



Britain - Nepal  
Academic Council



12<sup>th</sup> Nepal Study Days, Oxford, 24<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> April 2014

School of Anthropology and Museum Ethnography  
University of Oxford  
64 Banbury Rd, OX2 6PN, Oxford

## **PROGRAMME AND ABSTRACTS**

### **Conveners:**

Sondra Hausner, David Gellner and Krishna Adhikari

Supported by:



School of Anthropology and Museum Ethnography and  
All Souls College



# PROGRAMME

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## Thursday 24<sup>th</sup> April

10.30 – 11.30 Arrival/Registration

11.30 Opening / Welcome Remarks

### **11.40 – 12.30 Gurkhas Chair: David Gellner**

Chandra Laksamba & Lokendra Dhakal (CNSUK) 'British Gurkha Pension Policies: A Review'

Avash Piya (Aarhus) "'Free, Fair, and Transparent": Changing Discourses of Gurkha Recruitment'

12.30 - 13.30 Lunch

### **13.30 – 14.45 Religion (1) Chair: Sondra Hausner**

Zsoka Gelle (Vienna) 'Notes on the Sacred Geography of Yolmo Gangra'

Florence Gurung (Oxford) 'Local and Universal Orientations in Gurung Religious Identity'

Krishna Adhikari (Oxford) 'Contemporary Debates over *kul puja* among Bahuns and Chhetris in Nepal'

14.45 – 15.15 Tea/coffee

### **15.15 – 16.30 Religion (2) Chair: Michael Hutt**

Ian Gibson (Oxford) 'Religious Experience and the Character of Divinity in Bhaktapur, Nepal'

Ole Kirchheiner (Middlesex) 'Contextualisation of the Christian Belief System in Nepali Culture'

Marilena Frisone (Cambridge) 'Mediating the Teachings: Leadership and Charisma among Nepalese Members of a Japanese New Religion in Kathmandu'

16.30 – 17.00 Break

**17.00 – 17.25 Capital and Labour Chair: Krishna Adhikari**

Fraser Sugden (IWMI-Kathmandu/CNSUK) 'Unravelling the Paradox of "Super-Profits" under Semi-feudalism: New Perspectives on Migration and Pre-capitalist Agriculture in Mithilanchal'

19.00 Dinner at a Nepali restaurant

**Friday, 25<sup>th</sup> April, 2014**

**09.00 – 10.15 Gender Chair: Ian Harper**

Sara Parker & Kay Standing (Liverpool John Moores) 'Inspirational Women in Nepal: Learning from the Global South'

Marina Korzenevica (Copenhagen) 'Gendered Mobilities and Young People's Absence from Local Politics in rural Far East Nepal'

Kumud Rana (the Hague) 'Ethnicity, Gender and Nationalism: Political Debates over Citizenship through Naturalization in Nepal (2008-2012)'

10.15 – 10.45 Tea/coffee

**10.45 - 12.25 Nature and Environment Chair: Sara Parker**

Sangeeta Rajbhandary, M. Watson, & C. Pendry (Royal Botanic Gardens, Edinburgh) 'Ferns of Nepal'

Om Kurmi et al. (Oxford) 'Household Air Pollution and Risk of Cataract in Hilly and Terai Regions of Nepal'

Hanna Rusczyk (Durham) 'Local Knowledge of Community Resilience in Earthquake-prone Nepal'

Sangita Shrestha (Surrey/CNSUK) 'Constructions of the Environment in Nepal: Environmental Discourses on Air and on the Ground'

12.25 – 13.55 Lunch break

**12.55 – 13.55 BNAC General Meeting**

**13.55 – 14.45 Tourism Chair: Surya Subedi**

Kalyan Bhandari (Western Scotland) 'Cultural Tourism and Geopolitical Conflict in the Buddhist Heritage of Lumbini, Nepal'

Ken Ishikawa (Oxford) 'The Souvenir Embroidery for Foreign Travellers in Kathmandu'

14.45 – 15.10 Tea/coffee

**15.10 – 16.00 Health, Diaspora Chair: Anthony Costello**

Ram Prasad Mainali, V. Serra-Sastrey, & G. Montes-Rojasz (City Univ. London) 'Caste Inequity in Health Care and Health: Evidence from Nepal'

