Introduction

NEPAL: CULTURAL POLITICS IN THE LONG 1950S

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> "It is a new world, so why not a new history?"
> Fernand Braudel (1980: 8)

Our use of the idea of "the long 1950s" in this special thematic issue of SINHAS is a reference to French historian Fernand Braudel's understanding of historical periodization. For Braudel history is not driven by individuals or events but by vast configurations of structural forces that are slow to change and which don't conform to tidy periodizations (decades, centuries) or spatializations (nations, continents). Braudel insisted that broad patterns of power and resource distribution, the limits of technology, culture and ideology, geography, and even climate set the conditions for long-term, relatively stable historical trends that encompass entire inter-active "worlds" and, eventually, the globe as a single, interdependent unit. Famously Braudel focused his own work on the "Mediterranean World" during the era of European imperial dominance and the ever growing links between Europe, the Indian Ocean, and the New World.

The age of European colonial/imperial power was, for Braudel, a classic manifestation of his idea of structures of the "longue durée." But Braudel (whose career spanned the decades from the 1930s to 1980s) was keenly aware of living in a time of great historical transition as the sluggish fault lines of the longue durée began to shift dramatically into new structural configurations that signaled a new era. Long *foreshadowed* in the rise of anti-colonial movements and new forms of capitalism (especially industrial mass production), the post-World War (WW) II era, from the 1940s to 1960s, saw the restructuring of global interstate relations and new forms of global capitalism. The events that took place in Nepal in the 1950s, as elsewhere,

are part of a tectonic transition that had been set in motion long before, and which continued to reverberate long after the actual decade.

By placing this collection of articles under the heading "Nepal in the long 1950s" we aim to situate the events of that turbulent decade within larger frames both in terms of *time*—the complex historical processes that led to the transitions of the 1950s and continued thereafter—and *space*—the complex regional and global contexts in which events in Nepal took place. At no time can Nepali history be understood outside of the historical and spatial processes that were occurring beyond its borders but the long 1950s offer a particularly dramatic illustration of this fact. The following section helps set the stage for the contents of this special issue by briefly laying out some of the profound mid-twentieth century global historical shifts against which Nepal's own historical dynamics have to be read.

Nepal and the Rise of the Post-War Interstate System

The decades before and after WW II saw a profound shift in global relations and systems of power. In place of colonial dependencies emerged a new system of inter-state relations (enshrined in the official logic of the United Nations) in which a world of ostensibly independent sovereign nation-states interacted in an ostensibly democratic system of mutually-beneficial international cooperation and free trade. Though certainly an advance over colonialism, the post-war world order was hardly as benign as its major proponent, the United States (US), claimed. Catapulted into the position of reigning world superpower and eager to translate its economic might into political power, after WW II, the US championed the cause of decolonization in the name of freedom and human rights.[1] The US held up the vision of a world of United Nations, each formally equal and free to (peacefully) pursue its own interests—interests that were increasingly construed to be *economic* interests. Along with the United Nations, the US led the way in establishing huge new global financial institutions—the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, and others—that essentially reconstituted inter-state relations as economic relations, facilitating and safeguarding the movement of capital around the world. This new world of independent nation-states and free trade officially

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[1] Even if its practices were often far less benevolent than its rhetoric.

condemned military conquest even while freeing multinational corporations to "compete" in the new global market.[2]

Whereas nineteenth-century British Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli had justified British imperialism in the name of spreading British Civilization (something that all people would naturally wish to acquire and against which only ignorance and despotism could stand), in the 1940s and 1950s the US advocated national self-determination, democracy, open doors, progress, freedom, and free trade (things that all people would naturally wish to acquire and against which only ignorance and despotism could stand). In the post-war global arena a modern, US-backed "development" doctrine replaced Britain's old "civilizing mission" as the principal Third World "transition narrative"— the story of what every nation *should become* but can only accomplish under the (presumably disinterested) tutelage of an external power (Chakrabarty 2000: 30). To any new postcolonial nation-state the US would offer "aid" to help set it on the road to development, modernization, and open markets.[3]

Given Rana Nepal's need for patronage (as Britain prepared to withdraw from India) and the US' drive to replace the old colonial world with a new system of independent nation-states (atomized and easier to control bilaterally), it is not surprising that these two parties found each other in the years following WW II. Notably the US did not wait until *after* Nepal had thrown off its dictatorial, autocratic rulers before inviting it into the fold of independent sovereign nations. In 1944 and 1945 the US sent officials to Kathmandu seeking to establish direct political and economic ties (Satterthwaite 1947: 10). Once they received the US's official recognition of their independence in a proclamation from President Harry Truman in March 1947 (USIS n.d.: 10), by April 1947 Rana Nepal was ready to sign an Agreement of Commerce and Friendship (Satterthwaite 1947: 37) making the US only the second nation (after Britain) to establish full diplomatic relations with Nepal.[4]

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[2] Our understanding of post-WW II geopolitics draws significantly from the work of Kelly and Kaplan 2001, Mitchell 2002 and Chakrabarty 2000.

