nepal. The other, located near Swayambunath in the northwestern part of the Kathmandu Valley, is a newly built community temple meant to serve people from Mustang District. This paper asks why Thubchen has fallen into disrepair and disuse over the last decades, only to be “saved” by a team of foreign restoration experts, while the financial capital, sense of community, responsibility, and cultural commitment required, one could say, to “save” Thubchen by people from Mustang themselves has been invested instead in the founding of a new institution in Kathmandu. Through two narrative scenes and analysis, I examine who is responsible for a community’s sacred space, how each of the temples is being repaired or constructed, designed and administered, and the circumstances under which the temples are deemed finished. Finally, I comment on how these temples are currently being occupied and used, since restoration/construction efforts were completed.

More generally, this paper speaks to anthropological concerns about local/global interfaces, particularly how the expectations and visions of cultural preservation, which often emanate from the west, impact and are impacted by communities and individuals such as those from Mustang. The circumstances surrounding these two projects illustrate larger questions about aesthetics and identity, agency, and transnational movements of people, resources, and ideas, as well as nostalgia for things “local” and “traditional” generated both by people from Mustang and their foreign interlocutors. I do not aim to suggest a simple dichotomy or polarity between the agendas represented by these two temple projects. Likewise, I do not aim to question the inherent value of restoration efforts such as those undertaken at Thubchen, or to imbue efforts such as the construction of the new Baragaon and Kingdom of Lo Community Temple in Kathmandu with a romantic or idealized notion of “Mustang community”. Rather, this paper examines the dynamics under which both projects are taking place and the different assumptions and understandings about culture, community, and capital (social and economic) they represent. I hope to show how these perspectives, and the social actors that they encompass, speak both to and past each other.

A few words on methodology are in order, before continuing with a brief introduction to the geography, history, and ethnographic setting of Mustang, and then moving into the scenes themselves. I have been conducting ethnographic fieldwork in Mustang, and among people from Mustang, since 1993, and was based in Mustang in 1996-1997 while on a Fulbright fellowship. Since 1997, I have been conducting ethnographic work – primarily through formal and informal interviews – among people from Mustang now living in New York City. The materials for this paper have been gathered through interviews in Mustang, Kathmandu, and the US, as well as through an analysis of Thubchen restoration project documents, some of which are available to the public through the Worldwide Web. In addition, I draw on the 2002 NOVA documentary, “Lost Treasures of Tibet”, which explores the history of the Thubchen restoration project and the controversies surrounding the artists who painted Lo Monthang’s temples, as well as the dynamics between the people of Lo Monthang and the foreign restoration experts.

Mustang, Nepal: Geographic, ethnographic, and historical setting

Mustang District is located in Nepal’s Karnali Zone, along the western massif of the Annapurna Range. The Mustang District Headquarters is located in Jomsom, a five-day walk south from Lo Monthang and a four-day walk north from Beni, Myagdi District, and the roadhead leading to Pokhara. Mustang District is divided into upper (northern) and lower (southern) regions. These distinctions are both locally and nationally defined, and have economic, social, political, and cultural ramifications. For the purposes of this paper, I refer to upper and lower Mustang as areas that are “restricted” and “non-restricted,” respectively, as defined by HMG of Nepal. However, the internal divisions, dialects, and distinctions of Mustang’s populace are much more complex than this division asserts. For our purposes, the most important areas to distinguish are Baragaon, a region of nineteen settlements (not twelve, as the Nepali name for this area implies) comprised of speakers of Tibetan dialects, clustered around the Muktinath Valley, and Lode Tshodun (Tib. *glo sde tsho bdun*), the seven principalities of the kingdom of Lo, a Tibetan-speaking area of which the walled city of Lo Monthang is not only the capital but also the “capitolium” in the classical sense of the term.¹ The village of Kagbeni marks the division between upper and lower Mustang, in that foreigners are not allowed to travel north beyond Kagbeni without a special, expensive trekking permit. The region just north of Kagbeni and south of Lode Tshodun is known as

¹ For more information on the history and ethnography of Mustang, as well as local distinctions in terms of territory and identity, see Dhungel 2002, Fisher 2001, Jackson 1984, Ramble and Vinding 1987, Ramble 1990, Ramble 1995, and Ramble in press.

Shöd Yul and is home to people who, despite close cultural affinities with both the people of Lo and Baragaon, speak yet another language. The regions just south of Baragaon are known as the Thak Khola and Panchgaon, and are historically home to the Thakali, an ethnic group that speaks a Tibeto-Burman language.²

The entire region encompassed today by the Mustang District, and in particular the Kali Gandaki River Valley, has been a locus of trans-Himalayan trade for centuries, particularly in the exchange of lowland grains for Tibetan salt. The people of Mustang have depended on a combination of agriculture, animal husbandry, and trade to wrest survival and even prosperity from this landscape that stretches from the southern slopes of the Himalaya to the high, dry Tibetan plateau. Mustang is also a locus of Tibetan Buddhist, Bön (Tib. *bon*), and shamanistic traditions and practices and contains many sites of religious pilgrimage, including the Hindu shrine at Muktinath. Indeed, it is one of the few places in the greater Tibetan-Himalayan cultural world in which such a diversity of social and political forms, as well as religious institutions and practices, continue to shape the living landscape.

Lo was first founded in the late 14th century, emerging as an independent kingdom in 1440 AD (Dhungel 2002: 4). Yet from its founding until the Gorkhali conquests of Jumla in 1789, and in some senses until the Chinese occupation of Tibet in 1959, Lo retained strong cultural and political ties to the ancient kingdoms of western Tibet, namely Guge and the Gung Thang region of present-day Ngari Prefecture, TAR (Tib. *mnga' ris skor gsum*). The present king of Lo (Tib. *rgyal po*, N. *rājā*), Jigme Palbar Bista, is the 25th in a lineage of rulers dating back to the late 14th century. The kingdom of Lo has been a part of the nation-state of Nepal since the Gorkhali conquests. However, due in part to the then king of Lo's cooperation with Gorkhali forces in the 18th century, and in part due to the implementation of the Dependent Principalities Act of 1961 by the government of Nepal, Lo was allowed to maintain a degree of local autonomy; many of the *rājā*'s traditional rights, allowances, and honorary positions were respected (ibid.: 4-5). Until their formal incorporation into the Nepali administrative district of Mustang, the regions south of Lo were also organized as clusters of semi-independent principalities that, while recognizing the authority and territory of the king of Lo, also maintained their own social and political boundaries.

As this brief history illustrates, the diverse communities that comprise Mustang District have retained strong cultural, linguistic, political, and economic ties to Tibet. Given this history, it is perhaps not surprising to note that, after 1959, the Tibetan Resistance (Tib. *chu bzhi gangs drug*) chose Mustang as their base of operations, from which they waged guerilla war on

² See Vinding 1999 for a comprehensive ethnography of the Thakali.

People's Liberation Army forces from 1960 to 1974.³ Colloquially known in Mustang and greater Nepal as the "Khampa", these resistance forces were eventually subdued by the Royal Nepal Army; yet the legacy of the Khampa presence is still felt in Mustang, and was one of the principal justifications used by the Nepali government for keeping upper Mustang forbidden to foreign access until 1992.

Mustang today: Thubchen restoration in contemporary context

The opening up of the kingdom of Lo to tourists in 1992 encouraged tides of foreign visitors, donors, scholars, and seekers of "authentic" Tibetan culture to Mustang. The kingdom of Lo is often depicted as a territory unspoiled by Chinese occupation or modern encroachment, a glimpse into the world of "old" Tibet. This vision of upper Mustang articulated by Nepalis and foreigners alike is often less a recognition of Lo's historical and geographic ties to western Tibet or its burgeoning commercial links to the Tibet Autonomous Region, China, than it is a vague, Shangri-La poetic of lost realms and hidden kingdoms.⁴ However, this "opening up" of Lo to the so-called outside world has ushered in changes spearheaded in part by the very forces that also seek to preserve and profit from upper Mustang's stark beauty and traditional culture, as well as by the Loba, or people of Lo, themselves.

Over the last decade the people of upper Mustang, including Lo Monthang, have borne witness to and helped to create micro-hydro electricity projects, schools, and eco-tourism ventures, to choreograph cultural shows, and build kerosene depots and campsites within their villages. Foreign foundations, multilateral aid institutions, Nepalese conservation and development organizations, individual trekkers, and local investors have funded this work. Meanwhile, the government of Nepal has not honoured an agreement promulgated in 1991, which stated that sixty percent of the \$70 per person per day trekking fees collected in Kathmandu for foreign travel to upper Mustang would be returned to the region for community development (Aryal 1999). Lobas of all socio-economic positions are aware of this broken promise; most feel powerless to confront the Nepali government on this issue.

Since 1999-2000, the building of a road south from the Mustang/Tibet border and north along the Thak Khola to Jomsom has also preoccupied

³ For more information on the history of the Tibetan Resistance and its impact on Mustang, see Knaus 1998, Norbu 1979, and Peissel 1967.

⁴ See Craig 2002 for a more detailed discussion of Mustang's position vis-à-vis contemporary visions of Tibet and "Tibetanness" in global context. See Lopez 1998 and Schell 2000 for discussions of Tibet and Tibetans as objects of western imagination.

people throughout Mustang District, and has marked a major shift in local life. Significantly, this “farm road” has relied almost exclusively on local and regional funds, as well as migrant labour from neighbouring districts to the south. To date, no foreign donors have been directly involved in the execution of this road project. In fact, many foreigners with stakes in Mustang have perceived this new road as a threat to the region’s cultural heritage, as well as its tourism industry.⁵ Others warn, perhaps rightly, against environmental and political havoc that the road could bring. Despite these ambivalent tenors surrounding the road, most people from upper and lower Mustang see the road as an economic windfall – decreasing the cost of rice, cooking oil, and other necessities, linking upper Mustang traders with economic centres to the north and helping to offset post-1992 inflation, while at the same time shortening the burden and the distance for people throughout Mustang to make the journey from Jomsom to Pokhara.

Although this new motor road has begun to create profound social and economic changes in Mustang, particularly in Lo, the largest project in the kingdom, in terms of financial investment and foreign involvement, is the Mustang Gompa Conservation Project. This venture began with plans to repair and restore Thubchen Lhakhang, a temple built in 1472 and located in the heart of Monthang. First conceived in 1992 but commenced in 1998, this effort has brought together a host of players: a US-based foundation, Nepalese conservation and development organizations, a Kathmandu-based international architecture and restoration firm, foreign and Nepali subcontractors, and the rather nebulous category of “community support”. Representatives of the US foundation itself estimate that the foundation’s contribution alone exceeded US \$3 million by the time this restoration project was completed in 2002-2003 (Bruce Moore, personal communication 2002).

According to project documents, the mission of this endeavour is threefold: 1. to train local people and craftsmen in conservation technology and make them proficient in the conservation and maintenance of historic structures in Upper Mustang; 2. to stabilize the structure, repair the roof, conserve and clean wall paintings, and create a photographic inventory of Thubchen’s frescos; and 3. to develop conservation technologies appropriate to Mustang. The project team defines their mission with urgency, embedded within a narrative of “modern” encroachment onto “traditional” lifestyles.

“All over the world traditional settlements and cultures are losing out to modernization and are disappearing at an unprecedented rate. When a

⁵ In a show of more general concern for the architectural and aesthetic integrity of Lo Monthang as a whole and the wall that surrounds the city, in particular, the architects and planners involved in the Thubchen restoration project, argued strongly for the rerouting of the motor road to avoid impacting Monthang directly – a move that met with initial local resistance but that has since been adopted.

culture loses its forms or when people no longer enliven those forms, their life quickly slips away forever”, reads one project document. “In Mustang, intervention to save the physical heritage of its monuments has started. If sufficient local commitment is manifested and supported it is hoped that the non-tangible aspects of cultural heritage can be conserved as well.” Also key to the project rationale is the place Thubchen’s artistic treasures occupy in the larger history of Tibetan painting, the scholarly imaginings of what Tibetan civilization at its apex might have produced, and the place of Thubchen’s iconography in a pan-Asian art history.

As it is represented in project literature and the NOVA documentary, Thubchen’s neglect and disrepair exemplify a vision that locates modernity in its myriad forms as a bankrupt agent, coercing locals to abandon tradition, making them indirectly culpable for their cultural demise. The lynchpin of this perspective is that cultural heritage is under threat by an onslaught of global modernity and must be protected. While there is truth to this argument, a more subtle, in-depth analysis of why such changes are occurring – the socio-economic, political, and even aesthetic underpinnings of Thubchen’s neglect – as well as the place of Mustang’s people as agents of this change, is rendered superfluous to the larger mission: to preserve, protect, and restore cultural heritage as a catalyst for what the arbiters of this perspective see as “positive” local practice. Although some of the motivations for restoring Thubchen remain opaque, the validity of the endeavour is never questioned. Combined with an “objective” aesthetic appreciation of Thubchen’s artwork and an invocation of religiosity,⁶ the impulse to restore and the means to do so are justification enough.

Before the restoration project commenced, Thubchen bore the marks of time poorly. Although local and regional artists and artisans had restored this temple two hundred years ago, its roof had since shifted, causing walls and beams to crack. Rainwater had ravaged one entire wall of paintings, and the main statue of Sakyamuni Buddha, to whom the temple is dedicated, was covered in a thick layer of dust, its copper patina all but vanished. Once the domain of the king of Lo and the site of many village gatherings, Thubchen is now rarely used by villagers. The fields that belong to Thubchen, once cultivated by villagers to produce surplus for the king and to support seasonal festivals, have lain fallow for some time; some have been sold or leased to private families for their personal use.

Why such shifts have occurred? Many explanations are possible. In the wake of the Chinese takeover of Tibet and the closing of the Nepal-Tibet

⁶ The temple restoration is couched by donors as a merit making activity, in Tibetan Buddhist terms. Project documents often make reference to the team’s sponsorship of religious rituals at the start of the project and in Kathmandu. See Coburn 1998 for a discussion of the religious ceremony that was conducted before work on Thubchen commenced.

border in 1959, Monthang's great religious institutions – centres of learning and pilgrimage sites for centuries – lost access to similar institutions in Tibet. Quite rapidly, the flow of cultural and religious knowledge was arrested and re-routed to religious institutions established by Tibetans-in-exile in Kathmandu, India, and abroad. Monthang went from being a centre, often visited by highly esteemed teachers, to a remote, “backward” locale – a sense that is profoundly felt by all generations of people from Mustang, albeit in different ways.⁷

Since upper Mustang was opened to tourism, local inflation has increased dramatically. This, combined with anger and resignation at the Nepalese government's broken promises and misuse of funds, has contributed to an already significant tide of out-migration and further shifted historical patterns of seasonal movement (Tulachan 2002). Adding to this is the perceived lack of educational and employment opportunities available within Mustang. Despite the opening of some private and foreign NGO-funded boarding schools throughout the district, many of Mustang's children are sent to schools and monasteries in Kathmandu or India, where their parents also migrate seasonally or semi-permanently in search of cash income. Many people from Mustang now live abroad, including about 700 people from Baragaon and Lo living in New York City (Craig 2002). Beyond this, all Loba – from those who do leave to those with no recourse to passports or visas to foreign countries – are acutely aware of the inequalities in standards of living and economy between urban and rural Nepal and more globally. Most see the influx of wealthy tourists to Lo without the fulfilled promise of government returns to Mustang's communities, as both hypocritical and damaging. Many Loba are cognizant of being kept in what one resident of Tsarang described to me as a “cultural zoo”, their lives frozen as exemplars of “tradition” by those who hold the purse strings: foreign donors, tourists, trekking agencies, and the government of Nepal.⁸

⁷ These historical circumstances could be read in the light of academic discussions of postcolonialism, in particular Gupta's (1998) discussion of “backwardness” as part of the postcolonial condition, and in the context of Nepal, part of what being *bikāsī* or *abikāsī*, “developed” or “underdeveloped”, means to many Nepalis (cf. Pigg 1992). Further, the fact that Lo has shifted over time from being a centre of Tibetan religion and culture to a peripheral and neglected part of a still “peripheral” country, and then, after 1992, propelled into the limelight in great part because of the artistic “treasures” found in places like Thubchen by those at the centre of global consumption of Tibetan culture, illustrates both the power and the limitations of World Systems theory (cf. Wallerstein 1997) in an age of globalization.

⁸ The situation in upper Mustang is distinct from the unrestricted areas of Mustang. In lower Mustang, locals have recourse to earning money from tourism, either through owning or working in trailside lodges or tea shops, by renting animals for portage, selling trinkets or antiques, or working in Jomsom's airline or hotel industries. However, in upper Mustang, foreign trekkers are required by

Further, the establishment of Tibetan monastic institutions in exile has affected a sea-change in perceptions about how religious institutions should be built and managed. A non-residential temple like Thubchen, associated with a lineage of married *rnying ma* householder-priests (Tib. *sngags pa*) has less cultural cachet than it used to. Throughout the diasporic Tibetan world, as well as culturally Tibetan Himalayan hinterlands, one can observe a shift toward monastic centres as the quintessential representation of Tibetan Buddhism or “Tibetanness” more generally. The celibate, monastic model of Tibetan religious organization, as a self-perpetuating and in some ways more circumscribed institution than its *rnying ma* counterparts, is more conducive to garnering patronage from both “insiders” and “outsiders”, than more fluid community-religious institutions like Thubchen.⁹

Finally, although Mustang is one of the very few Nepalese districts (three out of 75 at last count) to have escaped the violence of direct combat between the Royal Nepal Army and the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist), or Maobadi, during the eight years of the People’s War, the impacts of this civil war are still felt throughout the district. Tourism has plummeted, and with it local livelihoods. Also, current military injunctions against lowland migrant labourers (Tib. *rong pa*) entering Mustang, combined with the loss of labour power due to more permanent out-migration of Mustang’s residents, has meant that fields normally planted have remained fallow, community labour power has dwindled, and the maintenance of social and religious duties has become less feasible, if not less important, to those who remain in Mustang.

It is within this complex social, economic, and political context that the restoration of Thubchen and the construction of the Kathmandu-based Mustang Community Temple has occurred, and to which I now turn in more detail, through two ethnographic scenes.

law to travel in organized trekking groups. With almost no exception, the food and labour (guides, porters, etc.) for these excursions come from outside Mustang. Loba are prohibited from opening restaurants or tea shops, supposedly for ecological reasons, as this area is designated a “fragile” ecosystem. Most local development remains in the jurisdiction of the Annapurna Conservation Area Project (ACAP), a division of the King Mahendra Trust for Nature Conservation (KMTNC) – a fact that is resented by many local residents, including district-level politicians in Jomsom.

⁹ This distinction between “insiders” (*nang pa*) and “outsiders” (*phyi pa*) is a double entendre in Tibetan; it also distinguishes between Buddhists and non-Buddhists and, in the case of Mustang, between people of one’s community or not (Ramble 1997).

Scene 1: Thubchen Lhakhang, Lo Monthang, Mustang

By mid-morning, the sun had warmed the adobe roofs of Monthang. The alleys that stitch together this labyrinthine walled city of several hundred households just south of the Tibetan border were quiet. King Jigme Palbar Bista rode off early this morning toward the Tibetan border, in anticipation of the trading season to come. The *mkhan po*, or abbot, of Chöde, Monthang's main *sa skya* monastery, presided over prayers to an audience of young monks – students at the monastery school. Elders spun prayer wheels by the city gates. Their sons, daughters, and grandchildren – at least those who are not working abroad on invalid tourist visas or away at boarding school – were otherwise occupied: herding sheep, goat, and horses, gathering dung for household fires.

On this day in midsummer, Thubchen's exterior walls of fading vermilion earth belied the activity that had been going on inside the temple. An Italian fresco expert was poised for another day's work. His task: to erase from the murals on Thubchen's walls damage caused by several centuries of weather and smoke from ubiquitous Tibetan butter lamps. This was a delicate operation, akin to re-colouring a tattoo. He and a team of local and Nepali assistants, whom he has helped to train over the past year, will spend the day cleaning frescos and stabilizing walls by injecting, literally with a syringe, new mud behind the old paintings. Then, they will carefully clean the images, renewing the vibrancy of earthen pigments and semi-precious stone colours. Although the work was difficult, the Italian believed he was doing something extremely worthwhile. As he stared into the flaming gold and lapis eyes of a protector deity or caressed the contours of a *bodhisattva*, he whispered to himself, "So much beauty. Such lovely lines. This, this was a Renaissance, too. A Tibetan Renaissance" (Pushpa Tulachan, personal communication 2002).

At a town meeting the day before, villagers saw for the first time what the Italian saw everyday by headlamp – thanks to high-powered lights brought to Monthang by the NOVA documentary film crew. The Loba were amazed by the paintings' brilliance. Some even cried. They whispered among themselves, wondering how such a transformation was possible. Some of the local workers tried to explain their techniques, but were often met by confused expressions. "What do you mean you make a new wall behind the old one?", asked one villager. "How is it possible to lift a god off a wall and then put it back again?", questioned another.

Yet the main focus of this meeting was not to bask in Thubchen's glory but to try and answer a pressing question: Who would care for Thubchen once the restoration is complete?

The Chairman of the Village Development Committee, the man who called this meeting, was notably absent. Apparently, a pressing business deal across the border in Tibet was more important to him. The king and the

abbot both attended, as did a quorum of villagers. Under the cinematic glow of the NOVA lights, the abbot turned to the principal architect, an Englishman who had worked in Nepal for years and who spoke Nepali, and made a bid for the temple. He said he and the monks of Chöde would take care of the structure, so long as they could collect the funds from entrance tickets they planned to charge foreigners.

At a similar meeting during the first phase of the project, the abbot said the following (and his attention also turned toward the foreign sponsors and architects): “For us, it is as though you are bringing light to a dark room, or delivering sight to the blind”, one project document recorded. This statement is as striking as it is ambiguous. Read in one way, it can be seen as an expression of the “colonized mind”, (c.f. Marglin 1990, Nandy 1983) albeit recast here in the context of neo-colonial relationships between international foundations, national governments, and local people. Read with more sympathy, this statement is blazingly true, particularly when considered under the glow of NOVA’s high-powered lamps. This restoration work has unveiled a part of Mustang’s cultural and religious history that, for several generations, had been unknowable under the layers of dirt and decay. Whatever the essence of this statement, it is telling that the abbot also recently asked for the architect’s consent to use one of the entry rooms in Thubchen as a library for Tibetan Buddhist scripture. The architect approved, though seemingly without any recognition of the irony that Mustang’s religious superior now felt the need to ask the permission of the foreign architect to use Thubchen – a reflection on how concepts such as propriety and value, senses of ownership and responsibility have been interpreted by both local and foreign players in the project.

Since the beginning of the temple restoration project, the townspeople of Monthang have provided clay for roof reconstruction and unskilled labour at prevailing rates. After the king negotiated a deal for the supply of timber from Tibet, villagers were also held responsible for transporting these beams and planks from the Tibetan border to Monthang. Other supplies have been flown in via helicopter at the US foundation’s expense. As is revealed in much detail in the NOVA documentary, the exchange of architectural knowledge and skilled labour has not only been a one-sided transfer from foreign and Kathmandu-based experts to Loba. Although the foreign team has taken pains to train local artisans in new and in some cases high-tech restoration techniques, much of the restoration effort involved an appreciation for and revival of the rammed earth construction techniques that are unique to this part of the world and, in that sense, part of the indigenous knowledge of Mustang. Likewise, the foreign team took pains to allay initial concerns on the part of commoners (Tib. *mi dkyus ma*) and nobles (Tib. *sku drag pa*) alike about the proposed restoration techniques

and to do this through “participatory” town hall-style meetings.¹⁰ However, divisions persisted, both between the “insiders” and “outsiders” and within the community of Monthang itself. For instance, some, though not all, Monthang residents felt that while they had honoured their responsibilities to contribute to temple repair, the king and the abbot had not been as forthcoming. While the abbot manoeuvred to make a claim on and perhaps a profit from Thubchen, the king said little about the course of the restoration project and the long-term plans for Thubchen, despite his obviously strong feelings about Thubchen, a temple over which his ancestors presided.

Scene 2: The Baragaon and Kingdom of Lo Community Temple, Kathmandu

On a late summer afternoon, I made my way toward Swayambhunath, a Buddhist stupa at the northwestern edge of Kathmandu. Over the last few years, Swayambhu has been transformed. Once a principally Newar site, this so-called “monkey temple” has now metamorphosed into a shrine that bears the distinctive marks of Tibetan spiritual territory and the financial largesse of several of Nepal’s Tibetan-speaking cultural groups, particularly those from Manang District, just east of Mustang. In recent years the kora (*skor ba*), or circumambulation route, around the base of Swayambhu hill has been fitted with new prayer wheels; the road has been widened and re-paved, and a giant statue of the Buddha has been erected at the back entrance.

I was on my way to the site of the Baragaon and Kingdom of Lo Community Temple – a project I had first heard about from Mustang friends now living and working in New York City. I headed toward an imposing structure tucked in between the fray of Ring Road and the forest that encircles and shelters Swayambhu from the city below. The three-storey building was painted in signature “monastery” red and bore many of the same architectural flourishes as other Tibetan temples: afternoon sun reflected off a golden rooftop and classic Tibetan patterns trimmed the roofline, defined the doorways.

Originally from the village of Purang in the Muktinath Valley, Ngodrup was Vice Chairman of the Kathmandu-based Community Temple Managing Committee and the principal designer of the building. He had come to this

¹⁰ It should be noted, however, that even though “participatory” approaches are currently in vogue within an array of development circles – from the World Bank to small, grassroots organizations – the meaning and function of said participation can vary widely. “Participation” is still implicated in relations of power that often serve to mask and/or re-inscribe social divisions and silence debate. For a critique of such approaches see Cooke and Kothari 2001.

job with a relevant, if not motley, occupational history. The middle child of a well-off family, Ngodrup was ordained as a monk at a young age, a vocation to which he adhered through his early twenties, when he disrobed, married, and began the life of a businessman. During the eighties, Ngodrup made a living selling Nepali-made goods and occasionally dealing in gold in Bangkok and Hong Kong, while others from Mustang were off selling sweaters to tourists in Assam and Benares. In the nineties, Ngodrup switched his focus to real estate, and worked the Kathmandu scene. Ngodrup's real estate connections made possible the purchase of land on a sought-after corner of the Kathmandu market. Although not an architect or designer by training, Ngodrup has cultivated his natural aesthetic talent over the last few years, and has honed his skills as an amateur general contractor. Together, we walked the perimeter of the ground floor of the temple, a meeting room larger than a basketball court, with space enough to seat and cook for 500. The walls remained bare. Support beams had been cast in concrete to resemble the carved wooden beams of Mustang's monasteries and homes. The kitchen included two industrial size sinks, tiled counters, plenty of outlets for rice cookers, and a buffet bar that faced the main hall.

"If we can't feed everybody", Ngodrup said, "what sort of community place would this be?" I was struck by the contrast to Thubchen, in which the kitchen was being transformed into a museum and visitor centre.

From the gathering hall, Ngodrup and I headed upstairs to the main shrine room. A few young Newar craftsmen were hard at work, forging Buddha eyes and hands in meditative *mudrā* positions out of clay and cement. The central figure on the altar – Shakyamuni Buddha – was headless but otherwise complete.

"We hope to finish the statues sometime in the next few months", said Ngodrup. "But definitely before Losar [Tibetan New Year]."

"Are any of the people working on the temple from Mustang?", I asked.

"Not really. Not any of the craftsmen, anyway. We've got a couple of boys working on the construction, but mostly they're Newars, Tamangs – people from here in Kathmandu."

As we toured the rest of the complex, Ngodrup explained that the original plot of land at Swayambhu was bought ten years ago for \$17,000 by a consortium that became the temple's Managing Committee. This fifteen-member group includes the crown prince of Lo, the head *sngags pa* of Muktinath, and other wealthy and well-respected businessmen from Baragaon and Lo. However, the dream of building a community centre and temple has only begun to be realized since 2000-2001, a time during which the committee received a much-needed influx of \$66,000 from the New York Mustang Association. Combined with the approximately \$50,000 that

had been raised within Nepal over the last decade, construction was able to begin in earnest, Ngodrup explained. The association later acquired the plot adjacent to their original purchase with some of these funds, and now held title to several hectares of prime Kathmandu real estate.

Ngodrup and I continued up the stairs to the next floor. I was shown the main temple, a library, two bedrooms with attached baths, and a small kitchen, to be used by lamas who would come to give teachings. None of the rooms were painted, though they were tidy and usable in a makeshift way. When I asked Ngodrup to outline the purpose of this temple and community centre, he answered, “This place should be of benefit to many people. It is a place to celebrate marriage festivals and to mourn when people die, to feel like you are in Mustang even if you are in Kathmandu. This is important now because so many people have left Mustang. Young people in New York, Kathmandu, Tokyo are marrying differently. Before people started going abroad, someone from Lo hardly ever married someone from Baragaon. But all that is changing now.” Ngodrup’s comments gave me pause. How possible is it, I wonder, to recreate home in a displaced realm? How does nostalgia service the illusion of memory? What is memory, if not the warding off of displacement, loss?

“This is a root (Tib. *rtsa ba*) place”, Ngodrup continued, “and a meeting place (Tib. *thug sa*) for all the people from Lubra and Kagbeni north, everyone from Baragaon and Lo, but not for the people from Panchgaon or Jomsom, not for Thakalis.” Ngodrup emphasized the geographical borders of this displaced temple’s jurisdiction not with ill-will, but with a sure sense that the people of Baragaon and Lo belonged together in a way that the Thakali ethnic group from further south along the Kali Gandaki River Valley did not.

This distillation of local diversity into a sense of “Mustangi” identity by those from Baragaon and Lo now living in Kathmandu or abroad is also a reflection, I argue, of a growing sense of the global cultural capital associated with “Tibetanness” and a desire, by some from Mustang, to be identified as such (Craig 2002). Combined with this is a burgeoning sense – fostered by foreigners and the Nepalese state, though in different ways – that Mustang’s heritage is quintessentially Tibetan and coincidentally Nepali.

Of course, local realities complicate this picture. The linguistic, religious, and economic distinctions between these regions of Mustang are formidable, but the borders of identity within Mustang are at once more fluid and more nested within local networks of kin and commerce than this picture allows (Fisher 2001, Ramble 1997). Mustang is neither monolithically Buddhist nor of one mind about its relationship to the Nepalese nation-state, Chinese Tibet, or Tibet-in-exile. Within Baragaon and Lo, *rnying ma*, *bka’ brgyud*, and *sa skya* schools of Tibetan Buddhism are

represented, as is *bon*, the label ascribed to a diversity of “pre-Buddhist” Tibetan religious practice. Knowing this, I asked Ngodrup if any particular sect or lama is going to be bound to this temple.

“No”, he answered. “So far, we’ve had *sa skya* lamas here, but there are *rnying ma pa* and *bka’ brgyud pa* on our committee. Anyone can give teachings. Even *bon po* is okay.”

Despite careful budgeting, funds had begun to run low. Ngodrup now faced the task of finishing the parking lot, public toilets, and altar, as well as painting the inside of the building. He had hosted several fundraising events, and had put pressure on all the committee members to donate as much as they could to the completion of the temple. “I haven’t taken a salary for the last few months. It is more important to finish now. I can always do more business later.”

As we stood on the roof, Ngodrup motioned toward a dilapidated shack near a pile of wood, some bags of cement, shovels and trowels. “Once we finish here we’ll make a guest house over there”, he said. “A place for people to stay when they come on pilgrimage, especially the elders. We’ll let people stay for fifteen days with free fooding and boarding. If people want to stay longer, they will pay something, or they can work. The idea is not to make money. We have enough hotels in Mustang. And many people from Mustang are already making a lot of money. This is a place to practice religion and celebrate Mustang culture. But right now we don’t have the money to finish this plan. Maybe next year.”

The Swayambhu temple was inaugurated in the summer of 2002 and blessed by Chopgye Trizin Rinpoche, a revered *sa skya* lama as well as the maternal uncle and one of the so-called root teachers (Tib. *rtsa ba’i bla ma*) of the king of Lo. Other VIPs included the king of Lo and all the members of the temple committee. Although the altar was not yet complete, Chopgye Trizin Rinpoche consecrated the new statues and recited prayers. Video-tapes of this event filtered back to the New York Mustang Association, though not in time to be shown at the annual Fourth of July gathering in Central Park, although it was played later as the New York Mustangis celebrated their New Year, an occasion known in Mustang as “bringing home the trade”. Indeed, it is this transnational practice of remitting capital that has made it possible for people from Mustang to build a new form of long-distance community in the shape of the Swayambhu temple.

Between worlds, behind walls: Analysis and theoretical implications

These ethnographic scenes raise many practical and theoretical questions. What motivates the US sponsors to spend millions restoring this temple in remote Nepal? Why are New York-based Mustangis so intent on remitting,

not only to their individual families, but also to the creation of a shared religious and social space outside of Mustang – a space in which belonging is not defined at the village or clan level, but rather at the level of being from Mustang? Why is it so important for both parties to focus their energies on a physical structure? Beyond ethnographic specifics, what can we glean from these two distinct though interrelated tales about the local/global interface? How can this puzzle of culture, capital, and community encompassed by and extending beyond Mustang help us to think about globalization and transnationalism? What can these ethnographic scenes – at once local and global stories – speak to the ways communities are imagined and imagine themselves?

In order to answer these questions, it is useful to examine the common reference points of these two temple projects. Although actual work on these projects only commenced three to five years ago, plans for both were begun more than a decade ago, in the wake of Nepal's democratic revolution in 1990 and the opening up of Lo in 1992. Both projects would not be possible without a synergistic combination of foreign (or foreign-earned) capital and community-based support. The motivations for this support can be compared and contrasted. In both Monthang and Kathmandu, people with money and connections are determining the course of community building. In Lo, those with negotiating power are the foreign sponsors, the abbot, the king, and a select group of Lo nobles who are helping to manage local labour forces. In the case of the Swayambhu temple, the managing committee is a somewhat more diverse group, in part because wage labour abroad and the rise of a Mustangi nouveau riche has shifted social roles and economic expectations among people from Mustang. As a woman born into Lo nobility and now married to a Baragaon noble put it, "Before people started going to America, there was money but it was different. People still knew their social place. Now, with all this new money, it doesn't matter as much where you were born, who your ancestors were. What matters more is if you have cash." As such, the Swayambhu temple includes arbiters of both "old" and "new" Mustang wealth; it is dominated by those most powerful within the diverse group of people who classify themselves as belonging to this temple. Yet the explicit lack of foreign involvement in this project still points to a different type of sponsorship dynamic – and a different scale of social and economic capital – than the Thubchen restoration endeavours.

Another point of convergence between the two temple projects: In the end, the abbot and Chöde Monastery in Monthang did accept the responsibility to care for the newly restored Thubchen. By shifting Thubchen's religious domain *away* from the king, the villagers, and *rnying ma* traditions with which it has historically been associated, and *toward* the abbot and Monthang's *sa skya* monastic customs, the restoration team has contributed to a particular vision of the "little Tibet" aesthetics to which upper Mustang is at some level expected to conform – a shift that is also

reflective of the more general trend toward identification with large monastic institutions, as discussed above. As illustrated by the consecration ceremony held at the Swayambhu-based temple in Kathmandu, *sa skya* teachers have also risen to the top of the ranks at the new temple. This could suggest, as did Ngodrup, that these teachers are currently the most important lamas for Mustang; yet the influence of *sa skya* teachers in Mustang could change over time, as it has in the past. Or, it could be yet another iteration of the more pervasive shifts in Tibetan religious practice and community organization, away from fluid structures and toward more rigid institutions. This shift has distinctly diasporic roots and transnational implications.¹¹

Aside from these parallels, many differences exist between the two temple projects. While the Thubchen project is driven by a foreign model of “cultural preservation” inextricably linked to a “traditional” place, the Kathmandu-based temple recognizes that Mustangi culture extends beyond the physical boundaries and cultural lifeways of villages in rural Nepal. While Thubchen’s utility is primarily that of a heritage site, and is representative of what could be called the museumification of culture, the Swayambhu temple hopes to be a place less about the preservation of tradition per se, and more about community gatherings and religious practice – a site where one can celebrate being from Mustang. Nowhere is this clearer than when one considers the kitchens in both temples. Thubchen’s kitchen will now be a visitor centre and museum, while in the Kathmandu-based Community Temple the ability to provide for and sustain people is central to its design and utility.

I would like to turn for a moment toward the metaphor of prisons and walls. While visiting a Loba friend in New York, he described his existence there as living in a “prison without walls.” I explore this comment in more detail elsewhere (Craig 2002), but a few points are worth noting here, specifically as they relate to this tale of two temples. Most people from Mustang now living in New York are illegal immigrants. They reside in the US, but their jobs and their visa status bind them to the blocks of Brooklyn and Queens, from where they commute to Manhattan and New Jersey. They are at once transnationally mobile and locally confined – an arresting paradox of late capitalism and globalization.¹² Even more striking, however, is the fact that most Mustangis living in New York continue to work for

¹¹ See Zablocki 2004 for a detailed discussion of transnational Tibetan Buddhism.

¹² Similar dynamics, in which engagement with the global economy (through migration, employment, trade, etc.) brings people at once a new level of wealth or power at a local level and yet serves to entrench more systemic divisions of wealth at regional, national, and global levels are illustrated well by a number of recent ethnographies and works of social theory (e.g. Finn 1998, Freeman 2000, Spyer 2000, and Tsing 2000).

either Indian or Chinese bosses. The old Nepali adage, in which Nepal is a “yam caught between two boulders” is recast on the streets of the USA.

Although younger, unmarried Mustangi immigrants are more likely to gravitate toward the electric excitement of New York, older Mustangis view their tenure in the US as a liminal time, economically productive but socially unmoored. In order to create a network of financial and emotional support they founded the New York Mustang Association. Among other activities, the Association hosts parties to celebrate festivals that draw on both Baragaon and Lo customs. Over the last three years, the association’s coffers have grown, making possible the large donation to the Kathmandu-based temple. Perhaps the New York Mustang Association saves and remits and instructs Ngodrup to build in the hopes of cobbling together a sense of home between their memories of village days, their dreams of a comfortable Kathmandu-based retirement, and their present state, a life of little rest and minimum wage inside America’s economic underbelly, in which participation in Mustang life is limited to long-distance phone calls and videos shuttled between the Kali Gandaki Valley and the boroughs of New York. Many of their actions are informed by nostalgic sensibilities – a theme reflected in a diversity of modern displacements, from the refugee who escapes the violence of genocide to the global worker who leaves his home and country to earn income abroad.