Premila van Oomen (SOAS) "'Bring Your Dad Along!'" From Heterotopias to Halls: Rocking Generations in a Nepalese Diaspora'

16.00– 16.30 *Final Thoughts and Planning for 2015*

# ABSTRACTS

## GURKHAS

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**Chandra Laksamba & Lokendra Dhakal (CNSUK)**

### **‘British Gurkha Pension Policies: A Review’**

Despite successfully obtaining the right of settlement in the UK, Ex-Gurkhas' discontent prevails due to unequal provisions on pension and benefits within the British Army. The pension agenda is one of many issues of equality that ex-Gurkha organisations have been raising. It is clearly the most important in that it affects those who have already retired, are vulnerable, and are rapidly ageing. In this context, it is relevant to investigate why the UK Government decided to apply the principle of equality on pay and pension provisions to serving Gurkhas while ignoring those already retired. For its part, the UK Government argues that the retired Gurkhas' welfare has always been fairly and justly treated. However, this argument of ‘fair’ treatment for pension provisions (on ground that their pensions were pegged to the cost of living in Nepal) now fails to convince ex-Gurkhas, for the simple reason that most ex-Gurkhas have moved to the UK, their new home, since 2004.

The aim of this review is to provide information and background on the unresolved Gurkha pension issue as it confronts both ex-Gurkha campaigners and the UK government. The review covers relevant agreements and policies; legal treatments and court

verdicts; stakeholders efforts and perspectives; and suggestions for future action. The review is intended to inform policymakers and the relevant stakeholders in the ongoing debate. It includes analyses of the Tripartite Agreement (TPA) between the three governments, the UK, India, and Nepal, and of other related provisions governing Gurkhas' terms of service.

The review is based on two CNSUK-organised symposia, a series of interactions with ex-Gurkha organisations and other stakeholders in the UK and Nepal, a review of relevant documents, and interviews with major stakeholders.

### **Avash Piya (Aarhus)**

#### **“Free, Fair, and Transparent”: Changing Discourses of Gurkha Recruitment**

The mythology of a Gurkha soldier being ‘brave’ and ‘loyal’ is based on the discourse of a ‘martial race’. The martial identity was characterized by the British for recruitment purposes as recruitment was limited only to certain hill ethnic groups (Gurung, Magar, Rai and Limbu) in Nepal. This has dominated many of the post-colonial representation of Gurkha soldiers for the last 200 years. However, in recent years the discourse of rights and inclusion has been central to recruitment in the British Army as recruitment is now open to all. The recruitment process is now generally characterized, by those recruiting as well as by those being recruited, as being ‘free, fair, and transparent’: it does not involve any money, it is based on merit, and it’s open for all.

Recruitment in the British Army comes with many benefits as individuals are able to acquire huge remittances, and a secured future with the possibility of settlement in the UK after retirement. Thus families continue to send their sons for recruitment as it is the most preferred choice of employment for

many. However, over the years the number of intakes has decreased, and competition has been very high as thousands of young people go through various stages of screening to fill in a few places. This has also led to the growth of a recruitment industry as various training institutions now provide physical and educational preparation classes for potential recruits vying for those few spots.

Based on ethnographic fieldwork in Pokhara, and following the recruitment process from July to December 2013, I suggest that the martial race discourse has been adjusted to discourses of rights and inclusion. I explore in this paper whether this has led to the formation of a new martial identity.

# RELIGION

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## Zsoka Gelle (Vienna)

### **‘Notes on the Sacred Geography of Yolmo Gangra’**

Yolmo Gangra, also known as Helambu, is an area of north-central Nepal situated on the upper reaches of the Melamchi Khola and the Yangri Khola and regarded by the Northern Treasure (*byang gter*) tradition of the Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism as a ‘hidden land’ (*sbas yul*). In general, ‘hidden lands’ refer to remote valleys and hills believed to have been concealed along with other spiritual treasures by Guru Rinpoche (Padmasambhava) in the 8<sup>th</sup> century, and a body of prophetic literature later discovered by Tibetan lamas, so-called ‘Treasure Revealers’ (*gter ston*) describes the ways to hidden lands where the Buddhist tradition may be preserved during the time of degeneration and decline.