[3] Even apparently regional initiatives (like the Colombo Plan) were funded by the United States and/or strongly shaped by the Cold War context (like the Non-Aligned Movement).

[4] Coverage of the Satterthwaite mission marks Nepal's first headlined appearance in the pages of American news magazines *Time* and *Newsweek*. A few earlier articles mentioned Nepal in the context of other news events.

Against India's wishes, in 1949 the US officially supported Nepal's unsuccessful bid to be admitted into the United Nations (USIS n.d.: 15). Already concerned over the US's aggressive wooing of Nepal before 1947, independent India saw American interest in Nepal as a threat to Indian authority on the subcontinent (Mihaly 2002[1965]: 30). India envisioned itself replacing Britain as South Asia's paramount power and did not welcome American meddling with what had been a (colonial) Indian dependent state. Nevertheless, on January 23, 1951 King Tribhuvan (having fled to Delhi) signed the momentous General Agreement for Technical Cooperation between Nepal and the United States, thereby allowing the US to launch an aggressive foreign aid and development agenda in Nepal (Wood 1987: 3). Tribhuvan's triumphant return to Kathmandu on February 18, 1951 officially marked the end of Rana rule but both India and the US hoped to shape Nepal's standing in the postcolonial world.

In the inaugural address for his first (elected) term as President of the US, in January 1949 Truman announced an aggressive new foreign policy objective to provide technical assistance to "developing countries" which were undergoing a "revolution of rising expectations." In the context of the Cold War if "rising expectations" went unmet, "frustrated millions would turn to radical political solutions," namely, communism (Mihaly 2002[1965]: 3). On the borders of Communist China (with quasi-independent Tibet already a victim), for Americans, Nepal had to be turned into a bulwark against the Red Menace.

The US dispatched its first "Point IV"[5] representatives to Nepal in January 1952 with Paul W. Rose as director of the United States Technical Co-operation Mission to Nepal (or TCM).[6] Point IV policy was based on the (patronizing) belief that US advisors sharing know-how and modeling hard work would act as a "catalyst" for rapid change. With Nepalis eager to embrace new knowledge and radically transform their society (US reasoning went), modernization was merely a "technical" problem (Hindman 2002) to be solved "within a relatively short time" (Mihaly 2002[1965]: 32).

[5] "Point IV" programs were named for the fourth agenda item in President Truman's January 1949 inaugural address. For more detail on the program and its implementation in Nepal, see Hindman (2002) and Robertson (2019).

[6] The TCM was soon renamed the US Operations Mission (USOM) and later the US Agency for International Development, Nepal (or USAID, Nepal).

The US quickly discovered, however, that "wise leadership and intelligent help" was useless without a government apparatus in place capable of actually *receiving* "technical assistance" in the name of the state. Official US policy soon shifted from catalysis to "capacity building" with American advisors helping to establish government ministries capable of managing and spearheading "development" of all kinds. Thus by 1960 the main result of US development aid to Nepal had been the creation of a bureaucratic apparatus that "could not carry on without American technicians or funds," manned by a new educated middle class who proved to be "the main beneficiary of the government expansion" (Mihaly 2002[1965]: 87–88). The US had not catalyzed much development but it had created something approaching a client state.

King Mahendra cleverly took the Truman Doctrine and ran with it—but not in the direction that the US had hoped. Rather than accepting the status of US Cold War client state, Mahendra set out to recruit as many foreign powers as possible, from across the ideological spectrum, in a game of competitive patronage (Croes 2006: 13). 1955 "saw the beginnings of the international scramble to aid Nepal" with China, Russia, India, and others vying for Nepal's political loyalties in a veritable Cold War auction (Mihaly 2002[1965]: 101). Mahendra used foreign aid both to prop up his domestic legitimacy (as "father of development" in Nepal), and to (hopefully) neutralize world powers by turning the Cold War into a bidding war.