Let us now consider this idea of a prison without walls in light of the wall that surrounds Monthang. Taken metaphorically, the earthen wall that surrounds Monthang can be conceived as a prison of tradition or, as some Loba themselves describe, a “cultural zoo” to which they have been relegated by the government of Nepal, foreign sponsors, and tourists, and whose preservation has taken precedence over other types of development efforts, from clean drinking water initiatives to maternal and child health care projects. It is significant, then, that many Loba are now choosing to build new buildings – from schools to houses – outside the walls of Monthang. This represents a certain rupture of social structure and physical space, in that such construction, historically forbidden by Lo’s nobility, is no longer challenged by the current king, but instead by outsiders, including foreigners interested in the maintenance of Monthang’s historic and aesthetic integrity.¹³ These circumstances also capture something of the paradoxes that define life in Mustang these days. On the one hand, what was once a barter-oriented economy has become monetized and placed in dialogue not only with rupees but also with dollars, either foreign-earned or foreign-donated. In turn, this has contributed the rise in land prices in and

¹³ A number of ongoing disputes exist between the king and other members of the royal family of Lo, as well as between local villagers and the foreign restoration team about how and under what guidelines building outside the wall should be handled.

around Monthang as well as a growing resentment among locals about their inability to acquire the sort of capital that draws foreigners to Mustang in the first place. On the other hand, the sense of international value and “world heritage” attributed to Lo Monthang and Thubchen, has further shifted how Loba conceptualize the value of their history and culture, and has raised questions about who bears the responsibility for so-called cultural preservation.¹⁴

The foreign and Nepali restoration team’s desire to renew Thubchen can be viewed in the light of assertions about the workings of multiculturalism in a global age (Turner 2000). Turner’s critique of globalization grants a weakening of the nation-state, often cited by globalization theorists, but couples this consideration with a rise in consumerism, the “fetishes of multiculturalism”, and the “salience of ethnicity” in constructions of globalized visions of culture. Here, the shifting place of the nation-state can be seen in the international consortium brought together to restore Thubchen at a historical juncture when the Nepalese state could not be weaker, as well as the transnational capital and labour mobilized to do so. Turner further argues that this sort of multiculturalism focuses on the superficial instead of honing in on the political and economic causes and conditions that are shaping the globe. When turned toward an analysis of the Thubchen project, this translates into a sharpening of the division between “traditional” and “modern” societies or places (Lo Monthang versus New York, for instance) as opposed to an analysis of the ways these two ends of a social and geographic spectrum are interlinked, and an examination of the fact that the reification of “tradition” and quests for “authentic” culture itself are products of modern life. The desire to preserve cultural diversity and what Turner calls “the salience of ethnicity,” in this case the social capital and exoticism associated with Tibet in general and Mustang as a quasi-Tibetan “forbidden kingdom” in particular, can be applied to a more cynical reading of the foreign restoration team’s good, if somewhat paternalistic, intentions. That is, harbouring more vulnerable, less powerful groups from the exploitative, homogenizing forces of global modernity. And yet, in making such claims to cultural preservation – as do Thubchen project documents and other representations of this effort – a vision of the people of Mustang as essentially un-modern proliferates. Their place in the 21st century as agents of their own cultural change and wielders of transnational capital, albeit on a different scale, goes unrecognized. Questions about who can own modernity, as well as who can own tradition, remain unanswered.

Let us return for a moment to the first ethnographic scene I presented.

¹⁴ The two main temples in Lo Monthang, Thubchen and Champa, were in fact being considered as additions to UNESCO’s World Heritage Site list in the late 1990s. However, due to disagreements between the UNESCO delegation and local residents, as well as among Loba themselves, the application for World Heritage recognition was abandoned.

The Village Development Committee Chairman's decision to attend to his business deal in Tibet, instead of the meeting that would determine the future stewardship of Thubchen, signals some of the paradoxes described above. We could view the chairman's absence as that of a person who chose between taking care of his local responsibilities for a "traditional" place and taking care of more "modern" economic concerns. Alternately, we could say that the modern invention of Thubchen as a quintessentially traditional place, in which he is implicated, bears less on his personal life-world than does the window of economic opportunity available for him through seasonal trade in Tibet. Perhaps he felt less invested in the decisions about Thubchen than he did in engaging in cross-border commerce. What is interesting, though, is that this trade also represents a convergence of "tradition" and "modernity". It is a moment of cultural continuity and change, in which the chairman enacted his part in a centuries-old trans-Himalayan economy, albeit with a transformed roster of commodities. Instead of bartering salt for grain, or horses, yak, and goat, he now traded in Nepal-made biscuits, Hindi film videos, and cash, which he exchanged for ready-made Chinese goods. Still, it is significant that he chose to place his efforts, and in that sense his solidarity, not with the cross-cultural cultural preservation agendas but instead with the maintenance of another form of Mustang social life.

But what of the tears Loba cried when they saw the artwork of their ancestors restored? This speaks to something beyond strategy or simple categorizations. An old temple like Thubchen is a paradoxical object, a site of passionate ambivalence. At once treasure and cage, living institution and museum, it is symbolic of the cycles of decay and renewal in Mustang that demands both a broader historical view and a closer reading of the contemporary context in which this effort has taken place – particularly when considering questions of motivation and responsibility for so-called cultural preservation and the more emotive and aesthetic aspects of such endeavours. In contrast to Turner, Appadurai's (1996) efforts to sketch out the universalizing trends of global modernity speaks to this less material and more emotive aspect of the two temple projects. Although Appadurai has been criticized for the ways he attempts to define global modernity in terms of "scapes", "ruptures", and "deterritorialization", without much recourse to the political economy in which such phenomena occur, his project is valuable precisely because he attempts to show how imagination circulates, and through these movements, transforms ground truth realities across the globe. Appadurai's focus on culture flows, rather than political economy, is useful in thinking about the motivations and desires behind the circulation of capital in both temple contexts – what motivates the foreign restoration team, the king and abbot, the committee chairmen, and all the people from Mustang who have contributed funds to the Kathmandu-based temple or in-kind labour on the Thubchen project.

In the case of the Swayambhu temple, the goal is to use cash earned abroad to create a space that is expressly not about money. At least, this is how the managing committee of this project talks about it. However, without access to hard cash generated by people from Lo and Baragaon engaged in the transnational remittance economy, this temple could not be. Here, the idea of “flexible citizenship” described by Ong (1999) in relation to powerful and wealthy Asian corporate nomads can be applied to a different category of flexible citizens: mostly illegal Mustangi workers. They are using their foreign-earned cash to re-imagine a community and create a social and spiritual space whose meaning is explicitly not limited to an expression of material wealth and, even more significantly, not dependent on foreign sponsors as the source of that wealth. This in itself is a powerful statement about questions of ownership and responsibility for Mustang culture, writ large.

In contrast, the Thubchen restoration project, which is billed as an urgent call to restore “traditional” (and in that sense non- or pre-capitalist) cultural values, is almost entirely dependent on foreign capital and also quite out of synch with the socio-economic realities of Lo Monthang, in terms of the sheer amount of dollars invested and, ironically, the “pricelessness” attached to the artistry found on Thubchen’s walls. In the actions of some people from Mustang – from the absent chairman to the eager-to-please abbot or the resigned king – we see the paradoxes that arise when large sums of cash pour into geographically marginal, yet well-connected places. And, when examining both projects, we see a development truism (and often a mark of development failure) in action: that it is easier to build or restore a physical structure than it is to realign social, economic, and political realities at a more systemic level, in a way that allows those dubbed the representatives of “traditional culture” to survive and adapt to massive change.

Finally, when thinking about the impetus for people from Mustang to invest in the Swayambhu-based temple, I am reminded of Benedict Anderson’s discussion of “long-distance nationalism” (Anderson 1998). Anderson argues that nationalism is often a child of exile or diaspora. It is precisely these long-distance circumstances that fuel an impassioned imagining of home. Furthermore – and this bears particularly on the migrant workers of Mustang – there is what Anderson calls a “differential tariff on labor” within the workings of global capitalism, which can contribute to the fermentation of nationalist sentiment. The events of September 11, 2001 could be seen as one example of these displaced nationalist networks. We might see an alternate, more benevolent vision of this labour differential in the global economy in Mustangis’ abilities, even as poorly paid workers in the underground economy, to build something of beauty and significance back home.

The fact that people from Baragaon and Lo are now uniting to erect a community temple is also an example of how transnational labour patterns contribute to the reshaping and re-imagining of “community” itself. This could be seen as a classic reformulation of Fredrik Barth’s thesis in his *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*, about the relational and imminently flexible nature of social divisions (Barth 1969). Yet the frames of community are no longer simply bound to a geographical space, but instead exemplify a different kind of boundary drawing, at once tied to Mustang’s geography and transcendent of it. Here, the economic logic of global capitalism – the place for illegal workers within vast, chaotic urban economies and what they choose to do back home with what they earn abroad – is remaking social and physical landscapes from Mustang to Manhattan and back again.

Conclusion: On finished products and further change

In conclusion, I offer a few words about utility and “finished” products. I also take a moment to bring the stories of these two temple projects up to date.

The completion of the Swayambhu temple has been relatively straightforward. The walls remained bare for a time, the statues unpainted. But the altar was consecrated, the statues continued to take form, and the kitchen was functional. The space began to be used for weddings, religious rituals, and social gatherings of other sorts after its official inauguration in 2002.

To finish Thubchen, however, was another matter. In the opinion of the foreign donor organization and the architects, the Thubchen restoration project was considered complete once the structure was secure and the frescos were cleaned. However, many of the temple’s paintings had been partially destroyed over the years. As discussed in some detail in the NOVA documentary, villagers, the king, and the abbot all wanted to see these religious images restored to wholeness. In particular, they asked that these icons’ shadow limbs be redrawn by today’s best painters, a project that Monthang residents argued would also provide local and regional employment. However, the foreign team opposed this idea, saying it would destroy the authenticity of the original 15th century frescos. Although a sincere lauding of the genius that created Thubchen – whoever the artists were – this perspective represented an ideal of artistic integrity and art history that did not correspond to the ways these images were viewed by the community in which the art is located. To Loba, the idea of leaving a protector deity or *bodhisattva* half complete, not for lack of resources or talent but because the artistic touch might vary, is anathema to what they saw as the primary purpose of these paintings: namely, guides to religious practice and sacred images first, cultural relics and exemplars of Tibetan art on the global scene second. While the westerners continued to focus on the question of who the artists of Thubchen were, Loba remained less concerned about individual

claims to authorship and more concerned with the overall aesthetic, from their cultural perspective. However, the preservationists won out on this point in the end – a further push, one could argue, toward the alienation of people of Mustang from their so-called living cultural institutions. In turn, this contributed to the impetus among people from Mustang to create a cultural and religious space of their own, outside the realm of contested cultural politics, outside Mustang.

But what of the two temples today? By the winter of 2003-2004, massive gatherings of people from Lo and Baragaon took place at the Swayambhu-based Mustang Community Temple. In the weeks leading up to the Tibetan New Year in February 2004, Trizin Rinpoche, the head of the *sa skya* school, gave a series of religious empowerments (Tib. *dbang*) at the temple. These events drew hundreds of people, mostly from Mustang, on a daily basis. In an interesting turn in the forging of “Mustang community” outside Mustang and the re-invention of tradition, the community temple also began offering classes in Mustang’s songs and dances to the generation of Mustang’s children who have been educated in Pokhara, Kathmandu, and India. Yet despite these signs of success and the demonstration of this temple’s utility, many people from Mustang whom I interviewed about the role of the community temple continued to view it with ambivalence. As one person from Baragaon put it, “The place doesn’t really have a root. It is sort of like how Mustang is becoming – empty. There is no main teacher, even though the *sa skya pa* have been around a lot. It makes us all wonder whom the place is for.” In that sense, questions of local and regional identity – of what it means to be from Mustang and who is responsible for maintaining cultural continuity – have not been solved by this locally-funded effort, but rather recast. Others I spoke with were more cynical. As one woman from Monthang put it, “Oh, that place is supposed to be about religion and making merit. But really it is just another place for all those women whose husbands are in America to show off their gold.” And so, a place that was constructed with the explicit hope that it would not be about money – and not be controlled by foreign funding or “outsider” visions of what Mustang should be – has become in some people’s experience a site of conspicuous consumption for those who are the conduits for another type of foreign-earned wealth.

The legacy of Thubchen project continues to evoke strong responses in people from upper Mustang – both positive and negative. In particular, many find it both frustrating and shameful that it has taken foreigners – and so much foreign money – to restore places that they feel belong to them, but whose ownership has been called into question and recalibrated through this international effort. Some from Mustang expressed questions that are at once practical and ideological about the value placed on upper Mustang’s cultural relics as compared to foreign and Nepalese investment in Mustang’s living population. Despite this ambivalence, the team of local, regional, and

foreign expertise that was assembled to carry out this work has gone on to fund and oversee the restoration of three other of Lo's artistic and architectural sites: Champa Lhakhang, a temple to the Buddha of the Future (Tib. *byams pa*, Skt. *Maitreya*) also located in Monthang; Lo Gekhar, a monastery complex several hours' walk south of Monthang, that is associated with Guru Rinpoche and the founding of Tibet's first monastery at Samye; and the main monastery in the village of Tsarang, founded in the 11th century and, at its height, home to a community of more than 2,000 monks. As such, a sense of pride and compromise has been reached in this cross-cultural endeavour. But the question of what these newly restored institutions will be used for remains, now that notions of propriety, ownership, and responsibility have been realigned.¹⁵

In closing, I recall a conversation with a friend from Lo Monthang during his visit to the US in 2003. On previous occasions, this doctor of Tibetan medicine (Tib. *am chi*) and royal priest to the *rājā* of Mustang, had expressed appreciation for and ethical consternation over both the restoration work being done in Monthang and the drive of people from Mustang to invest their foreign-earned capital not in community institutions in Mustang (such as the school of medicine and health clinic he helped to found) but instead in Kathmandu-based efforts like the Community Temple at Swayambhu. He had argued with foreign representatives of the restoration team over issues of public property and land rights during project meetings in Monthang. He had also expressed his hope to a meeting of the New York Mustang Association that they would consider channeling funds to more projects in Lo itself in the future, challenging them to question why "local development" always seemed to emanate from foreign efforts and pockets. What was it about the relationship between "insiders" and "outsiders" in Mustang, and about the politics internal to Mustang, that contributed to this dynamic, in which foreigners funded projects in Mustang while people from Mustang invested elsewhere?

On this occasion, I had taken my friend to the Metropolitan Museum of Art. We had toured through the Egyptian tombs ("How did they possibly get all those rocks here? It must have cost so much!"), wandered through early Christianity ("Now, I know that the man stuck to the wooden beams is Jesus, and the woman there is his mother. But who is Jesus's father?") and made a failed attempt to visit the Nepalese and Tibetan collections, which happened to be closed. Next, we arrived in East Asia, and came to stand in front of a giant fresco. This mounted fragment of a much larger Chinese work depicted the lives of the *bodhisattva*. At more than four metres tall and twice as wide, it impressed us both. Again, my friend asked me how

¹⁵ Since its restoration, Thubchen has not been the site of much local religious ritual, but has instead been used primarily as a gathering for staged cultural and political events, such as those sponsored by ACAP.

something so fragile, so old, and so large, could have made it to New York. “What motivated people to bring it here?”, he asked. I did my best to explain how large museums like this had acquired such “treasures”. For a while, we just sat on the museum benches, both a bit overcome by the beauty of the piece, and what its presence here meant. “This is the sort of place that the paintings in Thubchen and Champa belong”, he said. “They don’t belong in Mustang anymore.”

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Zombie Slayers in a “Hidden Valley” (*sbas yul*): Sacred Geography and Political Organisation in the Nepal-Tibet Borderland¹

Francis Khek Gee Lim

The Himalaya, with its high peaks and deep valleys, served for centuries as natural geographical frontier and boundary between the kingdoms and states of South Asia it straddles. Given the strategic advantage of controlling that high ground, it is little wonder that the Himalaya has throughout history witnessed countless skirmishes between neighbouring states that sought such strategic advantage. The interest in this mountain range, of course, was not restricted to matters of defence. North-south trade routes criss-crossed the Himalayan range, connecting the Tibetan plateau to the rest of the Indian subcontinent, ensuring lucrative tax revenues for those who controlled these economic lifelines. In the era of European colonialism in the “long” 19th century, the Himalaya became embroiled in what has been called the “Great Game” between the British and Russian empires, who sought to expand their respective commercial and imperial interests in the region. Due to its pristine environment, awe-inspiring mountains, and the remoteness of its valleys, the Himalaya was also the well-spring of countless legends, myths and romantic imaginings, engendering the sacralisation of the landscape that had served as a source of religious inspiration for peoples living both in its vicinity and beyond. Hence, despite its remoteness – or because of it – warfare, pilgrimages, trade and the search for viable areas of settlement have been some of the key factors contributing to the migratory process and interest in the area.

Largely because they lay in the frontier zone, enclaves of Tibetan settlements located deep in the numerous Himalayan valleys were often on the outer fringes of state influence, enjoying a significant degree of local autonomy until processes of state consolidation intensified in the last century or so, as exemplified by the case of Nepal. A particular body of Tibetan religious literature suggests that located in the vast mountain range

¹ This article is based upon a larger PhD project on the pursuit of the “good life” in the Langtang Valley, northern Nepal, where fieldwork was conducted from July 2001 to August 2002. I acknowledge with gratitude financial support from the following: Royal Anthropological Institute’s Emslie Horniman Scholarship; University of London Central Research Grant; and SOAS Additional Fieldwork Award. I wish to thank Prof. JDY Peel, as well as the editors and reviewers of EBHR, especially Prof. András Höfer, for their helpful comments and suggestions in the course of writing this article.

were a number of sacred beyul (*sbas yul*²), ‘hidden valleys’, where the Tibetan royal courts and their subjects might seek refuge when their societies faced the prospect of dissolution as a result of external threats. Contemporary scholars have identified some of these beyul, and have conducted a number of important ethnographic and historical studies (e.g. Aris 1975; Ehrhard 1997; Childs 1998, 1999; Diemberger 1991, 1996, 1997; Orofino 1991). Apart from enriching our ethnographic knowledge of these locales and their inhabitants, some of this research (e.g. Childs 2000, 2001; Diemberger 1997) further provides us with insights into patterns of trans-Himalayan migration as well as the processes through which these locales had been incorporated into nascent nation-states. In these remote communities, unique systems of social and political organisation evolved, often as the result of the articulation of specific local historical realities within the broader socio-cultural context of elements of Tibetan and Indic origin (cf. Clarke 1983: 25). A major volume of essays (Blondeau and Steinkellner 1996) on the history and social meaning of mountain cults in Tibet and the Himalaya has provided a crucial impetus to the study of political organisation in these mountain communities, effectively combining textual analysis and ethnographic method.

Despite such effort, there is a need for much more detailed social-historical research into the political systems of these enclaves, many of which are located in the Nepal-Tibet borderlands (Ramble 1997: 339-340), not least because it will serve to illuminate present-day patterns of domination, status valuation and local political processes. More specifically, studies into the various beyul thus far do not sufficiently explore the relation between the beyul concept and the historical formation of specific social and political structures. This article sets in part out to address these concerns in Himalayan research by presenting an analysis of the indigenous form of political authority and structure in the Langtang Valley, one of the significant beyuls identified in the Tibetan sources. None of the few previous cursory studies on the Langtang valley have included the concept of beyul in their accounts, nor do they provide any historical account of the formation of Langtang’s indigenous social and political organisation. This article argues that the notion of sacred geography not only forms an important part of social memory and discourse in Langtang, but also that the beyul concept had in Langtang’s history served an ideological function in relation to the development of its socio-political structure. Any attempt to understand the social practices of the inhabitants of Himalayan enclaves such as the Langtang valley must take into account wider geohistorical and geopolitical realities, as van Spengen (2000) has so admirably shown in his analysis of the trading practices of the Nyishangpa in the Manang district of Nepal. This

² Italicized terms and names are given in correct transliteration or transcription. The transliteration of Tibetan follows Wylie. Chinese is transcribed according to the Pinyin system.

is one of the key methodological considerations that guide my analysis throughout the article.

The setting

The fieldwork for this research was mainly conducted in the Langtang Village Development Committee (N. *gāũ bikās samiti*), which covers four hamlets totalling 540 inhabitants³ divided into at least sixteen named patrilineal exogamous clans, living in 109 households. The village is located in the Langtang valley just inside Nepal's present-day border with Tibet. The valley stretches in an east-west orientation for about 22 miles (approx. 35 km), carved out by the westward flow of the Langtang Khola that originates from the glaciers of Langshisa.

Following Hall (1982), I take the "Langtang region" to encompass an area of around 200 square miles that is drained by the Langtang Khola. Geologically, this region falls within the Inner Himalaya, while climatically it is in the transitional zone between the southern monsoon region and the arid deserts of the Tibetan plateau. The Langtang valley itself encompasses several ecological zones, from the relatively fertile subtropical forests at the western entrance of the valley, to the rocky, wind-swept stretches of Himalayan pasture that support herds of bovines and sheep belonging mainly to the valley's inhabitants. With its close proximity to Nepal's capital, Kathmandu, and its enchanting natural scenery, it was incorporated in 1976 into the national park that bears its name. At the town of Syabru Bensi, about a day's walk to the Tibetan border, the valley intersects with an important trade route that has for centuries linked southern Tibet with central Nepal and the Indian subcontinent. Even to this day, just before the Nepalese national festival of Dasain in October, flocks of Tibetan sheep travel along this mountain route to Syabru Bensi to be transported further on to the rest of Nepal.

³ Henceforth known as "Langtanga".

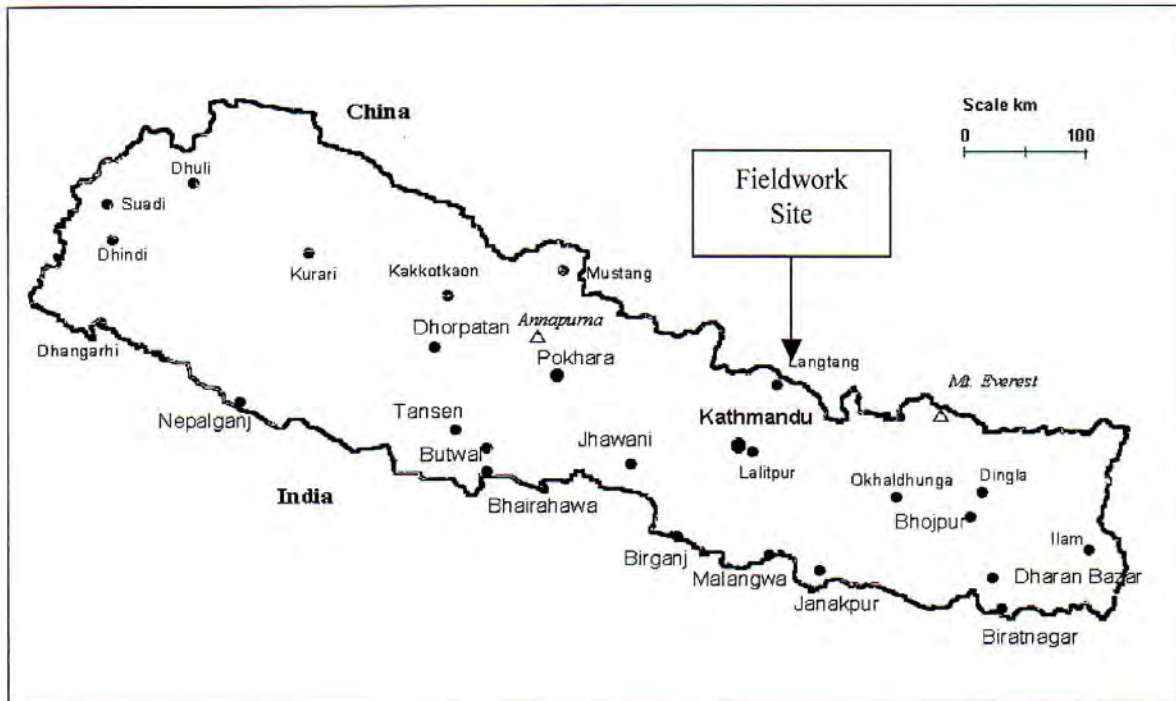


Fig. 1.1: Fieldwork site in Nepal

Before the 1960s, the daily affairs of Langtang village were subjected to minimal intervention by the central government in Kathmandu, except for taxation and in times of war. That state of affairs began to change after the isolationist Rana regime was deposed and Nepal embarked on an overall policy of socio-economic development. Langtang's relative isolation came to an end towards the end of 1962, when the new "panchayat" system heralded a period of intensive development that was underwritten almost wholly by foreign aid, witnessing a burgeoning of government administrative capacity. The construction of new schools and roads went hand in hand with the expansion of the civil service and a growing number of health workers and teachers. In 1970, the Rasuwa District headquarters, which had been located at Trisuli, some five days' walk from Langtang village, was moved to the present location at Dhunche, a mere two days' walk away. With this relocation of the district headquarters, Langtang village began to receive more visits from government officials, and with the panchayat system, villagers could express their demands — for example, for development funds — directly to the district through their village headman, the *pradhan pancha*, who sat on the district council (cf. Cox 1989: 15; see also Campbell 1997). By 1973, the incorporation of Langtang into the Nepalese state was more or less complete, when the government established a primary school and a police station in the village, as well as an army camp on the village outskirts in the light of the gazetting of Langtang National Park.

Sacred Geography: Langtang as Beyul ('Hidden Land')

Given that Langtang Valley is today one of the most popular trekking destinations in Nepal, it might stretch one's imagination to describe the valley as a "hidden land". Between the 13th and 15th centuries, however, the concept of beyul had aroused much interest and speculation amongst Tibetans, especially the adherents of the Nyingmapa (*rnying ma pa*), and inspired many an adventure and legend. The founder of the Chyangter (*byang gter*) branch of the Nyingmapa, Renzin Gokyi Demthruchen (*rig 'dzin rgod kyi ldem phru can*, 1337-1408), a famous tertön (*gter ston*, 'treasure finder') of teachings hidden throughout the Himalaya by the Buddhist saint Padmasambhava, is reputed to be the most influential figure contributing to the popularity of the beyul idea, after allegedly having discovered texts detailing various hidden lands (Childs 1999: 127-128). What does the concept of beyul (*sbas yul*) entail?

Sbas yul are valleys situated in the southern slopes of the Himalaya. According to legend, they were concealed by Padmasambhava so that they could be used as sanctuaries during times of need. The hidden land is both a refuge for meritorious individuals from all strata of Tibetan society during a time of moral and political disintegration, as well as a place for the spiritually inclined ... As a refuge from social and political strife, it is a settlement destination, a fertile landscape where society can function *with a king as a legitimate ruler*, and where an *idealised version of Tibetan society* can be sustained remote from the deteriorating conditions of Tibet (Childs 1999: 128, italics mine).

The conceptualisation of beyul therefore implied an ideal model of Tibetan political organisation, to be replicated in the hidden valley where the descendants of Tibetan kings and other Tibetans fled when facing the threat of social disintegration due to either civil strife or warfare. It is perhaps within this context that we can begin to understand the interest that was aroused in beyul writing, the efforts undertaken to find them, as well as certain historical waves of Tibetan migration throughout the southern Himalaya. As pointed out above, interest in, and the search for, the various beyuls took on impetus in the 13th century. As various writers have highlighted, this was largely in response to the perceived and actual threats to the integrity of various Tibetan kingdoms, whether from invading Mongols, Uigurs, or rival Tibetan kingdoms (Ehrhard 1997; Childs 1999). In the literature, there is a consensus that the legitimate ruler of a hidden valley must be member of the royal lineage associated with King Trisong Detsen (*khri srong lde brtsan*), "a tantric who is blessed and who is from the

unbroken lineage of the *mnga' bdag* kings themselves..." (*gnam zla gnas yig*: 17b, quoted in Childs 1999: 144)⁴.

Listed among the locations in the beyul literature was a place called Dagam Namgo (*zla gam gnam sgo*), or 'Heavenly Gate of Half-Moon Form'. In the biography of another tertön, Renzin Nyida Longse (*rig 'dzin nyi zla klong gsal*, died 1695), is an account of the protagonist's discovery of beyul Dagam Namgo in the year 1680:

Finally he set off on the 3rd day of the 8th month of the year of the monkey, offering prayers of supplication to the Master Guru U-rgyan [i.e., Padmasambhava or Guru Rinpoche]. Even though numerous illusions cropped up along the way he strode on further without giving way to doubt, and [so] he came to the centre of the 'sacred place'. How he saw the upper and lower caves where Padmasambhava practiced, [as well as] the small [cave] of his practice, the foot impressions, the impressions of bodily parts etc., together with many miraculous signs—[this all] becomes clear in a separate history (quoted in Ehrhard 1997: 337).

In relation to this article's main subject matter, a momentous event took place: as Renzin Nyida Longse was starting on his journey to search for the beyul, he met a Domari [i.e. a person of the Domar (*rdo dmar*) clan] and his son. According to Ehrhard, this son was Domar Minyu Dorje (*mi 'gyur rdo rje*, born 1675), who later became a prolific writer, his works including several important texts concerning Dagam Namgo. But where exactly was it located? Based on comparison with the geographical evidence presented in various texts, Minyu Dorje concluded that it must be located in the valley of Langtang (*glang 'phrang*). To further bolster his argument, he recounted a legend relating to the discovery of Langtang, which was interpreted as the 'opening of the gate to the sacred place' (*gnas sgo 'byed pa*):

Now for the origin of what is called *gLang-'phrang* a bull is said to have been killed once in 'Bri-bstim during the consecration feast for the erection of a stūpa of gold and silver by one patron. In the evening the bull fled to that secret land by reason of his supernatural knowledge. The valley was discovered by virtue of the fact that the owner followed its trail; for this reason [the valley] is known under the name Bull Passage—so it is said in the tales of the people of old (quoted in Ehrhard 1997: 345).

To Minyu Dorje, Langtang was unlike any other beyul:

⁴ Cf. Michael Aris (1990: 93-94): "[a]ll the Buddhist kingdoms founded at different periods in the Himalayas traced their descent from, and founded their legitimacy upon, the early royal dynasty of Tibet."

It is even more excellent than all the other secure hidden lands that have been described previously. It is easily reached and lies near Tibet. In other treasure mines, [however], it is not dealt with in detail. [If it is asked] why, [the answer is] because it is a secret and protected area... In short, a hidden land is a land where a person flees to in the face of terrifying enemy troops. Its characteristic is that of a fully secure place. If, therefore, Yol-mo [present-day Helambu, an area just south of the Langtang valley] and La-phyi for example, are termed 'hidden lands', what is more to be said [of a land] that surpasses them in matters of security? (quoted in Ehrhard 1997: 342, 346).

From the above we can see that Langtang/Zla-gam gnam-sgo was more highly estimated by Minyu Dorje than any other beyul. Further, as Ehrhard has convincingly argued, Minyu Dorje thought that Langtang beyul is the centre of a sacred space arranged in the sacred *maṇḍala* form.

There is a dearth of material on the history of Langtang in its early days of settlement. In order to reconstruct the early political organisation of the place, I will rely on comparative historical and ethnographic material, as well as oral accounts provided by the Langtangas themselves. Given that the Langtang valley was located in the frontier region that branched just east of the important north-south trade route between the southern Tibetan town of Kyirong and central Nepal, and that this particular region of the Himalaya had witnessed numerous wars between various Nepalese kingdoms and the Tibetan and Chinese armies (Regmi, D.R. 1961: 167-230; Shaha 1990; Stiller 1995; Petech 1973; Uprety 1998: 32-65), Langtangas' formal political allegiance would have shifted as much as the fluid state borders. To the north, from the 10th to the early 17th century, Langtang probably came under the influence of the Gungthang Kingdom, centred at Dzongga, which dominated southern Tibet and its vicinity. In the early 17th century, the Gungthang kingdom was subdued first by the rival Tibetan polity of Tsang. Later, the Fifth Dalai Lama subsumed the area in 1641 under his rule with the help of his Mongol patrons and made Dzongga the administrative centre of the southern region (Childs 1999: 218-219).

In the south, during the 17th century, Nepal witnessed the rise of two strong and ambitious rulers in the persons of Ram Shah of Gorkha, and Pratap Malla of Kathmandu. Sensing that Ram Shah had his sights on the important trade routes to southern Tibet, Pratap Malla, exploiting the internal turmoil that was engulfing Tibet at that time, reacted by launching two military incursions around 1630, capturing the trading towns of Kyirong and Kutu. After the Fifth Dalai Lama had consolidated his rule, he managed to wrest back the two towns, while Kathmandu continued to hold on to the areas right up to the northern border, an area that included the Ghale principalities and the Langtang Valley (Holmberg 1996: 42; Shaha 1990: 29-

30; Regmi 1960: 381-383). The Gorkhalis, under the leadership of King Prithvi Narayan Shah, annexed in 1744 the fertile lands around Nuwakot, just north of Kathmandu, thus securing the trade route that ran from Kathmandu through Rasuwa Garhi to Kyirong in Tibet, forcing Jayaprakash Malla, the ruler of Kathmandu at that time, to sign a pact with the Gorkhalis in January 1757 to share its revenue from its trade with Tibet. By this time, the Manchu rulers of the Qing dynasty in China had already gained a firm foothold in Tibetan politics, and kept a Resident (or Amban) in Lhasa exerting great influence over the Dalai Lama. In 1791, after a series of disputes over Tibet's refusal to use debased Nepalese coins, the Gorkhalis, having already conquered the Kathmandu Valley, launched an attack across the northern borders. This military incursion provoked the reaction of the Chinese imperial army which swept across the border at Rasuwa Garhi in pursuit of the retreating Gorkha army through Nuwakot to as far south as Betrawati, within a stone's throw of Kathmandu. After the two warring parties had signed a peace agreement, the combined Chinese-Tibetan army retreated, and this was followed by a period of relative peace between Nepal and Tibet that lasted for almost 60 years. The Langtang region witnessed war again when Jang Bahadur Rana, the Prime Minister and de facto ruler of Nepal, decided in 1854 to invade southern Tibet once more with the hope of controlling Kyirong and Kuti. In this particular instance, villages along the invasion route through Rasuwa to the border not only had to supply food, but also conscripts, porters, as well as animals for the Nepalese army (Uprety 1998: 70). Given that Langtang lies just on the border, it is highly likely that Langtangas were also drafted to help in the war effort. In the end, though Jang Bahadur failed to annex the two strategic towns, he managed to force the Tibetan government to pay a significant annual tribute.

According to local oral history, Langtang was caught up in between the imperial designs of the two neighbouring states of Tibet and Nepal, with Langtangas having to pay taxes to whoever was dominant at any particular time. However, an indication of where Langtangas' true loyalty lay in those tumultuous times of border skirmishes and shifting frontiers can be gained from a well-known story. It tells of Langtangas' attempt to resist the invasion of the Nepalese army, resonating with the notion that Langtang as a beyul must be a well-guarded refuge in which an ideal Tibetan society could be sustained. The story speaks of an elderly couple, affectionately referred to as *yibi meme chenpo* ('the illustrious grandmother and grandfather'), staying at Thangshyap, near Langtang village. Their main duty was to guard against any intrusion by outsiders. When the Nepalese army moved up the Langtang valley and tried to subdue the people of the area, the elderly pair turned the slope into a thick sheet of slippery ice. This act prevented the soldiers from reaching the top of the slope, and inflicted considerable casualties on the invaders. When the Nepalese army tried to breach the defence again the next day, the old woman, referring to her aching body due her physical exertions the day before, complained loudly:

“Khasa gyap, dering dün”. She actually meant, “yesterday, [pain in the] back, today [pain in the] front.” But the soldiers misunderstood the old woman as saying, “yesterday, [killed] a hundred, today seven [hundred]⁵.” Afraid of suffering even more casualties, the Nepalese soldiers eventually gave up their military incursion and retreated in panic. In memory of the old couple’s heroic effort, a memorial (*mchod rten*) was constructed just in front of Thangshyap, where villagers would pray once a year, in the fourth Tibetan month, for their continual protection.⁶

The mukhiya clans

The earliest known political organisation in Langtang was that of the so-called mukhiya (N. *mukhiyā*, ‘headman’) clans. Members of these four clans are believed to have arrived from Kyirong after hearing the news of the discovery of a beyul in Langtang valley. The news allegedly inspired the migration of the first wave of settlers from Kyirong to Langtang. And given that Langtangas usually place the founding of the village “about four hundred years ago”, the time coincides with the period of turmoil in southern Tibet in the 17th to 18th centuries during the disintegration of the Gunthang kingdom. Given that the intensification of interest in, and the search for, beyul usually coincided with periods of external threats to existing social and political orders (Sadar-Afkhami 1996: 2), we could surmise that it was during the turmoil of southern Tibet in that period that the first mass migration of Langtangas’ ancestors from Tibet occurred. These earliest settlers subsequently devised a system of rotating once every four years the village headmanship amongst the four founding clans, namely the Jhapa, Shangpa, Zangpa, and Thokra.⁷

⁵ In Tibetan, the pronunciation of *rgyab* (‘back’) and *mdun* (‘front’) sounds similar to *brgya* (‘hundred’) and *bdun* (‘seven’) respectively.

⁶ Langtang valley, as a beyul, is revealed by the myth and its associated ritual practice as an “inner” sanctified space that has to be protected. The protective pair of “grandmother and grandfather” can be found in other settlements in the Himalaya, for example in the village of Dzar in Mustang (cf. Gutschow and Ramble 2003: 144, 156).