Treasure texts (*gter ma*) related to Yolmo Gangra are contained in a collection entitled ‘Biographies and Future Prophecies of the Northern Treasure Tradition’ (*Byang gter lugs kyi rnam thar dang ma 'ongs lung bstan*). In addition to giving visionary descriptions of the hidden land and suggesting routes to it, these texts also provide instructions on the means by which the land may be tamed, locations where temples should be built, or lamas need to establish religious communities. From the 16<sup>th</sup> century onwards, several famous Tibetan treasure revealers visited Yolmo in search of the hidden land, where they engaged in retreat, constructed temples, and sometimes even settled down and started new lineages. In some cases they recorded their activities in

hagiographies (*rnam thar*), in others their disciples or successors wrote a biography or lineage history.

I wish to explore the impact of the instructions of Guru Rinpoche's prophecies on the activities of Yolmo lamas, especially of Nyima Sengge, who came to Nepal in the early 18th century, and settled in Yolmo after he was given a piece of land by Jaya Jagajaya Malla for his services. This investigation will also address the question of the antiquity and concomitant authenticity of the treasure texts related to Yolmo.

### **Florence Gurung (Oxford)**

#### **'Local and Universal Orientations in Gurung Religious Identity'**

Within the discourse surrounding ethnic politics in Nepal since 1990, there is an assumption that ethnic identity should include a clear and unambiguous religious element: that each ethnic group should be able to claim a particular religion, be it Hinduism, Buddhism or a more locally specific shamanic or animistic tradition, as their own. As a consequence, many Gurungs have changed their official religious affiliation to either Buddhism or Bon. However, the form in which each of these religions is now practised within Gurung communities differs significantly from the customs of the past, with local village Buddhism replaced with a more orthodox form of Tibetan Buddhism, and the disparate practices of the pachyu and klyepri priests subsumed under the newly institutionalized Bon of the Tamu Pye Lhu Sangh.

In studies of diaspora communities, religion has often been shown to strengthen ethnic identity, as religious practices serve to bind community members together and connect them with their country or region of origin. However, other studies have shown

how, particularly with second and third generation migrants, religious identity can take on a more universalist orientation, connecting adherents to a broader global community, and thus diminishing the perceived value of ethnic identity. This paper examines the ways in which religion is practised by Gurungs in the UK as an expression of ethnic identity, and the different ways it is associated with Gurung culture and, in contrast, the extent to which the global reach of these religions is emphasized and celebrated. It demonstrates that both these orientations are evident simultaneously, and that while there is some intimation of a tension between them in the way in which adherents of one religion characterize the other, within both Gurung Buddhism and Gurung Bonism they are largely seen as mutually supportive.

### Krishna Adhikari (Oxford)

#### **‘Contemporary Debates over *kul puja* among Bahuns and Chhetris in Nepal’**

*Kul puja* is a form of ancestor worship among Bahuns and Chhetris (BC) in Nepal. Despite being a crucial aspect of their social lives, it has, surprisingly, been ignored in scholarly studies. This paper attempts to address this gap by presenting a case of *kul puja* from an Adhikari village of Western Nepal, where I conducted field work in December 2012 and June 2013 as a participant observer.

*Kul puja*, as a core ritual of BC householders, involves reciprocal relations with the ancestors. It also symbolises pluralistic practices by combining *laukik dharma* (worshipping local and farm-related deities) with grand generalized Hindu *dharma* (worship of the classic Hindu pantheon). The *kul puja* promotes solidarity and identity, on one hand, and tensions, on the other. Tensions come from the presence of *Brahmanistic* ideals of non-

violence (*ahimsa*) along with locally ingrained systems of blood sacrifice.

Recently heightened debates on identity politics in Nepal have affected these local BC groups and left them confused: whether identity should be informed by actual cultural practices or through their reinvention based on (Brahmanical) ideals. The present practice (*kul puja* with blood sacrifice) has unparalleled ability to promote belonging and social solidarity among otherwise fragmented BC lineage groups. In order to preserve this solidarity, accommodative strategies are adopted by allowing people to follow their individual choices of continuing with the tradition or of following their ideals of *ahimsa*. The entrenched practice of blood sacrifice is difficult to stop, and any attempts in this regard may run a risk of jeopardising the thin balance of mutual obligations and reciprocal relations among *kul* members from this world, the other world and the world in between.