Arguably foreign aid also allowed Mahendra to scuttle Nepal's "democratic experiment" of the 1950s. Enraged by the elected government's populism (and popularity), on December 15, 1960 Mahendra staged a bloodless royal coup d'état. He dismissed Prime Minister B.P. Koirala's government (that had come to power in mid-1959), dissolved the parliament, assumed all executive state power and imprisoned most of the important leaders of all political parties. The king charged that the Koirala-led government was responsible for misrule, corruption and the lack of law and order in the country (Baral 2012). In an interview with *Time* magazine, Mahendra whined, "The Koirala government was always trying to put me in an awkward position....It preached that the King was standing in the way of reform." As for Koirala's proposed property tax, *Time* quotes Mahendra as asking, "Why should we pay taxes when we can always get more money from the Americans?" (Time 1961: 27–28). He had a point. By the early 1960s, "Nepal was," in the words of one foreign expert, "being smothered in foreign

aid" (Wood 1987: 189). With the US (and other countries) bankrolling the state, why raise taxes on Nepal's ruling class and risk alienating Mahendra's main power base? Reasoning that "any anti-communist government is a good government," the US ultimately stood behind Mahendra as it did with other "dictator democracies" (e.g., Egypt, Yugoslavia, Indonesia) across the Cold War world (Mihaly 2002[1965]: 139).[7]

Mahendra's coup "institutionalized an authoritarian order under absolute monarchy under which a new institutional framework, entirely different from that of parliamentary democracy, was created for mass political participation" (Baral 2012: 129). Thus was born his infamous party-less "Panchayat Democracy," a system of autocratic royal rule backed by a rubber-stamp parliament. Organized politics went underground and, aside from a brief Nepali Congress Party armed insurrection in 1962, waited decades for a change of political climate. Far from holding Mahendra accountable, foreign donors rewarded him, heaping vast amounts of aid money onto Nepal and transforming the country into what one USAID worker dubbed a "development laboratory" (Fujikura 1996: 271).

For Nepal, then, the long 1950s are decades of social and political flux as patterns of power—both nationally and globally—shifted from long-entrenched colonial dependencies to new, "modern" inter-state relations. The emerging new global order simultaneously placed Nepal within Cold War constraints *and* created the conditions for new forms of international patronage, new configurations of national political power, new civic freedoms, new foreign development initiatives in Nepal, new class-based patterns of social organization in Kathmandu, and new commercial opportunities (including tourism) drawing on liberalized trade regimes linking Nepal with the outside world.

Articles

The five articles in this special thematic section explore Nepal's experiences within the global temporal and spatial dynamics of the long 1950s. Crucial in these works is the recognition that Nepali history occurs beyond the national and the political—the two frames that dominate, and stifle, most of the existing historiography of Nepal in the 1950s. National politics are

[7] The almost simultaneous Cuban Missile Crisis and Chinese invasion of contested areas along India's Himalayan border (Morin 1995: 67) must have contributed to the US's willingness to turn a blind eye to Mahendra's anti-democratic scheming.

surely important but they need to be situated within the larger contextual frames that have, in many instances, shaped the very outcomes that a bounded nationalist historiography takes for granted. Furthermore, these articles begin to explore historical territory beyond the purely national/ political—considering, for example, the impact of Indian anti-colonial movements on Nepal (Gyawali, Parajuli) or how Cold War machinations helped shape post-1951 Nepal's society and culture in the realms of education (Rappleye) and health (Heydon, Robertson).[8] These articles also illustrate the importance of understanding Nepal's creation as a "modern nation-state" not merely as a kind of heroic, internal/national struggle for liberation from Rana rule, but also as the outcome of global forces that set the parameters of Nepal's sovereignty, shaped Nepal's state apparatus (Heydon, Rappleye, Robertson), and influenced the Nepal state's decisions as it made its way in the post-colonial world (Gyawali, Parajuli).[9]

Lokranjan Parajuli's article on the Rana-era university *that wasn't* examines some of the pressures and manifestations of global forces building in strength through the 1940s that finally compelled the very last of the Rana prime ministers to briefly entertain the idea of a national university for Nepal. Parajuli explains how this seemingly progressive move has to be seen in the international context of recently-independent India's plans to vernacularize its education system, which the Ranas saw as a threat to Nepal's own linguistic nationalism. Though the university never materialized, the episode illustrates Rana Nepal's efforts to navigate the global political and cultural currents that would soon sweep them away. The new post-war, post-colonial ideal of the nation-state was premised on new understandings of popular sovereignty that doomed the Rana regime.