⁷ The rotation of headmanship amongst chief houses or villagers seems to be a common Tibetan practice. Barbara Aziz (1978: 199, italics mine) noted that in the district of Dingri just across the border from Nepal, “[t]heoretically the headmanship of a hamlet rotates among village members, or is assigned to a popular vote of members. It is not hereditary and there must be a consensus of agreement for an incumbent to retain office. In most villagers, however, the same person remains in office for several years consecutively. Or, the headmanship may be shared by general agreement between *two or three chief houses in the villages and thereby moves from one to another almost automatically.*” Saul (1999: 68) also notes that

It is significant that the Langtangas tend to use the Nepali term *mukhiyā* rather than *gowa* (*'go pa*), its Tibetan equivalent. The explanation for this has to be considered in relation to the incorporation of Langtang into the nascent Nepalese state. From the time of the “unification” of Nepal by Gorkhali kings in the middle of the eighteenth century, to the Rana regime of hereditary prime ministers, the country’s rulers relied primarily on a system of land grants to control the population⁸. To increase its hold over communities such as those on the frontier with Tibet, the Nepalese rulers in Kathmandu maintained, and sometimes enhanced, the status of the local headmen with special land grants (such as *kipat*) and conferring of additional powers so that these communities could continue to exist and be governed in accordance with their traditions (Steinmann 1991: 477-483; see also Forbes 1999: 115-116; Caplan 1970: 3-9). As long as these two groups of state functionaries – the nobles and state officials, and village headmen – fulfilled their stipulated roles, state interference in local affairs was kept to the minimum, allowing a significant degree of autonomy to these communities.

The term *mukhiyā* in Langtang encompassed two different types of local officials: the *jimivāl* was allocated the task of collecting taxes on wet fields, and the *tālukdār* on dry fields (Holmberg, 1996 [1989]: 45). As there were no wet fields in Langtang, the two subdivided roles collapse into the sole title of the *mukhiyā*, while *tālukdār* came to designate the *mukhiyā*’s runner, locally known as *chog*, tasked with enforcing rules and helping in the initial preparations for various village festivals and rituals, such as the collection of grain and butter from all households. State administration from early Gorkha times exhibited what has been termed “dual foundation”, characterised by a combination of “centralization of political authority and decentralization of administrative functions” (Regmi 1979:18). Such arrangements engendered a politically symbiotic relationship between rulers and state functionaries.

By the turn of the nineteenth century, the patron-client relationships had established deep roots in the country. At the national level, the rulers, nobles and senior government officials supported each other ... At the

in the Mustang region of Baragaon, a rotation system of headmanship was instituted around 1930.

⁸ Large swathes of land were granted to officials and nobles close to the ruling families – the so-called *jāgīr* and *birtā* land – on which no tax was levied. The main aims of these land grants were to reward the services rendered to the regime by these individuals, as well as to secure their continued allegiance and service. The recipients in turn exercised control over the tenant farmers who worked on these lands. The rulers also relied on the village headmen, whose role was to collect tax and control local land use. For a more in-depth discussion of the history of landownership in Nepal see, e.g., Regmi 1976, Caplan 1970.

village level, the local functionaries depended on rulers and nobles for their positions, providing in return the valuable services of collecting taxes and controlling land and forest use (Malla 2001: 291).

In the case of the Kingdom of Mustang, for example, Ramble (1997: 396) points out that the central government in Kathmandu allowed the Mustang king to retain his rule over the principality while demanding the periodic payment of taxes. Later, the nobles of the Baragaon area were also tasked with the collection of taxes in Dolpo. It was within this larger state system that Langtang's mukhiya political organisation was embedded. In other words, during this period of Nepalese state consolidation, especially after the fixing of the Nepal-Tibet borders in 1856 when Langtang formally came under Nepalese jurisdiction, the legitimacy of the headman's authority was a function of both local historical and cultural factors, and the policy of the Nepalese state at large (cf. Diemberger 1997).

Zombie Slayers in Langtang: Ascendancy of the Domar clan

To understand Domari rule in Langtang, we first turn to clan history and the various myths associated with it. Here, I follow Godelier's (1971) historical approach to the study of myth as embedded within, and at the same time commenting upon, material social relationships. What counts as "memory" or "history" is inextricably related to competing politico-cultural interpretations of contexts, which include the notion of place (see also Rappaport 1990: 11-17, 188-189). Bearing this in mind, I now present a version of the clan history as recounted by Minyu Lama, the most revered Domari in Langtang today.

According to Minyu Lama, the Domar⁹ clan originated from a sacred mountain in China called Riwo Tse Nga (Chin. *Wu Tai Shan*, or 'Five-Terrace Mountain', also known as *Qing Liang Shan*¹⁰). A Chinese Emperor had included the clan as part of the dowry accompanying the Chinese princess who had been betrothed to the Tibetan king, Trisong Detsen¹¹, who

⁹ The Domaris belong to a special category of religious practitioners known as the ngagpa (*sngags pa*), or hereditary priests, who are believed to possess a special religious quality called the dung gyü, transmitted through the male line (Aziz 1978: 53).

¹⁰ I wish to thank Charles Ramble for pointing out to me the identity of Riwo Tse Nga and Wu Tai Shan. Known also to the Chinese as Qing Liang Shan, it is situated in the present-day Chinese province of Shanxi. The mountain is regarded as one of the "Four Great Buddhist Mountains" in China, and is famed throughout the Buddhist world as the abode of the Bodhisattva Manjushri.

¹¹ From both Tibetan and Chinese historiography, we know that Trisong Detsen did not have a Chinese wife. According to a published history of the Domar clan

is credited in Tibetan hagiographic accounts as the ruler who introduced Buddhism into Tibet. Upon arriving at the Tibetan court the Domaris were installed in high positions in the court hierarchy. The clan was further differentiated into six different lineages arranged in a hierarchy structured by their respective abilities and skills. For example, the Holung Bagyi Dong was able to dispel locusts, to prevent them from causing damage to the crops. The highest lineage, to which Minyu Lama belongs, was the Namdro Zangyi Dong, whose members were believed to be able to slay zombies (*ro langs*; for an interesting discussion of Tibetan zombie stories see Wylie 1964). Attention to such purported skills is relevant to our present goal of understanding the position of the Domar clan in Langtang. The belief that the Domaris, at least in times past, were zombie slayers is widely held by Langtang villagers. While no zombies could be seen stalking villagers at the time of fieldwork, the reputation of Minyu Lama was built on the fact that he was believed, on several occasions, to have prevented the dead from terrorising the villagers during funeral rites, and to be able to exorcise evil spirits from afflicted individuals. Some older Langtangas recall Minyu Lama's deceased father as being an even more formidable figure, a tall man who knew everything and was able to predict imminent deaths.

These stories of the Domaris' connection with the Tibetan rulers, and their ability to slay zombies, are just some of the sources of their authority in Langtang, another of which is related to Langtang's founding myth. The present head lama of the Langtang temple, who is not a Domari, mentioned that prior to the arrival of Minyu Dorje, lamas of the Drukpa Kagyu (*'brug pa bka' brgyud*)¹² order lived there. In fact, they were responsible for the construction of the first temples in the Langtang valley. For example, present-day Langtang village has two temples situated next to each other, the older of which was built by a Drukpa Kagyu lama by the name of Milun Ganpo. In any case, in the accounts narrated by Minyu Lama, when his illustrious ancestor Minyu Dorje first reached the Langtang valley, having entered from the east, he was met by a Drukpa by the name of Chorangri.

(Chophel 1998), some members of the clan had formed part of the retinue that accompanied Princess Wen Cheng to Tibet when she was betrothed to Songtsen Gampo. Minyu Lama's linking of the Domar clan to Trisong Detsen, who did not have a Chinese wife, is perhaps due to his desire to trace his lineage to this prominent king who has been credited with bringing Buddhism to Tibet.

¹² The Drukpa Kagyu is a branch of the Kagyupa, named after the country where it had taken root, Bhutan (Drukyul, *'brug yul*) (see Tucci 1988: 36). See the account below regarding the duel between Minyu Dorje and Chorangri. The fact that the Kagyupa were the first to arrive in Langtang is not surprising given that one of the most prominent members of that school, Milarepa (*Mi la ras pa*), had been to the neighbouring Helambu, and could very likely have passed through the Langtang valley en route there (cf. Clarke 1983).

At that time, there were already people at Langtang. There was also a lama called Chorangri, who was from Bhutan [Drukyul] but was not a Domari. Chorangri knew that Minyu Dorje was coming, transformed himself into an eagle, and flew to Langshisa Kharka to meet him. When the eagle arrived at the place, it dropped headless to the ground in front of Minyu Dorje, who was at that time seated by a *bod lcog* [a low Tibetan table] with his servant and having his lunch of tsampa and water. Seeing the lifeless and headless eagle, Minyu Dorje took the tsampa, moulded it into the shape of an eagle's head, and attached it to the bird. Immediately the eagle came back to life and was transformed into Chorangri. He said to Minyu Dorje, "This is my place and you are my guest. Let me go ahead and make the necessary arrangements to welcome you." Minyu Dorje replied, "Please don't say that; we'll go together." When they reached Numthang, they made some tsog [*tshogs*, 'offerings'], which became the hills, and the water from the hills was tsogjang [from *chang*, 'barley beer']. From Numthang, Chorangri, again transformed into an eagle, flew ahead, while Minyu Dorje was being carried by his servant. The servant thought, "The other lama could fly all the time, and I have to carry my lama." Minyu Dorje could read his thoughts, and was angry with his servant for doubting his ability. To prove his power, he made handprints in a cave at Chyadang, which can be seen even now. Convinced but also ashamed, the servant continued to carry his master.

Eventually, Minyu Dorje reached Chorangri's dwelling, and spent the night there. Next day, the two lamas got engaged in an intense debate, with Minyu Dorje standing at a small hill called Borkhang at Langtang, and Chorangri at another hill some distance away. Their arguments were facilitated by a crow carrying letters between them. For many days the debate raged without a clear winner, since the two were almost on a par with regard to learning. The matter came to a head one day in the monsoon season when the grass was tall and abundant. Minyu Dorje issued an ultimate challenge: the person who can climb to the top of a blade of grass without causing the dewdrop at the top to fall to the ground will be the winner, and the loser will have to leave Langtang. Rising to the challenge, Chorangri turned himself into a snail, and started climbing up a blade of grass with a drop of water at the top. The dewdrop fell. Meanwhile, Minyu Dorje transformed himself into an ant, and because of its small size, managed to emerge triumphant in the task, leaving the drop of water intact. Acknowledging defeat, Chorangri left Langtang.

After getting rid of his rival, Minyu Dorje embarked on a number of tasks to stamp his authority on Langtang. First he had to build a temple. For guidance, he consulted Padmasambhava by making a divination. There are a couple of accounts regarding Padmasambhava's instruction. Minyu Lama says that Minyu Dorje was instructed to build a temple near the present-day

Prangjang (see below), lying next to the village. However, the temple was destroyed in a fire, and a new one was built on top of a hill that looks like an elephant trunk. In another account, Guru Rinpoche (Padmasambhava) initially asked Minyu Dorje to construct not one but four temples, a project which the latter said was beyond his ability. As a compromise, Guru Rinpoche told him to build just one, but to represent the remaining three on three of the four walls of the temple being built.

Langtangas also credited Minyu Dorje with the great act of banishing from Langtang a man-eating demon, or *dü* (*bdud*), that had demanded annual human sacrifice. According to Langtang villagers, each year different families would take turns to supply a male to be sacrificed to appease the *dü*, failing which disasters would befall the village. Chorangri was not able to get rid of the demon, and now Minyu Dorje conducted the most extreme rite of tantric exorcism, *jinseg* (*sbyin sreg*)¹³, a ritual fire with the capacity to burn out and destroy the demon. When that effort failed, Minyu Dorje teamed up with another religious specialist by the name of Meme Pengyab, the ancestor of today's *lha bempa* (*lha bon pa*), who had the capability to see the *dü*. Together, the two religious virtuosos caught the demon, and with Meme Pengyab dragging it from the front with a rope and Minyu Dorje pushing it from behind, the *dü* was led away from Langtang towards India from whence it had originally come. The final twist to the story is that as they were about to leave the Langtang valley, at the place called Wangyal, near the present-day Syabru Bensi, the *dü* escaped into a cave when Meme Pengyab was momentarily distracted. To prevent the *dü* from escaping, Minyu Dorje blocked the cave with a huge boulder and assigned a *devi* (*devī*, 'goddess') to guard over it. I have been led by Langtang villagers to the shrine near Wangyal dedicated to the *devi*, and from the shrine, looking towards a cliff in the distance, one could see black markings on the wall which the locals believe depict the shape of the *dü* being led away, with a rope tied around its neck.

The above semi-historical and mythical accounts of the arrival of Minyu Dorje in Langtang, narrated by one of his redoubtable descendants, can perhaps be conceived as what Malinowski (1936) has called a "social charter" which is manipulated by the power holders to justify or explain

¹³ Mumford (1990: 142) has offered a vivid description of the *jinseg*: " ... the performing lama drew a four-directional mandala on the floor colored red, green, black, and white, to represent all types of area gods. A fire was lit over the mandala on which the performing lama boiled a pot of oil to a great heat. While chanting mantras, he suddenly poured in alcohol. A blazing pillar of fire shot up and spread out to every corner of the ceiling; the audience was surrounded by flames as if trapped in a burning house... The demons had been burned out, to be released into a higher rebirth."

their dominance. Similarly, in the specific context of Tibetan and Himalayan studies, Alexander Macdonald has stressed that hagiographies of heroic figures, such as Songtsen Gampo, and prominent saints are often portrayed as “history”, contributing to the various “power models” that are “formulated and exploited by certain elites and are used as instruments of social control” (1984: 133ff; see also 1980). Here, I take “history” as a representation that refers to “ideologically embedded knowledge represented as ‘the past’” (Yelvington 2002: 231). Ask any adult in Langtang about the founding history of the village, and you will likely be told stories of the exploits of Domar Minyu Dorje, in addition to the more popular story about a man searching for his lost bull. The fact that the Drukpa Kagyu preceded Minyu Dorje was not widely known amongst ordinary Langtanga. Almost all whom I asked about the founding of Langtang mentioned the story of Minyu Dorje’s arrival, but said nothing of his predecessors. This is perhaps indicative of how deeply entrenched in the Langtanga’s social memory is this particular founding myth. Of course, the knowledge of Langtang as a beyul further lent justification to the Domaris’ high status and provided legitimacy to their rule in Langtang. We therefore see that the dominant discourse regarding the sacred space of Langtang effects an act of forgetting that in turn contributes to the coherence and persuasiveness of a particular ideology of social order and political power¹⁴.

If we agree with the historian Moses I. Finley (1965) that the narrator of oral history often reflects his own interests, we could attempt an interpretation of the story concerning Minyu Dorje as a rationalising justification of the Domaris’ dominance in Langtang. Clearly, the part about Minyu Dorje of the Nyingmapa defeating Chorangri, who belonged to the rival Kagyupa, could be seen as suggesting both the superiority of the clan and the Nyingmapa over its rivals. This affirmation of the Domaris’ power reinforces what is suggested by the widely known legend amongst the Langtanga of the Domaris’ reputation as zombie slayers. Furthermore, in Langtangas’ social memory, their welfare has been closely associated with two very significant acts of Domar Minyu Dorje: the building of the temple

¹⁴ That is not to say that all members of that clan are presently equally respected, and while most of them would have at least some religious training, currently it is the learned ones who are most revered. While villagers do indicate that in recent years the previous high status of the Domar clan has waned somewhat, ritually, however, the Domaris’ dominant position is still unassailable. In both the temples at Langtang and Kyangjin, there are designated seats near the main altars, which could be occupied only by lamas who are from the Domar clan. In the temple status symbolism of Tibetan Buddhism, the further one sits from the door, and nearer the main altar, the higher is one’s status. Even the head lama, who is supposed to be the most spiritually accomplished in Langtang, if he is not a Domari, would not be allocated that special position. All village-wide rituals would never start before a participating Domari lama has arrived.

under the direct instruction of Padmasambhava, and the expulsion of the cannibalistic demon from the Langtang valley. We note also that Minyu Lama mentioned the Domaris' close relationship with King Trisong Detsen, and we link this to the textual exegesis mentioned at the beginning of this article regarding the notion that the rightful rulers of beyul must belong to Trisong Detsen's imperial lineage. In this narrative, therefore, the legitimacy of the Domaris' political and religious dominance is embedded within the concept of beyul and the identification of Langtang as one of these sacred "hidden valleys". Here, we can relate the above narrative to the potential ideological function of myths in legitimising political structure (cf. Balandier 1972: 118-119).

Ideology emplaced: Land, ritual, power

Not much is known further about the Domaris in Langtang after Minyu Dorje and his sons constructed the new temples in Langtang, allegedly under the instructions of none other than Padmasambhava himself. We know that Minyu Dorje had one daughter and five sons, one of whom was Kunzang Gyume Lhundrub (died 1767), mentioned in a Tibetan source as having commissioned an entire key collection of Nyingmapa teachings, the "Collected Tantras" (*rnying ma rgyud 'bum*) (Ehrhard 1997: 258). According to the current head lama, he was the founder of the temple at Kyangjin. Another son, Pema Dorje, constructed the temple at Langtang. The ancestors of the Domaris currently residing in Langtang are said to have arrived only around the closing quarter of the 19th century. Informants belonging to the former mukhiya clans claim that as there was no Domari lama in the village at that time, some members of the mukhiya clans went across the border to the vicinity of Kyirong to search for a suitable lama to take over the Langtang temple, and to give instructions to those who desired to live a religious life. The Langtang searchers eventually found a Domari at a place called Rama (*rag ma*), about three to four hours walk from Kyirong in Tibet, who agreed to move to Langtang. What happened next had tremendous consequences for Langtang, with the subsequent period witnessing the rise to power of the Domar clan.

An important part of the deal to persuade the Domari lama to come to Langtang was that the mukhiya would relinquish the leadership of the village to him. Upon their arrival, the Domaris established themselves on an estate next to the village temple as the centre of authority from where they would exercise both religious and temporal power. Villagers still call this estate the Labrang (*bla brang*). This term itself gives an indication of the high status of the new Domari lama, for the word "labrang" refers to the estate of a very high lama — in fact a reincarnate lama, or trulku (*sprul sku*) (see Goldstein 1973: 448; Tucci 1988: 10; Mills 2000: 27) — or at least a revered tantric priest (Aziz 1978: 53). Under the new arrangement, the Labrang took over the office of the headman from the mukhiya clans and subsequently came to dominate both religious and political life. At the

beginning of the 20th century the Rana government established a horse farm at what is today known as Ghoratabela, not far from Langtang village, and the Domaris, as the new mukhiyas of the village, were given the task of looking after the state horses.¹⁵

Following the passing away of the first Domari lama, the clan split into two factions as the result of a dispute between his two sons, Kusho Nima and Kusho Renzin. The latter moved out of the Labrang to establish his own estate, known as the Prangjang:

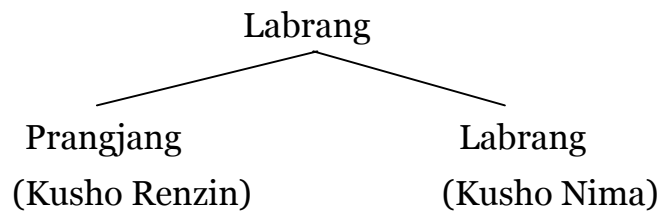


Fig. 1.2.: Segmentation of the Domar clan

As will be recalled, one of the important agreements between the mukhiya clans and the Domaris for the latter to settle in Langtang was the transfer of the leadership of the village. With this transfer, the erstwhile system of rotational headmanship was abolished. Henceforth, until the local election within the panchayat system in the 1960s, the role of headman was transmitted through male agnates, primarily through brothers. If no male sibling were suitable, then the office would be taken over by the son of the former headman. Kusho Nima inherited the headmanship from his father, the first occupier of the Labrang. Later, with the arrival of elections, Kusho Nima was elected as the first *pradhan pancha* (renamed from *mukhiya*). Kusho Nima had two sons: unfortunately one died before being able to take over the office, and the other was found to be unsuitable, as he was mute and considered intellectually undeveloped. In this circumstance, Kusho Renzin, as the younger brother of Kusho Nima, took over the office of the headman, hence precipitating a gradual shift in the centre of power from the Labrang to the Prangjang.¹⁶

¹⁵ One wonders if the reason behind this assignment was in any way related to the fact that the Domaris' clan god, Tamdin (see below), is also believed to be the patron deity of horse traders.

¹⁶ In her study of Sherpa Buddhism in the Solu-Khumbu region, Ortner (1992) argues that the process of temple founding was intimately tied to contestations for political power amongst influential male siblings, the result of which was the founding of a temple by the triumphant party. The motivation behind the building of temple by the winner of the power struggle was to cement his authority as a

Referring to the Tamang village of “Tamdungsa”, in the same administrative district as Langtang, Holmberg (1996 [1989]: 47) points out that the standing of the headman was a function of both his reputation within the community and his role as intermediary between the locality and the state. There was, however, a crucial difference between Langtang and the Tamang village of Tamdungsa, where the headman and the lamas, though both manifested a royal disposition, were nevertheless personifications of two distinct institutional roles. In Langtang, however, religious and temporal authority was vested in a single person. The power wielded by the headman was very considerable, reminiscent of the “royal style” noted by Hocart (1950) as typical of the Indian villages. Some older people in Langtang can still recall the almost absolute rule the Domari headman exercised over village affairs. He was responsible for the arbitration of disputes and enforcing village regulations, such as the prohibitions against smoking, drunkenness, and the killing of animals. Only extremely serious cases, such as murder, were referred to the district authority. Since there were neither police nor army in the locality at the time, the responsibility of enforcing state laws and village rules fell upon the shoulders of the headman’s runners, called *chog*¹⁷.

Myths by themselves are, however, insufficient to sustain the dominant position of the Domaris. In addition to territorial cults and meanings attributed to Langtang valley as a *beyul*, here we shall see that the pre-eminence of the Domaris was also partly a function of two other conditions: the Nepalese political system in general, and the economic base of the society. As I have already indicated, from the founding of the modern Nepalese state in the late 1800s to the 1950s, the political system was based upon the centralisation of authority coupled with the decentralisation of administration. In such a political arrangement, many remote communities were able to maintain a high degree of local autonomy. It was within this larger state system that unique indigenous forms of social, economic and political organisations evolved. Before the onset of trekking tourism in Langtang in the late 1970s, for subsistence the inhabitants relied mainly

“protector” in a visible form, but also, paradoxically, to indicate to fellow Sherpa that he (the winner) was humble or “small” in the eyes of the gods. Ortner suggests that the rationale behind the act of temple founding was an internal cultural tension, or “contradiction”, between “bigness” and “smallness” that is an essential feature of Sherpa culture (Ortner 1992: 53-81). In Langtang, the fraternal rivalry between the Domari brothers had not resulted in the founding of a new temple, but the establishment of an estate alternative to the Labrang. The founding of the Prangjang estate was not the consequence of Kusho Renzin being banished from the Labrang by Kusho Nima, but an aggressive act on the part of the younger brother to challenge the Labrang’s authority.

¹⁷ In the Lama village of Tarkhyeghyang in Helambu, the positions of village headman and head temple official were inherited by patrilineal descent. Temple assistants are known as *Uje* (*dbu-rje*, see Clarke 1980: 134)

upon agriculture, such as the cultivation of buckwheat, barley and potatoes, as well as animal husbandry comprising the breeding of sheep and various bovine stocks.

In addition, before the Chinese occupation of Tibet, Langtangas were actively engaged in the trans-Himalayan trading of salt and rice between Kyirong in Tibet and central Nepal, plying the main trade route that passed through Rasuwa Garhi at the border. Langtangas also collected medicinal herbs from the surrounding forests both to supplement their diet and to be sold for cash in the markets of Trisuli Bazaar and Kathmandu. Prior to the nationalisation of forests and institutionalisation of the new national panchayat regime in 1962, Langtangas' economic activities were another crucial factor that contributed to the emergence of an indigenous pattern of landownership that entailed not only a system of resource extraction and distribution, but also provided the material basis that sustained social and political structures in Langtang.

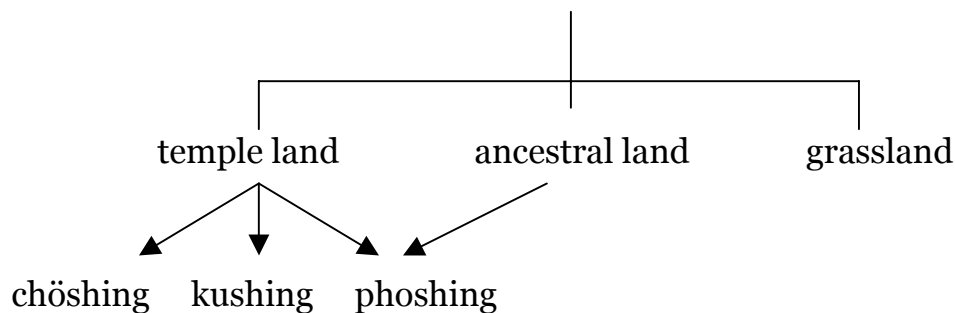


Fig. 1.3.: Langtang landholding

The first and most common category of land is phashing, meaning 'ancestral land', encompassing both the land first cultivated by the ancestors of a particular lineage, and also those other lands acquired from other villagers. Phashing could be bought and sold between any willing owners. The second category of land included swathes of grassland for herds of animals to graze. Any lineage that had the privilege of using a particular patch of grassland, was once obligated to contribute butter to the two temples at Langtang and Kyangjin, the amount of which was proportional to the size of the grassland allocated. The third category of land pertains to the temple. In Langtang, temple land is distributed amongst certain sections of the population, with the primary purpose of ensuring the supply of grains, beer and butter required in communal rituals and the upkeep of the temple. One subcategory of temple land is chöshing (*chos zhing*, 'religious land'), whose ownership rotates between the two Domari estates of Prangjang and Labrang. Furthermore, for the purpose of gaining merit, some Langtang households might donate a proportion of their phashing to the temple as phoshing, which oblige the donor to give to the temple 4 *pāthī* of barley to support the annual festival Nara (see below). The third subcategory of

temple land that concerns us here is kushing, which were allocated by the temple to the twenty-eight lineages from nine different clans who had first settled in Langtang¹⁸.

Name of clan	Number of lineages with kushing
Shangpa	6
Nagpa	5
Zhu Sanga	5
Garza	4
Zangpa	2
Jhapa	2
Zang Yümpa	2
Thokra	1
Wypa	1
Total	28

Table 1: The kuriya lineages

One of the main purposes of granting the kushing was to ensure the annual organisation of temple festivals, such as Nara and Yulbi Chechu, to which all kuriya (owners of kushing) were obligated to contribute certain amounts of grain, derived from the cultivation of their kushing.¹⁹

Kushing land, with a total size of around 6-7 *ropani*²⁰ are inherited agnatically within the each kuriya lineage. If a particular lineage was unable to fulfil its obligations, then its kushing has to be transferred to another lineage within the same clan. The difference between phoshing and kushing

¹⁸ The mukhiya families had promised the Domari from Rama that the 28 lineages in Langtang at that time would each contribute a male member to the temple to be trained under the Domari as village priests. These families were given kushing, hence becoming kuriya.

¹⁹ The kushing is very similar to the notion of *bog ma*, a term referring to the communal land owned by Tibetan monasteries. For Tibetan monasteries with considerable landed property, the usufruct of the *bog ma* is usually transferred to certain aristocratic families (*bog bdag*) who have “to deliver part of the harvest to the [monastery]... and to pay taxes to the government.” (Tucci 1988: 158) The kuriya in Langtang thus replicates the obligations of the *bog bdag* in other Tibetan monasteries. In Mustang there is a comparable system, known as drongpa, in which the drongpa households commanded high socio-political status and were obligated to sponsor important temple festivals. In the villages of Kag and Dzong, village headmen were selected only from the drongpa households (see Saul 1998: 51-54).

²⁰ Here one *ropani* is defined locally as the area of land ploughed by the dzo (a cross-breed between the yak and the zebu cow) in a day.

is that the former refers to phashing land donated to the temple by individuals, while the latter refers to the lands granted by the temple to the founding lineages of Langtang. Apart from their religious duties, the kuriya were also required to take turns each year to provide two of their members as assistants/runners (chog) to the village headman. These chog were responsible for enforcing village rules and regulations, and for maintaining law and order prior to the establishment of a police post in Langtang.

The consequence of this pattern of landownership with its concomitant ritual obligations was the engendering of a three-tiered structure of “ritual hierarchy”: with the Domaris holding chöshing at the top, the kuriya holders occupying the middle position, while those without kushing (the so-called yangpa) who were disqualified from organising the most important village festival of Nara, were then relegated to the bottom rung of the ritual hierarchy. From the perspective of Langtang’s political and social inclusion, this indigenous system of landownership bound the various founding lineages into a social unit that was continually re-created and reaffirmed through the annual celebration of Nara. It has been shown here that the Langtang system of landholding was once underpinned by a set of religious and temporal obligations that defined the boundaries of Langtang sociality. My contention is that ultimately, the ideology that gave legitimacy to this system consisted of the Domaris’ right to rule in the sacred beyul of Langtang. Systems of landholding are often more than just solely economic arrangements; they are implicated in notions of identity and personhood, as well as communities’ participation in specific social orders.

Writing about the “Lama” villages in the neighbouring Helambu region, Clarke (1980: 81) notes that membership in these villages is predicated upon “taking a loan from the temple, part of which is paid back immediately, and on which annual interest is payable as a contribution to the costs of a temple-festival.” In Langtang village, the kushing granted to the twenty-eight households of the nine founding clans could be seen as the functional equivalent of a temple “loan”, the “payment” of which consists of the organisational and financial contributions to the Nara and Yulbi Chechu festivals. Therefore, as in the Lama villages of Helambu, village membership in Langtang was once conceived in terms of the villagers’ participation in the corporate life of the temple. Michael Vinding (1998: 272) points out that the term kuriya is used amongst the Thakali to refer to households represented in the village assembly, whose social obligations included the duty of the village worker to participate in public works programme. One crucial difference between the Thakali and Langtang cases seems to be the ritual component that formed an integral part of the latter’s political organisation. In fact, Vinding highlights that in Thak Khola “ecclesiastical and temporal powers are clearly separated, and in some villages *religious specialists cannot become headman*” (ibid.: 282, italics mine). In Langtang, however, political and religious supremacy were invested in the single person of the

Domari headman. The dominance of the Domar clan in Langtang was symbolically most eloquently expressed and affirmed in the annual festival of Nara.

Nara

Nara was considered the most important annual festival for Langtangas, and indeed for all other Tibetan Buddhists in the region such as those in Helambu in the adjacent valley (Clarke 1991: 43). The full name of the festival is Nara Donjuk (*na rag dong spyugs*), which means approximately ‘finishing with hell’, as the primary aim of the central offering is to accumulate merit so that the donor will not descend to hell upon his death but gain a better rebirth. At a more mundane level, Nara is concerned with the securing of blessings or *tendil* (*rten 'brel*, ‘material prosperity’) not just for the donors of the festival but also for the village as a whole. The duration of the Nara differs from region to region; in the Helambu area Nara could last one to twenty days in the village of Tarkhyeghyang, while in Langtang the festival usually lasts five days.

Each year, four *kuriya* households from a total of twenty-eight would be the principal donors for the festival, defraying most of its expenses. In the first stage of preparation, *longchang*, two “temple administrators”, or *jipa*²¹ (*spyi pa*) from the four organising *kuriya* would gather the villagers and ply them with beer. Amidst the drunken stupor and amicable atmosphere, villagers recall their status as either *kuriya* or *yangpa*. All the *kuriya* would have to offer certain amounts of grain for the making of *chang*. The total amount of grain a particular *kuriya* would have to contribute depends on the number of households within that particular lineage²². Some of those without *kushing* (the *yangpa*) may contribute to the cost of Nara as a means of gaining merit (*phan yon*). All additional costs, along with the supply and preparation of food for the duration of the festival, are borne by the main

²¹ Clarke (1991: 43) is of the opinion that the term “*jipa*” used by the Helambu people is a corruption of the Tibetan *sbyin bdag*, which means ‘sponsor’. However, by adhering to both phonetic and ethnographic evidence, I would suggest that it refers to *spyi pa*, the term for a junior administrator of the temple. Apart from its ritual functions, the temple in Tibetan cultural areas is also an economic institution with its own properties (*spyi*), one of which is land. In general, *spyi pa* refers an official responsible for the administration of land belonging to the temple (see Tucci 1988: 130, 158). In the case of Langtang, and probably also in Helambu, the term *spyi pa* also connotes a donor (hence, *sbyin bdag*) with reference to festivals such as Nara. This view takes on further credibility in relation to the pattern of landownership of the Langtang Labrang, as discussed above.

²² E.g., in a lineage consisting of three brothers, the eldest, if he holds *kushing*, has to give 21 *pāthī*; the second brother, known as *yang chewa*, 6 *pāthī*; and the youngest, the *yang chungwa*, 4 *pāthī*.

organising *kuriya*, the *jipa chenpo*, and the Domari clan (from either the Labrang or the Prangjang).

During Nara the principal ritual actors are divided into three categories. The first is called *chökya* and made up of Domari clan members, who are the principal donors for the first day of the festival. The four *kuriya*, the *jipa chenpo*, are divided into two groups of *jipa*, the *trapa jipa* and the *chomo jipa*²³. The former is responsible for the second and fourth days, and the latter for the third and the final fifth days. The most important people in the Nara festival are, unsurprisingly, the Domaris. Not only do they comprise one of the three main categories of principal sponsors, the Domari lamas are also the chief officiating lamas of the festival. In addition, one of the main deities propitiated during Nara is none other than Tamdin (*rta mgrin*), the Domaris' clan-god (*skyes lha*). On each of the five days of Nara, the main officiating priest would invoke Tamdin while conducting a sequence of religious dances (*'cham*). It is necessary here to give an overview of this principal deity to further explicate the Domaris' ritual and political dominance in Langtang.

Numerous works in Brahmanic and Tibetan literature have affirmed Tamdin's tremendous ritual power. The 'Horse-head One' has his origin in the Brahmanic religion: known in Sanskrit as *Hayagrīva*, he is believed to be an *avatāra* of the Lord Vishnu. As one of the 'defenders of faith' (*chos skyong*; Skt. *dharmapāla*) of the Brahmanic religion, his wrathful nature is harnessed to his dominant role as the 'destroyer of obstacles' (Skt. *krodha vighnāntaka*), eradicating all impediments that might hinder one's quest for enlightenment (Linrothe 1998: 86). *Hayagrīva* has been appropriated by Tibetan Buddhism into its vast pantheon and become known as Tamdin, belonging to a special group of guardian deities called the Trag She Ghe (*drag gshed brgyad*, see e.g. Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1977: 23; van Gulik 1935: 10-28). As an archetype of fierce compassion in Tibetan Buddhism, Tamdin is considered a terrific form of the Bodhisattva Chenrezi²⁴ (*spyān ras gzigs*, *Avalokiteśvara*), as well as the manifestation of Padmasambhava²⁵, who is credited for introducing Buddhism into Tibet. Tibetan sources refer to the deity's critical role in the introduction of Buddhism from India to Tibet: when Padmasambhava was invited by King Trisong Detsen to Tibet to promulgate the *dharmā*, the saint allegedly encountered great opposition from the local demons and deities. To subjugate these malicious spirits,

²³ Tib. *grwa pa* and *jo mo*, i.e. 'monk' and 'nun', respectively.

²⁴ Chenrezi is depicted in Tibetan Buddhist history as the father of the Tibetan nation. Taking the form of a monkey, the bodhisattva mated with a mountain demoness, an emanation of *Tārā*, to give birth to the first Tibetans (Samuel 1993: 168).

²⁵ One of Tamdin's origin mantra is "Om Hrih Padma Sambhava Hum" (Rhie and Thurman 1996: 189).

Padmasambhava invoked Tamdin, and in transforming the erstwhile enemies of Buddhism into its guardians, bound them by an oath to defend the new faith in Tibet (Nebesky-Wojtkowitz 1977: 101-102, 171, 193). Under his new guise, Tamdin is the lord of all *dharmapāla*, the chief defender of the Buddhist faith.

For Langtangas, Tamdin is widely acknowledged as a *srung ma* (see also Mumford 1990: 117-139), a ‘guardian’ of not only their religious faith, but also against harmful forces. It is the only clan god in Langtang whose cult is not restricted to the clan to which it is the tutelary deity, given its wider function encapsulated within the pantheon of Tibetan Buddhism. On the 29th day of each month in the Tibetan calendar, the Ngi Shu Ghu (*gnyis bcu dgu*), the Domaris pray to their guardian deity in the Langtang temple. On this day, Langtangas with physical or mental afflictions believed to be caused by evil forces, would bring offerings of grain to the temple, hoping the Domari would pray to Tamdin to help eradicate their sufferings. When asked why they sought help from Tamdin, respondents always mentioned Tamdin’s “great power”. The importance of Tamdin to the Langtangas in various village rituals such as the Nara and Ngi Shu Ghu thus directly confirms the Domar clan as a crucial point of reference, symbolically expressing and affirming it as the principal protector and benefactor of the community as a whole.

