

Sebastian von Einsiedel, David M. Malone and Suman Pradhan, eds.
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Nepal in Transition is a nearly 400-page long collection on Nepal's peace process jointly edited by Sebastian von Einsiedel (a German UN official), David M. Malone (a former Canadian diplomat) and a Nepali, Suman Pradhan (a former journalist, now a UN political affairs officer based in New York). A mix of Nepalis and international contributors, many of whom were involved in the peace process, author the fourteen chapters. The book is divided into three main sections, starting with an introduction to the context, then a core section covering the 'Critical Transition and the Role of Outsiders' and a final section detailing regional dynamics. Most of the chapters contain some interesting insight or narrative description—and two or three chapters are outstanding reads—but the collection in general is slightly disappointing.

As stated by the editors in their introduction the aims of the book are to offer a “mid-term assessment” of Nepal’s peace process as well as “a country case study of internationally supported peacemaking and peace building efforts” (p. 3). However, the book tries to do more than this. This perhaps stems from hurriedly tacking additional chapters on to an original smaller focus on the United Nations Mission in Nepal (UNMIN) and international intervention in Nepal. Several chapters in the core section (those authored by Ian Martin, Teresa Whitfield, Catinca Slavu) appear as a cohesive explanation and score chart of UNMIN and international involvement in Nepal.

Other linked chapters focus on explaining one aspect of the peace process, in particular the chapters written by Rhoderick Chalmers, Jörg Frieden, Frederick Rawski and Mandira Sharma, Slavu, Bhojraj Pokharel, Aditya Adhikari, S.D. Muni and Prashant Jha). However the chapters on the economy (Sujeev Shakya) and regional relations (Rajeev Ranjan Chaturvedy and David M. Malone) seem part of ticking-off exercise to ensure the topics are covered. Stylistically these two chapters contain brisk workman-like descriptions of their topic rather than interesting argument-led explanations of peace process-related themes. The book could have benefitted from chapters on the economic or regional impact of the conflict and the peace process, but they are not found in these chapters.

The highlights of the book for this reader were Nepali social scientist Deepak Thapa’s chapter on ‘The Making of the Maoist Insurgency’ and Rawski and Sharma’s chapter entitled ‘A Comprehensive Peace? Lessons from Human Rights Monitoring in Nepal.’ Thapa’s chapter works as a succinct update to his earlier co-authored book (2004). In a few short pages he marries an introduction to the factors behind the People’s War with current academic literature on social movements. He offers a clear argument as to why the conflict started when it did (political opportunity). He also sheds light on other topics including why the 1854 Muluki Ain still plays an important role today, namely in generating an undeniable link between social hierarchies and ethnicity and caste as well as useful passages on the link between Maoists and ethnic group mobilizations. His largely convincing argument places the People’s War beginnings neatly into a theoretical context.

Rawski and Sharma’s chapter is unique in the book for several reasons. They are the only practitioners (both work on human rights in Nepal) who consider constraints to their work as, in part, stemming from practices of Nepali political culture and the Nepali state. In this particular

analysis the authors draw heavily on *Nepal's Political Rites of Passage*, an International Crisis Group (ICG) report (2010). In this the frustrating failure of human rights monitoring on issues such as impunity is not simply blamed on lack of political will, or the obstruction of the Nepal Army, Maoists, or India but is also made inseparable from well-established cultural practices of Nepali politics. Nepali political culture and the logic of the state, in this view, operate along ingrained patronage networks which extend power and corruption and which fundamentally clash with contemporary human rights notions on transitional justice or the rule of law.

The chapter goes on to offer a candid evaluation of the impact of international monitoring and advocacy. This is followed by a nuanced critique of the transitional justice approach to post conflict peace building, illustrating the dangers of the powerful using commissions to delay work on impunity. Rawski and Sharma also raise the important issue of sequencing in a peace process, making the valid criticism that “[i]t was not until almost three years after the peace agreement was signed that the UN and other international actors began to take initial steps to link development, impunity, and institutional reform” (p. 198).

In the latter stages of the conflict, as the authors state, the Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights (OHCHR)—with civil society support for its formation, a large field presence and “one of the most robust mandates ever seen for a UN human rights field operation” (p. 182)—helped to mitigate some violence and abuses (especially torture, disappearances, abductions and civilian casualties). OHCHR also, alongside other human rights defenders, helped to expand the political space for the democratic and civil society movement. As the authors say, rights monitoring was also more successful when it was linked to close understandings of the economic, political and social context at local, national and regional levels.