Bandana Gyawali follows the subtle shift in discourse from *unnati* to *bikās* that characterizes the Nepal state's ideological arc across the Rana to post-Rana transition. From Rana-era policies aimed at mimicking colonial Britain's claims to be bringing "progress" through benevolent autocratic rule, Gyawali documents how the new democratic Nepal embraced the narrative of "development" being advanced by the United States, the Soviet

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[8] See Parajuli (2018) on how Cold War politics influenced the making of Tribhuvan University during the second half of the 1950s.

[9] The literature written in the internal/national struggle mode regarding the end of Rana rule is quite extensive. Just to cite some examples, see Uprety (1992); Pangeni (2053 v.s.) and Gautam (2055 v.s.).

Union, and other major players in the new, post-war, post-colonial world order. This shift marks not only a major change in the state's priorities and functions, but also an increased dependence on foreign aid. Ironically, this foreign dependence allowed Mahendra to effectively abandon the ideal of popular sovereignty (via electoral democracy) and reestablish autocratic rule—now in the name of *bikās* and with the complicity of foreign states willing to disregard their democratic ideals in the context of the Cold War.

Thomas Robertson helps to further contextualize Nepal's history within global Cold War dynamics by showing how the United States' identification of Nepal as a "front line" state played a major role in Nepal's targeting as recipient of "development aid." With countries on both sides of the Cold War divide competing for Nepal's allegiance, the United States prioritized state-making and a range of rural development programs in Nepal with the aim of holding back the tide of communism.

Jeremy Rappleye offers a detailed look at one such instance of US-led efforts to build institutions and bring about progress—by promoting a particular vision of education. Working with Nepali colleagues (many of them trained in the US with US-government assistance) American advisor and education professor Hugh Wood helped shape both the Nepal government's education apparatus, and some of its basic understandings of what constitutes education through influences on curriculum and pedagogy. Promoting values such as democratic egalitarianism, scientific objectivity, and social change, Wood's vision constituted a new "cultural script," the influence of which continues to reverberate uneasily through Nepali history. Rappleye argues that Wood's model of education as progress linked to development aid has shaped Nepal's education policy ever since—with often dysfunctional results.

Susan Heydon's article on the history of biomedicine in Nepal situates the emergence of Nepal's modern health apparatus in the long-1950s context of gradual and increasing if still limited exposure to biomedicine during the Rana era, to the post-Rana state's uneasy embrace of Christian medical missions in the 1950s, to the gradual establishment of larger-scale, aid-based health programs from the 1950s onwards. Because of their sometimes seemingly miraculous efficacy, Nepali elites have long sought the services of foreign medical specialists (Liechty 1997). Heydon documents how, during the 1950s, commoners too looked to chance encounters with foreign mountaineers and other travelers as chances to (hopefully) treat a wide range of health problems. After 1951 the new developmentalist Nepal state

had to balance its desires for improved health care with its fears of foreign (especially Christian) social interference. In this light Nepal welcomed aid-based healthcare assistance as the state gradually built up its own biomedical apparatus.

Together these articles offer a set of new perspectives on Nepali history in the 1950s. They hopefully help set precedent for further research that situates Nepal's history within larger temporal and spatial frames, as well as broaden the scope of historical study into more social and cultural dimensions.

Archives

One of the reasons why these articles open new ground in the historiography of mid-twentieth century Nepal is that they draw on a range of archival collections that have rarely been used by scholars of Nepal. Therefore, to conclude, we offer a few notes on the specific archives used to generate the articles published in this special section on Nepal in the long 1950s.

In producing his article on US involvement in Nepal during the early phase of the Cold War, Robertson relies on the holdings of the following four archives, all located in the US, three of which are US government run: the National Archives at College Park in Maryland (NARA II); the USAID Library in Washington, D.C.; and the Harry S. Truman Presidential Library in Independence, Missouri. Yet the bulk of his sources come from the collections held at the Yale University Archives in Connecticut where the private papers of Chester Bowles, US Ambassador to India and Nepal during the 1950s and a Yale graduate, are now held.[10]

Rappleye's article is largely based on holdings of three archives located in the US: The University of Oregon (where Hugh B. Wood taught) archives in Oregon; the Hoover Institutional Archives located at Stanford University in California (which houses Wood's personal papers); and the National Archives at College Park in Maryland (NARA II) which houses the archival documents of the US State Department.[11] For her article published in this issue, Heydon relies on both published sources and the archives of what

[10] According to Robertson, the Bowles papers "are extensive and have a lot of material on Nepal from the early 1950s" that need to be further studied. Personal communication, May 14, 2019.