Conclusion

In a recent article on divine kingdoms in the Garhwal Himalaya, William Sax notes that most 20th century studies of kingship have not adequately addressed the relationship between territorial control and conception of sacred places, and that many specialists of religion still persist in “using transcendental and non-empirical categories... to describe and analyse their object” (Sax 2003: 177). I share with Sax a non-reductionist approach to the study of power and authority in sacred places: in the present article, the beyul concept is not seen as a transcendental religious category that contrasts with the “worldly” or the “profane”. By paying close attention to the interaction — or what Max Weber would characterise as “elective affinity” — between ideas on the one hand, and social institutions and practices, on the other, the methodology I have adopted eschews the separation of the “religious” from the “social” and “political” in the exercise of power by a dominant social group. As Macdonald (1987: 7) has argued in his discussion of power and authority in the Himalaya, “political, economic and religious charisma are not separated, ... [a]uthority and power are not qualities... which are either religious or political: they are both, and their manipulation is moral, in local eyes.”²⁶

²⁶ However, Macdonald seems to contradict himself when he, in the very same article, gives primacy to violence and conflict in the initial formation of social

According to Tibetan textual exegesis, beyul was conceptualised as a sanctuary where an idealised Tibetan society could be established and sustained, ensuring in part the preservation of the royal lineage which was ideologically deemed essential to the peace and prosperity of Tibetan society. In this article I have explored the relationship between the beyul concept and the form of political organisation it has historically engendered in Langtang. I have shown that the ideology that portrays Langtang as a sacred place both sustained, and was sustained by, a local political economy that in turn was part of a larger regional system. In what form did this “ideal” Tibetan society take root in the Langtang valley? Langtang’s indigenously evolved system of land distribution and ownership was once underpinned by what I would call a “ritual hierarchy” of its social organisation. Until fairly recently, the local political hierarchy was mapped on to this ritual hierarchy. The popular history of the settlement of Langtang village intimately relates to the conception of the valley as a sacred geography, as revealed by the myth of its discovery, manifest in the indigenous system of land distribution, and the ritual and political dominance of the Domari. In this article, I argue that the historical formation of Langtang’s indigenous social and political organisations can fruitfully be understood in terms of the beyul concept, especially in relation to the notion that only those associated with Trisong Detsen’s royal lineage could be the legitimate and ideal rulers of the various beyul. The evidence presented here invites future comparative studies into the autochthonous socio-political structures in other Tibetan enclaves along the Nepal-Tibet border, especially in areas where lamas of specific lineages have historically dominated the local ritual and political arenas, such as in Nubri, Yolmo and Khenbalung.²⁷ Such comparative studies would provide us with a clearer picture of the infra-structural histories of these enclaves, and improve our understanding of the status contestations and seismic shifts in social and political alignments in the present times.

Epilogue

In Langtang, the Domaris’ hold on temporal power has been challenged in recent years, most significantly after King Mahendra of Nepal promulgated the “Partyless Panchayat Democracy” in 1962. Under this political arrangement, all citizens were empowered by law to elect their local leaders in periodic elections. In the first two decades of the panchayat regime, the Domari candidates managed to get elected to the post of village headman, renamed the *pradhan pancha*. By the late 1970s however, after the creation

orders. In this formulation, religious notions of authority are essentially epiphenomena — ideologies that provide justifications for the exercise of power.

²⁷ For an extensive list of Tibetan enclaves situated along the Nepal-Tibet border see Jest 1975: 33-35.

of Langtang National Park and the introduction of tourism to the area which caused a radical shift in Langtang's economic orientation from agriculture and animal husbandry to the cash economy of tourism, there emerged a new group of rich and powerful tourism entrepreneurs who relied on their new-found wealth and status to challenge the Domaris' dominance in local elections (Lim 2004a and b). In 1982, one of these beneficiaries of tourism, Temba, managed to get elected as the *pradhan pancha*, defeating a relatively young and inexperienced Domari candidate, Tshewang, who was unable to match his opponent's ability to mobilise personal wealth to secure the support of voters. Elections in the next ten years saw the Domari continually challenging Temba in local elections, but to no avail. Throughout this period, Temba had become the richest man in the village, with his family members owning at least four hotels throughout the Langtang Valley. Following the restoration of multiparty democracy in Nepal in 1990, subsequent elections in Langtang were marred by widespread violence as disputes flared up between the Nepali Congress, which Temba represented, and the Communist Party of Nepal (United Marxist-Leninist), represented by another wealthy hotel owner. Temba won the election again by a slight margin in 1992. In the 1997 election, after violence perpetuated by supporters of the two parties had once more threatened to engulf the whole village, the political leaders and other village "big men" consulted amongst themselves and decided not to carry out the election, but to select one "neutral" person who would be deemed satisfactory to all sides. They selected Tshewang, the Domari.

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Realities and Images of Nepal's Maoists after the Attack on Beni¹

Kiyoko Ogura

1. The background to Maoist military attacks on district headquarters

“Political power grows out of the barrel of a gun” – Mao Tse-Tung’s slogan grabs the reader’s attention at the top of its website.² As the slogan indicates, the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) has been giving priority to strengthening and expanding its armed front since they started the People’s War on 13 February 1996. When they launched the People’s War by attacking some police posts in remote areas, they held only home-made guns and *khukuris* in their hands. Today they are equipped with more modern weapons such as AK-47s, 81-mm mortars, and LMGs (Light Machine Guns) purchased from abroad or looted from the security forces. The Maoists now are not merely strengthening their military actions, such as ambushing and raiding the security forces, but also murdering their political “enemies” and abducting civilians, using their guns to force them to participate in their political programmes.

1.1. The initial stages of the People’s War

The Maoists developed their army step by step from 1996. The following paragraph outlines how they developed their army during the initial period of three years on the basis of an interview with a Central Committee member of the CPN (Maoist), who was in charge of Rolpa, Rukum, and Jajarkot districts (the Maoists’ base area since the beginning). It was given to Li Onesto, an American journalist from the *Revolutionary Worker*, in 1999 (Onesto 1999b).

Squad-level forces consisting of 7 to 9 persons were formed during the Second Plan of the People’s War which started six months after the initiation. During the period of the Second Plan, lasting for a year, 32 squads were formed in three districts. This Central Committee member said “these squads were more quantitative than qualitative and armed with only homemade guns. After the squads were formed the main goal was to convert

¹ The original version of this paper was presented in Tokyo at a workshop on “Social Dynamics in Northern South Asia”, organized by the Institute for Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa (ILCAA), Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, in June 2004. I wish to thank Dr. David N. Gellner for his substantial help in improving the English of the present paper.

² www.cpnm.org

the zone here into a guerrilla zone.” Accordingly, the main actions taken by the Maoists during this period were ambushes on police forces and raids on police posts. The Third Plan started 18 months after launching the People’s War, i.e. around August 1997. According to this interview, “the target of this plan was to improve their military strength and power”. The Maoists managed a military training programme and collected guns and ammunition in three ways, by producing, buying, and capturing. During this period more military actions were launched. In the Third Plan some squads were sent to other regions. After the government launched the counter insurgency police operation called “Kilo Sierra 2” in their affected area in 1998, the fourth expanded meeting of the Central Committee of the CPN (Maoist) decided to start the Fourth Plan under the stage of strategic defence. The main slogan of this plan was “March ahead along the great path of building Base Areas” (Onesto 1999a). According to this plan, platoons consisting of 25 to 35 persons were formed by uniting squads and the party made plans to escalate its armed struggle. The Fourth Plan started on 27 October 1998. Under this plan the Maoists raided police posts more frequently to seize arms and ammunition and various forms of actions including attacks on telephone towers and banks and blasting government offices in the district headquarters were carried out.

1.2. The first attack on a district headquarters

It was 25 September 2000 when hundreds of armed Maoists carried out a surprise attack on Dunai, the district headquarters of Dolpa.³ The Maoists attacked the District Police Office and the District Jail, releasing all 17 prisoners.⁴ They set some government buildings on fire, including the Chief District Officer’s office, the District Police Office, and the Land Reform Office, and looted nearly Rs 60 million from the only bank in the district, that is, a sub-branch of Nepal Bank Limited. During a five-hour-long attack, 14 policemen were killed and more than two dozen were injured. This was the first attack on the district headquarters by the Maoists. It can be guessed that this action was the first one carried out by the company level force of the people’s army.⁵ On the same evening as the attack, the general secretary of the CPN (Maoist), “Prachanda” or Pushpa Kamal Dahal, issued a

³ Dolpa is located in a remote mountain area in western Nepal, adjoining the base area of the Maoists.

⁴ Since this Dunai attack, whenever raids have been made on the district headquarters, they have released prisoners.

⁵ Although the Royal Nepalese Army camp was located in the distance of just two kilometres from the District Police Office across the Bheri river, the army didn’t come to help the police. Criticizing the army for not cooperating with the police, the then home minister Govinda Raj Joshi of the Nepali Congress party resigned from his post four days after the Dunai attack.

statement saying: “Our party is ready to hold dialogue with the government in an institutional way.”

After the Palace Massacre of 1 June 2001,⁶ the Maoists intensified their military action against the police and their political campaign in the cities, taking advantage of the chaotic situation at the centre. The main reason that caused Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala to resign from his post was the Maoists’ attack on Holeri police station in Rolpa district in July. Koirala asked King Gyanendra to deploy the Royal Nepalese Army to rescue 70 policemen who had been abducted by the Maoists during the attack on Holeri police station. However, the RNA was not deployed in the area. He later disclosed that the direct reason for his resignation was this disobedience of the army.

The newly appointed Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba declared a ceasefire with the Maoists on 23 July 2001, the day after he took up his post. Deuba was clearly shocked by the Maoists’ attack on a police post in Bajura, next door to his own home district, killing 17 policemen on the very night of his assumption of office. The Maoists took the maximum advantage of the freedom they got during this four-month-long first ceasefire period to expand and strengthen their party organization and its military front. During this time, the CPN (Maoist) held its first national convention of the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) in the remote village of Kureli situated in northern Rolpa, the heartland of their base area, in September 2001. The convention was inaugurated by Chairman “Prachanda”, and the battalion commander “Pasang” or Nanda Kishor Pun chaired the inaugural session.⁷ It means that a battalion-level force had already been formed at that time. At the end of the convention it was decided that the PLA would have a central headquarters and that general staff, a general political department, and a general logistic department would be set up to facilitate the central headquarters. Furthermore, Central General Staff was formed under the leadership of Chairman “Prachanda” and it was decided that “Prachanda” would be the supreme commander of the newly formed People’s Liberation Army.⁸

⁶ As might be recalled, ten members of the royal family including all the five members of King Birendra’s immediate family died in this massacre. The official investigation report ascribed the guilt for killing both the other nine and himself to the crown prince Dipendra.

⁷ CPN (Maoist) 2002.

⁸ It was publicly declared on the next day of the Ghorahi attack that “Prachanda” had become the supreme commander of the PLA.

1.3. Under the state of emergency

The first attack by the battalion level of the PLA was the one on Ghorahi, district headquarters of Dang in Rapti Zone. On the night of 23 November 2001, the Maoists one-sidedly broke the ceasefire with the government and resumed their armed actions by carrying out simultaneous attacks in various places across the country, including Ghorahi, Syangja, and Surkhet. The biggest attack was on Ghorahi.⁹ According to the statement published by “Ananta” or Barsaman Pun who was in-charge of the Western Region Military Headquarters (WRMH), around 2,000 persons including the local forces and the militias led by a battalion under the command of WRMH were involved in this Ghorahi attack. The main force led by a battalion commander “Rajesh” and a battalion political commissar “Pasang” raided the Royal Nepalese Army barracks and arms depot in Ghorahi, capturing a huge number of arms, ammunition, and explosives. (In fact, this was the first attack by the Maoists on an army barracks. Before this, they had targeted only the police force.) They also attacked the District Police Office, the District Administration Office, some other government offices, and the area police post in the nearby town of Narayanpur. During the attack 9 policemen and 14 army men were killed¹⁰ and the Maoists captured about 450 weapons, including four 2-inch mortars, three 81-mm mortars, two GPMGs (General Purpose Machine Guns), thirteen LMGs (Light Machine Guns), 93 SLRs (Self Loading Rifles), 17 pistols, and 59 .303 rifles, with nearly 125,000 bullet rounds (Ananta 2001). They also captured a large quantity of grenades and explosives. They claimed that they used a total of twenty-two vehicles including twelve army trucks to transport those captured arms, ammunition and explosive materials to their base area.¹¹ They also looted Rs 58,949,202 in cash and Rs 20 million worth of goods from the banks. The Maoists captured the town of Ghorahi for about 7 hours from 11 p.m. 23 November to 6 a.m. next morning. They abducted some

⁹ In *Maoist Information Bulletin-1* they justified breaking the ceasefire and resuming armed actions as follows: “Throughout the three rounds of talks between August 30 and November 13, that we had with the old regime, the Deuba government did not make a single political proposal to solve the problems of the country... Meanwhile, the Gyanendra clique, which effectively controls the traditional royal army and through which it had staged a royal coup d’état last June by wiping out the whole family of King Birendra, was making massive military preparations throughout the country against the revolutionary forces. The Dang barracks and military depot were the centre of a military offensive they were planning against the revolutionary base area in the Rapti Zone (i.e. the districts of Rolpa, Rukum, Salyan etc.). So it was obvious that this counterrevolutionary move under the cover of ‘peace talks’ had to be effectively pre-empted. This was what happened on November 23.”

¹⁰ The Maoists claimed that seven persons on their side died during the attack.

¹¹ CPN (Maoist) 2002.

officers including the Chief District Officer (CDO) but released them later. On the same night the Maoists carried out the simultaneous attack on the district headquarters in Syangja.¹² They raided the District Police Office, killing 14 policemen,¹³ and captured about 150 weapons. They claimed that they had looted about Rs 50 million worth of cash and gold, etc., from banks. These Ghorahi and Syangja attacks were the second and third ones on district headquarters after Dunai.

Only two days after the Ghorahi and Syangja attacks, on the night of 25 November 2001, the Maoists carried out a fourth action on Salleri, the district headquarters of Solukhumbu in the foothills of the Mt. Everest in eastern Nepal. The armed Maoists led by a platoon from their base area in western Nepal¹⁴ raided some government offices including the District Police Office and the District Administration Office in Salleri and the control tower of Phaplu airport, killing 33 persons including a CDO, a land revenue officer, four army personnel, and 27 policemen.¹⁵ They captured about 200 weapons and some Rs 50 million worth of cash and gold from banks. The day after this Salleri attack, the 26 November, the government declared the State of Emergency across the country and deployed the Royal Nepalese Army fully, for the first time, against the Maoists.¹⁶ Under the State of Emergency, which lasted for nine months, the Maoists carried out their largest attack so far in western Nepal. On the night of 16 February 2002 some two to three thousand Maoists surrounded Mangalsen, the district headquarters of Achham, and attacked the army barracks and the District Police Office using some of the sophisticated arms they had captured in the Ghorahi attack. They simultaneously raided the airport in Sanphebagar situated a few hours' walk from Mangalsen. The casualties on the government side were the biggest ever. At least 137 persons, including 57 army personnel, more than 75 policemen, including 27 stationed in Sanphebagar airport, and five civilians, including a CDO, a district intelligence officer and his wife, a post officer, and a local photographer were killed.

¹² On the same night, the Maoists also attacked a parked helicopter belonging to the Asian Airlines at the Surkhet airport and district development offices in some districts.

¹³ The Maoists claimed that there were no casualties on their side during the Syangja attack.

¹⁴ According to the testimony of a member of this platoon who participated in the Salleri attack, whom I met in Rukum in March 2003.

¹⁵ Though the government side claimed that hundreds of Maoists were killed during the attack, according to *Maoist Information Bulletin-1*, only fifteen Maoists died in this action.

¹⁶ Before the declaration of the State of Emergency, only the police force was deployed to control the insurgency.

The deployment of the Royal Nepalese Army to control the insurgency after the declaration of the State of Emergency did not stop the Maoists developing their military organization. When the security forces made an attack on the gathering of Maoists on the Lisne peak in east Rolpa both by land and from the air on 2 May 2002, the People's Liberation Army had a "temporary" brigade ("Etam" 2002). The Maoists were gathering on the Lisne peak located on the border of Rolpa and Pyuthan districts, preparing the attack on Khalanga, the district headquarters of Pyuthan.¹⁷ They were obliged to cancel the attack on Khalanga but, instead, made the deadly attack on the base camp of the security force in Gam village in north-east Rolpa on 7 May. More than 70 security personnel including an army major who was leading the united force of the army and the police were killed.¹⁸

1.4. The first action by a brigade-level force

Two weeks after the State of Emergency had lapsed, on the night of 10 September 2002, a brigade of the People's Liberation Army made an attack on Sandhikharka, the district headquarters of Arghakhanchi. The brigade commander "Pasang" specified in his statement, issued after the attack, that this well-planned action was carried out by the main force of a newly formed brigade under the Western Command. The Maoists started their assault on the army barracks, the District Police Office, and some other government offices at just 10 p.m. by firing sophisticated weapons, including 2-inch mortars and GPMGs. "Pasang" wrote in his statement that they had everything under their control after a short time and captured a lot of weapons including LMGs, SLRs, 2-inch mortars, and Rs. 40 million cash. 69 security personnel were killed and 81 persons including a CDO were abducted and released the next day. "Pasang" admitted that 59 Maoists including a company commander lost their lives during the attack ("Pasang" 2002). Maoists specially mentioned the importance of this Sandhikharka attack as the first action after they had entered the new stage of the war with centralization of their military force by forming brigade-level forces. Commander "Pasang" wrote:

Arghakhanchi is a white area under the Western Central Command. While giving influence on the white-area and expanding the red-area, we made a plan to attack Arghakhanchi with the purpose to expand the red-area gradually to the capital Kathmandu ("Pasang" 2002).

¹⁷ According to the testimony by some Maoists I met in Rolpa in 2003.

¹⁸ One of the Maoists whom I met in Rolpa admitted that there were heavy casualties on their side also.

“Prachanda” indicated the political meaning of this attack in a statement, issued three days after the attack, saying:

If the government wants the positive, peaceful and political solution, we are ready to declare the ceasefire at any time to start the procedure of talks. However, if the government continues the false propaganda for holding the election and keep on murdering the people like now, we want to make it clear that we are ready to conduct the higher military actions (“Prachanda” 2002).

On 14 November 2002, two months after the Sandhikharka attack, the Maoists again made an assault on a district headquarters. This time it was Khalanga in Jumla district of western Nepal. They raided the army barracks, the District Police Office and other government offices, killing 33 policemen, four army personnel, and a CDO. Despite the fact that the government side was pre-informed about the attack, it could not prevent it because they did not know on which date it would occur.¹⁹ The raid was carried out the day after a three-day-long *Nepāl Banda* (general strike). During the *Nepāl Banda* the security force was on high alert but they never imagined the Maoists would attack the day after a *banda* (Dhungel 2002).

1.5. After the breakdown of the second ceasefire

Two and a half months after the Jumla attack, on 29 January 2003, the government and the Maoists declared a ceasefire for the second time. The truce lasted for seven months. During the ceasefire three rounds of talks were held but the two sides could not reach agreement. “Prachanda” declared the end of the ceasefire through the Maoists’ website on 27 August 2003. After the breakdown of the second ceasefire, the Maoists adopted the strategy of decentralized actions such as personal assassinations of army and police personnel²⁰ and political activists and attacks on small police posts in the Tarai area. They attempted to raid the camp of the Armed Police Force²¹ in Kusum of Banke district on 11 October²² and the APF’s training

¹⁹ According to Dhungel (2002), security force got the information from some person who was transporting food in the eastern mountain region of Jumla.

²⁰ The morning after “Prachanda” declared the end of the ceasefire, the Maoists shot two RNA colonels separately in Kathmandu. One was killed and the other was seriously injured.

²¹ The Armed Police Force was formed in January 2001 to counter the Maoist insurgency. Maoists murdered the chief of APF Krishna Mohan Shrestha, his wife, and his bodyguard in Lalitpur on their way back from their morning walk in

centre in Bhalubang²³ of Dang district on 13 October²⁴ but both attacks failed badly.²⁵

After the failure of these two actions, the Maoists avoided major attacks and stuck to the strategy of decentralized actions. During the second ceasefire the CPN (Maoist) had stepped up its military organization. They formed a division in the west in the beginning of 2003²⁶ and then another division in the east. “Pasang” or Nanda Kishor Pun became a commander of the Western Division and “Ananta” or Barsaman Pun became a commander of the Eastern Division. Both of them are Magars from Rolpa district. Chairman “Prachanda” disclosed in his interview published in *Maoist Information Bulletin-4*, issued on 15 September 2003, that the People’s Liberation Army had formed 2 divisions, 7 brigades, and 19 battalions.²⁷ He explained the reasons for adopting the strategy of decentralized actions in the same interview, saying:

All the military strategies and tactics are based on the goals of preparing for going into strategic offensive from the present stage of strategic equilibrium. From a tactical point of view, at present the people’s army is going ahead with primary and decentralized resistance so as to feel the pulse of the enemy, tire them out and to prepare ground for the centralized offensive.

It was on the night of 2 March 2004 that the Maoists made an attack on a district headquarters after a long gap of nearly sixteen months. The target was Bhojpur, situated in the mountain region in eastern Nepal. It was

January 2003. This assassination actually forced the government to declare the ceasefire.

²² According to “Eagle”, a Maoist whom I met in Rolpa in September 2004, the Kusum attack was carried out by the “Satabariya” Second Brigade and the Bhalubang attack by the “Mangalsen” First Brigade of the PLA.

²³ Bhalubang is located 70 km east of Kusum.

²⁴ These were the first major attacks by the PLA in the Tarai area, close to the Indian border.

²⁵ It was reported that the security forces got the information about the attack on the Kusum camp from a PLA commander who had surrendered.

²⁶ When I travelled around the Maoists’ base area, Rolpa and Rukum districts, in March 2003, I heard from some local Maoists that a division had just been formed in the west but it was not yet declared.

²⁷ Soon after the Central Committee meeting of the CPN (Maoist) held in Thawang of Rolpa, “Prachanda” made it public through a statement, published on 1 September 2004, that they had formed 3 divisions, 9 brigades, and 29 battalions. The Maoists formed the new Central Division and “Pasang” became its commander.

reported in an article by Khadka and Shrestha (2004) that a force of around 1,500 persons including six companies, one from each of six battalions belonging to the Eastern Division²⁸ of the PLA, raided the telephone tower, the District Police Office and the bank, killing 20 policemen and 12 army personnel. It was the biggest ever action made by the Maoists in the Eastern Region, where they had less a strong organization. In fact, it was not a “surprise” attack, as the government side was pre-informed about a possible attack by the Maoists. According to this article, the eastern headquarters of the Royal Nepalese Army had made a public statement that they were aware that three companies of the PLA had come to the east from the west to expand their organization in eastern Nepal and that armed Maoists were gathering in the Solu area of Solukhumbu district to make an intensified attack on some district headquarters. The government side even got reports, through a surrendered Maoist and some documents found with a Maoist who had been killed by the security force one week before, that the Maoists were planning to raid a district headquarters either in Khotang or Bhojpur very soon (Paudel, Vedraj 2004). However, it appeared that the concerned security section paid little attention to it.²⁹

Just eighteen days after the Bhojpur attack, on the night of 20 March 2004, the Maoists carried out a major attack on Beni, district headquarters of Myagdi, under the command of the Western Division of the People’s Liberation Army. This ninth attack on a district headquarters was actually the largest one that the Maoists had ever made from the viewpoint of their military force and the scale of the attack. According to Magar (2004), this Beni attack was the last action under the strategy of “unification of decentralized actions”. Magar reports in the article that “Avinash”, the Third Battalion Commander of the PLA, told him that they had already completed the process of decentralized actions, dependent centralization, and unification of decentralized actions, and were preparing for “highly centralized attack”. I was able to obtain an audio tape of the mass meeting³⁰ of the Maoists held in a remote village of Gulmi district in May from Ujir Magar, a journalist for *Kāntipur* daily paper. In this mass meeting, in which the Third and the Twentieth Battalions of the PLA participated, “Avinash” explained in his address the reason why they had chosen to attack Beni, saying:

²⁸ The Eastern Division of the PLA had three brigades and nine battalions at the time of the Bhojpur attack.

²⁹ It was reported through various media that both the responsible persons of the RNA and the police in Bhojpur were mysteriously absent on that very night.

³⁰ In this mass meeting the formation of the people’s government of Gulmi district was declared and the weapons that the Maoists had looted during the Beni attack were displayed.

We, the Western Division of the PLA, made a plan to attack the battalion barracks of the Royal Nepalese Army as we have already made successes to raid its company level forces. We discussed about whether to attack the battalion barracks in our base area³¹ or the one in the Magarat Autonomous Region³² and decided to attack Beni located in the latter.

I believe that detailed research about the Maoists' largest attack so far on a district headquarters can reveal various realities about the Maoists, including their actual military capacity and their behaviour towards the public. However, as far as I know, very few reports and analyses about their military actions have been published till now. Thus, I will try to describe in detail how they carried out an attack on Beni and then note the images of Maoists that the public had, both during and after the attack, based on news reports of the local media and the testimony of some local Maoists, the public, and some army officers I met in Myagdi. For this purpose I visited Beni twice, from 25 to 28 March and from 29 April to 3 May 2004. When I visited Beni for the second time, I tried to go up to Dhorpatan near the border of Rukum district in order to trace the movements of the main force that had participated in the attack. But when we arrived in the village of Takam after a whole day's trek from Beni a local Maoist leader stopped us from proceeding, citing security reasons.³³

³¹ As noted above, since the initiation of the People's War the Maoists have considered Rolpa, Rukum, and Jajarkot districts as their base area.

³² On 9 January 2004 the CPN (Maoist) declared the region between the Bheri river in the west and the Kali Gandaki river in the east as the Magarat Autonomous Region. The districts of Rolpa, Rukum, Salyan, Pyuthan, Gulmi, Syangja, Baglung, Myagdi, Arghakhanchi, Dang (only mountain areas), Nawalparasi (only mountain areas), and Tanahun (only half part of the district) are included in it.

³³ I went to Takam with a Beni reporter of *Kāntipur* daily, Ghanshyam Khadka. "Pravin", the vice-secretary of the Myagdi-Mustang United District Committee whom we met in Takam, told us if we tried to go ahead against his advice, they would regard us as spies of the Royal Nepalese Army.



2. Before the attack

2.1. Location

Beni, the seat of district headquarters of Myagdi district in Dhaulagiri Zone, lies in Arthunge VDC. It is a bazaar with a population of about 5,000 surrounded by mountains and situated about 50 km west of Pokhara. The Myagdi river running from west to east on the south side of Beni joins the Kali Gandaki river running from north to south at the south-east end of the bazaar. Since it was connected by road to Pokhara, Beni has become known as the starting point of the trekking route to Jomsom and Dhaulagiri areas. Many foreign trekkers pass through this bazaar to go to Mustang, Dhorpatan, and Dhaulagiri areas.³⁴ The bazaar of Beni is divided into two parts by the Kali Gandaki river. The western part lies in Myagdi district and the eastern part is in Parbat district.³⁵ Most of the government offices, including the District Administration Office, the District Police Office, and the District Court, stand in a row along the Myagdi river in the western part of the bazaar.

³⁴ It so happened that no foreign trekker was staying in Beni that night.

³⁵ The district headquarters of Parbat is in Kushma, about 20 km south-east of Beni.

2.2. Signs of the attack

2.2.1. Encounter with a group of armed Maoists

According to Ghanshyam Khadka, a reporter for *Kāntipur* daily based in Beni, a team of thirty to forty persons of the CPN (United Marxist-Leninist) led by some local leaders had launched a political campaign to go around various villages of Myagdi district in the middle of February 2004. When they were in Shikh VDC in eastern Myagdi, they noticed some 100 to 150 armed Maoists were staying in the same village and moving westwards. (This relatively small force of Maoists may be presumed to have belonged to the Fourth Brigade of the Western Division from Gandaki area which had come to participate in the attack.) But they did not make contact with each other and the Maoists did not intervene in their programme at that time. It was on 29 February when the UML team reached Chimkhola VDC that the Maoists blocked them, forbidding them to conduct their programme inside the Vishesh Kshetra (*viśeṣ kṣetra*, Special Region).³⁶ The UML team was obliged to go back to Beni from Chimkhola and decided to hold their last programme in Pulachaur VDC, a village close to Beni. When Ghanshyam went to Pulachaur on 3 March to cover the UML programme, some villagers told him that the Maoists had just held a military training on the top of the hill in the village.

2.2.2. Blockade

Ghanshyam heard from an NGO staff member working in Ramche VDC that the Maoists had called the local villagers together on 28 February and directed them not to go to Beni for an indefinite period. He also received reports from the villagers in north Myagdi that the Maoists were directing the villagers through megaphones not to go to Beni after 6 March and to finish their work in the district headquarters before that. They added, “If you meet any kind of accident in Beni because you did not listen to us, it is your responsibility.” Furthermore, Ghanshyam saw a poster in a local hotel in Singa VDC on 3 March, on which the same notice was written. Ghanshyam had never heard of this kind of thing happening in his district. He guessed that either the Maoists were going to attack Beni or some high-ranking

³⁶ According to “Pravin”, the Vishesh Kshetra was formed in April 2002. Eleven districts are included in the Vishesh Kshetra. They are Rolpa, Rukum, Salyan, Dang, Pyuthan, the Vishesh Jilla (*viśeṣ jillā*, Special District), Myagdi-Mustang, Arghakhanchi, Gulmi, Baglung, Kapilbastu. Among them, the Vishesh Jilla and Myagdi-Mustang were the original districts formed by the Maoist. The CPN (Maoist) formed the Vishesh Jilla by putting together thirteen Kham Magar villages in north Rolpa and east Rukum but decided to dissolve it in a central committee meeting held in August 2004. The areas of the Vishesh Kshetra and the Magarat Autonomous Region are virtually identical.

Maoist leaders might be moving in the area or they had a plan to disturb the “people’s welcome” or “felicitation” for the royal couple which was to be held on 28 March in Pokhara.

Around the same time, the same kinds of activities were seen in Rukum and Baglung, the neighbouring districts of Myagdi. A local journalist of *Kāntipur* reported from Rukum on 29 February³⁷ that the Maoists there were strictly prohibiting the residents in the district from moving from one place to another, except for giving permission to students who had to take their SLC examinations in the district headquarters. A villager told this journalist that the Maoists were threatening the people, telling them that if they secretly moved about without their permission, they would be sent to a labour camp. The same journalist reported in the same issue of *Kāntipur* that the Maoists were using school compounds for their military training in the course of four-month-long “people’s military campaign” in the remote villages of Rukum. In Pipal VDC a secondary school had to close its classes for two days a week earlier because the Maoists had captured the school and were holding training there. A local daily paper, *Dhorpātan*, published from Baglung, reported in its 2 March issue that the Maoist in-charge of no. 4 Baglung issued a statement declaring that they would start to blockade the district headquarters from 3 March for an indefinite period and the traffic of people and goods to the district headquarters would be prohibited from 8 March, according to the blockade programme in Rapti, Lumbini, and Dhaulagiri Zones. The Maoists also disclosed that they had declared this blockade programme in order to carry out an armed action.

The Maoists set up two posts to check the traffic of villagers to Beni after 6 March, one in Vaviyachaur VDC, located at three hours’ distance on foot from Beni, and another in Darwang VDC, located five hours from Beni. Both of the check-posts were situated on the way to Dhorpatan area in western Myagdi. They did not set up any post on the north side, that is, on the trekking route to Jomsom.³⁸ Due to this blockade, the traffic of people to Beni noticeably decreased after 6 March but the Maoists allowed foreign trekkers to come and go to Beni.

According to shopkeepers in Darwang bazaar, the Maoists did not stop people from coming to Darwang but they did not let them go to Beni. After 14 March they even became stricter and started to prohibit the villagers from going to neighbouring villages. In the meantime, some students in 10th class started to come to Beni, escaping from their villages secretly during the night, to take their examinations for SLC (School Leaving Certificate) that was supposed to start on 24 March in the district headquarters.

³⁷ From 1 March 2004 issue of *Kāntipur*.

³⁸ Clearly, they were more careful about the route that they were planning to take when attacking Beni.

A local in Darwang said that, during the blockade, groups of Maoists frequently came to Darwang bazaar to buy foodstuff. He said that Darwang bazaar had been like a “supply centre” for the Maoists for three years. Maoists from Rukum, Baglung, and Rolpa used to come there to purchase food and other daily materials. They even kept their own horses there for transportation. (The Maoists held a mass meeting to declare the formation of the second people’s government of Myagdi-Mustang district in Darwang in January 2004.)

2.2.3. Warnings

Many people I met in Beni said that they had heard a rumour that in the villages the Maoists were suggesting to the guardians of children attending boarding schools in Beni that they should take their children back as Beni might be insecure. Some parents did indeed fetch their children from Beni. According to a teacher in Lokdeep Secondary Boarding School, parents of some fifteen boarding students from nearby villages came to take their children back home at the beginning of March but all the students returned before examinations started on 20 March.

2.2.4. Abduction

On the night of 8 March, the Maoists abducted sixteen villagers including two local schoolteachers and three women from Chimkhola VDC.³⁹ All were Magars. Among them an old man over sixty was allowed to go back the next day. But the others, aged from seventeen to forty, were told that they had been taken to work for a “big programme” and would not be allowed to go back until this programme was over. They were taken to Machchhim in Muna VDC after two days’ walk and divided into several groups. Most of them were taken to Takam VDC, situated in western part of Myagdi district, and stayed there until 19 March, just one day before the Beni attack. They said that they had seen thousands of armed Maoists gathering in Takam on around 18 March. One of the abducted said that they had to cook *dāl bhāt* and beef curry for the *lāl senā* (red army). In the same way, twenty-six youths were abducted on 15 March in neighbouring Baglung district.⁴⁰ Among them 23 were taken from Bungadobhan VDC close to Dhorpatan area. Most of the abducted were Dalits (low caste people). In fact, these people were abducted to work as “volunteers” during the action. One of their main tasks was to carry the injured Maoists.⁴¹

³⁹ I was able to interview some of them, including two teachers in Beni.

⁴⁰ According to an article published in the 20 March 2004 issue of *Kāntipur*.

⁴¹ One of the abductees I met in Beni said that the majority of “volunteers” were either Magars or Dalits.

2.3. Preparation

2.3.1. Special People's Military Campaign

According to “Pravin”⁴², the vice-secretary of the Myagdi-Mustang United District Committee of the CPN (Maoist), his committee started to prepare for the military action around 20 February, just one month before the Beni attack, following the decision of the Western Command and the Western Division of the People's Liberation Army. “Pravin” and his comrades were put in charge of arranging food and lodging for thousands of guerrillas who would come to Myagdi district from outside. Prior to this, the CPN (Maoist) had launched the Vishesh Jana Sainya Abhiyan (*viśeṣ jana sainya abhiyān*, Special People's Military Campaign).⁴³ “Pravin” explained the relationship between this campaign and the attack:

We started the Vishesh Jana Sainya Abhiyan from Gulmi district on 3 February. The main purpose of this campaign, which will last for four months till 2 June, is to strengthen our military power and to end state power. The achievement of the armed rebellion by the general public (*ām saśāstra vidrohī*) that is, creating a situation in which the general public rises up by itself with arms in their hands, is the aim of this campaign. We carried out the Beni attack as a part of this campaign.

2.3.2. Reporters

For the first time the People's Liberation Army invited some journalists close to the Maoists to report on the spot on the Beni attack (Dhital 2004b). According to “Sandhya” (2004), eastern Nepal correspondent of the Maoists' website magazine *Janādeś*, four reporters participated in the attack. They were Manrishi Dhital, western Nepal correspondent of *Janādeś*, “Sandesh”, a correspondent of Radio Janaganatantra (Radio People's Republic), “Chetan”, a war correspondent of the Western Division, and “Sandhya” herself. Dhital wrote in his article:

⁴² I had an interview with him on 1 May 2004 in Takam VDC. He is a 41-year-old ex-teacher.

⁴³ According to Jwala (2004), Maoists are operating this campaign in their most affected area, that is, the Rapti Special Region and the Bheri-Karnali Region in western Nepal. Jwala quoted the Maoists as saying: “At the time when the Royal Nepalese Army has been completely Americanized and the propaganda claiming that the Maoist army has already become weak is being propagated, the Maoists have started this campaign in order to destroy this situation. In this campaign they are forcing one person under 60 years old from every household to take up weapons and join the Maoist army.”

In the beginning of March 2004, I received an invitation to go and collect news about a long campaign. When we arrived in the western base area following an invitation, we saw all kinds of nationalities of Nepal including Tibetans from the Himal, Madhises and Tharus from the Tarai, Dotyals⁴⁴ and Khas from the Seti-Mahakali and Karnali-Bheri regions, Magars from the Rapti-Dhaulagiri region, Gurungs from the Gandak region, Rais, neglected and suppressed Dalits and Newars. A lot of women of all the nationalities, wearing combat dress and carrying weapons, were also participating.

While we were in the base area, helicopters flew over Thawang and Mahat⁴⁵ and there was an air raid in Mahat. As we participated in a three-week-long march of the People's Liberation Army from the base area, we arrived in Beni, the district headquarters of Myagdi, on 20 March (Dhital 2004b).

“Sandhya” wrote about the preparation and the sending off programme held in some place in the Vishesh Jilla (Special District):

I have just visited the Vishesh Jilla under the Western Command. In this very instance, Pasang, Commander of the People's Liberation Army's Western Division, is making the final preparations, giving instructions to his army about the action, and arranging the military formation in order to complete the responsibility given by the history... Thanks to the garlands of red *lālī gurās* (rhododendron) and the *abīr* (red powder) presented from the people of the Vishesh Jilla, the cheeks of Commander Pasang, of Com. Viplav who has the responsibility of being political commissar, of all the People's Army personnel, of all the cultural activists and of all the journalists participating looked beautiful... After the welcome programme ended, Division Commander Pasang read out a letter of congratulations sent by Supreme Commander Comrade Prachanda. After that a message of congratulations sent by the in-charge of the Western Command “Diwakar” was read out and then Com. Pasang and Com. Viplav expressed their own views... From that day an enormous people's military march started as well (“Sandhya” 2004).

“Etam” described the start of the march:

⁴⁴ People from Doti.

⁴⁵ Thawang is a village located in north-eastern Rolpa. Mahat, a village near Thawang, belongs to Rukum district. Both villages were included in the Maoists' Vishesh Jilla (Special District).

“Division! Attention! Division, stand at ease! The First Brigade will head out first. The People’s Liberation Army will march ahead starting with the First Brigade. Second, Third, and Fourth Brigades will follow.” After Division Commander Pasang gave the last order, the Western Division of the PLA started its march from the courtyard of the secondary school in Lukum.⁴⁶

“Chetan”, the war correspondent of the Western Division, filmed their journey using a video camera (Dhital 2004b). The Royal Nepalese Army came across a copy of the tape in a bag found near Beni after the attack. One of the RNA officers who saw the tape said:

There were scenes of a big mass gathering in a large ground. The camera caught the whole mass. Leaders were shown being given garlands and Pasang addressed the mass. There were scenes of sending off. After two days, it seemed that they passed through a mountain road covered with snow. The camera filmed horses and around 500 “volunteers” in plain clothes. Most of them looked like Magars. Somebody said to the camera, “We have arrived in the bosom of Dhaulagiri.” The video tape ends with a scene of a snowy path.