The editors’ co-authored introduction and conclusion are among the weakest chapters of the book. The introduction gives an overview of the history (repeated again in shorter form in several chapters) and then a basic overview of different causes of the conflict, something Thapa also details in the following chapter. Both the introduction and conclusion summarize and restate arguments in the book whilst not referencing more complex views on Nepal, the Nepali state and the peace process. The editors, unlike Rawski and Sharma, do not move beyond a form of analysis that essentially asks “what is missing in the peace process?” and “how should democracy be deepened in Nepal?” They say clearly in the

conclusion that “Nepal’s transition to democracy is...stuck and still has a long way to go” (p. 368). The introduction and conclusion also seem excessively concerned with stressing the Nepali peace process’s relevance to the outside world, a mode bound to annoy Nepal specialists.

The first section called ‘The Context’ contains a generally strong set of chapters. Chalmers, former head of ICG in Nepal, writes an engaging chapter on ‘State Power and the Security Sector: Ideologies and Interests.’ The perspectives of both the then Royal Nepal Army (RNA) and Maoists are well presented in the chapter, which remains still relevant despite progress in army integration. Panday’s chapter on ‘The Legacy of Nepal’s Failed Development’ is an excellent introduction to the topic and the impact that development (and the lack of it) had on the conflict. Despite a searing critique of current development practices Panday, a Nepali civil society leader and activist, retains optimism in the capacity of development to bring about real change. He does not question the notion of “development” but, in a fruitful discussion, suggests many ways that it could do a better job in Nepal.

Frieden (a Swiss development professional who worked in Nepal), in the following chapter, concentrates on the role of donors during the conflict. He highlights the February 2005 takeover by King Gyanendra as a turning point and belated wake up call for donors, many of whom apparently began to re-study their programs and took greater interest in structural causes of the conflict, such as social exclusion. Frieden’s chapter also implicitly echoes a common perception among some internationals in Nepal: namely that Western engagement in to Nepal acts as a vital bulwark to manipulation of Nepal by India.

Shakya’s chapter offers only a cursory overview of economic challenges in Nepal. Shakya, a Nepali business executive in Kathmandu, unsurprisingly argues for a greater role for the free market, which he believes can stand above the messy pragmatism of politics. He does not engage with economic literature on development, which often shows a greater role for the state in many development success stories. Nor, strangely, does Shakya reference the work of M.C. Regmi in a very brief discussion on land issues. Apparently, he says, it is “the fatalist attitude of Nepalis towards their country’s economic possibilities [which] predisposes parents to encourage their children to migrate” (p. 119).

Lawoti’s chapter on ‘Ethnic Politics and the Building of an Inclusive State’ is a generally solid overview of ethnic politics and the political role of ethnicity in Nepal. Readers familiar with Lawoti’s other published works will find much repetition in the chapter. Lawoti, a Nepali professor

of political science in the USA, highlights the long history of ethnic activism by different communities and raises other important issues (including media bias by caste elites). However he predictably does not engage with notions of fluid or multiple identities.

The next section entitled ‘Critical Transition and the Role of Outsiders’ contains the core of the book. Whitfield (‘Nepal’s Masala Peacemaking’)—a former UN official and Senior Advisor to the Center on International Cooperation and the Center on Humanitarian Dialogue—presents a detailed account of early international peacemaking efforts up to the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) signing in 2006. The chapter focuses on the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, the UN, the Carter Center and the Swiss government. The readable narrative highlights the many ways in which the peace process was, practically speaking, not always Nepali-led. This does not mean, however, that Westerners were central drivers of the process. The chapter ultimately, like many others, emphasizes the preeminent role of “the heavy hand of India” (p. 156). As with Frieden, Whitfield also implicitly suggests that diversity in the peacemaking process through multiple actors (i.e. European, American and UN involvement) was ultimately beneficial to Nepal in order to balance Indian influence.

Readers familiar with Ian Martin’s statements during and after his time as UNMIN Special Representative of the Secretary-General will not find much new material in his chapter on UNMIN, although he writes insightfully. The article is somewhat reflective of Martin’s encounter with the Nepali media discourse around UNMIN, especially Reporters Club style questioning. Although not the author’s fault this does mean that the criticisms he engages with tend to be among the easiest to rebut. Of particular interest in the chapter are Martin’s frustrations with the government for not creating a national-level monitoring mechanism for UNMIN reports to feed into, difficulties in cantonment verification and monitoring, the failed attempt to widen UNMIN’s mandate and Martin’s views on the role of India.