[11] Rappleye mentions that there is much more Nepal-related material at Oregon (including film) and in the documents related to the US State Department in NARA II for other researchers to dig into. Personal communication, May 13, 2019.

came to be known as the International Nepal Fellowship and the United Mission to Nepal (UMN), now held at the Divinity School Library of Yale University in Connecticut, US. Those archives were initially organized by the late Betty Young, UMN archivist, and were housed at the University of Edinburgh (in the UK) until 2007 when they were moved to Yale.[12]

Both Parajuli and Gyawali rely on archived publications for their respective chapters. Parajuli's contribution is mostly based on two state-owned periodicals from Nepal: the newspaper, *Gorkhāpatra* and the now-defunct magazine *Nepal Śikṣā*. He also relies on the published corpus of the privately operated (literary) magazine, *Śāradā*. He consulted the microfilms of *Gorkhāpatra* while he was a visiting academic at the University of Illinois at Chicago and had access to the other two published sources via his own personal collection and those of the Martin Chautari Library and Tribhuvan University Central Library in Kirtipur.

Apart from the published documents of Nepali Congress and B.P. Koirala, Gyawali relies on the private newspaper *Āwāj* and the state-publication *Bikās* to generate her article. She accessed the latter two publications via their microfilms held at the Madan Puraskar Pustakalaya in Patan, Lalitpur. This Library is not only the world's largest repository of Nepali language books but also has an extensive collection of Nepali newspapers and magazines, only a few of which have been microfilmed and/or digitized.[13]

The archives consulted by the five contributors to this special thematic section of SINHAS and other archives in Nepal, India, the UK and different parts of the world consulted by other colleagues (e.g., Malagodi 2016) who also work on issues related to mid-twentieth century transformations in Nepal are part of the global academic infrastructure that supports historical research. Historians working on other parts of South Asia have taken advantage of such dispersed but related collections held in archives in different parts of

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[12] According to Heydon, "Although more limited for the earlier years, these archives are extensive and wide-ranging and offer considerable opportunities for further historical research across a broad spectrum of mission activities in Nepal." Personal communication, May 14, 2019.

[13] As periodicals from the transitory years of the 1950s, Gyawali thinks that "*Bikās* and *Āwāj* are relevant for those wishing to explore early articulations on economics, development, and democracy. Additionally, they are important sources that illuminate the open-ended, restive nature of Nepal's democratic transition." Personal communication, May 13, 2019.

the world for quite some time.[14] Historians of Nepal have used archives in Nepal, India, and the UK previously but, as exemplified in this collection of articles, they are now beginning to take advantage of several collections held at state-owned and university archives in the US as well. More knowledge of these archives (and others including numerous United Nations archives) and increasing access to them are absolutely essential if we are to see something like a global history of Nepal for especially the twentieth century.

We also note the need for bringing archival collections held inside and outside of Nepal into dialogue. Despite their original research in various US-based archives, the articles by Heydon, Rappleye and Robertson do not engage with corresponding collections in Nepal. Similarly, the article by Parajuli could have benefited from digging into corresponding collections in India and perhaps the UK. Such inter-archival dialogue, we are sure, would have further enhanced our understanding of the long 1950s in Nepal. For example, on many topics, juxtaposing documents from official Nepali archives with corresponding US national archive materials would almost certainly shed important light on what "development aid" actually meant for Nepal. Notably, these are projects that might be fruitfully pursued by teams of researchers, not just individual historians.

We end with one further point. The above is not to suggest that visiting archives outside of Nepal is absolutely essential to come up with new insights and perspectives on Nepal in the long 1950s and beyond. Many unpublished sources available in the National Archives in Kathmandu, many published items and unpublished documents held in institutions such as the Madan Puraskar Pustakalaya in Patan and Asa Saphu Kuthi in Kathmandu, and many unpublished private paper collections owned by families in different parts of Nepal remain under-utilized by historians of twentieth century Nepal. There is also urgent need to collect oral histories from people from all walks of life, perhaps especially from those whose memory and memories are unlikely to ever end up in any formal document archive. Our point is that Nepali students with an interest in historical research (from whatever discipline) need not feel that having financial support to do research in far-off archives is the only way to make an *original* academic contribution. Far from it, abundant archival sources held in Nepal remain to be explored, analyzed and, indeed, created. When that happens and when Nepali and non-Nepali archives begin

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[14] Just to cite two recent examples, see Guha (2018) and Raghavan (2018).

to dance together, perhaps the golden age of Nepali archival research will have arrived (cf. Stiller 1974).

Acknowledgments

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