The main force of the PLA entered Myagdi district by way of Dhorpatan area in Baglung district. “Sandhya” wrote about their trip to Beni in her article:

After climbing for three and a half hours, we arrived at the top of the mountain. We measured the temperature and altitude there. The temperature was 15 degrees and the altitude was 3,738 m above sea level. It was raining on the peak. There were signs of snowfall. I felt very cold. It was probably the highest I had ever climbed in my life. I also felt very bad that I couldn’t walk... As we marched, the commanders were giving commands to their teams using telephone sets... We travelled night and day. Though we felt sleepy and tired, we were able to cope with it and, after passing Baglung district, we arrived at the Jaljala Mountain in Myagdi district. We measured the altitude there. It was 3,379 m above sea level. While playing *lukāmārī* (hide and seek) in the snow, everyone was thinking about the forthcoming action (“Sandhya” 2004).

⁴⁶ “Etam” (2004). Lukum is a village situated in south-eastern Rukum district.

2.3.3. Assembling and dispatch

According to “Pravin”, about 6,000 persons participated in the Beni attack, consisting of 3,800 armed Maoists of the PLA and 2,200 “volunteers” including non-armed Maoists and villagers who had been abducted by force to help them. All the four brigades of the Western Division, the “Mangalsen” First Brigade from the Vishesh Kshetra (Special Region), the “Satabaliya” Second Brigade from the Bheri-Karnali region, the “Lisne” Third Brigade from the Seti-Mahakali region, and the “Basu-Smriti” Fourth Brigade from the Gandaki region, participated in the action. On the other hand, the Third Battalion Commander “Avinash”⁴⁷ said that 3,600 persons of not all the battalions and only some from each of the four brigades and 6,000 “volunteers” had participated in the Beni attack.

“Pravin” said that all the forces began to assemble in and around Takam VDC in Myagdi district on 17 March. Geographical, political, and military trainings were given to the participants there. Local villagers in Takam testified that a huge number of Maoists came from the direction of Jaljala in two groups, one in the evening of 18 March and another in the morning of the next day. They stayed in various villages around Takam and set up mess in many places including the main villages of Takam, Siwang, Kaphaldanda, Machchhim, Muna, Phalaigaun, and Lamsung. The Maoists mobilized the villagers to prepare food for them. One of the women in Takam who helped to cook for the Maoists said that they had cooked around 700 kg rice on the night of 18 March. Some villagers in Takam told that the Maoists had bought several cows to eat in the village, at a price of Rs 4,000 to 4,500 per head. They even brought their own butchers. The Maoists tried to take some villagers as “volunteers” to Beni but the people in Takam opposed in union, saying that they would not let anybody go from this village to Beni but they would do whatever they could do in the village. As the area in-charge of the Maoists had accepted their demand, nobody from Takam participated in the attack as volunteers.

According to “Pravin”, they changed the original plan while staying in Takam. He explained the reason:

Our original plan was to raid Beni on the night of 22 March but we advanced the date of the attack by two days because we had a report from Beni that the information about the attack might have been leaked out. In fact, we intercepted the conversation of the security force in Beni, indicating the possibility of leaking at 11 p.m. on 18 March. Immediately after we got a report, we decided to advance the date and to carry out the action on the night of 20 March.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ From his speech to the mass meeting held in Gulmi in May 2004.

⁴⁸ Some Maoists whom I met in Rolpa in September 2004 confirmed this.

The main force left Takam area for Beni on 19 March. “Pravin” said that they had divided the force into seven groups as follows: 1) A battalion to block the security force in Kushma, district headquarters of Parbat. 2) A battalion to block the security force in Baglung, district headquarters of Baglung. 3) A battalion with 300 personnel to block the security forces stationed in the Ghumaunetal camp, situated 3 km north of Beni. 4) A platoon with 60 to 70 personnel to block a possible encounter with the RNA patrolling team from the Ghumaunetal camp. 5) The Fourth Brigade to go to Pari Beni (*Pāri Benī*), that is, the eastern side of the Kali Gandaki river. 6) A battalion with 300 personnel to raid the district jail located on the opposite side of the Kali Gandaki river. 7) The main force with Division Commander “Pasang” to attack Beni. The biggest force (7) took the main route to Beni, that is, via Darwang-Vaviyachaur-Singa-Arthunge. From near Tatopani in Singa VDC one group went up to the Arthunge hills and another went straight to Beni along the Myagdi river. “Etam” wrote that the Third Brigade went ahead by the motor road along the river and the other three brigades took the mountain road (“Etam” 2004).

The main force left Takam towards Darwang in the afternoon of 19 March. A villager in Takam expressed how they looked when they left:

When they went to Beni, there were an uncountable number of people just like “hairs”. They were marching in a line. I saw some people hunting fleas from their own bodies. They seemed not to have taken a bath for long time. There were some old people walking with sticks. Among the armed Maoists, around 20 to 25 % were women.

Darwang bazaar is located three hours’ walking distance from Takam. It is a small bazaar with about 100 households whose inhabitants are Magars, Kshetris, Bahuns, Thakalis, and Dalits. Since 16 March the Maoists had strictly forbidden the people of this area to move from one village to another. It was on the evening of 19 March that the first group of Maoists came to Darwang. A local teacher in Darwang testified:

The Maoists came here in two groups. The first group came on the evening of 19 March. They just passed through and did not stay. I heard that this group spent the night in Ratodhunga of Vaviyachaur VDC. But the second group that arrived in Darwang in the early morning of 20 March stayed here to take a meal. They left Darwang around 11 to 12 a.m. Some Maoists said that they would raid Beni at 10 p.m. that night.

Around 1 to 2 p.m. on 20 March a shopkeeper in Darwang bazaar saw some Maoists running towards Beni in a hurry carrying bombs. They

seemed to have received instructions to come quickly. A local woman who owns a lodge in Darwang bazaar said:

When they left here for Beni, local Maoists ordered all the households here to prepare meals for them next morning. They said: “As we will come back here again at 5 a.m. next morning, you have to prepare meals in time.” But, in fact, they came back here only in the afternoon next day.

“Pravin”’s testimony supports this:

Our original plan was to end the raid early in the morning and to withdraw when it got a little lighter. However, the battle lasted longer than we expected.

All thirteen people⁴⁹ who had been abducted from Chimkhola VDC on 8 March were with the first group of the main force. They left Takam in the evening of 19 March and passed through Darwang to arrive in Ralawang of Vaviyachaur VDC at night. They stayed in the houses of Ralawang until noon the next day and were sent to Thaiwang in Kuhun VDC to take bamboo-stretchers which had been made there around 1 or 2 p.m. These stretchers were used for carrying the wounded. They transported the stretchers to Simalchaur in Vaviyachaur VDC and then went to the Arthunge hills to wait there at 1 a.m. on 21 March.

The main force almost encountered a patrolling team of the Royal Nepalese Army near Beni.⁵⁰ “Pravin” said:

When we were in Ralawang, we came to know that a group of the security forces had come to Simalchaur, only an hour’s walking distance from Ralawang. We thought we might have to fight them; however, it did not happen as they did not advance from there but went to Beni. They did not even notice that we were there.

Janādeś reporter Manrishi Dhital also wrote about this:

⁴⁹ Among the abducted sixteen, one old man was allowed to return the next day and other two may have escaped.

⁵⁰ “Pravin” claimed they were from the camp in Pokhara. On the night of the attack, some 120 soldiers of the RNA from Pokhara were staying in the hall of the District Development Office.

At midnight on 20 March, we got a report that the *Śāhī Senā* (Royal Army) had come out of Beni. The People's Liberation Army was at a distance of four hours' walk from Beni. The commander of the people's army directed hundreds of guerrillas to be ready, saying: "If they come, we will fight here", but the royal army returned to Beni after reaching a place just half an hour away. When the sun was setting, dozens of warriors of the people's army put their own identity cards in their pockets, put bullets in their guns and we also put adequate energy in our pens, a cassette tape in a taperecorder and a film in a camera, while thinking about the coming war... Now, there were two ID cards in our pockets. One was signed by Dharanidhar Khatiwada, General Director of the Department of Information belonging to the old power⁵¹ and the other signed by Santosh Budha Magar, President of the new Magarat Autonomous Regional People's Government. The two ID cards have the same names and the same organization. Only the logos of the two powers and the colours of the cards were different (Dhital 2004b).

3. The attack on Beni – the longest battle

3.1. Opening an attack

3.1.1. The Arthunge hills

Beni bazaar lies in a small valley surrounded by the Arthunge hills on the north-western side and the Jyamrukot hills to the south. The main attacking force took a route via the Arthunge hills to enter Beni. One of their main targets, the barracks of the Shri Kali Prasad Battalion of the Royal Nepalese Army, lies at the western end of Beni. Some force of the People's Liberation Army came via the main road along the Myagdi river from Vaviyachaur and made an attack on the barracks from the side of Mangalaghat bazaar, located in the west of Beni. The Arthunge hills stand just behind the RNA barracks.

A shopkeeper in the Arthunge hills who lives along the way to Beni said:

I returned home at 7.30 p.m. on 20 March after attending the funeral of a villager who had committed suicide earlier that day. I took my wife with me to that house again and returned to my home at 9.15 p.m.. Immediately after that, around 9.30, I saw the Maoists running towards Beni. I heard the first gun report at 11.05 p.m.

⁵¹ The Maoists call the government the "old power" and themselves the "new power".

Western Division Commander “Pasang” and his main attacking force took the route via the Arthunge hills to enter Beni. The article by Manrishi Dhital confirms it:

After ascending for three hours in utter darkness [it was a new moon night], we came to know that the attack would start at 11 o'clock at night. It was already 10.30 p.m... Due to the darkness we could not find out the place given for reporting. After some time the Myagdi district headquarters, Beni, was seen in a dim light. While Sandhya and I were delayed, Chetan Kunwar walked down a hill. Then there were three of us. Five minutes before 11 o'clock we took our tape-recorders from the bags. While giving some symbolic directions through his own communication set, Division Commander Pasang with his own team also went down the hill. He was speaking to somebody: “Our troops have already reached much closer to the barracks. Now, the first firing is about to start. Please stand by. The town has already been surrounded by our troops” (Dhital 2004a; cf. also “Sandhya” 2004).

Dhital writes about the beginning of the attack as follows:

We were forcing our eyes to concentrate on our watches. It was 10.58 p.m. All of a sudden, the sound of firing was heard in Beni's main bazaar. The situation was becoming more intense. From just 11.00 p.m., the 81 mm's troop of Agni, our senior and experienced member, kept on firing bombs continuously for fifteen minutes, from a distance of at least 2,000 m. In the form of counter-attack, bombs started to come to all the hills surrounding the Royal Army's barracks. Within five minutes, a fire broke out in the hills to the eastern side of Beni. 51 minutes after it had started, Division Commander Pasang gave directions to the bombing troops to stop and directed all the troops that had entered the district headquarters to go ahead and cut the barbed wire (ibid.).

The Maoists fired 81-mm and 2-inch mortars from at least three points, two places on the way to the Arthunge hills and at one place on the hill to the south of Mangalaghat. I saw one of the spots in Arthunge village. It was at a height of over five hundred metres above the army barracks. They set up one 81-mm mortar and two 2-inch mortars at the same place. More than fifty empty cartridges for the 81-mm mortar's bullets were lying on the ground. “Etam” had mentioned in his article that about 45 81-mm mortar shells had fired within 15 minutes of the beginning of the battle (“Etam” 2004).

3.1.2. The Shri Kali Prasad Battalion (Engineering)

The Shri Kali Prasad Battalion (E) of the Royal Nepalese Army led by a lieutenant colonel had been stationed in Beni since 32 months before the raid. Before that only a platoon of the RNA used to stay in Beni. The battalion were stationed there to construct the road from Beni to Mustang. I don't know how many army personnel were staying in the barracks on the very night as the army officers I met did not give the information, however, it can be guessed that some several hundred soldiers were there when the Maoists attacked on the night of 20 March. Some soldiers were stationed in the Ghumaunetal camp, located 3 km north of Beni on the way to Jomsom. About twenty army personnel were stationed on a post on the roof of a building of the District Development Committee (DDC) Chairman's quarter and other twenty on a post on the roof of the District Police Office main building. By chance, about 120 personnel of the RNA from the Pokhara camp had just arrived in Beni and were staying in a DDC conference hall located behind the buildings of the DDC and the District Administration Office that night. "Pravin" admitted that they had been ignorant of the force from Pokhara staying inside the DDC compound although they did know about the forces stationed on top of the DDC Chairman's quarters.

The lieutenant colonel of the RNA who led the fighting with the Maoists testified:

Some time after 10.30 p.m., all of a sudden, support firing by 81-mm mortars, 2-inch mortars, GPMGs (General Purpose Machine Guns), and LMGs (Light Machine Guns) began from the upper side and from the far distance. Right after that firing started from close quarters, from the east and the west. 25 shells of 81-mm mortar and about 300 shells of 2-inch mortars were found inside our compound.

The lieutenant colonel claimed that they had no information about the attack,⁵² saying:

When we carried out the operation against the Maoists called *Baḍhārkūḍhār* (Sweeping Operation) across Myagdi district about two weeks before the attack, we found few Maoists in the district. We didn't have any information about the attack. The first bullet was the first information for us.

⁵² "Pravin" claimed that the RNA in Beni got the information of the Maoists attacking Beni and the additional force came from Pokhara on the basis of this information.

3.1.3. Beni bazaar

Most of the government offices in Beni were built in a line at the south of the bazaar along the Myagdi river. The District Police Office stands at the eastern end and the District Development Committee's buildings at the western end. Between them, the Telecommunication Office, the Assistant Chief District Officer's quarters, the DDC chairman's guest house, the Karmachari Milan Kendra (Officers' Meeting Centre), the CDO's quarters, the District Court, and the District Administration Office stand in a line from east to west. The barracks of the Shri Kali Prasad Battalion are situated at a distance of about 300 m to the west of the DDC office. It is clear that the location of these government offices made it easier for the Maoists to attack as they could concentrate their forces in the limited area. The Maoists utilized tall private houses in front of government offices for their attack. As soon as they started their action, they entered these houses and fired at the security forces from the roof or from inside the rooms.

A 66-year-old shopkeeper whose house is located just in front of the District Court started to hear gun reports just at 11 o'clock on the night of 20 March. In the beginning he thought the RNA might be practising as had happened before. But when he looked outside, he saw the Maoists coming from the east and entering the compound of the District Court. After a while, he heard the gun reports of GPMGs and LMGs from the rooftops of neighbouring houses. This shopkeeper, who had served in the Indian Army as a soldier until 1995, could recognize the different sorts of guns from their reports.

A 37-year-old man, whose home and restaurant-hotel stands in front of the DDC chairman's guesthouse, did not open the door when the Maoists banged loudly on the shutters. There were eleven guests staying in the hotel that night. The Maoists broke the lock and entered around 11.30 p.m. He saw seven Maoists including two females. They asked him to give them the room keys of the VDC offices⁵³ on the second floor. When he said that he did not have them, a Maoist with a Mongoloid face in his early twenties got angry and threatened him. They broke into one of the VDC offices and started to shoot from there. They stayed in the room until 9.30 the next morning and kept on firing for ten hours.

The Beni reporter of *Kāntipur* daily newspaper Ghanshyam Khadka was invited to dinner that night by a friend who owns a hotel in Bank Road, situated about 200 metres north of the District Police Office. As there was an undeclared curfew in the town after eight at night, he decided not to go back home and stayed in his friend's hotel. He had already gone to bed when

⁵³ Muna and Ramche VDC offices were in his building since December 2003 for security reasons. In fact, most of the VDC offices in Myagdi had moved to the district headquarters as their buildings in the villages have been destroyed by the Maoists.

he heard the sound of firing in the distance around 10.30 p.m. He also thought that the army might be firing as they sometimes did at night. However, he started to hear the sounds of fire being returned and explosions at eleven. At 11.15 p.m. eight to ten Maoists came into the building where he was staying and went to the rooftop. As he had heard that the Maoists sometimes used local people as human shields during an attack, he put off the light and hid. The Maoists left the building after firing from the roof for nearly an hour.

Two retired ex-soldiers, one who had worked for the Indian Army for 24 years and another for 17 years, lived in a house just behind the hotel compound where Ghanshyam was staying that night. They were brave enough to go out of their rooms to observe what was happening. They said:

It was five minutes after eleven when we heard gun reports. Ten minutes after that, some thirteen to fourteen Maoists in combat dress, including two women, entered our house by opening the windows of back rooms and passing through the house to the lane. We saw some of them carrying SLRs (Self Loading Rifles) and INSAS (Infantry Small Arms System) rifles. Though all their faces were camouflaged with black powder, many of them looked like Mongoloids. Many of them were speaking some language of western Nepal.

The compound of the District Agriculture Development (DAD) office is situated just in front of the District Police Office (DPO). The Maoists made this building one of the main firing points on the DPO. That night only one guard was inside the compound. The guard described how they entered:

I was sleeping in the guard room on the first floor of the office building. I don't know the time as I didn't have a watch, but at first I heard gun reports from the bazaar side. Immediately after that they came into the compound from the river side [the Kali Gandaki river is just behind the compound]. There were some 500 to 600 Maoists around here. They asked me to give the key of the DAD officer's room on the first floor and I gave it. I was helpless on my own and could not refuse.

The DAD officer's room faces the DPO building. There is no obstruction between them. Obviously, the Maoists used this room as the main spot to fire on the DPO building before they went into the DPO compound.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ A DAO officer said there were about 500 empty cartridges left in his office room.

3.1.4. Mangalaghat bazaar

The barracks of the Shri Kali Prasad Battalion are located between Beni bazaar and Mangalaghat bazaar. On its western side, Mangalaghat bazaar, smaller than Beni, lies along the Myagdi river. It seemed that the first battle between the Maoists and a small patrolling group of the security force occurred in a small lane between the barracks and Mangalaghat bazaar. Six persons, four from the security forces and two from the Maoists,⁵⁵ died on the spot.

According to some local people in this bazaar, a part of the main force of the Maoists that came along the Myagdi river reached there around 10.45 p.m. They forced the local people in the bazaar to open their shops and took whatever drink and food they wanted and then started to fight. Interestingly, there are many ex-Gurkha soldiers in this bazaar who had served in the Indian Army. One of them, a 60-year-old man who was in the Indian Army for eighteen years, reported:

At first I heard gun reports in the distance and then a huge number of people, at least 1,500, came into the bazaar from all sides. There were people from the age of fourteen-fifteen to about fifty years old but most of them were boys and girls either teenagers or in their early twenties. I saw some Maoists carrying AK-47 rifles on their shoulders. Many of them had grenades. From the sounds I could tell that heavy exchanges of fire were taking place.

The Maoists brought out many sacks of food grain and tables from several shops in the bazaar to use as barricades in the front line.

3.1.5. The District Jail

The Myagdi District Jail is situated on the opposite side of the Myagdi river. According to "Pravin", a battalion of 300 personnel that came from the Bhakunde hills made a raid on the District Jail. Normally, twenty-one policemen were stationed in the District Jail but two of them were on leave, so only nineteen policemen were there on the night of 20 March. According to an article published in *Kāntipur* on 31 March, one of the policemen on duty that night said that, when no security forces came to aid them, they escaped to save their own lives and hid behind rocks on the river bank. However, the testimony of one of the prisoners whom I met in Beni was different. He had returned to Beni after being freed by the Maoists during the raid:

⁵⁵ Six bodies were found in one place, in the hall of a house under construction near the spot.

Around 150 Maoists entered the jail at 11.30 p.m. The policemen had already run away from the jail. The Maoists told us to come out as they were going to blast the buildings and we, 33 prisoners in all, ran away. They accompanied us up to the road and said: “If you go down [to Beni bazaar], you will be caught in a battle. So you had better go up [to the village].” We all went to the village but I and the other three returned here later.

Manrishi Dhital’s article (2004b) confirms his account:

Troops led by Commander Akarshan reached the jail and sent a report at 12 midnight: “We captured the jail. There was no resistance at all. There is only one *havaldār* [a police rank] here. He had only one rifle. There are 35 prisoners.⁵⁶ What to do with them?” Commander Pasang ordered: “Please free all the prisoners. Free the *havaldār* as well. Please you come to this side to join us. Where have the other policemen gone?” Akarshan answered: “They seem to have run away. Now we will follow your orders.” After that we saw the jail on fire.

When I went to the District Jail in Beni on 26 March, I saw that the Shiva-linga in the small temple to the right of the entrance gate had been destroyed. A local journalist told me that the temple had been built by the prisoners. It was clear that the Maoists had destroyed it.

3.1.6. War clinics

The Maoists set up treatment centres for the wounded in at least five places in Beni and some more in Mangalaghat. An area in-charge of the Maoists, named “Ramesh Vidrohi” whom I met in Darwang VDC participated in the Beni attack as a “volunteer”. It was his first experience of military action. He was in a local volunteers group whose responsibility was to carry the injured persons during the attack. He said:

I was in charge of three treatment centres. We set up three kinds of treatment centre. The primary treatment centres just to stop bleeding were set up near the front line and the second one a little behind the primary centres and then the third ones, where most of the surgery, such as taking out bullets, was conducted, were set up a little distant from the front line. The wounded started to be brought around 1 a.m. on 21 March.

⁵⁶ As noted above, the real number of prisoners was 33.

The Maoists turned the house of a local Newar into one of the main treatment centres. It stands on the northern side of Birendra Chok, just 80 metres from the compound of the DDC and the DAO. A house owner described what happened:

I and my wife were sleeping in a room in the first floor. After hearing gun reports and some noise outside, we went down to a room on the ground floor where our three daughters were sleeping. Immediately after that, fifty to sixty Maoists in combat dress came into our house both from the garden side and from the shop side. At first we thought they might be the security forces but, in fact, they were Maoists. They knocked on the door of the room where we were staying but we didn't open it. When I looked out the window, I saw they were breaking a lock to enter the room next to ours. After they left, we realized that they had used three rooms in our house, one on the ground floor and two on the first floor, as their treatment centre. We, the five of us, stayed inside the room and didn't go out for the whole night until they had left.

Though his family had no conversation with the Maoists, a tailor's family living in a small rented house several hundred metres north of this Newar's had a different experience. The Maoists used the tailor's house not only as a treatment centre but also to store their ammunition. It was also around 11 p.m. when the Maoists came into their house. His wife explained how they came in and how they behaved:

I and my two small children were quietly staying in the first floor with the light off. When I opened a window facing the garden, I saw many people coming down from the hill behind our house. Most of them were dressed like army men and their faces were painted black. They brought bullets into our courtyard and came to fetch them during the fight. As they made the ground floor a treatment centre, we could not go out to the toilet for the whole night. When they came into our house, a guerrilla asked my younger brother who was sleeping alone on the ground floor, "Where is the army firing from?" When he answered that he didn't know, this Maoist kicked my brother with his booted foot. He even slapped my six-year-old daughter when she said "Don't hit my uncle".

The Maoists set up another treatment centre in a vacant house under construction owned by the Thakali Samaj (Thakali Society), situated 200 metres north-east of the District Police Office, and in a quarter of the District Agriculture Development Officer inside the DAD office compound.

They also made other medical centres on the lane in New Road, about a hundred meters north of the tailor's rented house, and at a house in Ganesh Tol about four hundred metres north of the DPO. In Mangalaghat bazaar as well, the Maoists set up at least two main treatment centres immediately after the battle had started. A shopkeeper, whose kitchen they used as a treatment centre, said:

Within five or ten minutes after the firing started at 11 p.m. all my family, except my aged mother who was alone upstairs, gathered in one place. While we were discussing about which room would be safe to stay in, some Maoists opened the shutter of my shop on the ground floor and came in. Then, a woman Maoist with a red band around her head and wearing trousers and a shirt, who had a Kshetri-like face and looked about 20 years old, came upstairs and asked me for water and some bedclothes. She said that they had some injured persons and added politely, "We don't do anything to you. So please stay safely." I came to know later that the first exchange of fire had already occurred between the Maoists and a patrol of the security forces near Mangalaghat bazaar at that time and they had brought some wounded.

The Maoists also used the class rooms of Lokdeep Secondary Boarding School that stood behind Mangalaghat bazaar. On that night nearly fifty students and six teachers were staying in the school building. All the students and four teachers were in the second floor and two teachers were in the first floor. The Maoists used the rooms in the ground floor. They also set up an emergency clinic close to the front line in an open space behind a house at the eastern end of the bazaar.

3.2. In the battle

3.2.1. Communication

It was about two and a half hours after the Maoists had started the action, that is, around 1.30 a.m. of 21 March, when all the 515 telephone lines in Beni were suddenly cut off.⁵⁷ After many bullets had hit the telephone exchange station, telecommunication was interrupted. There was no one in the station. But the Maoists claimed they had not cut off the telephone lines intentionally. "Pravin" said:

There was no plan to destroy the telephone exchange station. Rather, we had a plan to make contacts with the outside through telephone lines and to capture the materials in the exchange station.

⁵⁷ Some of them were lines of Galeshwar, situated 3 km north of Beni.

From the facts that the Western Division of the PLA, for the first time, invited some journalists to report about their battle and that they even tried to record their fight with a video camera, it is clear that the Maoists intended to use the Beni attack to demonstrate and publicize their military power. Journalist Manrishi Dhital makes this quite explicit:

After some time, both the communication and the electricity were cut off. Our previous plans, to meet all the Beni's local journalists and establish communication with them, to update the latest news to our media and to inform the members of our umbrella organization, the Nepal Journalist Association, that its members were reporting from the front line, ended in failure due to the interruption of communications (Dhital 2004a).

Dhital's article indicates that the reporters were observing the battle from the place where Division Commander "Pasang" was commanding his troops. It can be guessed that "Pasang" was high up, just behind Beni bazaar, on the way to the Arthunge hills. "Pravin" indirectly confirmed this idea saying that Commander "Pasang" was in wards 1 and 2 of Arthunge VDC, which refers to Beni bazaar and the forests surrounding the bazaar, during the attack. He also said, "Pasang was mostly high up behind Hulak Chok, located to the north-west side of the Beni bazaar and north of the army barracks." Dhital's second article (Dhital 2004b) confirms it:

After the sun rose on the hills, we came to know that we were on the northwest side [of Beni]... Around two at night, news came to Pasang's communication set. It was the voice of Third Brigade Commander "Vividha": "All the posts surrounding the officers' residences⁵⁸ have been captured. We captured some INSASs, SMGs, and SLRs. One army soldier is in our capture, what to do with him?" Pasang greeted with cheerful gesture: "Thank you! Thank you very much! Now, please take the offensive. Go ahead." At 2.15 a.m., I heard the voice of this action's Commissar "Viplav": "Pasang! What is the new report?" Pasang reported: "Friends are taking the offensive... They have cut the wire and reached very close to the barracks. We have to wait for the reports from Parivartan and Vividha." Viplav replied: "Yes, I will report to the upper ranks according to that. Please let the friends go ahead. How are our weapons working? We will win, won't we?" Pasang said only this: "They are working well. It seems that it will take a little longer. Out."

⁵⁸ Government officers' residences were located next to the army barracks on the west side.

This article indicates that the Third Brigade led by “Vividha” attacked the army barracks from the side of Mangalaghat bazaar since the officers’ residences are located on the western side of the barracks. Dhital also wrote about the blocking teams:

By two o’clock at night, the troops that went to block the army barracks in Kushma in Parbat, in the district headquarters of Baglung, and in Ghumaunetal in Myagdi sent reports that they were blocking the forces there (Dhital 2004b).

Even after the attack had been going on for more than five hours, no helicopter of the RNA came to help the security forces in Beni. Dhital mentioned the first helicopter that came to Beni:

Fighting was almost over in all other places and the battle was concentrated on the large buildings of the main barracks. When it was nearly five o’clock in the morning, we heard the sound of a helicopter up in the air but it was flying very high and could not be seen. The beating of its wings could be heard for half an hour. It came lower. As it received a counterattack, after dropping some deadly bombs, it disappeared. After that, Beni was quiet for at least half an hour. The situation of a truce was nearly created. Only some gun reports were heard. After half an hour, again intense firing started up all around the main barracks. By that time, it was already bright daylight...

The fight went on even after daybreak. Dhital continued:

Around 7.30 in the morning the voice of the First Brigade Commander “Parivartan”⁵⁹ was heard on the radio set: “All the district government offices are under our control. We came to know that there was a large number of soldiers in the District Police Office as well. There is a lot of ammunition here. Please send volunteers.” In no time Pasang sent hundreds of volunteers to search all the district government offices. Volunteers had already searched many banks and important non-government offices (Dhital 2004b).

⁵⁹ According to some Maoists I met in Rolpa in September 2004, “Parivartan”, whose real name was Nep Bahadur K.C., died at a shelter in Kapilbastu district on 13 May, due to an accident in which his security guard’s socket bomb had exploded. He was 31 years old and from Iriwang VDC of Rolpa district.

3.2.2. The government offices

At the western end of Beni bazaar lies the largest compound of government offices. The buildings of the District Administration Office, the District Development Committee's office, the DDC chairman's quarters, the DDC conference hall, and the government lawyers' office stood in that compound. As mentioned above, some 120 security force personnel from Pokhara had just arrived in Beni that night and were staying in the DDC conference hall that stood behind the DDC office. There were twenty army men on the post stationed on the roof of the DDC chairman's quarters.

A peon who works for the Chief District Officer was sleeping inside the DAO office with his wife and two sons when he heard gun reports from the mountain side to the north at 11 o'clock that night. Two hours after that, he heard a clamour outside and the Maoists entered the compound. Being afraid, the peon and his family went to hide under the bed. They stayed there until they finally went out to take refuge in the army barracks, located about 300 metres away to the west, at 4.45 a.m.. They were lucky enough to be able to escape in time. Another peon of the DDC chairman was found dead outside at the western end of the DDC conference hall. He was hit by bullets. A family of four stayed inside the building of the District Court until morning. The husband was injured.

There were other civilian victims inside the DDC chairman's quarters. Six former Maoists who had surrendered to the security forces were staying in a room on the first floor. Four of them were killed. One of the two survivors testified:

That night all of us were in a room facing the street on the first floor.⁶⁰ When firing started at 11, I and another person took shelter behind a cabinet and stayed there for seven hours until 6 next morning. Windows were broken and grenades and bullets came into the room. The other four were killed around 2 a.m. They were shot because they stayed in the centre of the room. Two of them may have been shot when they stood up to escape. The Maoists set fire to the buildings of the DDC and the DAO offices around 3.30 a.m. As fire began to come into the room, we decided to go out at 6 a.m. We ran towards the DDC conference hall, where the security forces were, with our hands raised to show we were not fighting and went inside the hall. At that time, the security forces were still in the hall. After that, the Maoists started an even more intense attack. There was firing until 9.30 a.m. Only when a helicopter came and dropped ammunition, did the Maoists start to withdraw.

⁶⁰ This room is situated just under the security post on the roof.

“Pravin” mentioned that the security forces in the DDC conference hall had not attempted to take offensive action but just responded to Maoist fire: “There was no intense return of fire from the Pokhara force staying in the conference hall.” He made it clear that they had no idea about the existence of the additional security force from Pokhara staying inside the DDC compound. In the compound of the DDC and the DAO, seven persons were killed. Among them were five civilians including a peon of the DDC chairman’s office and four surrendered Maoists. On the side of the security forces, one RNA soldier and one person of the Armed Police Force were killed. It seems that the existence of 120 personnel of the security force did not help to protect the buildings and facilities of the DDC and DAO from being set on fire. The buildings were completely destroyed.

3.2.3. The Chief District Officer

Adjoining the compound of the DDC and the DAO offices, is the compound of the District Court to the east and then the Chief District Officer’s quarters. The CDO of Myagdi, Sagarmani Parajuli, and six policemen were in the CDO’s quarters that night. Previously the Maoists had killed three CDOs in the attacks on Salleri (Solukhumbu), Mangalsen (Achham), and Khalanga (Jumla). Other CDOs had been abducted and freed after some time. It can be said that capturing a CDO is one of the Maoists’ main aims when attacking district headquarters. CDO Parajuli (2004) described his experiences that night in an interview:

I went to bed at around ten. I had already fallen asleep. I woke up after hearing the sudden sound of firing. As the Royal Nepalese Army also used to go into “practice” before, I called up the army expecting to hear that this was what was going on. We had established a separate “system” in order to facilitate contact when the regular line wasn’t working. However, that line was dead too. Then I realized the Maoists were attacking...

Firing increased. I heard many people speaking outside. I felt it was not very secure to stay here... Thinking that I might be able to survive if I went to the LDO’s (Local Development Officer) quarters, I tried to go there through a kitchen garden but came to know they had already been there...

I went slowly to the LDO quarters. Nobody was there. I tried to open the door but it was locked from the inside. I squeezed inside under the flap of the door. I felt like staying in a toilet or a corner. There is a small guest room as soon as you enter the building. I lay down there making my body as small as possible and put both hands behind my head. I stayed watching the door.

After half an hour I heard girls screaming “Salim, Salim”. I also heard boys saying “Prahar, Prahar”.⁶¹ I thought “Prahar” must be somebody’s name. I saw the blue light of their torch. I realized that they covered their torches with blue plastic sheeting in order to prevent the light from spreading. Some people came and asked, “Is somebody here?” The young female Maoists who were there answered, “We have already searched.” After that I felt relieved. They were talking while sitting on a nearby table, going outside, and firing.

I thought they would leave around three or four o’clock. But that situation continued. The battle was going on. There were continuous gun reports. I heard the sound of a helicopter.⁶² I felt it would be better now. Now I could survive...

I heard the sound of somebody running and saying: “If you want to save your life, surrender.” I felt that the situation was not yet favourable. After hearing the sound of somebody coming toward me, I thought I should not be lying down. I went outside at once and raised my hands. I surrendered. They caught me. “Are you [from] the army?” “No.” “Are you a policeman?” “No, I am an officer.” “Of which office?” “District Administration Office.” “Which position do you have in that office?” “Chief District Officer.” After that they searched my body and looked at my ID card. They asked, “Are you a commissar?” I said, “I am an officer. I don’t know what a commissar is.”⁶³ And then they took me to a commander.

According to Parajuli, when he was taken to a Maoist commander around eight o’clock in the morning, he saw a DSP (Deputy Superintendent of Police) handcuffed there. Then the Maoists had the CDO appeal to the security forces to surrender through a megaphone in three different places. As the police force in the District Police Office had already surrendered by then, he was made to appeal to the army. Even while he was appealing, fighting was going on. Parajuli continued:

In the meantime, the fighters went in front of the District Court and started firing. Bullets shot from that side came toward me. The fighters protected me from being shot. There were many people of the Maoist army. There was a lot of blood. They took me near Birendra Chok. Again I was made to appeal for them to surrender by means of a hand-held

⁶¹ These words may be Maoists’ code words. It is known that they use the code words to communicate with each other during battle.

⁶² The first helicopter came to Beni around 5.20 a.m. but it did not stay long.

⁶³ From these conversations it can be deduced that this Maoist did not even know what a CDO was.

megaphone. A third time I requested them to surrender from the top of the post office. At that time they set fire to the army post in front of us...

3.2.4. The District Police Office

From Dhital's second article (2004b), it can be guessed that the main force that made an attack on the District Police Office was the PLA's First Brigade led by Commander "Parivartan" and the main forces that made an attack on the barracks of the Shri Kali Prasad Battalion were the PLA's Second and Third Brigades.⁶⁴ The District Police Office (DPO) and the army barracks were their main targets. As in other attacks on district headquarters, it was easier for the Maoists to capture the police office than the army barracks. Though they were unable to capture the army barracks, they captured the police office around 7.30 a.m.

There were about 90 policemen and 20 army personnel stationed on the DPO, situated at the eastern end of the government offices. One of the policemen⁶⁵ who had been abducted by the Maoists after surrendering said:

Firing and bombing started from the direction of the hills and the bazaar. At around one or 1.30 a.m., they entered the compound and started to fire from closer distance. They attacked mainly from the north side. After it got light, they broke the fence and some 1,000 guerrillas came into the compound. They started to appeal us to surrender. We surrendered at 7.30 a.m. and were abducted around eight. After that they set fire to the buildings of the DPO.

Dhital added about the capture of the DPO:

When it was nearly eight o'clock in the morning, we captured 34 policemen including DSP Rana Bahadur Gautam and two soldiers of the royal army. Before this, we had captured CDO Sagarmani Parajuli as well. After removing weapons, bullets, and many other war materials, soldiers spread kerosene around⁶⁶ and set fire to the DPO at 8.30 a.m. In all the main government offices except the hospital, flames started to rise... (Dhital 2004b).

⁶⁴ A Maoist whom I met in Rolpa in September 2004 said that the First Brigade attacked the DPO, the District Jail, and the army barracks as well from the eastern side. He was with the force of the First Brigade during the attack.

⁶⁵ He and another policeman were freed next day after being injured in air bombing by the RNA helicopter but the other 37, including the CDO, two army men and 34 policemen, were freed only after seventeen days.

⁶⁶ They looted kerosene from shops in Beni bazaar.

The Maoists brought many wire-cutters to cut barbed wire surrounding the compound of the security forces. When I went to Beni on 25 March I still could see that the barbed wire surrounding the northern and eastern sides of the DPO was cut in many places. After cutting the barbed wire, they blew holes in three places in the fence with bombs and entered the compound. In fact, it was the security forces in the DPO who suffered the heaviest casualties. Thirteen policemen and two army personnel were killed there. According to the newly appointed CDO of Myagdi, whom I met on 2 May in Beni, in total 19 policemen were killed and three were still missing. Among the nineteen, two were under the unified command of the army and the bodies of three were found later in the Kali Gandaki river. Two others, who were on duty in the district jail, were killed when they came out from the huge rock in the river bank where they were taking shelter during the night. They were said to be shot by the Maoists from the opposite bank of the Kali Gandaki river when they came out by mistake, taking the Maoists in combat dress to be security forces coming to help them.