While the reader may or may not agree with decisions that were taken by UNMIN leadership it is not clear from Martin’s chapter that, in many cases, there were other policy alternatives. It is possible that, to take a few examples—and notwithstanding very real constraints—the original UNMIN mandate could have been different, that security sector issues could have been speeded up and that so-called child soldiers and late recruits could have been released earlier from the cantonments. However Martin’s chapter will be useful for many readers, as well as for

discussions on UN peacekeeping design and lessons for the UN system (expanded in Martin 2010). Surprisingly, Martin makes little mention of UNMIN's successful efforts to recruit from previously underrepresented sections of the Nepali population. This effort made an impact on the national inclusion debate (as criticisms of it showed), influenced recruitment policies across the UN, development and INGO sector and changed the lives of recruited individuals.

The following two authors (Slavu and Pokharel) offer perspectives on the elections. It is interesting to note that Slavu, an independent consultant and election advisor in Nepal, considers the main purpose of electoral processes to be "consolidating or deepening democracy" (p. 232). Students of post-conflict elections may suggest that this is among the last aims of a first election after war, with the demilitarization of politics and the need to install a government with democratic legitimacy being far more important. Her chapter documents the before, during and after of the 2008 election in detail.

Bhojraj Pokharel writes a short but interesting chapter discussing his role as Chief Election Commissioner of the Election Commission during the post-conflict period, in which he stressed his own view of the purposes of a post-conflict election. This was that he deliberately sought to be flexible on rules in order to assist the broader peace process. The section ends with a nuanced study of internal shifts inside the Maoist party since 2006 by noted Nepali journalist Aditya Adhikari, highlighting the move from insurgency to party politics. This chapter is one of the few in the book to draw heavily on Nepali language sources and also shows a historical understanding of the Maoist movement in Nepal.

The third section of the book contains, in the chapter by Chaturvedy (an Indian foreign policy expert) and Malone a general overview of Nepal's foreign policy dilemmas. Prashant Jha, a leading Nepali journalist, in his chapter on 'A Nepali Perspective on International Involvement in Nepal' emphasizes the "centrality of India to developments in Nepal" (p. 333). Jha's chapter along with S.D. Muni's detailed chapter on Indian involvement work as a kind of corrective to many of the earlier chapters by internationals. Both authors emphasize the importance of India to Nepali politicians and the peace process. Their chapters also reflect changes in Indian policies, as well as highlighting Indian policies that contradict each other, often due to the sheer range of Indian interests involved in Nepal. Incidentally the chapter by Muni (an Indian academic with strong Nepal connections) contains no shocking revelations regarding Indian support for the Maoist party. To review or

condemn *Nepal in Transition* on such a flimsy basis is absolutely mind-boggling.

Given the absence of competition, prominence of the authors involved and the range of factual and explanatory information in the book it is clear that *Nepal in Transition* will become a valued resource for several different audiences. This includes researchers of conflict and peace studies, future election observers and development professionals working in Nepal. The book additionally contains new information and fresh arguments for those who follow Nepal, particularly in the chapters authored by Nepalis. The book also stands out for being largely political in focus, in contrast to the anthropology focus of much internationally published work on Nepal. Due to the range of topics covered the book can be seen as an update to the edited collection, *State of Nepal* (2002).

Inevitably, in such a structure, there is also plenty of repetition. Many of the chapters repeat virtually identical introductory histories of Nepal before moving onto their specialist topic. Perhaps the editors expect readers to only read those chapters of direct interest to them and not the book as a whole. There are several glaring copy-editing and spelling mistakes (on pages 88 and 99 for example). This occurs particularly in the footnotes, some of which are not completely referenced for follow up reading (e.g., p. 59, p. 166). Also, frustratingly, not every chapter has a bibliography of references and references are made to policy papers that are not in the public domain (e.g., a draft report by John Bevan and Bhaskar Gautam, referenced in Slavů's chapter on page 235).

One criticism of *Nepal in Transition* is, however, not that the information it presents is incorrect but that it leaves out other important perspectives on the peace process. For Nepal specialists an interesting aspect of the book lies in how internationals perceived the peace process and Nepal. In a typical international authored chapter the author starts by detailing the long history of exclusion, bad governance or another fault of the Nepali state and then details the mistakes of the Panchayat and 1990s systems in perpetuating that wrong. The 2008 elections are then presented as essentially without major problems. Typically authors then detail their particular role in solving that wrong, with a focus on the ways in which their mandate or role was frustrated and only achieved partially. At this point many of the international authors blame India. Only Rawski and Sharma's chapter and also Jha's move beyond this frame to substantively analyze international perceptions of Nepal.