3.2.5. The Shri Kali Prasad Battalion

From the fact that the Maoists are still using modern weapons they had looted from the Royal Nepalese Army's barracks in Ghorahi, Mangalsen, and Sandhikharka, it is clear that capturing of army battalion barracks is quite important for them. "Kirti", the area in-charge of the Maoists I met in Takam VDC, said proudly; "The Beni attack was the first action on a *gaṇa* (battalion) of the RNA led by a colonel." She also said: "Our original plan was to occupy the army camp and to free the soldiers after giving political training to them." However, as we have seen, they were not able to take the army barracks.

A lieutenant colonel who led the Shri Kali Prasad Battalion testified about how the Maoists fought:

They occupied the compound of the British Gurkha Welfare Centre adjoining the army barracks on the east and attacked from there. After the first helicopter had come and left Beni around five in the morning, the Maoists started the most intensive attack on the barracks. They came into the compound but soon withdrew after we struck back. They came like waves one after another. I saw a woman Maoist trying to climb a tree even after she had been hit by 15 to 16 bullets. During this most intense firing from five to six in the morning, five army personnel died inside the compound.

Six bodies of the Maoists, including a woman guerrilla, were found inside the compound of the barracks. According to a member of the Red Cross Society in Beni, who participated in collecting the bodies after the attack, all of them were lying in the northern side of the huge rock that stands on the right hand of the gate. He said that four of them looked like Magars and the other two like Tharus.⁶⁷ A lieutenant colonel said they were shot dead during this early morning's intense firing. An AK-47 was found near the body of a Maoist wearing a belt with the name of "Ramesh". It was the first time the government side had evidence of the Maoists using this assault rifle. Since neither the RNA nor the police have this weapon, it is clear that the Maoists brought them from outside the country. "Pravin" admitted that it was their AK-47 and that it was made in China (not in Russia). According to an article published in the weekly magazine *Samaya* (31 Vaishakh 2061), the "People's Radio" broadcast by the Maoists in the Western Region claimed in February 2004 that they had 66 AK-47s (Baral and Khanal 2004).

The Maoists admitted in the statement published immediately after the attack in the name of Western Division Commissar "Viplav" and Commander "Pasang" that two of the PLA's brigade vice-commanders, "Yoddha" and "Bahuwir", a battalion commander "Vishal", and a battalion vice-commander "Vayu" died during the attack. I particularly tried to identify the places where the two brigade vice-commanders died. There was no evidence found from the ID cards and documents collected from the bodies of the Maoists that showed them to be high-level commanders. However, "Pravin" made it clear that "Yoddha" had been killed in the compound of the army barracks.⁶⁸ "Pravin" indicated that the six bodies found in the compound of the army barracks were those that were left behind after they had carried some of them away. He also said that after a brigade vice-commander had been shot dead they decided to withdraw from the compound of the army barracks. According to "Kalpana" (2004), "Yoddha" belonged to PLA's Second Brigade. "Yoddha" was "Kalpana"'s husband. This indicates that the Second Brigade made an attack on the army barracks.

3.2.6. War clinic

Thirteen "volunteers" who had been abducted by the Maoists from Chimkhola VDC (as described above) were waiting from 1 a.m. in the Arhunge hills near Beni for the wounded to arrive. In fact, most of the civilian "volunteers" were taken there to help carry the wounded and looted goods, including weapons and ammunition. According to the volunteers from Chimkhola, it was between 1.30 and 2.00 a.m. when the first injured

⁶⁷ Magars from Rolpa and Rukum districts are numerous in the core fighting force of the PLA. Tharus come from the Tarai.

⁶⁸ "Eagle", a Maoist I met in Rolpa in September 2004, confirmed this.

person was brought. They left there for the west around 3.00 a.m. with the wounded on stretchers. "Pravin" said that there were few casualties on their side until 4.30 a.m. and that they suffered the heaviest toll after it got light. He also said that the highest toll was seen in Birendra Chok area, along the street from in front of the District Court, the DAO, and the DDC offices leading to the army barracks.

The closest treatment centre to Birendra Chok was the one set up in a house of a local Newar. The Maoists stayed in his house from 11 p.m. to 9.30 a.m. next morning. Though the house owner and his four family members stayed in a room on the ground floor and did not come out until the Maoists left, they could see and hear their activities through a window that faced the door of the room the Maoists were using. He described the situation:

Some volunteers were seen giving water and conveying messages to fighters and some children bringing bombs and ammunition outside. Women health workers were giving treatment. Most of the slightly injured went back to the front line after getting the first aid treatment. An injured child of about fifteen years old was crying. They were asking the seriously injured persons: "Which group are you from?" "Where are you from?" Many people were speaking non-Nepali languages like Rolpali [the Kham language spoken by the Magars in Rolpa and Rukum districts] and a Hindi-like language [such as would be spoken by people from the Tarai]. Later we came to know that they ate all kinds of food including biscuits, chau-chau instant noodles, *ciurā* (beaten rice), and drank the cold drinks in our shop. But they didn't drink any alcohol. They used a room on the ground floor, two rooms including a bedroom, a secret room that we use for *pūjā* (religious ritual), and a veranda on the first floor. They used all the bedding and cushions in our house and even some clothes. We had to throw them away as they became so soiled with blood.

A tailor's family whose rented house was used as a treatment centre, as described above, testified that more than a hundred injured persons were brought there. His wife described their activities:

They brought the wounded along the main road from the direction of Hulak Chok [situated on the way to Birendra Chok]. Two men were doing treatments. A man wearing gloves was giving injections and treating wounds and another was giving tablets to the patients. I didn't see them taking out bullets. It seemed that they were doing treatments mainly to stop bleeding. There were many women. Some women were even carrying small babies. Many of them were speaking languages that we didn't understand. Some said that they had come from Rukum.

The Maoists set up another treatment centre in an open space on a lane situated just 50 metres north of the tailor's house. A nurse happened to observe what was going on there:

Around 1 a.m. they brought a portable table there and set it up in the lane. They stayed there until around 4 a.m. They put the wounded on it and treated them. Their way of treatment looked so rough. I saw a health worker taking out a bullet with his hand after opening the wound with a knife. He even didn't ask the patient if he was feeling any pain. When I checked the remaining drugs later, I saw there were injections of Diclofenac for pain relief and Buscopan tablets that were usually used for abdominal pain. They may have used both of them at one time to lessen the pain. I saw a girl in combat dress who looked like a Bahun or a Kshetri, aged around sixteen, shot in front of the house, seven houses beyond ours, and dragged along from there. She was shot in her chest and weeping. Another Maoist scolded her saying: "Don't cry. We have either to kill or to die." Soon after that she died.

Another citizen living in this area saw the Maoists placing their red party flags over the bodies and taking them away. The nurse described her interaction with the Maoists also:

When a helicopter came flying overhead at 5.20 a.m., a Maoist came and asked me for a key to the gate of our house. I said that I didn't have it as I was just a tenant. Then he broke the lock with some tool and came in. He went to a water tap to wash his face and then mixed *sattū*⁶⁹ with water to eat. He asked me: "Mother, could you sleep at night?" And he asked for mustard oil and cotton to clean his gun. When I told him to leave soon, he said: "You don't need to be afraid." After that he moved to the roof of the neighbouring house and left for a hill at the back.

On the eastern side of Beni bazaar, treatment centres were set up in at least three places: in the District Agriculture Development Office in front of the District Police Office,⁷⁰ in the vacant offices of the Thakali Samaj, and in a private house in Ganesh Tol. I could not find any eyewitness who saw their activities in the DAD office or in the house of the Thakali Samaj, as there was only one guard staying in the former, who didn't dare to go out, while

⁶⁹ *Sattū* is like field rations made by frying corn or wheat flour and mixing it with salt and spices.

⁷⁰ They also made use of the compound of the temple adjoining the DAD office.

the latter was located in an isolated place near the river. In the private house in Ganesh Tol, the Maoists came in only at seven in the morning. They used the front room of this house. A member of the family said:

During the night they only came here to drink water. They brought some ten to twelve injured persons here after seven. Two or three girls treated the patients. I saw them using a spoon from our kitchen to take out a bullet. One was shot in his shoulder and another in his thigh. A man shot in the chest died while receiving treatment.

A shopkeeper in Mangalaghat bazaar could do nothing to stop the Maoists using his house as a treatment centre and taking sacks of rice and sugar from his shop for their “struggle” (*morcā*). A woman Maoist who first came in his house asked him: “How many army personnel are stationed here?” He answered: “I have no idea but as it’s a battalion there must be many.” She spoke politely. After he had some conversation with her, he stayed inside a room on the first floor with his family. During the night time they could only hear some of their conversation. He said:

They were using a kitchen for treatment. I heard voices of a man, possibly a doctor, and some nurses. A girl, maybe a nurse, was telling the others not to turn on their torches. They were also saying that it was convenient that there was a plentiful supply of water in this house. At one point I went out of the room to fetch my aged mother who was alone in a room on the second floor. At that time, I could see many people with white bandages lying on the floor. I could not get my mother with me as some Maoist asked: “Who are you?” So my mother was alone until 4 a.m. Around 3 a.m. I heard some two or three people talking with regret in their voices about the fact that so many of their friends had fallen. They took a lot of goods from our shop including food and drinks and ate all the food in the kitchen. In the morning, some Maoists with guns came to buy some food and drink in my shop. I said, “You have already taken many goods. What is the point of paying for one or two bottles of Coke?” Then they apologized: “We are very sorry. Our friends should not have done that.” They were still here when the helicopter was flying overhead and left only around 10.30 a.m.

The Maoists used five classrooms on the ground floor of Lokdeep Secondary Boarding School in Mangalaghat. They were coming and going there until 11 a.m. After they had left, one injured policeman was found there. He was one of the security personnel involved in the first exchange of fire with the Maoists in between Mangalaghat bazaar and the army barracks. After surrendering, he was treated by a Maoist health worker.

“Pravin” said that there was a MBBS doctor in the Western Division of the PLA. I tried to identify where he was during the attack but I could not.

3.2.7. Beni bazaar

An ex-Indian soldier living in Birendra Chok in front of the District Court said that as it got brighter, the firing became more intense:

I saw many Maoists in the street in front of my house. They were shooting .303 rifles and SLRs. It seemed that experienced Maoists were shooting SLRs and women and less experienced persons were shooting .303 rifles. I also heard the sound of machine guns like GPMGs and LMGs from the roofs of the neighbours' houses. They used a lot of socket bombs as well. They set fire to the buildings of the DDC and DAO at around 4 o'clock in the morning. The CDO's quarters and the building of the District Court were set on fire around 8 a.m. At about 8.30, the CDO was brought here and made an appeal through a megaphone. He was saying: “I am the Chief District Officer of Myagdi. The Maoists have already captured the District Police Office. Hand over your weapons and surrender.” After that, around 9 a.m., an 81-mm mortar killed four Maoists in front of the District Court.⁷¹ They carried away three bodies and one body and a leg remained there. After that they started to withdraw slowly.

Just in front of the main building of the District Police Office stood a house owned by Netra Bahadur Mahat, a district president of the Nepali Congress (Democrat) party. This house burnt down completely and two civilians were burnt to death inside the house. The house was rented out as a restaurant and lodge named the “Baglung Hotel”. Both of those who died were guests who had just returned from the Gulf countries and were on their way home. It was mysterious how it caught fire. Some people in the bazaar said the Maoists had intentionally set fire to it in order to make the area bright at night time. But “Pravin” denied it. He claimed that a fire missile had hit the house by accident. He said they had let the family of the tenants come out of the house before that and had taken them to some secure place. Ghanshyam Khadka who was in a friend's hotel at that time happened to see this tenant family. Khadka said they were taken to the hotel by Maoists around 3 or 4 a.m. The tenant did not inform the Maoists that two guests were staying in rooms on the first floor.

It was around 12.30 p.m. when some 30 Maoists entered the office of the Pashchim Anchal Finance Company. According to the branch manager of this office, many of them looked like Dalits or Magars. There was a woman

⁷¹ It is not certain which side fired this mortar.

of around twenty years old. They asked the branch manager for the key to the place where cash was kept. When he refused, they threatened him, saying: “We will blast it.” Then he gave them the key. They searched the office and took away Rs. 195,284 in cash, two computers, two printers, a fax machine, a gun, and bullets. He saw a Maoist informing somebody through a communication set that they had taken Rs 200,000 in cash. They left at 4.30 a.m.

At the northern end of Beni bazaar lies the big compound of the Myagdi District Hospital. Despite the fact that it is located not far from the front line (about one km away), the Maoists did not use the facilities of this hospital. There were two doctors and six or seven patients in the hospital that night. Though they brought two seriously injured Maoists in a jeep inside the hospital compound, they ran away leaving the two and the jeep when a helicopter came flying overhead. The two Maoists in the jeep were found to be dead. Apart from these two, no other injured Maoists were brought to the hospital. It was around 8 a.m. when a Maoist, about 40 years old, in plain clothes,⁷² accompanied by a boy, came to the doctor’s quarters and asked for stretchers. He said in a polite way: “If you can’t give us stretchers, could you come with us?” A doctor gave him the key of the room where stretchers were kept. The Maoist also said: “If you need, we will return them later.” They took all seventeen stretchers in the hospital but nothing else.

3.2.8. On the bank of the Kali Gandaki river

Near the suspension bridge called *Kālo Pul* (black bridge) over the Kali Gandaki river, just behind Beni bazaar, river-protection works were going on. The contractor and his workers stayed on the opposite bank (the Parbat district side) at night. They saw a group of Maoists covering dead bodies with red party flags and offering silent prayers while doing *lāl salām* (red greeting) raising their right arms on the river bank at around six or seven o’clock. “Pravin” confirmed that they were actually himself and his comrades. He said:

I was responsible for burying nine bodies who had died during the battle and carried them to the bank of the Kali Gandaki, where some volunteers had already made a hole to bury the bodies. After a five-minute simple tribute programme, we buried them. I didn’t know whose bodies they were.

⁷² “Pravin” indicated that this Maoist was himself.

3.2.9. Mangalaghat bazaar

The Maoists who came to Mangalaghat bazaar were one of the main forces that had attacked the army barracks. They used some ten or twelve shops there as resting places during the battle. One of them was the restaurant owned by a 39-year-old Magar woman. There were only females, including her, three daughters and her mother, in the house. After her husband had left her, she made a living by running a restaurant on the ground floor of her house. The Maoists opened a door and came in the house immediately after the firing started at 11 p.m. She described what they did:

First, they took a table away to use it as a shelter. They drank most of the soft drinks and some beer here. They didn't take hard drinks but threw them in the street. All of them were under thirty. There were many women and children whose guns were touching the ground because of their small height. They went to the front line to fight and then came back here to take a rest and eat. As one came back, another left. They went to fight by turns. They just appeared not to care about their own lives.

Around 9.30 a.m. her elder sister came to the house because she was worried about them. After seeing the disorder there, she scolded the Maoists. One of the Maoists apologized, saying that they had made mistakes. When her elder sister came, she noticed that the Rs. 30,000 cash that she was keeping on a shelf for a relative was missing. Some Maoists were still there but she was too afraid to ask them about the missing money.

3.3. Retreating

3.3.1. Decision

According to "Pravin", when the RNA helicopter flew back to Beni at 9.30 a.m., the battle turned into a situation of retaliation by the RNA. So the Maoists decided to withdraw. "Pravin" explained about the timing of withdrawal:

Actually, the battle lasted longer than we had expected. If we had continued the battle, we could have captured the army camp. Helicopters could not do anything to us. But we made a decision to retreat, regarding the capture of a CDO and the District Police Office as our victory.

It appears that entrance of the helicopters of the Royal Nepalese Army was one of the main causes for the Maoists to decide to stop the battle and withdraw from Beni. The first helicopter came over Beni at 5.20 a.m. but it flew away at 5.45. Then helicopters came at 9.30 a.m. and dropped

ammunition for the security forces. Some helicopters came again at 10.30 a.m. Manrishi Dhital also wrote about the timing of the withdrawal:

After the army had started to drop bombs on the civilian residential area in the course of the aerial bombing after nine o'clock in the morning, the rebels decided to leave the town around 10.30 a.m. in order to avoid civilian casualties. And they started to go back each by their own route. After Commander Pasang declared the end of the ground battle, we also decided to leave the town... (Dhital 2004b).

3.3.2. Taking breakfast

When it got light, the people in Beni had opportunities to watch the activities of the Maoists. Many eyewitnesses in Beni bazaar said that the Maoists were openly walking in the bazaar in the morning and even some were shopping in the bazaar while there was no security force on the street. Some Maoists were seen dancing with their weapons in the air on the roof of the District Police Office when they had captured it. Even on the street, many guerrillas were seen dancing and singing.

Even with helicopters flying overhead, it seemed that the Maoists were composed. The testimony of a restaurant owner, whose shop is on the Pari Beni side (the Parbat district side), clearly exemplified this. There are several eating houses on the Pari Beni side, close to a suspension bridge connecting with Beni's main bazaar (on the Myagdi district side). It is only several minutes' walk from the District Police Office. About 100 armed Maoists came to take breakfast there. One eating house owner described what he had seen:

They came here around 9.30 a.m. after finishing the transportation of the weapons and ammunition they had captured from the District Police Office. They divided into groups and entered the restaurants. In my shop some 15 Maoists came in. All of them were holding long rifles. Their age seemed to be between fifteen and late twenties. Half of them were women. They were in a sweat and looked tired but very excited as well. They even looked happy. Seeing them laughing and chatting, I thought maybe they do have a heart. I am sure they were not afraid to die at all. They ate all the unsold foods which had been prepared the previous morning and paid about Rs 300 after calculating how much they had eaten. While they were eating, a helicopter came overhead. They looked a little afraid and one of them said: "It may affect the public, we will leave soon."

3.3.3. Leaving Beni

By 11 a.m. most of the Maoists had left Beni. They took the same route as when they came to Beni. The biggest attacking force went via the Arthunge hills. I had a chance to watch a video tape filmed by a local in Beni. The camera caught the scene of Maoists climbing the hill behind the bazaar towards the Arthunge hills. They just looked ordinary, not in a hurry, but walking normally. A person in Mangalaghat bazaar described how the Maoists had left, saying: “They went away comfortably (*unīharū ānanda sita gae*).”

However, it was not the end of the battle. They had to face aerial bombing from helicopters on their way back. Dhital described it as follows:

Bombs dropped in front of us with a huge sound.⁷³ We slipped down there... And two fighters who had been walking before us, carrying an injured person and an injured woman fighter, all of the three became covered with blood and scattered on the ground here and there in front of us. A stretcher was some distance away and broken. There was a big hole on the ground and blasted pieces of bombs were scattered in the surrounding area. We came to know later that a bomb dropped from a helicopter had hit an injured person. And they were killed on the spot...

On 21 March aerial bombing on the procession of our People’s Army continued all day long. The air was held by the Royal Army and the ground was held by the People’s Army. A policeman captured by us was killed on the way by a bomb dropped on the line of the People’s Army... Due to this whole day of aerial bombing, half a dozen of the rebels died on the way (Dhital 2004b).

One of the “volunteers” abducted from Chimkhola VDC testified:

We volunteers, carrying the wounded on stretchers and in *dokos* (baskets) were walking at the end of the line. There were more than a hundred injured persons. The length of the line of people walking was nearly 1 km. At about 8 a.m. we arrived in Vaviyachaur VDC. The wounded were taken into the villagers’ houses and given treatment there. We could sleep for a while during that time. We left there for Darwang at about noon. While we were walking, a helicopter came and dropped a bomb near us. After that all of us from Chimkhola decided to escape. When we entered a house to

⁷³ It can be guessed that this happened in the Arthunge hills.

drink water in Ratodhunga of Darwang VDC, we took the chance to run away.

It seems that the group with the wounded took the direct way to Darwang through the Arthunge hills and Vaviyachaur. The local people in Darwang bazaar said that the first group with wounded arrived there at around 10 a.m. on 21 March, and many wounded started to come at around 1 p.m. They treated the patients in five places in Darwang bazaar. A local said:

Persons with light injuries were walking normally. It may be due to the lack of stretchers or volunteers, I don't know, but I saw a man in his mid-twenties, who had a bullet injury in his throat, walking. He looked very sick and took a long rest in front of our house. Most of the people didn't speak much and looked very tired. Some volunteers looked like they were reluctantly carrying the wounded. Some low-ranking Maoist was saying that they had captured everything in Beni but I could not believe him.

When they left for Beni the previous day, the local Maoists had ordered the people of Darwang to prepare meals for their breakfast but as they came late, the food was cold. Furthermore, Darwang also became an insecure place for them as a helicopter came at around 4.30 p.m. and dropped a group of security forces on the top of a hill near there. When an army helicopter came, there were thousands of Maoists in Darwang but it didn't drop bombs. By 1 a.m. at night the last injured Maoist had finally left Darwang. The next early morning, at around 6.30 a.m. on 22 March, there was an exchange of fire in Devasthan VDC near Darwang bazaar between the Maoists and the security forces that had been dropped by helicopter. The battle lasted for an hour. According to the local people, seven Maoists were killed in this battle.

“Pravin” said that their original plan was to assemble in Takam VDC again after the attack and to hold a victory celebration. They had even kept some cows and food for that purpose in Takam and the neighbouring villages, however they could not hold the celebration due to the aerial bombings by army helicopters. The main force with Division Commander “Pasang” had to change their route to avoid the aerial threat. They left the route to Darwang for the south and crossed the hills into Baglung district. When “Pasang” gave an interview to the BBC Nepali language service by satellite telephone on the night of 23 March, they were in Tarakhola, Baglung (Dhital 2004b). The next morning the security forces attacked them again. Dhital wrote about this attack and their difficult travel:

The Royal Army started to attack again from the highpoints of Tarakhola at five in the morning of 24 March. Everybody woke up in the morning and decided to leave that place. We made places for the wounded to stay in the dense jungle area of Tarakhola. After the attack had started, a helicopter came and began dropping bombs. We walked through reed bushes. If there had not been reed bushes on that steep slope, we might have slipped and fallen into the river. The reed bushes prevented us from slipping down by accident. Crossing the open and naked mountain, we arrived in Patale village of Myagdi district at night. Until our arrival in Patale, nobody could eat two meals. I felt that the most important things in war are food and ammunition. When the fighting started in Tarakhola, everyone carried sacks of rice from the food stores. We three journalists too took 30 kg sacks of rice to carry. On the way I saw some fighters and the wounded eating uncooked rice. They had been hungry for many days and the injured began to walk on crutches during those two or three days of intense fighting (Dhital 2004b).

3.3.4. Prisoners of war

After the CDO and the police force led by a DSP in the District Police Office had surrendered, Maoists abducted them as prisoners of war (POWs). They took about 40 POWs including the CDO, the DSP, two army men, and about 35 policemen with them and left Beni at around 10.30 a.m. for the west via the Arthunge hills. Two policemen who were injured in the aerial bombing returned the next day and one policeman died on the way, as noted above. The force with the POWs also took a roundabout way, by way of Tarakhola in Baglung.⁷⁴ Most probably the POWs were with the main force led by “Pasang”.⁷⁵ According to the interview with CDO Sagarmani Parajuli, they were taken by a long roundabout route of the Arthunge hills – Vaviyachaur – Armat – Tarakhola (Baglung district) – Mundagaun (Myagdi) – Muna – Jaljala – Pelma (Rukum) – Hukam – Mahat – Thawang (Rolpa). After fifteen days the POWs were taken to Thawang, the headquarters of their Vishesh Jilla (Special District), on 5 April. “Pravin” said: “We took the POWs to the Yenana of Nepal.”⁷⁶

The CPN (Maoist) issued a statement in the name of Western Division Commissar “Viplav” and Commander “Pasang” the day after the attack, asking the government to exchange the POWs they had abducted with their leaders including the central committee members Matrika Yadav and Suresh

⁷⁴ According to Parajuli (2004).

⁷⁵ According to a villager in Darwang, twelve policemen were taken by way of Darwang.

⁷⁶ Yenana was the base area of the Chinese People’s Liberation Army led by Mao Tse-tung.

Ale Magar⁷⁷ and area bureau member Kiran Sharma. However, they released all the POWs from Thawang under the mediation of ICRC (International Committee of Red Cross) on 6 April. After receiving the offer of the release of POWs from the Maoist side, the representatives of ICRC went to Thawang in Rolpa district by helicopter to take them back.

3.4. Results

3.4.1. Human casualties

In a statement issued under the names of “Pasang” and “Viplav” the Maoists claimed that 125 “Royal Army men” and 26 policemen had been killed during Beni attack,⁷⁸ but there is no basis for establishing this number of casualties. According to the newly appointed CDO of Myagdi whom I met on 3 May 2004, 16 policemen were killed during the Beni attack, three bodies of policemen were found later, and three policemen were still missing. As the Royal Nepalese Army admitted that 14 army personnel were killed during the battle, in total 33 security personnel were killed and three were missing.

In this Beni attack, civilian casualties were higher than ever before. According to a list made by the CDO office in Beni, 19 civilians were killed during and after the attack.⁷⁹ Of these, eight, including four ex-Maoists who had surrendered, were killed in crossfire in Beni. Three boys between six and twelve years old in nearby villages were killed in separate incidents when grenades left behind by the Maoists exploded. Another eight persons, seven in one place in Jyamrukot VDC and one in Bhagawati VDC, were killed by the helicopter aerial bombing after the attack.

Regarding casualties on the Maoist side, government and Maoist accounts differ substantially. The Defence Ministry claimed immediately after the attack that the security forces had killed 500 Maoists. Since the number of bodies found was many fewer than this, this number would seem to be an exaggeration. A lieutenant colonel of the Shri Kali Prasad Battalion claimed that they had confirmed 202 bodies of the Maoists within one kilometre of Beni. However, the Beni branch of the Red Cross Society that collected and buried the bodies left by the Maoists confirmed 67 bodies in total in and around Beni bazaar. In this data, the persons who had been killed by aerial bombing and in the clashes after the main attack are not included. Accordingly, the actual number is supposed to be bigger than this. On the other hand, “Pravin” gave precise figures: 78 persons including 6 volunteers died on the Maoist side, and 422 persons including 14 serious

⁷⁷ It was reported that both of them were arrested in Lucknow in India in February 2004 and handed over to the government of Nepal.

⁷⁸ From *Maoist Information Bulletin-9*.

⁷⁹ This data is based on records submitted in Myagdi district. It was reported that some other civilians were killed during the aerial bombing in Baglung district.

cases were injured. The Maoists admitted that two brigade vice-commanders, “Yoddha” (Second Brigade) and “Bahuwir” (Third Brigade), a battalion commander “Vishal” and a battalion vice-commander “Vayu” were among the dead. From the ID cards that were found with the bodies, some platoon level commanders were also killed during the attack.

3.4.2. Weapons captured

According to *Maoist Information Bulletin-9*, the Maoists captured 35 SLRs, 65 .303 rifles, 14 INSAS rifles, one M-16, 7 pistols, 3 LMG,s one 2-inch mortar, 50,000 bullets, and 10 mortar rounds. On the other hand, the weapons and tools captured by the Royal Nepalese Army were: one AK-47, one LMG, 5 SLRs, three .303 rifles, 17 wire-cutters, and others.⁸⁰

3.4.3. Damage to the government facilities

The Maoists set fire to various government offices. The buildings of the District Development Committee and the District Administration Office were completely destroyed and those of the District Police Office, the District Court, the District Forest Office, the District Jail, and the Myagdi library⁸¹ were badly damaged. Equipment in the telephone exchange station was also damaged. All of 515 lines went dead. Documents in Nepal Bank, the land revenue office, and the district education office were burnt. Question papers for the SLC examinations in the district education office were also burnt. As the question papers had leaked out in the bazaar, new questions had to be prepared for the examination that started on 24 March.

4. After-images of the Maoists

4.1. Remains

The Maoists left some problems with the people in Beni and Mangalaghat. One of the most serious ones was the bodies left behind. Since the government did not take responsibility, civilian volunteers under the initiative of the local branch of the Red Cross Society in Beni buried them. In fact, the Maoists dug holes in some places to bury bodies beforehand but most of the bodies were left on the spot. Among those, about 45 bodies were buried in one place on the river bank of Kali Gandaki and another 10 in the river bank of Myagdi near Mangalaghat bazaar. Some were buried in the

⁸⁰ According to an article published in the local daily paper *Dhorpātan* (23 March 2004).

⁸¹ The small building of the Myagdi library stood close to the DDC compound. The Maoists did not destroy the Arthunge Village Development Committee’s office situated between the library and the DDC compound.

jungle behind Beni, en route to the Arthunge hills. Some of the civilian volunteers who had helped to collect bodies testified that there were some bodies covered with red communist flags.⁸² Some ID cards and documents were found on the bodies. They said that ID cards included those from all the four brigades of the Western Division of the PLA.

A body found alone on the river bank of Kali Gandaki was covered with a party flag. According to a person who had collected this body, it was wrapped in a green blanket used by the police, which showed the possibility of his being killed in the District Police Office. An ID card and some other documents were found in his pocket. From the ID card he was identified as a platoon commander with the party name “Akrosh”. He was from the Vishesh Jilla (Special District) and belonged to the “Mangalsen” First Brigade, the Third Battalion, the C Company and the number 1 Platoon. A document found from his pocket shows that there were three “assault groups”, a “discharge group”, a “rifle supply group”, a “mining group”, “headquarters”, and a “health post” in his force. “Akrosh” was leading “assault-1 group” consisting of twelve members and another two assault groups were led by other platoon commanders. It also shows that each fighter got two to four grenades and about fifty bullets. A small notebook in which their code words were written was also found on the body of a platoon commander “Elat”. This proves that they were using code words during the battle.

4.2. Controversial issues

There are some controversial issues regarding the Maoists that I heard in Beni and other places. I tried to clarify if they were true or just rumours, but I could not confirm them. Here are some of those issues.

4.2.1. Yogis

Many people in Beni mentioned a group of *yogīs* (Hindu ascetics) who came to Beni bazaar several days before the attack. They said that they were in a group of several persons and went around the bazaar visiting each household and playing music. Some people said that yogis usually stayed at a sanctuary in Galeshwar, located at a distance of 3 kilometres from Beni, at night but those yogis stayed in an open space in front of the District Police Office. They left Beni a couple of days before the attack. The people in Beni suspected that they might be Maoist spies. Some people even said that they saw one of the yogis holding a cordless phone.

⁸² They guessed that bodies with party flags might be those of commanders.

4.2.2. Pregnant Maoist

One of the stories that I heard most frequently when I visited Beni in March was that of a pregnant guerrilla who had been injured and given birth to a baby. The source of the story was a village of the Arthunge hills about 45 minutes' climb from Beni bazaar. The people in Beni said that they heard this story from villagers there. It was said that a pregnant Maoist had been seriously injured in the battle and was operated upon to remove the baby in a school in the Arthunge hills. She died after giving birth to the baby. This story was spread immediately after the attack and some of the civilian volunteers who had collected bodies tried to find a female with signs of an operation but they found no such body. I asked some villagers in the Arthunge hills about this story but nobody had witnessed it. They only heard about it. But a shopkeeper I met in the Arthunge hills said that he had seen a woman aged about forty in plain clothes holding a newly born baby. This woman with an old man and another woman passed through in front of his house at around 5.30 a.m. on 21 March. I could not verify if they were Maoists.

“Pravin” denied the truth of the story, saying: “That story is completely untrue. We have never taken a pregnant woman into the battlefield.” He even said that they were going to take action against the journalists who had published articles about the story.⁸³

4.2.3. Stimulants

Some officers in the Shri Kali Prasad Battalion claimed that the Maoist fighters were injecting stimulants during the battle. Even some people in Beni bazaar mentioned that many syringes were left on the street. However, I could not find any proof as nobody could clarify if any stimulants had been found and as I could not find anyone who had witnessed any Maoist using injections on the battlefield.

4.2.4. A video tape filmed by a Maoist

It is true that the Royal Nepalese Army happened to seize a video tape filmed by a Maoist from a bag left behind. As noted above, Dhital (2004b) wrote that a war correspondent of the Western Division of the PLA, “Chetan”, was filming with a video camera. He also indicated in his article that “Chetan” was hurt during the battle. So it can be guessed that the videotape seized by the RNA was filmed by “Chetan”.

An army officer I met in the Shri Kali Prasad Battalion said that the scenes of mass gatherings held in some place of their base area before they

⁸³ The local weekly *Myāgdī Sandeś* and the national weekly magazine *Nepāl* published articles about this story.

marched to Beni were shown in that video tape. According to him, Division Commander “Pasang” was seen in the tape announcing: “The number of our force is 14,500”, and “We have to fight for three days and three nights until we capture Beni”. These two phrases were reported by some media including the national daily paper *Kāntipur*.⁸⁴ However, “Pravin” denied its credibility. He claimed that their force was only 6,000 including 3,800 armed members of the PLA and 2,200 unarmed “volunteers”, and that their original plan was to end the attack early the following morning. Since I could not watch this video tape, I cannot clarify this.

4.2.5. Possibility of Maoists shot by Maoists

I met some persons in Beni who suspected some Maoists had fallen due to bullets mistakenly shot by their own comrades. Some people even heard a Maoist having a brawl with another, saying that bullets hit their own friend. Third Battalion Commander “Avinash” said in his interview (Paudel, Matrika 2004) that some guerrillas inside the compound of the army barracks had been killed by an 81-mm mortar shot by the Maoists.

4.2.6. Helicopter

A night-vision helicopter could not come to Beni to help the security force. An army officer in the Shri Kali Prasad Battalion said that it did come to Pokhara from Kathmandu but could not reach Beni because it was raining in Pokhara. But in fact it was not raining at all that night in Pokhara. It is said that a DSP in the District Police Office requested the security forces in Pokhara many times to send a helicopter. A helicopter came at around 5.20 a.m. but returned soon without doing anything. As he could not get help from Pokhara, the DSP was said to have thrown a communication set down and surrendered at 7.30 a.m. despite the fact that they had not yet finished their ammunition.

4.3. Images of the Maoists

4.3.1. In the eyes of the general public

Although most of the people in Beni did not venture to talk to the Maoists, the expressions they used when they talked about the Maoists show some common patterns. What follows are some of the expressions I heard most frequently.

⁸⁴ Issue of 30 March 2004.

Age

Most of the armed Maoists were under 25 years old.

There were many children carrying long guns that almost reached the ground due to their small height.

There were some senior “volunteers” over fifty years old.

Gender and ethnic group/caste

More than 30 % of the armed Maoists were women.

Most of the armed Maoists were Dalits (low castes), Mongoloids and Tharus.

Most of the volunteers were either Magars or Dalits.

There were also Kshetris, Bahuns, and Tharus among them.

There were many Maoists with black faces.⁸⁵

Languages

The Maoists were speaking some language of western Nepal.

They were speaking languages that the people in the bazaar didn't understand.

Some Maoists were speaking a Hindi-like language.⁸⁶

They were using code language while checking memos.

Equipment and dress

Some Maoists were holding communication sets that looked like cordless phones and communicating with people elsewhere.

Armed Maoists were wearing combat dress very similar to that of the RNA.

Most of them were wearing cloth shoes of the “Gold Star” brand.⁸⁷

Some Maoists bought “Gold Star” shoes in Beni bazaar.

The body of a Maoist was later found, holding new “Gold Star” shoes that he had just bought in Beni.

⁸⁵ It appeared that they smeared their faces with black powder.

⁸⁶ This may be Tharu or Maithili or Bhojpuri.

⁸⁷ Popular made-in-Nepal shoes specially for villagers.

Volunteers

Many volunteers were wearing stained clothes. They looked as if they had not changed their clothes for many days.

Some volunteers said that they had been taken for programmes by force.

Some volunteers were wearing sandals.

Some volunteers were cleaning the guns of guerrillas.

People from distant places, outsiders

One child said that he had walked seven days to reach Beni.

Some volunteers said it took twelve days to arrive in Beni from their district.

All of them appeared to have come from outside of Myagdi district.

They didn't know about the topography of Beni. Some Maoists didn't even know about the location of the Kali Gandaki river.

Role of the local Maoists

Local Maoist leaders including "Pravin" were seen in Beni bazaar.

Local Maoists made plans about where to set up the treatment centres.

Some Maoists were accusing the local Maoists of bad management.

After death

Maoists dug holes to bury bodies beforehand.

They carried bodies as far away as possible from the front line.

Some bodies had their right arm raised as if doing *lāl salām* (red greeting).

Some bodies were covered with red party flags and some were wearing black bands around their heads.

Fearless

They were not afraid to die at all.

Some Maoists fired towards helicopters from the ground.

Behaviour

They drank beer but no hard drinks.

Some Maoists told the people in Beni that they would come back to attack again soon.

When they left Beni, they looked very relaxed as if they were going back home after they had finished some simple business.

4.3.2. In the eyes of ex-Gurkha soldiers

Many retired Gurkha soldiers who served in the Indian or British Armies live in Beni and Mangalaghat. Interestingly, they observed the Maoists in a more professional way. Here I would like to quote some of their impressions about the Maoists and their way of fighting.

A 66-year-old ex-Indian Army soldier who had witnessed the Maoists fighting in Beni:

They were fearless. When one person fell, another fighter picked up his or her gun and fired. Their way of fighting looked like “Kill them, otherwise die”.

A 60-year-old ex-Indian Army soldier in Mangalaghat said:

That was a forced battle. Many people, especially volunteers, seemed to have been brought against their will. The Maoists continued to fight for twelve hours. The muzzle of a gun usually does not stand continuous firing for more than one hour but they were continuously firing for twelve hours. It was like a battle of madmen.

A 45-year-old ex-Indian Army soldier in Beni gave a more analytical impression:

It seemed that they were quite ignorant about the place. I saw them throwing some grenades wrongly towards a private hotel in front of our house. However, the armed Maoists looked well trained. They knew good tactics to finish the enemy's ammunition. They used frequently the tactic of making fake firing sounds and explosions in order to put psychological pressure on the security forces. When a helicopter came flying over Beni, they kept on making explosions for 20 to 30 seconds. Soon after that it left. I heard them shouting “Shoot the RL!” near my house. “RL” must have meant ‘rocket-launcher’. Maoists who came to our house were holding SLRs and INSAS rifles. As far as their weapons went, they were not inferior to the RNA.