The editors could have broadened the book along the lines of a cohesive focus on the peace process. They could have included a chapter

or afterword by a victim's association representative, for example. Further space could have also been allowed for a chapter on local level politics, perhaps to also illustrate the complex interaction between local and national politics. Instead the book looks primarily at national level discussions whilst, at the same time, critiquing Kathmandu-centric policies of the government. The book also includes, as mentioned, a foreign policy chapter and an economics chapter, which are not closely linked in to peace process themes. Additionally the issue of gender in peace processes is not included (and only 3 of the 19 authors are female).

The chapters in *Nepal in Transition*, in general, rely heavily on policy paper-level analysis and only contains a few references to deeper, more complex ways of looking at Nepal and the peace process, including, for example, the ICG *Nepal's Political Rites of Passage* report, Nepali language sources and articles published in this journal. This does not mean either that the narratives or arguments presented in the collection are totally incorrect (this author agrees with many of them). Nor does it mean that well-known vocal commentators of the peace process (Kanak Mani Dixit, Kul Chandra Gautam) should have been included in this book in place of the largely sympathetic Nepali commentators who contributed. It is only to suggest that there are other ways of looking at the Nepali peace process as well as international interventions, something only one chapter in the whole book suggests.

Compiling a slightly more critical version of the events and policies under scrutiny would be an interesting exercise. A starting point could be to revisit policy choices of actors in the peace process at key moments. The sequencing of the peace process, debates on verification, the lengthy wait to demobilize so-called child soldiers and late recruits, the nature of UNMIN's electoral assistance, efforts to explain UNMIN's mandate, the funding priorities of donors and many other topics would be worth looking at again, from alternative and outsider perspectives. An additional step would be to question the assumptions and policies brought to a Nepali context by internationals to the peace process, especially through the UN and donor agencies. Rawski and Sharma do this for human rights and transitional justice and it could be done for many other topics, such as elections, child soldiers (see Sharrock 2011), governance, the security sector and more. In this respect an article by Ratna Kapur, a law Professor and former UNMIN Senior Gender Advisor, on gender issues in the peace process and the position of the Gender Affairs office inside UNMIN would be of interest to many. Kapur's unpublished views, referenced in

Puechguirbal (2010), reportedly emphasize the marginalization of gender issues inside UNMIN and in the peace process.

This approach would then lead into questioning the underlying premises of internationalists during the transitional and post-conflict period. Among other topics this could have included deconstructing the very notion of a transitional or post-conflict period, placing it instead in a historical context and considering also the extent of continuities in Nepal's political culture. The emphasis of the editors and many authors in the book in their approach towards the peace process, is on the "gap" thesis of looking at post-conflict states. Alex De Waal, criticizing this approach, says this is when "...countries are defined by what they are not: they are not delivering services in an equitable manner; they are not exercising a monopoly in violence within their territories; they are not choosing their leaders through democratic processes, and they are not putting international assistance to its rightful use. In turn this approach leads to approaches for peacemaking, peacebuilding, reconstruction and development that are premised on trying to achieve a particular normative standard" (2009).

Proponents of this approach, such as many authors in *Nepal in Transition*, tend to focus on what is missing from an ideal picture of an inclusive, stable, functioning, conflict-resolved and service-delivering state, not on what works or is actually taking place. In a passage worth quoting in full the editors bemoan the fact that Nepal "is still far from qualifying as a liberal democracy in which the procedural aspects of elections is complemented by respect of individual liberty, the rule of law, and the respect of basic rights, all of which are secured by checks on the power of each branch of government, equality under the law, impartial courts...and separation of religion and state" (p. 368).

This kind of argument limits the overall usefulness and explanatory power of the book, particularly for Nepal specialists, and also makes many of the arguments deployed increasingly vulnerable to changing political winds inside Nepal. As De Waal (2009) suggests measuring post-conflict countries against an ideal of a post-conflict state is not as analytically useful as trying to understand how the practice of politics actually works. *Nepal in Transition* is a useful reference book on post-CPA Nepal, containing much of interest for many different types of readers. However, a more interesting explanation and score chart of the Nepali peace process would have located a "mid-term assessment" alongside references to and acknowledgement of the complex political culture of Nepal.

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