5. Possible background and aims of the attack

The Beni attack was clearly the largest ever military action of the Maoists in terms of military force, that is, the number of persons who participated and the force of arms. The Western Division of the People's Liberation Army, consisting of four brigades, including elite troops from their Vishesh Kshetra (Special Region), participated in this action. They used all kinds of modern weapons. According to Third Battalion Commander "Avinash",⁸⁸ for the first time, they made full use of 81-mm mortars. He said they had used only "one or two bullets" before the Beni attack. It was also the longest battle they ever had. They continued to fight for nearly twelve hours. They made the most intense attack upon the army barracks after it got light. The Maoists highlighted the characteristics of the Beni attack in *Maoist Information Bulletin-9*, saying: "The highlights of this massive raid by the valiant PLA fighters was that for the first time in the eight-year-old PW (People's War) the battle was conducted and the district headquarters was occupied in broad daylight till noon". They showed their military ability to defeat the police force and to fight with the Royal Nepalese Army almost equally at least on the ground. On the other hand, the government side showed a lack of seriousness regarding a possible attack on the district headquarters despite the fact that there had been some warning signs of an impending attack since two weeks beforehand.

Beni was, in fact, an ideal target for the Maoists to attack for the following reasons.

1. Geographical reasons: Myagdi adjoins the Maoists' base area, Rukum district, and it can be accessed within several days from there. It takes only five or six hours on foot to reach Beni from the Maoists' supply centre Darwang bazaar. Beni lies in a small valley surrounded by hills. This made it easy for the Maoists to attack, and difficult for the security forces to defend. Furthermore, most of the government offices including the District Police Office and the army barracks stand on one side of the bazaar along the Myagdi river. This location also helped the Maoists.
2. Political reasons: Myagdi district was included in the Vishesh Kshetra (Special Region) that was considered the most affected region of the Maoists. At the same time, the region between the Kali Gandaki river in the east and the Bheri river in the west was declared as the Magarat Autonomous Region in January 2004. Accordingly, to occupy Beni had political and symbolic importance for the Maoists.
3. Publicity reasons: Beni is located close to Pokhara. It takes less than three hours by car to reach Beni from Pokhara. Actually, except Ghorahi in Dang district, Beni was the most easily accessible district headquarters that the Maoists had ever attacked. Hence, many international and national media

⁸⁸ Paudel, Matrika 2004.

personnel went to Beni to cover the incident as soon as the news of the attack had been reported. The scenes of physical casualties published in the various media helped to show the magnitude of the attack.

The Maoists explained the official purpose of the Beni attack in *Maoist Information Bulletin-9*, saying: “Though there has been much speculation on the motive and timing of the military strike in the media, the Party and the PLA have no illusion that it is part of the preparation for the strategic offensive in the protracted PW.”⁸⁹ It was also indicated in the same bulletin that they carried out raids on Beni and Bhojpur in order to show the insecure situation in Nepal and to show the emptiness of the government’s claim that it could hold general elections in the near future. They claimed: “On the political front, two successful centralised military strikes in Bhojpur and Beni within a span of three weeks have given a mortal blow to the royal military dictatorship that was seeking to legitimise its rule through a fake election in the near future.” In this sense they could be said to have achieved their aims to some extent. They also got credibility, especially in international circles, by freeing the POWs they had taken in Beni at their own initiative. However, their physical gains were much less than what they had lost. Despite the fact that they used the biggest ever quantity of ammunition in the Beni attack, the number of weapons and the amount of cash they captured were less than in some of previous actions. To make up for what this attack cost them will take a long time, maybe longer than a year. Their main source of income, that is, forcible donations from business circles and civilians, may become even more intensive. Human casualties on the Maoist side were also the biggest to date. They lost two experienced brigade vice-commanders, a battalion commander, a battalion vice-commander, and some platoon commanders in this action. After the attack, both the government and the Maoist sides claimed a victory, but, in fact, it was a perfect example of how this is a no-win war.

The Maoists were operating their “special people’s military campaign” in western Nepal until 2 June 2004⁹⁰ with the purpose of encouraging “the armed rebellion by the general public” and “centralized military actions”. To achieve these purposes the Maoists were abducting civilians in large numbers. Various media frequently report the mass abduction of students and teachers from schools in remote villages. When I visited the western part of Myagdi district in May 2004, Maoists were operating the “one help from each household (*ek ghar ek sahayog*) campaign”. This was a campaign to help the Maoists’ people’s army by any means. The villagers in Darwang VDC explained the actual result of this campaign, saying: “Those who have money have to give them cash, those who have food have to give them rice,

⁸⁹ In the central committee meeting held in Thawang of Rolpa district in August 2004, the CPN (Maoist) decided to enter the stage of the strategic offensive.

⁹⁰ It was later extended for some months.

those who have clothes have to give them clothes, and those who have nothing have to give them one member of their family.” This shows very clearly that it is the poorest who have to pay the most. That is the reality of the Maoists’ People’s War.

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**CORRESPONDENCE,
ANNOUNCEMENTS, REPORTS**

Research Report

The Tibetan Dialect of Lende (Kyirong): A grammatical description with historical annotations. University of Berne, Department of Linguistics, 2002, 375 pages. To be published in *Beiträge zur tibetischen Erzählforschung*, edited by Dieter Schuh, VGH Wissenschaftsverlag, Sankt Augustin.

By Brigitte Huber

This dissertation, based on twelve months of fieldwork, provides the first linguistic description of the Tibetan dialect of Kyirong (sKyid-grong). It not only gives a synchronic description of the dialect, but also attempts to show its historical development by comparing it with Written Tibetan data and, to a lesser extent, with data from other Tibetan dialects.

Kyirong Tibetan is spoken in Kyirong county in western Central Tibet about 70 km north of Kathmandu. The Lende valley, where the variety described in the thesis is spoken, lies west of Kyirong, on the border to Nepal. There are about a dozen villages in the Lende valley, on an average approximately 3,000 meters above sea-level. Most families are farmers tending cattle (cows, yaks, various sorts of crossbreeds, and a horse or two per family) and planting barley and potatoes. There are also numerous exiled Tibetans from Kyirong and Lende living in Kathmandu (approximately 800 persons) and in villages in the Rasuwa district in northern Nepal, where the four camps of the “Rasuwa Tibetan Refugee Settlement” were established in the early sixties.

The Kyirong dialect stands in very close connection with a number of Tibetan dialects spoken in the adjoining parts of Nepal, namely (a) in Langtang and Helambu (Yolmo), southeast of the Kyirong area, as well as (b) in Tsum, which lies west of Kyirong, furthermore (c) Kagate, which is also spoken in Nepal, but not in the immediate neighbourhood of the other dialects mentioned above.

The introduction provides information about Lende and Kyirong, about dialect classification and closely related dialects, as well as about the circumstances of the fieldwork. The latter was conducted in Nepal, as the author was not able to obtain a Chinese visa to work in Kyirong itself. The main informants, however, were not Kyirong Tibetans living in exile, but people who were born in Lende and actually live there, making periodical visits to Nepal.

The introduction is followed by a chapter on phonetics and phonology, where the phoneme inventory is established. In the chapter on diachronic

phonology the sound changes undergone by this dialect are extensively documented. A part of this work also led to the description of the development of tone which results in three different register tones, a development which has so far not been observed among central Tibetan dialects.

In the chapters on “noun phrase”, “verb phrase” and “clause combining”, synchronic descriptions are separated from historical observations. Most descriptive sections are immediately followed by a section entitled “historical annotations”. These are graphically differentiated by use of a different font, which should facilitate the reading for those interested only in either synchronic or diachronic issues. The “diachronic sections” provide etymologies or attempt to provide explanations for the expressions described in the “synchronic sections”, where most of the comparisons with other Tibetan dialects are made. Furthermore, the interlinearization of all the examples displayed in the study also include lexical meanings as well as grammatical functions. Thus the examples are also accessible to those readers who are not familiar with Tibetan.

The last chapter is devoted to an oral text which has been transcribed and interlinearized. Its purpose is to illustrate the use of the dialect. Finally, the vocabulary occurring in the thesis is listed in three glossaries. The Kyirong-English glossary contains the etymologically corresponding forms of Written Tibetan. This is followed by an English-Kyirong Tibetan-Written Tibetan glossary, and a Written Tibetan-Kyirong Tibetan-English glossary. A more extensive vocabulary of Kyirong Tibetan is being prepared for publication in the *Comparative Dictionary of Tibetan Dialects* (see EBHR 23, pp. 97-101).

Throughout the study, the data from the Kyirong dialect are written in either phonetic, or (more often) phonological transcription, whereas etymological correspondences in Written Tibetan are given in transliteration. Thus the Written Tibetan forms listed always represent the etymological correspondences of Kyirong Tibetan words, rather than a written form of the Kyirong dialect. There are two reasons for this: First, Kyirong Tibetan has no system of writing; literate people follow the orthography of modern literary Tibetan. Second, not all the words contained in the Kyirong Tibetan vocabulary are etymologically transparent. Rendering them in the Tibetan script would have amounted to inventing ways of spelling. Consequently, the Tibetan script is used only in the chapter “Diachronic phonology” where such correspondences are also given in transliteration.

The bibliography includes not only linguistic studies of other Tibetan dialects, but also general literature about the Kyirong area.

The study represents a small building block in the documentation of the Tibetan linguistic area, and is meant to contribute to the classification of Tibetan dialects and to the understanding of the historical development of Tibetan in general. Furthermore, in the field of linguistics, it can be of

interest to typologists, inasmuch as the findings provide a description of a hitherto unexplored language, with quite a few interesting grammatical and morphosyntactic peculiarities on a research basis. Lastly, used as a language manual, it could also serve anthropologists and other scientists in conducting their research in or about the Kyirong area.

Conference Report on *Rituals of Divine Kingship in the Central Himalayas*

By William S. Sax

On 12-13 November 2004, a workshop was held at the University of Heidelberg on the topic “Rituals of Divine Kingship in the Central Himalayas”. The conference was funded by the Special Research Area 619 “Dynamics of Rituals”, funded by the German Research Council.

The focus of the workshop was the historical and contemporary systems of “Divine Kingship” found in the North Indian states of Uttaranchal and Himachal Pradesh. In some parts of this region, tiny “kingdoms” are ruled from gods in their temples, who communicate with their subjects through possessed oracles, and enforce their decisions through their own armies. Elsewhere, human kings rule as the representatives of gods, or the system looks like the “classical” system of Hindu kingship, in which a human king with semi-divine qualities rules the land, but ritually subordinates himself to his lineage deity.

The workshop began on Friday morning with a greeting from Axel Michaels, Speaker of the Special Research Area, and an introduction by William (“Bo”) Sax, organizer of the workshop. Sax stressed the fact that in all of the systems to be discussed, “religion” and “politics” seemed to be one and the same thing. He went on to argue that this identity of religion and politics was also characteristic of Hindu kingship during the “classical” period. The scholars gathered together here, however, were not historians but ethnographers, and their contributions were based on contemporary fieldwork. The goals of this conference were two: to compare systems of divine kingship in the Central Himalayas in order to see what they had (and did not have) in common, and to examine the part played by rituals in the institutions of divine kingship.

Sax's introduction was followed by a paper from Peter Sutherland (Baton Rouge), in which he argued that the “magical” transformation of gods into

kings, and of everyday features of the landscape into sites of power, is achieved by means of the gods' "choreography", that is, their movement through space. He was followed by Claus Peter Zoller (Heidelberg), who spoke about the *Daknātsaṅ* or "dance of the wizards", a festival of the god Mahasu. Zoller argued that the introduction of the god's cult has led to a "hierarchization" of local power structures, in which the god's *dewāl* musicians have been transformed from powerful shamans to professional entertainers of a divine king. Next, Daniela Berti (CNRS, Paris) discussed the famous royal festival of Kullu Dashera, illustrating how it continues to blend religion and politics despite the introduction of the democratic state and new forms of patronage. Next, Elisabeth Conzelmann (Berlin) spoke about the history of Mandi state in present-day Himachal Pradesh. One of the most interesting features of Mandi is that it was officially ruled by the god Madhorao, who took the form of a temple icon. In general however, Mandi seems to have fewer of the features associated with hill states, and more of those associated with north Indian kingdoms, than the other states discussed in the workshop. Commentary on the first four papers was provided by Brigitta Hauser-Schäublin (Göttingen).

Jean-Claude Galey (Paris) spoke about the fragmentation or scattering of the former kingdom of Garhwal, arguing that although kingship survives in the present era, it has been transformed, so that it is like a roof without a main beam. The related cults have become more autonomous and independent than previously, and in any case the cult of Mahasu was never directly linked to the Garhwali king. Next, Brigitte Luchesi (Bremen) discussed ritual processions in Kullu, an occasion when local gods take on their most "royal" forms. She concluded her paper with a fascinating example of how these gods continue to use their power to conduct forms of "urban renewal". William Sax (Heidelberg) next talked about the divine kings' warriors, the *khūnd*. These warriors formerly waged war on behalf of local divine kings, and engaged in protracted blood feuds. Sax focused on the rituals in which the *khūnd* renew their clan shrines. In the final paper of the workshop, Denis Vidal (EHESS, Paris) offered a microscopic description and analysis of how one blood feud among *khūnd* came to an end. Burkhard Schnepel (Halle) provided comments on the second set of four papers. Revised versions of the papers will be published in a volume of collected essays, hopefully in 2006.

BOOK REVIEWS

Trance, Besessenheit und Amnesie bei den Schamanen der Changpa-Nomaden im ladakhischen Changthang [Trance, possession and amnesia among the shamans of the Changpa nomads in Changthang of Ladakh] by Ina Rösing. Gnas: Weisshaupt Verlag 2003. Pp. 270, bibliography, glossary of indigenous terms, four appendices, two sketch-maps, 43 colour plates. No index. ISBN 3-7059-0174-5.

Reviewed by András Höfer, Heidelberg

The book presents the findings of two journeys to the Changpa of Ladakh and is a sweeping combination of life histories of shamans, descriptions of their rituals and a kind of research diary. Only two of the six chapters are devoted to Changpa shamanism. The rest include a discussion of the ecology and economy of Tibetan nomadism (which makes up more than one quarter of the book); furthermore two chapters dealing with the shamans among the Ladakhis proper; and finally detailed appendices. The latter contain reflections on the shamanic calling, on the author's working hypotheses and method of investigation, along with a linguistically rather unpretentious introduction to the language and the problems of its interpretation, and a useful preliminary comparison between the practices of the Ladakhi and the Changpa shamans.

What Rösing refers to as "shaman" throughout the book is the ecstatic healer called *lhaba* (male) and *lhamo* (female). While the word "shaman" might be acceptable as a rough translation for the sake of simplicity, it is questionable whether the beliefs and practices of the *lhaba* and *lhamo* derive from a "shamanistic religion" (p. 164), and whether everything, above all the ecstatic ritual techniques, that cannot be unequivocally identified as "Buddhist" must by necessity be immediately regarded as "pre-Buddhist" elements (pp. 72 ff., 162). It is more correct to say that pantheon and ethos of the *lhaba/lhamo* are part of a widespread oral tradition of Tibetan Buddhism, which exists in regionally varying configurations, and in which clerical Buddhism and local cults, partly of pre-Buddhist origin and partly connected with ecstatic practices, interpenetrate to form a complex symbiosis, but in such a way that the supremacy of the former remains unchallenged. Indeed, a specialty in the case of Ladakh is that the *lhaba* and *lhamo* are bound to act under the spiritual guidance of the monks (as pointed out first by P. Dollfus in her *Lieu de neige, lieu de genévriers* 1989, p. 91). It might also be recalled that the *lhaba/lhamo* do have their cognates, variously named *lhapa*, *lhabon*, *lhawa* or *lhakama*, etc., both in Tibet proper and in several communities of Tibetan linguistic and cultural affiliation in the Himalayas. In Nepal alone, their occurrence has been

attested to among the inhabitants of Dolpo, Gyasumdo, Khumbu, Shorong and Khembalung ...

What intrigues Rösing the most in her quest for the function and authenticity of ecstatic experience (trance) are two questions, namely (i) to what extent may trance be regarded as a staged performance (“theatre” in her somewhat pat terminology), notwithstanding its efficacy for the client/patient; and (ii) whether what she terms as “post-trance amnesia” is a genuine psychic state or simply pretended and thus part of a strategy to fend off the unwelcome curiosity of the alien scientist. The answer to the first question Rösing believes to have found not among the Ladakhis proper, but thanks to her encounter with the Changpa shamans. Overwhelmed by her mere sensory experience of the physical intensity with which a cooperative Changpa specialist executes his ritual, she thinks she has at last succeeded in “grasping” – intuitively, rather than rationally, as she puts it – the authenticity of trance (pp. 182-183). Quite justifiably, she has been prompted to seize the shaman’s ecstatic experience, for want of a better access, in its verbal manifestation as recorded on tape. Yet here she faces the difficulty many of us are likely to run into when we attempt to transcribe an oral performance of this kind or even to establish it as a text in its own right. In the end, a brief section of the recitation (identical in all of the four different versions transcribed by her educated local assistants) is found to be of central relevance. What it reveals, to be sure, is not something about the nature of trance in terms of a psychic state or process, say, on the subliminal level, but a “message” (*Botschaft*) of the shaman possessed by a goddess to the clients within and the world without. His admonitions with reference to traditionally Buddhist values – purity of mind and body, individual self-determination for the sake of salvation, renunciation of greed and violence, etc. – are shown to be paralleled by Western psychosomatic concepts and at the same time also interpreted, with a rather modish touch, as warnings against the threats posed by “modernity”, including market economy, environmental degradation and cultural alienation.

As an answer to her second question concerning the reason for some shamans’ striking evasiveness about trance (by imputing their ignorance or loss of memory to the fact that it is the gods who act through them), Rösing detects a more or less close correlation between “deep [genuine] trance” and “deep [genuine] amnesia” on the one hand, and between staged trance and pretended amnesia on the other, not without admitting the impossibility of drawing a clear-cut distinction between “deep” and “staged” in certain instances at least (pp. 198 ff.). Still, the reader is left wondering how, by means of what objective criteria, the “depth” of the trance could be “gauged”. The physical intensity of a performance alone cannot serve as a standard, since extraordinary energy input in creating “dramatic” effects by dancing, posturing, mimics, acoustic or bodily virtuosity and the like can also be observed in many cultures in those types of performance which

Rösing would presumably regard as staged ones. Conspicuously, Rösing's approach has received hardly any inspiration from A.-L. Siikala's notion of "role-taking" (developed further by R. Hamayon) or from the writings of the Performance Studies school.

Much of what Rösing reports beyond her principal field of interest is of ethnographic importance and awaits further corroboration. It is also interesting to note, e.g., that the Tibetan (originally Chinese) term *spar-kha* is employed with the denotation of 'spiritual energy' (pp. 140 ff.); that in recent times the number of shamans in Ladakh has known an unprecedented increase (pp. 129 f.); or that a Ladakhi shamaness was caught at learning modern colloquial Tibetan with the obvious aim at "improving the language" of those gods of Tibetan provenance, who frequently speak through her when she is in trance (p. 144).

The entire book is written in the first person singular. Rösing takes the reader by the hand and guides him through her experiences and reasonings, as it were. In so doing, she remains distanced throughout the narrative of her encounters with the shamans and dwells at some length on her own dilemmas in interpreting what she sees and hears. Her own research method is dubbed as "speaking anthropology" or "dialogical anthropology" with explicit reference to the theory of "writing culture" (pp. 231 ff., 252). She writes very well, having adopted a smartly spontaneous style, but the readability is sometimes achieved to the detriment of terminological precision and analytical penetration. Here and there, the translation of quotations and text samples appears to contain some minor inaccuracies. The bibliography lists a total of about 280 titles; a few of the cited sources relating to shamanism and ecstatic phenomena are critically evaluated.

Rösing is a psychologist and psychotherapist with academic affiliation, and her book addresses primarily the reader with similarly specialized interests. Her merit is to have paved the way for further research – preferably to be carried out, to mutual benefit, in collaboration with a Tibetologist or an adequately qualified anthropologist. This would assure completion of the ethnographic documentation and help to widen both the theoretical and the comparative perspectives.

***Terra, Territorio e Società nel Mondo Indiano* edited by Daniela Berti and Gilles Tarabout. In *Etnosistemi*, Anno X, n. 10, Rome: CISU 2003. 155 pages, 18 figures, 27 plates, ISSN 1122-6234. [English edition forthcoming: *Land, Territory and Society in India*. Delhi: Manohar.]**

Reviewed by Chiara Letizia, Rome

From the 1980s onward, the social sciences began to reconsider the spatial dimension and to see political and cultural territory increasingly as “an inescapable notion in the human experience” and a “builder of identity, perhaps the most efficient of all” (J. Bonnemaïson and L. Cambrezy: *Le lien territorial, entre frontières et identités, Géographies et Cultures*, 20, 1995, pp. 7-18). The present volume on Land, Territory and Society in the Indian world lends support to this general development and challenges certain stereotypes concerning the notion of territory that circulate in the literature. Indeed, the main purpose of this collective work is to call into question the common stereotype, according to which neither territory as such nor territorial boundaries are relevant to Indian studies. Researchers of all disciplines (ethnology, history, Indology) have repeated this *cliché* and emphasized the “secondary character or the non-existence of the notion of territory in India”.

As the editors note, this widespread view acquired a theoretical expression in the statements of Dumont and Pocock, according to whom the territorial factor was a secondary one when considering India as a whole, whereas social organization, kinship and castes constituted primary factors (L. Dumont and D. Pocock: *For a sociology of India. Contributions to Indian Sociology*, 1, 1957, pp. 7-22.) Dumont did not deny the existence of the territorial factor; rather, he studied it carefully and was, paradoxically, one of the rare anthropologists to devote himself to this issue. However, his aim at finding a general structuring principle for the whole of Indian civilization made him subordinate the empirical level to the ideological level which, according to him, neglects the territorial factor. Despite all the criticism directed at Dumont, there was little discussion on this specific point. Berti and Tarabout stress that if the notion of territory in India has not been regarded as relevant until now, it is because research has been clinging to an ideal-type of territory, which corresponds to that of the modern nation-state.

Instead of denying all territorial logic to societies that do not conform to this model, the editors propose the adoption of a larger notion of territory, which also implies the notion of identity: “The notions of land and territory can also be seen as ways, very often connected, in which places are socially

defined, occupied or claimed, and influence or determine in a decisive manner different aspects of social life” (p. 4).

Reacting to the negation or neglect of the importance of territory in India, the present work intends to “show, through concrete and circumscribed cases, the importance of territory not only in the definition and regulation of social, political and religious relations in the Indian subcontinent, but also as a category having an explicit cognitive value, which is revealed as the subject of a symbolic activity, of discussions and representations” (p. 2). The book assembles contributions from researchers in a variety of disciplines (history of religions, anthropology and Indology), who work from different sources to provide an example of the plurality of symbolic utilizations of territory in the Indian world.

Three Sanskrit specialists open the volume with a study of texts from various epochs, thus adding a historical perspective.

Michel Angot discusses the notion of land and territory in the Vedic hymns and specifically in the treatises on sacrifice (Brāhmaṇa). He points out that the gods (*deva*), who do not inhabit fixed places and unceasingly travel through the vastness of space, are placed in opposition to all fixed and closed places which are attributed to demons (*asura*). Localization is thus devalued and stands in contrast with the positive value of travel and movement in an ideology that portrays, at the divine level, the values of a nomad society, and that constitutes the mythological counterpart to the mobility which characterizes Vedic ritual.

Gérard Colas analyses sources that are in direct contrast with the Vedic idea of wandering gods, and reveal, instead, settled divinities, well established in their temples, in the cities and villages. Epigraphic evidence from the 4th and 5th centuries shows that the gods became physical entities active in human society to such an extent that the question of their legal status was raised for the administration of donations of landed property. Ritual handbooks of the Vaikhānasa, temple-priests of Viṣṇu, prescribe primarily donations to the priests, rather than directly to a divinity. A later Vaikhānasa manual, however, refers to the epigraphic formulation that addresses the donations to the god rather than to priests. Ritual, devotion and political power are intimately linked and, in this context, give rise to explicit, multiple and often contrasting discourses concerning territory.

Phyllis Granoff focuses on the role played by locality in the construction of religious identities in ancient and medieval India. She analyses texts of debates that illustrate the sectarian politics of medieval Śvetāmbara Jainism, as well as Buddhist inscriptions. While it is often assumed that the differences between the sects are essentially ritualistic in nature, and that the ritual details are used to distinguish one from another, in reality, according to these texts, the differences appear to be not religious, but rather territorial. Indeed, the rival groups are associated with geographical areas,

and this regional and linguistic tie is the principal "marker" of identity in that it determines the manner in which these religious groups view themselves and others.

Two ethnographic articles highlight the interaction between the land and its inhabitants.

Guenzi and Singh analyse the geomantic practices used by the astrologers of Benares in their divinatory consultations. They bring to light a reciprocal influence at work in the relationship between the territory and its inhabitants: the actions accomplished by men who turn the land into a "living" or "dead" land and, conversely, the influence the type of land inhabited can exert on human behaviour. The earth is not only a divinatory tool (one divines by means of the soil) but also an object of divination; one can cast the horoscope of parcels of land and territories. All these divinatory techniques applied to the study of the land reveal that territory is regarded as a "space for the collective sharing of a destiny" (p. 64).

Caroline and Filippo Osella study the methods used by inhabitants of Kerala to maximise auspiciousness within lands and buildings; they seek to establish harmony between the territory and the beings, living and dead, who dwell in and around the land. As can be concluded from the funeral practices, humans and the land mutually participate in the substance of the other. Life-cycle and paddy production stand in relation to one another – which is sometimes a relationship of similarity and sometimes one of opposition.

Two studies examine the relationship between kinship and territory.

Pier Giorgio Solinas' paper is devoted to the conflict between two rival factions in a Santal village of West Bengal. It demonstrates how the religious and social conflict manifests itself in terms of spatial division at the same time, resulting in what the author calls a "territorial schism": the faction provoking the split establishes its own temple with its priest, and the conflict becomes explicit with the creation of two separate religious territories.

Kinship is also central to the sole article dedicated to Nepal which, unlike India, has seen a great number of anthropologists address the theme of territory. Gérard Toffin highlights the social relevance of territory among the Newar of the Kathmandu valley. In his analysis of funeral associations – which play an essential role in the religious life and social organization of localities – and of local village divinities, he points out that the importance of territory for this ethnic group is even greater than that of blood links.

Finally, three contributions address the relationship between the religious and political dimensions of territory.

Gilles Tarabout's paper deals with the various types of territory that constituted the basis of the power relationships in 17th century Kerala, and with the changes that occurred during the 18th and 19th centuries. The thesis

presented here is that the notion of territory (and even that of several superimposed territories) existed in Kerala well before the colonial period, and that consideration of this notion is essential to an understanding of the social organization and social dynamics of the period. In the long conflict between the kingdoms of Cochin and Travancore concerning the territory of a temple, one can observe the progressive transition from a multiplicity of territories of various categories – fragmented, embedded in one another and hierarchically ranked – to the notion of a unified, homogenous territory, characteristic of a modern State.

Daniela Berti examines the territorial dimension of the cults dedicated to the village divinities in the district of Kullu in Himachal Pradesh. Analysing the notion of *hār*, the jurisdiction of a god, she shows that the territorial factor is a criterion around which social, political and religious life is organized. The territory “far from being reduced to the ‘empirical’ level of social organisation, forms an integral part of the local discourse and serves as a theoretical or ‘ideological’ point of reference for behaviour and for ritual and religious practices” (p. 128). The strongly affirmed territorial dimension characterizing the cults of village gods explains the importance they were assigned by the various political powers that succeeded one another in the region. Each of these powers (Hindu kingdoms, British colonial administration, modern democratic State), without exception, attempted to adapt its respective political logics to those in operation in the territories of the gods.

Christiane Brosius, finally, analyses the way in which the notion of territory was used in India in propaganda videos prepared on the initiative of the militant Hindu Right in the late 1980s and early 1990s in order to create, elaborate and visualize their idea of “*hindutva*” (Indianness). These videos were produced for the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in the aftermath of the “patriotic pilgrimages” organized by this same party. Through the images and narratives of these territorial processions, a series of metaphors were created, linked with space, family and the body (the nation like a woman, the national territory like her body, the citizens like its devout sons). The videos reveal that the Hindu Right’s re-mapping strategies of Indianness constitute a partial fusion of various familiar spatial concepts and practices. Nationalist rhetoric produces a new cartography of the nation, calling upon religious traditions to transmit the idea of a national identity and to provide common denominators for the idea of Hindu superiority.

This book has first of all the merit of disproving a preconceived view in Indian studies, which has resulted in biased interpretation and the neglect of facts concerning the notion of territory. It also points the way for future studies and demonstrates that the analysis of representations linked to territory is essential to our understanding of the Indian societies of today and yesterday. The authors of this volume have made no attempt to show that there is only *one* specific Indian way of conceiving territory. On the

contrary, they have attempted to uncover several of them, and this will in turn facilitate comparison with other societies.

***Dancing the Self: Personhood and performance in the Pāṇḍav Līlā of Garhwal* by William S. Sax. New York: Oxford University Press 2002, ISBN 0-19-513815-1, pp. 224, 12 b&w plates, ink-drawings, bibl., index.**

Reviewed by Stuart Blackburn, London

Anyone who attempts a book about performance faces an uphill task, for writing about performance is a little like showing home movies to friends: what was so captivating when you first experienced it, is not so vivid when recycled to others. Ever since fieldworkers wrote up their descriptions of shamanic seances in Siberian cultures in the late nineteenth century, we have struggled to capture performances in print. But how can you reproduce the shimmering vitality of music and song, the dynamic motion of bodies and emotions on the cold page? Performance theory has always been bedevilled by this methodological problem. Some have tried to inject a sense of the live experience by using a special orthography for translations; some have used the “personal diary” approach. Some now include a CD of the event and/or a website link.

William Sax has not attempted any of these. Instead he has gritted his teeth and written a (more or less) conventional monograph, relying mainly on description, plus a good bit of translation and the occasional personal anecdote. But he too has attempted to close the gap between performance and its second-hand articulation, although not by any stylistic techniques. Rather he has done something more original and long overdue: he has tried to resolve the dichotomy by arguments within the book itself. And this is what distinguishes this book – an intellectual energy, which flows alongside the rich veins of ethnographic data. At times the energy is perhaps too free-flowing and runs away with itself; for one thing, the thesis of the book – that performance creates selves – is not entirely convincing. But when the writing is guided more closely by the author's deep knowledge of the performance tradition and its context, the observations ring true. Those insights are many and varied, so that, in the end, through this combination of explanatory ardour and local knowledge, the writing of the performance has been brought closer to the performance itself.

The performance at the centre of this book is the *pāṇḍav līlā*, a folk theatre tradition in the central Himalayas, in the Garhwal region in the newly-created Indian state of Uttaranchal. In this region of steep ravines and snowy peaks, villagers perform this drama of a war between two sets of brothers, best known from textual versions of the Mahabharata story (a useful summary of which is provided in a prologue); continuing for as many as nine days, it is the most prominent performance tradition of the region – indeed it is not found outside its borders. Sax knows this tradition and region well, and he takes the reader deep into its context, the landscape, the enormous expenditure of resources required to put on the plays, the rituals surrounding them, the inevitable conflicts and controversies, and also the personalities on display. Through him, and despite the gap between experience and page, we can feel something of the emotions, the pride, the joy as well as sorrow, that accompany the long nights of dancing and drumming, of recitation and possession. In one village, at the end of the 9-day event, which occurs only once in about thirty years in a village, the author comments that the people were sad. Asked why, they said, “We haven't performed a *līlā* for years. Just now we're all together... But who knows who will survive, and who will die before the next performance?” (p. 37). Similar anecdotes throughout the book bring the experience of performance to the reader.

We learn that the *pāṇḍav līlā* is locally perceived and enacted as a “sacrifice” (which fits the traditional role of the Rajput caste that sponsors the performance); in fact, it is understood as a kind of ancestor worship, since the heroes who die in the drama are thought to be the forefathers of the Rajputs in the region. We also enter into the experience of the drama through the many sections of translation and narrative summaries provided; these are readable, and sometimes striking, although the prose reads more smoothly than the verses (nothing new there). Key details are also highlighted: Bhima's club, for example, is made from a cherry tree used only for rituals and never for domestic purposes. The author brings out inconsistencies, as well: for instance, in one remote, northern valley, Karna, the anti-hero of the epic, rules as a divine king. And the tradition is not timeless: a special kind of maze (with saris draped on stakes), representing a battle formation used in a critical episode of the folk theatre, is not only a recent innovation, but one which uses printed scripts and is popular because of this association with literacy.

Almost as a sidelight, we also discover a good deal about the Mahabharata story, which by itself is worth the price of admission. Many of us who (like this reviewer) are “familiar” with the story will find out just how much we did not understand. Sax has not set out to study the relation between epic text and folk performance, but he has provided a wealth of detail for anyone interested in this topic: we can no longer doubt that there

really is no “the” Mahabharata, and yet, the dancers high in the Himalayas do not radically depart from the textual mainstream of the epic.

I found two kinds of weaknesses in this otherwise excellent book. First, there are presentational problems. Although the photos help the reader to understand this performance (one or two in colour would also have been nice), there is no map showing Garhwal in its larger context of South Asia and the Himalayas. The chapters are also uneven, in length and in their relation to the central argument about the construction of the self in performance; for instance, chapters 5 and 6 (both revisions of previously published essays) are interesting but do not really advance the author’s key arguments. This imbalance also throws up a few unnecessary repetitions, for example, the comment that in the far north people do not open the book of Karna without a goat sacrifice. Similarly, the concluding chapter is a wonderful essay (clever, provocative and humorous) on that “hall of mirrors” known as Other and Self; but it does not round off the book by driving home the arguments about performance and personhood.

A second misgiving is that whereas the author states his arguments forcefully, he does not always fully demonstrate them. The principal claims are set forth clearly in the fine Introduction. After a brisk summary of performance theory, drawing mainly on Austin and Tambiah, the author claims (with others) that performance not only reproduces social meanings but produces them as well. In order to grasp this power of performance, Sax argues, it is necessary to abandon the conventional emphasis on the truth of rituals and move toward a more fruitful emphasis on their efficacy. Too many analyses, in his view, are pole-axed on the false distinction between expressive (inner, psychological) and instrumental (external, pragmatic) acts; again, expressive acts, including ritual performances, are too often seen as merely reflective of the social world whereas Sax wants to show that they are actually generative of it.

Although I am entirely sympathetic with this position, I do not think he actually manages to demonstrate it. How in fact is this proposition demonstrable? A performance might, as Sax amply shows, be very closely tied to a region, to a caste’s image of itself, to the values of performers and audience. But how can we know that a performance creates social relations?

We are persuaded by the author’s reasoning that performance does not merely represent meaning but actually embodies it (e.g., the martial quality of the Pandavas’ weapons). And Sax makes a good case that performance of the *pāṇḍav līlā* operates on two levels, invoking cognitive realms while underpinning social relations. But underpinning or representing is different than “creating”.

Similar questions can be raised when Sax turns to the book’s central question: “How is the self constructed in and through performance?” (p. 6). He states that the book “will show how *pāṇḍav līlā* constructs a regional

self, a gendered self, a caste self, a generational self, and so on” (p. 15). Again, how can this be demonstrated? The author provides a good discussion of anthropological and Hindu discourses on the “self”, but problems of definition remain. “Self”, “identity” and “individual” are not properly distinguished; and another distinction, between a “small self” and a “big Self” in Hindu thought, is mentioned in the Introduction but never referred to again. And what is a “regional self”? Or a “generational self”? Pandora's box of psychology and selfhood has been opened but, one feels, not fully explored. Until we can describe “self” and “identity” more precisely, perhaps the most we can say about performance and society is what Geertz said about the cockfight in Bali many years ago: it is a story they tell themselves about themselves.

Whatever kind of self *pāṇḍav līlā* might construct, it is certainly not a Freudian one. In the book's big set-piece, the author refutes psychoanalytic interpretations of culture in favour of a socio-cultural one. A central episode in this Himalayan drama, and in the epic text, involves a parricide, which Robert Goldman has taken to be a (very rare) example of a positive Oedipal complex in Hindu literature. Against this interpretation, Sax juxtaposes his own knowledge of the full performance of *pāṇḍav līlā*, in which filial piety is constantly rewarded and its neglect punished; moreover, after the son kills his father, the latter is revived and the play ends in reconciliation. The author also draws on local child-rearing practices, making the telling observation that although filial piety is highly valued, in fact, “relations between fathers and sons [in Garhwal] are characterized by distance and formality” (p. 82).

Armed with this arsenal of evidence, Sax argues that the parricide episode does not reveal a repressed desire of a son to kill his father, but rather the opposite: the valorisation of filial piety (when a father's support and love is absent, boys feel a deep need for a senior male figure). The episode is also said to represent the importance of martial honour (challenged to fight by his father, the son must fight) and the continuity between male relatives (the ancestor worship at the base of the tradition). This full contextual interpretation is convincing, and yet not entirely satisfactory. It seems clear that filial piety, masculine cohesion and martial values shape local society, but we still want to know why parricide stands at the centre of the performance. Yes, there is reconciliation, but why should a son's killing of his father be so prominent?

Sax himself partially answers this question when he writes that examples of fratricide and parricide are important precisely because they “violate the values of filial piety and fraternal solidarity” (p. 90). In other words, we transgress what we value, and thereby underscore those ideals. This ambivalence, that we enact not only what we desire but also what we fear, might be one reason for the parricide episode; such an explanation, however, is lost if we completely dismiss the psychoanalytical position. If

we consider performance only in terms of its capacity to reproduce/produce the social world (relations, identities, religious concepts), we run the risk of stripping it of its ability to create imaginary worlds. Performance is, of course, a set of behaviours enacted within a material world, but it can also angle itself against that world or invent a parallel one.

Whatever its weaknesses, there is no doubt that this book should be read by anyone interested in performance or India. It is a serious meditation on a wide range of fundamental issues – individual and collective identity, the efficacy of ritual, the universality of the Oedipal complex, the agency of Hindu gods, text and performance, to name a few. One can also read this book as an attempt to resolve a series of dichotomies: normative concepts of self and lived experience; symbolic and functional approaches to ritual; culture and power; self and Other. Since most of these are versions of the mind-body split, or idealism versus materialism, their resolutions, as Sax shows us, lie in the embodied meanings of performance, which is as raw as it is regulated. I would also commend this book for its lucid prose, which strikes that rare balance between specialist language and common sense.

Finally, the book is a success in that it achieves a more far-reaching aim of reinvigorating performance theory. The basic tenets of the theory, worked out in the 1970s and 1980s, have by now largely passed into the mainstream of scholarship, but this success has bred a certain complacency; having won the war against the textualism, performance theory sleeps silently. Beating his drum high in the Himalayas, Sax has injected new intellectual vigour into the received wisdom about performance. He not only reworks old favourites (such as Austin and Tambiah) but also enhances the theory with readings outside the canon (such as Gramsci and Bourdieu). Sax has written a concise book, just under 200 (closely-printed) pages but has flung out many arguments, and in the end, his reach may exceed his grasp. Perhaps this is the curse of the Mahabharata, that sprawling epic about which it is confidently said, “If it's not in the Mahabharata it doesn't exist.” Sax's book has pushed performance theory out of its cosy niche and into current debates about gender, agency and life-history, and now it is for others to tell us what its limits may be.

***Resistance and the State: Nepalese experiences*, edited by David N. Gellner. New Delhi: Social Science Press, [2003]. Pp. 383 + xiv. ISBN 81-87358-08-4.**

Reviewed by John Whelpton, Hong Kong

This collection of papers, originating in a South Asia Studies Conference held in Edinburgh in 2001, is not narrowly focussed on Nepal's current political crisis but addresses a wide range of problems now confronting the country. After the editor's own introduction, which discusses the basic concepts of "state" and "resistance", and outlines the historical background, the ten papers are categorised into three sections, focussing on development and local politics, ethnic activism and the Maoist insurgency.

The first section begins with two essays exploring how government initiatives, sanctioned by the international development industry, can be experienced at local level as restricting individual and community autonomy and as a threat to livelihood strategies. In a paper with jointly authored discussion of theoretical issues but separate accounts from the field, Ian Harper and Tarnowski find similar issues raised by both public health and conservation programmes. Tarnowski argues that despite the switch from centralised state control of forests to the "community forestry" approach, management remains in practice very much a top-down affair whilst the formalised committee structure of user groups makes it easy for members of the existing village-level elite to retain key positions. Harper examines dilemmas posed by the D.O.T.S. (Directly Observed Therapy Short-Course) T.N.B. control programme. To avoid sufferers' failing to complete a full course of medication, and thus both jeopardising their own recovery and strengthening the TB bacillus's drug-resistance, D.O.T.S. requires health workers to observe the patient taking each dose of medicine and withhold treatment if this condition is not met.

Very similar ground to Harper's and Tarnowski's is covered by Ben Campbell's examination of how the local Tamangs circumvent the regulations imposed upon them by the authorities of the Langtang National Park, whose establishment criminalised villagers' traditional use of forest resources. In line with much recent thinking in the social sciences, he is concerned with the state's overriding of local interests and local knowledge, and also questions how far the Nepalese bureaucracy genuinely wants or is able to put into practice the environmentalist theories in whose name it claims to act.

The remaining two papers in the first section concentrate on popular attitudes towards the state in general and on the political process itself.

William Fisher finds a growing disenchantment with officialdom and party politicians in Myagdi district during the 1990s, together with increasing responsiveness towards *janajāti* rhetoric and, among the untouchable castes, towards Maoist propaganda. The monarchy did remain the focus of loyalty during the decade, but this was compromised by unwillingness to accept the official explanation of the 2001 royal massacre. Krishna Hachhethu's "Political parties and the state", summarises the author's recent monograph (Hachhethu 2002) on the functioning of the Congress and UML party machines at grass-roots level. This shows how, despite misgivings amongst local activists, the two major parties have come to concentrate on channeling benefits through patronage networks rather than on seeking broad popular support for their policies.

The section on ethnic activism, combines a broad overview with two papers focussing on particular groups. Karl-Heinz Krämer restates the general argument of his 1996 study, though adding more recent data, particularly from the 2000 survey of public opinion in 51 *janajāti* groups by Media Services International. Aligning himself firmly with the Janajati Mahasangh (to whose members he dedicated his earlier monograph), he argues that Nepal's key problem is systematic discrimination against groups other than the Parbatiya and Newar high castes and that Nepal's official status as a Hindu state helps perpetuate this. Gisèle Krauskopff contributes an analysis of different forms of activism amongst the Tharu, contrasting in particular the elite-based Tharu Welfare Society, an ethnic association dating from the end of the Rana period, and BASE (Backward Society Education), which was once known as the Tharu Workers' Liberation Organisation. Marie Lecomte-Tilouine contributes a study of the rebel Lakhan Thapa, a Magar who proclaimed himself "king" in his home village in Gorkha district and was later captured and executed by Jang Bahadur Rana's soldiers in 1877. She contrasts the various readings of the episode, including the older mainstream view of him as a mere charlatan, Magar ethnic activists' portrayal of him as a champion of both Magar interests and Nepalese nationalism, Janaklal Sharma's suggestion that he was a *santa* of the Josmani religious sect and also (in an addition to the earlier version of the paper published as Lecomte-Tilouine 2000) the story as told by the great-grandson of one of Lakhan's collaborators, who serves as priest at the shrine now standing on the site of Lakhan's "palace". Interestingly, local tradition as reflected in Magar activists' account tend to make the local Chetris rather than Jang Bahadur the chief villain of the story whilst the priest's version of that tradition almost totally empties it of political significance, suggesting that Lakhan was merely interested in the "uplift" of his own home area.

The section on the "People's War" begins with Colin Millard's paper combining a brief history of the Maoist movement up to the 2001 ceasefire with a first-hand account of attitudes towards the political system in Dhorpatan Valley south-west of Dhaulagiri, just beyond the Maoist core area. As

in Fisher's study of Myagdi, the main motif that emerges is total disillusionment with the functioning of parliamentary democracy and also some nostalgia for the pre-1990 era. Judith Pettigrew gives a sensitive portrait of the impact of the rebellion on Gurung (Tamu) villagers in Kaski district, acknowledging the attraction of the movement for some young Gurung but focussing more on the fear and incomprehension it has spread, particularly amongst older villagers and those with sufficient resources to be worth looting. The volume finishes with Anne de Sales' account of how the Maoists established their initial hold in Kham Magar country in Rukum and Rolpa. Originally published in *Puruṣārtha* (2001) and in this journal (2000), her findings need supplementing with more recent material, in particular Gersony (2003) and Thapa (2003) but the basic analysis is sound enough. The Leftists skilfully exploited not only Kham alienation from the Nepalese state but also the divisions between different clans, and they have been using ethnic discontent in the hope of building a political order where ethnic distinctions are transcended by the control of the Communist party itself. Both the state's security forces and the Maoists were generally seen as unwelcome intruders but the Maoists often seemed the lesser of two evils as their exactions were, at this initial stage, less onerous.

Fortunately for potential readers who are not academic anthropologists, most chapters are free of abstruse theorizing, even though small portions in the otherwise reader-friendly contributions by Harper, Tarnowski and Cameron are hard going. The editor's introduction discusses in detail the concept of "resistance" but in jargon-free fashion. In addition to direct confrontation with authority and the indirect and subtle opposition analysed by James Scott, Gellner also classes as "resistance" the ways in which in pre-1951 Nepal "ordinary... people attempted to use the state for their own ends, by joining it, co-opting its personnel, bribing them, or morally coercing them" (p. 3). Such responses were (and still are) widespread but it is arguable that at least some of these are best classified as "coping with" rather than "resisting" the state. Accommodation to the dominant power, whether this involves active alignment or simply avoiding being seen as opposed to it, has been a key motif throughout Nepalese history and its importance in post-1990 politics is clear from Hachhethu's paper. He attributes the success of both Congress and of the UML in the 1990 election and the poor performance of the two Rashtriya Prajatantra parties to the rural population's wish to "follow the victor". He also describes how locals flocked to the office of the governing party with their problems rather than trust the workings of the supposedly neutral courts and bureaucracy. The success enjoyed so far by the Maoists rests on their having been able to draw upon this tradition as well as on the spirit of resistance: they attract a minority ready to revolt and then skilfully coerce a majority concerned mainly with keeping out of trouble. The latter attitude is well illustrated by an inhabitant of Jumla in 2003: "We obeyed the Ranas and during the Panchayat we did what we were told. Democracy came and we followed.

Tomorrow there may be another system and we will have to listen to them too. We can never say we won't obey" (Mainali 2003). Such attitudes are likely to persist whilst the powerful – whether “feudals” or Maoists – readily resort to intimidation of their opponents and while access to public resources depends on personal favour rather than impersonal regulations.

Against this background, the empowering of “communities”, which everyone agrees is desirable in principle, is clearly a tough order. In his critique of community forestry, Campbell rightly points out that “it is not possible to overcome ecological underprivilege by transferring roles, rewards, and duties to an ideal construction” and that policy-makers have to deal with the fissiparous communities that ethnographers actually reveal (p. 106). Policy-makers also have to accept that inequalities of power and status within local communities cannot be entirely overridden: over the long-term there is hope for making dominance less absolute, but, as in other societies, elites have to be co-opted into the process of change.

Several authors do seem to be hankering after some form of pure community assertiveness which would not require compromises with those currently holding power whether within or outside Nepal. This applies possibly to Campbell himself and also to Krauskopff's particularly interesting contribution. She displays a rather different approach from that of Guneratne (2002) towards the *kamāiyā* system in the western Tarai and towards the role of BASE (Backward Society Education), the NGO whose campaign against the institution paved the way for its formal abolition in summer 2000. Whilst acknowledging the energy and radical intentions of BASE's founders, her account is less enthusiastic than his, Krauskopff is troubled by BASE's switch from a relatively confrontational stand against landlords in Dang to a human rights approach dependent on international donor agencies; a change which is in fact partly a reversion to the group's origins as it had initially been financed by USAID through the No Frills NGO. She also argues that the *kamāiyā* system was not unique to the western Tarai nor a uniquely Tharu problem but rather something “which ... occurs all over Nepal and in the eastern tarai as well under another name” (p. 220).

Krauskopff, who also reports, contrary to what Guneratne implies, that there are still a significant number of Tharu landlords in Dang, has extensive personal knowledge of the area and her analysis deserves to be taken seriously. However, there probably needs to be more research done before a definitive account of the *kamāiyā* issue can be written. Marked dependence of debtors upon their local creditors does indeed occur throughout the country but arguably took a particularly extreme form in the western Tarai. As for the appropriacy of BASE's NGO status and dependence on foreign donors, my own feeling is that the organisation should be seen as making tactical switches to maximise its effectiveness rather than as having “sold out”. Fujiura, who shares Krauskopff's worry about depoliticisation

(Fujiura 2001), points out that without external funding BASE would never have been able to mobilise the Tharu peasantry on a massive scale and Guneratne reports that securing this backing effectively ended the physical harassment of its members by landlords and their allies. As all observers agree, the formal “liberation” of the *kamāiyās* has not led to a happy ending since so many were evicted by their former masters and the government failed to make arrangements for their resettlement. This was not, however, the fault of BASE or other campaigners and its overall record, particularly in the field of adult literacy and general consciousness-raising, remains a good one.

Turning to the analysis of elites themselves, Gellner, in attempting to situate the Maoist rebellion in long-term historical context, points to the similarities in method (though not, of course, in ideology) between the Maoists and the Ranas, both of whom relied to a large extent on military coercion and on the conscription of labour. The comparison is a valid one but should be made with the whole of unified Nepal’s pre-1846 history rather than just with the Rana period. Indeed if a specific period is to be singled out, then that of “unification” under Prithvi Narayan and his immediate successors is arguably a better candidate. Although Gellner states that under the Ranas “the tax burden” was severe, this was true only of the proportion of his crop forfeited by the actual cultivator, not of the proportion going to the central government. In fact, during the latter half of the Rana period, the real value of land tax on a given cultivated area was steadily declining, with the benefit going to local landlords whilst the Ranas’ own total receipts continued to grow as new land was brought under cultivation. In contrast, in Prithvi Narayan’s time, the bulk of rent paid went directly to the “king’s share”, even if its assignment as *jāgīr* income meant that the revenue passed only notionally through the central treasury. In areas where the Maoists have established control they are themselves again appropriating for their “people’s government” the fifty per cent share of the crop the cultivator had traditionally been required to surrender.

Lecomte-Tilouine’s contribution adds to our understanding of the complex relationship between the political elite and religious practitioners. She points to the complex of legends associating Magar priests with Thakuri monarchs, the most famous of which associates the first Lakhan Thapa (after whom the 19th century rebel is named) with Ram Shah’s queen Mankamana. She also refers to the contradictions in the Rana attitude towards the Josmani sect, to which the later Lakhan may have belonged: at about the same time as Lakhan’s revolt, a Josmani *santa* recruited *matawālīs* to his monastery and was imprisoned by Jang Bahadur, yet later emerged as a trusted member of Jang’s circle and initiated his brother and successor, Ranauddip Singh, into the sect. This bears comparison with Maharaja Bir Shamsheer’s initial encouragement of the Arya Samaji Madhavraj Joshi and perhaps also with Mohan Shamsheer’s reported

sympathy to a request that the Bishwakarmas (normally regarded as a section of the untouchable Kami caste) should be recognised as Kshatriyas. Possibly, though the Ranas were in many ways champions of Hindu orthodoxy, they at times wanted to lessen their dependence on the Brahmans and other twice-born castes by giving some recognition to other groups.

Running through the whole book, even where not explicitly addressed, is the question of the categories of caste, ethnic group and caste and their relationship to each other. Millard argues that *jāt* and *jāti* were separate concepts until the Muluki Ain of 1854 made the “dramatic change” of equating one with another (p. 287). The Ain certainly marked a new commitment by the state to the maintenance of a single caste hierarchy throughout the whole country (see Höfer 1979). Most likely, however, for the ordinary Nepali the term *jāt* (probably best translated by ‘descent group’) has always combined the concepts of “caste” and “ethnic group”, the boundary between which is in any case a problematic one. Social change is now reshaping group boundaries and Fisher argues that Myagdi society can now be seen as composing three major blocks: Brahmans, the “middle castes” (with whom he seems to include Thakuris and Chetris as well as Magars and other *janajāti* groups) and finally the “Untouchables” or *dalits*.

Though Krämer argues that ethnic rather than class divisions are the key factor in Nepalese society, for most other contributors, both are important and the two sets are intersecting ones. This is brought out especially strongly in Krauskopff’s analysis of BASE’s difficulties in reconciling divisions between Tharu landlords and tenants with the demands of Tharu ethnic solidarity. However, in some areas, including certainly parts of the Dang Valley, class and ethnic/caste boundaries do roughly coincide and this, of course, tends to sharpen social conflict. For example, the clashes in the hills west of the Kathmandu Valley cited by king Mahendra amongst his justifications for removing the Congress government in 1960, were frequently between wealthier Parbatiya settlers and the poorer Tamang population. Right across the country, the *dalits*, at the bottom of the ritual hierarchy, are also largely at the bottom of the economic one.

The absence from this volume of a chapter focussing on *dalits* as Krämer’s focusses on the *janajātis*, is in itself symptomatic of this group’s failure to organise themselves effectively. This is mainly, of course, because of the formers’ particularly depressed state, but also because of their internal divisions.¹ The *dalit* groups have long resented the predominance of the Bishwakarmas, who have taken the lead in the broader *dalit* movement as well as having made an attempt just before the end of the Rana regime to claim high-caste status for themselves. Such tensions are

¹ For a fuller discussion of the factors obstructing the emergence of a strong and united *dalit* movement, see Bishwakarma 2001/02.

obviously further increased when, as Millard reports for Dhorpatan, some Bishwakarmas continue to assert that they are higher in the caste structure than the *dalits* generally. But while specifically *dalit* organisations have had limited success, these groups have, not surprisingly, been particularly responsive to Maoist propaganda as is well shown by Fisher's Myagdi informants. If and when the western hills are able to vote for a government of their choice free of intimidation, it is conceivable that substantial *dalit* support for the Maoists will cause many in other castes to swing behind the Maoist opponents.² But then, as the editor points out, social scientists do not often have a good record when it comes to predicting the future.

The editing and general appearance of the book are generally of a high standard and I particularly liked the cover photograph of a 1999 Gai Jatra skit on the then prime minister's relationship with his secretary. The only clear lapses I spotted were the publisher's failure to include the date of publication and the introduction's placing the start of the Rana era to 1845 rather than 1846 (p. 3) – I may myself be partly responsible for the latter as I saw the introduction in draft.

Overall, the book is an excellent contribution to our understanding of Nepal's current situation and worth the attention of everyone seriously interested in the subject.

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² I am grateful to Mrigendra Karki for pointing out that this factor may be behind the persisting support for the Nepali Congress (Democratic) suggested by a report of a victory for its candidates in an election organised by the Maoists themselves for "People's Governments" in two Achham villages (*Kāntipur* 1/7/04). The villagers evidently imagined they were being allowed an unfettered choice and were warned by the Maoist commander against repeating their mistake!

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***Other Worlds: Notions of self and emotion among the Lohorung Rai* by Charlotte E. Hardman. Oxford/New York: Berg, 2000. ISBN 1859731554 (pbk), ISBN 1859731503 (hbk), xix + 315 pp.**

Reviewed by Mark Turin, Ithaca

Other Worlds addresses the *Weltanschauung* of the Lohorung Rai, with specific emphasis on what it means to be a socialised person in their culture. The book follows in part Hardman's doctoral dissertation of 1990, itself based on fieldwork conducted between 1976 and 1980. The Lohorung, conventionally grouped under the Rai ethno-linguistic division of Himalayan peoples, number 3,000 and live slightly north-west of Khandbari in eastern Nepal.

Hardman draws on "ethno-psychological" notions, such as Lohorung concepts of self and articulations of emotions, to elucidate the values and codes of social behaviour she witnessed during her fieldwork. To contextualise this chosen frame of reference, the author explains how she turned to ethno-psychology much "the same way that some anthropologists have

looked to subsurface or deep structure as a form of explanation” and stresses that “what characterizes these psychological concepts has ramifications in all kinds of areas of life ... not just rituals” (p. 15). In a charming chapter entitled “Theories in my boots”, Hardman describes her arrival and immersion in Lohorung life and her concomitant emphasis on the participants’ point of view: “to accept on faith Lohorung descriptions and explanations of their own experiences and to accept that their meanings could not be grasped if I applied too many rationalist explanations” (p. 9).

Having established the theoretical and analytical framework for her study, Hardman embarks on a detailed exposition of the various ancestral influences that dominate and shape the daily lives and rituals of the Lohorung with whom she lived and worked. “There was no escaping the daily situations involving superhuman beings in Pangma”, she writes, “superhuman beings have emotions and needs which have to be met” (p. 42). In particular, we learn of the importance of *sammang*, ‘ancestor’, ‘spirits of powerful ancestors’ and the salience of *saya*, ‘internal link with the ancestors’, ‘vital principle’, ‘ancestor within’, for grasping “aspects of the alternative reality within which notions of ‘self’ and ‘emotion’ are embedded” (p. 43).

The author is at her best when illustrating how the communication between living Lohorung and their *sammang* ancestors is dominated by attempts to control these same relationships. Hardman conveys with considerable nuance the Lohorung understanding of illness, which, she argues, may be “understood better if we see them as the attachment to the body of ancestors’ desires and anger” (p. 48). While the ancestors “themselves don’t penetrate the body”, she continues, “their desires and emotions can” (p. 49). Unsurprisingly then, given that illness in Lohorung culture is as much about individual physical malaise as it is about the “unwanted anger and hunger, desires and feelings of ancestors and spirits,... those who know how to communicate with these supernatural beings” are key figures in Lohorung society. With careful reasoning and sophisticated examples, Hardman convincingly illustrates both that there is often no distinction between physiological and mental or emotional pain, and that “happiness and sociability are closely linked to health” (p. 55).

Hardman demonstrates an impressive linguistic aptitude for Lohorung, and translates indigenous words with care. George van Driem, a Dutch linguist who has published a study of the complex Lohorung verbal agreement system and is presently working on a grammar of the language, credits Hardman with having a “good working command of the language, which is amply manifest in her work” (2001: 691). The three appendices to the book all have interesting linguistic content: an overview of the language, kinship terminology and unglossed Lohorung texts. Given the author’s linguistic precision and accuracy, then, it is all the more regrettable that Berg publishers failed to employ a skilled copy editor and then farmed out the

layout of this important book to JS Typesetting in Wellingborough, Northamptonshire, who were clearly unfit for the task. The countless typographical and orthographical errors — including a widespread absence of spaces after commas and periods — significantly reduce the reader's pleasure.

In all, Charlotte Hardman succeeds in demonstrating how notions of self, person and emotion among the Lohorung, which have a physiological or biological basis, are also constructed by people's own personal and cultural understandings. As a reader and reviewer, though, I am left with an unanswered question. How much of what she describes is specific to the Lohorung community? In other words, where is the comparative data from neighbouring groups? It is entirely possible that complex understandings of illness and possession, as illustrated in this case by the Lohorung example, may be a general cultural feature of other Himalayan peoples.

The strength of an approach so focused on a particular topic — in this case Lohorung notions of self and emotion — may also be its undoing. On completing this 300-page book, the reader will have been led through many of the experiential aspects of Lohorung social life and also be well versed in how this experience is culturally constructed, but will know relatively little of the wider socio-economic aspects of Lohorung culture. What Hardman achieves in depth she sacrifices in breadth. The result is that much of the cultural glue which contributes to social life between households — land use, economic alliances, kinship — is not discussed in any detail. We must hope that Hardman will apply her analytical care and ethnographic precision to produce equally compelling narratives of other aspects of Lohorung society.

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***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

Hills by Ostrom, Martin, Prachanda Pradhan and Ujial Pradhan, Shivakoti, and Yoder.

The book is an abbreviated and revised version of the doctoral thesis by Olivia Aubriot: *Eau: Miroir des Tensions. Ethno-histoire d'un système d'irrigation dans les moyennes montagnes du Népal central*, submitted at the Université de Provence (Aix-Marseille I) in 1997. Field research for the thesis was carried out in the village of Aslewacaur over several visits between 1990 and 1994. The author claims to have received major inspiration for her work from E. R. Leach's study *Pul Eliya: A Village in Ceylon. A study of land tenure and kinship*, and has chosen a multidisciplinary approach, combining anthropological, agricultural and geographical perspectives embedded in a historical matrix.

L'eau, Miroir d'une Société consists of an introduction and four chapters followed by an extensive annex. Chapter 1 provides the historical background to an understanding of the development of irrigation within the larger framework of agricultural intensification in central Nepal. In chapters 2 to 4, the focus is on irrigation in Aslewacaur: chapter 2 introduces the village, and discusses the construction and maintenance of the main channel of Aslewacaur – the centrepiece of its irrigation network – in its historical and political dimension; and chapters 3 and 4 contain an analysis of water distribution in both time (chapter 3) and space (chapter 4).

The village of Aslewacaur is situated in Gulmi district of central Nepal at 700 m. altitude. The author describes the village as unique or singular in many respects, most prominently because of its homogeneity in terms of topography, land use and social composition in a Middle Hill context, where diversity is the rule. Aslewacaur is located on an elevated river terrace, which overlooks the confluence of the Kali Gandaki and Barigad rivers. Most of its fields are laid out on the comparatively flat and plateau-like surface of the river terrace, and most of them (81%) are irrigated. The houses are scattered among the rice fields, a settlement pattern which underscores the prominent influence of irrigated space on village life. The social structure of Aslewacaur is also homogeneous to an unusual degree: 88% of its inhabitants are high-caste Brahmins, and 90% of these belong to the Pandey clan, which is divided into the two groups of Jaisi and Bagale. Social dynamics within the village are largely determined by the interaction of these two closely related groups. Irrigation in Aslewacaur is also characterized by singularities, above all by the historical origins of the irrigation network (“L’histoire de l’implantation du réseau d’irrigation d’Aslewacaur est singulière...”, p. 25) and by the use of a water clock to measure the time allotted to the irrigation of each field.

The history of irrigation in Aslewacaur is treated as part of the history of the intensification of land use in the Middle Hills of Nepal. The cultivation of irrigated rice as it is practiced at Aslewacaur has its origins in the plains of northern India and was introduced to Nepal by high-caste Hindu migrants

from the 15th century onwards. Cultivation of irrigated rice at Aslewacaur, according to Aubriot, resembles the practice in Northern India, both because of the flat topography of the village territory, and because of Brahmin dominance in the village. The spread of irrigated rice cultivation in the hills of Nepal accelerated at about the beginning of the 20th century as part of a general trend towards intensification of land use in the Middle Hills of Nepal, which also brought in its train the introduction of crop rotations, and the transition from communal to individual user patterns. At Aslewacaur, the expansion of irrigated land at the beginning of the 20th century was brought about through the initiative of one individual – Tilochan Pandey, who as collector of land tax had reason to benefit from the increase of irrigated land. He laid the foundation for irrigation at Aslewacaur by organizing and financing the construction of the main channel between 1893 and 1896. The local farmers initially rejected the channel, which thus fell into disrepair due to lack of maintenance. The project was revived eighteen years later on the orders of the then prime minister Chandra Shamsheer Rana, who threatened the villagers with confiscation of their land in case of non-cooperation with Tilochan Pandey: a case in point for Aubriot to demonstrate that even though irrigation systems in the hill zone of Nepal were in most cases established through local initiative, state intervention was also occasionally practiced.

The water clock is a central image or leitmotif, used by Aubriot to very good effect as an indicator of the close relations in Aslewacaur between water management, social structure, and cosmic order. A water clock, which consists of a bowl with a small hole in its bottom, placed inside a larger water-filled bowl, measures time units through a process of submersion: the small bowl fills with water and sinks to the bottom when it is full, thus completing one unit at a time. The water clock is thus a water clock in a double sense: water is used as a medium to regulate the amount of water for irrigation by measuring the time of its supply for distribution. The water clock is introduced at the very beginning of this book to point toward a paradox: the exact and minute measurement of water for irrigation, which resembles the practice in dry areas where water is scarce, in a region where water is plentiful. This observation provides a starting point for the central argument of Aubriot's study: the allocation and distribution of water is determined primarily by the social structure of the village and only secondarily by environmental constraints or technical considerations. The water clock as an instrument that is normally used by astrologers is emblematic also of the linkage between irrigation and the cosmic order, i.e. the arithmetical correspondences that exist between the signs of the zodiac and the irrigation cycles, which, moreover, are named after these signs. The use of the water clock and of astrological terminology is interpreted by Aubriot as a device for lending additional legitimacy to an irrigation order in a Brahmin society, where the arts of calculation and astrology are held in high regard.

The core chapters of Aubriot's book are dedicated to the exploration of the interconnectedness of social structure, landholding patterns, and distribution of water. Aubriot finds that water for irrigation is distributed according to membership in kin groups or lineages. The close association that exists between lineage and distribution system is beautifully expressed by the ambiguous meaning of the term *kule bhāī* used in a booklet on the history of the irrigation system of Aslewacaur. It can be translated as both 'brothers of the channel' or 'brothers of the lineage', and highlights the close correlation between kinship group and user group. The social structure of Aslewacaur is characterized by the division of the Pandey clan into the Jaisi lineage and the Bagale lineage group – and the further division of these units into sub-lineages. Irrigation time measured by the water clock is allocated between lineages and within lineages between groups of the same genealogical order. As the landholdings of the various kin groups are grouped together, the social structure of Aslewacaur imprints itself on the landholding pattern, which is made visible in village space through irrigation structures and irrigation patterns. As the author puts it: "The imprint of kinship on water appears as an imprint on the land transcribed by the distribution of water" (p. 193, my translation). The social division of Aslewacaur into two major groups and landholding complexes is clearly illustrated by the map on p. 189, which shows the bipartition of the territory into a western half dominated by the Bagale and an eastern half dominated by the Jaisi group. The division of land between these two groups and their subgroups determines the distribution of water. This is shown by the alignment of the three secondary channels which distribute water from the main channel throughout the village perimeter. Two channels irrigate the Bagale lands in the western half of the irrigation network, while the third channel irrigates the Jaisi holdings in the eastern half. The geography of water distribution and the geography of landholdings are supplemented by history because the irrigation infrastructure reflects the pattern of land ownership at the time of its installation.

However, this raises questions concerning the dynamics of a living community in the context of an irrigation infrastructure which has frozen the social structure of the past in space – dynamics which in the case of Aslewacaur are driven by demographic changes, gender imbalances caused by the temporary migration of male labourers to India, the permanent migration of households to the Terai, as well as the transition from an economy based on exchange to an economy based on monetarization, and conflicts over resources. Aubriot shows that the tensions between the two major social groups, the Jaisi and Bagale, which materialize as conflicts over the distribution of water and the maintenance of the irrigation infrastructure, constitute a major problem for the village. Her interest in and concern for this particular aspect of water management is attested by the title of her original doctoral thesis. At the bottom of this tension lies an attitude of superiority assumed by the Jaisi, who consider themselves the

founders of Aslewacaur and who occupy a more powerful position within the village than the late-coming Bagale. On the water management level, these tensions have led to a growing imbalance of participation by the two groups in maintenance works and the appearance of the first symptoms of physical degradation of the irrigation infrastructure. A formidable hazard are the disruptions of water supply due to landslides, which constitute a serious danger to the irrigation channels. In discussing the village response to this particular risk, Aubriot returns to the paradox of a management system that meticulously regulates water distribution in the face of an apparent surplus of this resource. She argues that it is precisely the awareness of the ever-present threat of water shortage that prompts villagers to regulate their water use with so much attention to detail. Careful measurement of water for irrigation is therefore an element not of the management of a scarce resource but of the management of a prevalent risk. The response to damage by landslides also supports the author's argument that the layout of irrigation structures is determined prominently by social rather than by technical considerations. When one of the secondary channels was damaged by a landslide in 1990, initial attempts to realign the channel away from the zone of risk were overridden by the wish to maintain the channel in its original location in conformity with the distribution pattern of kin groups.

The author is clearly enamoured of her choice of the mirror as a metaphor for the inter-linkages between water and society. The question is, however, whether the mirror-image really captures the essence of the relationship that Aubriot has analyzed so carefully. By clinging to it, Aubriot involuntarily invokes a social determinism from which she has otherwise been trying to distance herself. That water is not just a reflection of social structure and relations, but also a medium for cooperation or conflict with repercussions on society is an aspect of water-society relations that is not conveyed by such an image.

This is a very good book by an anthropologist endowed with an excellent sense of space and of spatial structures, and of their potential and significance as indicators of social structures as well as media for social interaction. The social structures underlying the temporal and spatial patterns of irrigation are meticulously researched, and the patterns themselves presented very clearly in verbal and visual form. The book is richly illustrated with graphs, showing above all the intricate ramifications of lineages and sub-lineages, as well as with maps showing field structure, irrigation structures and temporal and spatial irrigation patterns. The plates are of variable quality. In contrast to the good colour photographs, the 15 black and white photographs are of poor quality, most probably on account of technical problems connected with the conversion of digital files to prints. They are too small in size and lacking in contrast to be helpful. The author writes in a lucid style, and the ease with which she tackles the presentation of the complex and sometimes confounding intricacies of kinship relations

deserves admiration. The language is refreshingly free of the technical jargon that has been generated within the literature on sustainable development, and which is used by so many authors to make their writing appear more relevant. Quite the contrary, Aubriot's study of the tensions underlying the management of water resources, even in a relatively homogenous village, is a healthy antidote to the unmitigated user-group enthusiasm currently in vogue in the literature. That in explaining the causes of these tensions she attributes more weight to kinship affiliation than to socioeconomic parameters such as poverty, vulnerability etc., may diminish the value of her contribution in the eyes of some, and earn her the reproach of nurturing a genealogical bias. Her monograph is, however, a convincing and well-documented reminder not to lose sight of a determinant of human-environment relations, which does play an important role in many societies, and for the study of which anthropologists are particularly qualified.

***Social Demography of Nepal, Census 2001* by Harka Gurung. Lalitpur: Himal Books 2003. Pp. vi, 59; 15 tables, 11 figures, 6 annexes. ISBN 99933 43 55 2.**

Reviewed by David Seddon, Norwich

This little monograph sets out – in a number of short sections, backed up by tables and figures – selected data from the 2001 census, and makes some comparisons with the 1991 census in particular. These data relate largely to the numerical distribution and change over time of social categories in Nepal, defined variously by caste, ethnicity, religion and language. In addition, there is some discussion of literacy among the social categories identified. Migration is barely addressed, apart from some consideration of population change, by what is referred to as “native area”, between 1991 and 2001. Other possible topics – including those relating directly to demography (e.g. fertility and mortality rates, age and sex distribution) as well as school enrolment, higher education, health status and other indicators of well-being (e.g. income), political involvement, etc. – are not discussed.

It is an interesting and provocative compilation, as much for what it omits as for what it covers. The main text (pp. 1-34) consists of an Introduction, a section on Caste and Ethnic Groups (pp. 3-10), a section on Linguistic Groups (11-18), a section on Religious Groups (19-21), a section on

Caste/Ethnicity and Religion (22-25), a section on Literacy Level (26-27), a section on Janajati and Dalit Schedules (28-33) and a final Overview. It does not really live up to its title as *a Social Demography of Nepal*. It is not as broad in coverage as some of Dr. Gurung's previous works of this kind (*Ethnic Demography of Nepal*, 1996 and *Nepal: Social Demography and Expressions*, 1998). What it does essentially is to provide in an accessible form some statistical data on the caste, ethnic, religious and language groups into which the census divides the population of Nepal, and a commentary on the relationship between the "schedules" drawn up for the census and the reported data.

The central message conveyed in the Publisher's Note that precedes the main text – and arguably the intention of the author as well as the publisher – is that the 2001 census has "allowed" many caste and ethnic groups not previously enumerated "to claim their rightful place among the peoples of Nepal"; "near-extinct languages have been granted due recognition; and all religious groups have been properly documented" (p. vi). This kind of language – which implies that the census has "revealed new truths" about the nature of Nepali society, particularly as regards the numerical distribution of different caste, ethnic, religious and linguistic groups – pervades the monograph. Indeed, the Publisher's Note explicitly draws attention to the fact that "the two censuses held since the 1990 restoration of democracy in Nepal have revealed a very different social picture of the country than was expounded during the earlier period of cultural and social homogenisation actively pursued by the state" (p. vi).

The various tables and figures provide rich material for consideration, conjecture and consultation; the monograph should certainly be read and kept for reference by all those concerned with the social and political configuration of contemporary Nepal. But what is really interesting about the compilation is what it does and does not reveal about the contentious nature of the process of group classification and its relationship to the construction of identity – a matter of central importance, politically as well as socially and culturally in contemporary Nepal.

There is a passing reference in the Introduction to the preoccupations that underlay the 1911 census (the first census of Nepal) and how these affected the classification and publication of the data. One finds a more protracted consideration in section VIII on Janajati and Dalit Schedules of how the "schedules" were drawn up for the 2001 census in the light of the work of the Task Force on Janajati Utthan Pratishthan in 1996 and a similar body responsible for what have been referred to variously as Upechhit (excluded), Utpidit (suppressed) and Dalit (oppressed). This, the last substantive section of the main text, should properly have been the opening section. For it provides an interesting, but all too brief and not entirely epistemologically satisfactory, discussion of the ways in which the categories into which the census attempted to divide the population were constructed,

and of how discrepancies between the schedules (involving pre-determined classifications) and the reported data (including self-reported affiliations) arose.

The author is, of course, more aware than most, of the contentious nature of caste, ethnic, religious and linguistic classification, and refers explicitly to the pressure in contemporary Nepal for the proliferation of identities (p. 28). But some of the discussion reads as if the discrepancies between the schedules and the reported data can be resolved on the basis of what “is” or “is not” the “reality” in the field. The construction of identity is more complex and problematic than that. Behind the seemingly innocuous and “scientific” production and analysis of these statistics is a serious sociological issue of who is responsible for the construction of “reality” (for the suppression of certain versions and the creation of others) – as regards “identity” or anything else for that matter – and precisely how that takes place. The census is clearly one “arena” (and an important one as a reference point) among others.

If this monograph provokes debate along these lines with reference to the changes taking place as regards how and by whom caste, ethnic, religious and linguistic identity is defined/constructed, it will have served a valuable purpose. If it generates a more substantial attempt to examine and explore how caste, ethnicity, religion and language relate to other aspects of the contemporary social, economic and political structure of Nepal, that would also be excellent.

Information for authors

Proposals for articles should in the first instance be sent to the managing editor, Prof. William Sax. All articles submitted are subject to a process of peer review.

We would prefer that you send us both "hard" and electronic copy of your contribution, formatted in Microsoft Word. Please use author-year citations in parentheses within the text, footnotes where necessary, and include a full bibliography. This is often called the "Harvard" format.

In the body of your text:

It has been conclusively demonstrated (Sakya 1987) in spite of objections (Miller 1988: 132-9) that the ostrich is rare in Nepal.

In the bibliography:

Sakya, G.D. 1987. *Nepalese Ostriches: A trivial myth*. Kathmandu: Mani Pustak Bhandar.

Miller, M.L. 1988. A comprehensive rebuttal of G. Sakya. *Kailash* 6 (2): 121-83.

Smith, B.C. 1992. Looking for ostriches. In *Research Methodologies for the Himalayas*, edited by J. Pande, pp. 110-145. Shimla: Mountain Publishers.

Use of quotation marks:

Use **double quotation marks** (" ") for quotations of any kind, and for so-called "epistemological distancing".

Use **single quotation marks** (' ') for quotations within quotations and semantic glosses, including literal renderings of indigenous terms.

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EBHR c/o William Sax
Ruprecht-Karls-Universität
South Asia Institute
Department of Anthropology
Im Neuenheimer Feld 330
D-69120 Heidelberg
Germany
e-mail: william.sax@urz.uni-heidelberg.de
Tel. +49-(0)6221-548836/8931
Fax +49-(0)6221-548898

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