**Ian Gibson (Oxford)**

### **‘Religious Experience and the Character of Divinity in Bhaktapur, Nepal’**

This paper will compare the place of religious experience within Hinduism and evangelical Christianity in the city of Bhaktapur, and explore the connections between experience and understandings of the character of divinity. Bhaktapurian Hinduism places an unusually heavy stress on the ‘dangerous deities’: gods and goddesses who require blood sacrifice and are typically conceived as amoral. The city has a complex system of religious specialization, which affects popular understandings of religious experience. Recent years have seen the growth of a number of modernist Hindu movements, such as the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON). These factors lead to a pervasive insecurity in relationship with deities and an

understanding of religious experience that is multi-faceted and caste-mediated. In Bhaktapur's Christian churches, there is a strong emphasis on the all-powerful (*sarba shaktimaan*) nature of the Christian God and on his holiness (*pabitrataa*), which is conceived in terms of love and purity. The key descriptive terms used for God are 'all-powerful' (*sarba shaktimaan*), 'loving' (*premi*), 'holy' (*pabitra*), 'merciful' (*dayalu*), and 'living' (*jibit*). There is a strong emphasis on the necessity of individual conversion stories, which promote a narrative view of experience and a division of life into periods of 'before' and 'after'. Individual experience of God at the time of conversion and subsequently in prayer are decisive in shaping understandings of God's character. The contrast between Hindu and Christian life-worlds in Bhaktapur suggests a form of cultural change described by Joel Robbins as 'adoption', where a new culture is adopted on its own terms, with minimal attempt being made to integrate it into traditional cultural categories. Older cultural categories coexist with the new, rather than integrating with them.

## Ole Kirchheiner (Middlesex)

### **'Contextualisation of the Christian Belief System in Nepali Culture'**

The Christian presence in Nepal has over the last fifty years grown and represents today ½-1 million of the Nepali people. Allegiance to Jesus Christ is fundamentally different from the traditional Nepali religions (Hindus, Buddhists, animist/shamanists etc.) regarding worldview. In the light of this, is it possible for Nepali Christians to contextualise their faith, or segments of their worldview, within Nepali culture so that they can live among traditionally religious people in an acceptable cultural way as they did before becoming Christians or are they bound to live a life segregated from other Nepalis?

My research demonstrates that within the Christian belief system subjects can be contextualised into the Nepali culture, that Christians can share major life situations, such as weddings, festivals and funerals, in different ways fairly successfully. However, not everybody contextualises Christianity equally successful either because of preconceived ideas or (mis)conceptions rooted in their own or local traditions about Christianity, or because traditionally religious people, primarily in their families, reject them.

This paper sharpens the focus on how uses of contextualisation of the Christian faith system may or may not help overcome tense or intimidating situations between Christians and non-Christians in Nepal. The paper will make use of findings identified and presents the various methods and ways of contextualisation developed by Christian Nepalis.

**Marilena Frisone (Cambridge)**

### **‘Mediating the Teachings: Leadership and Charisma among Nepalese Members of a Japanese New Religion in Kathmandu’**

Tenrikyō (‘Teachings of the Heavenly Wisdom’) is a Japanese New Religious Movement founded in 1838 in Nara province, Japan. Its teachings are based on a revelation by ‘God the Parent’ through the mouth of the foundress Miki Nakayama. Entangled with the history of early diplomatic relations between Nepal and Japan, this movement gained a number of followers also in Kathmandu, among Nepalese people, especially within the local Newar community. Based on thirteen months’ fieldwork in Kathmandu, this paper analyses the role of local Tenrikyō leaders as key mediators of these religious teachings to the community of Nepalese followers. Leaders are generally either Japanese representatives of Tenrikyō – who have spent a long time in

Nepal, and are quite knowledgeable about the local culture – or Nepalese followers – who are fluent in Japanese, have lived in Japan, and have studied Tenrikyō teachings there. Precisely because of the competence they have acquired in the course of their formation, they occupy an in-between position at the interface of the Japanese and Nepalese communities. This paper will demonstrate how, by narrating their personal experiences within Tenrikyō, by translating the scriptures, and by performing sermons and exegetic speeches, their roles as leaders are gradually co-constructed within the community. As a consequence, their resulting charismatic role within the church is not based on a supposed exceptional gift, as traditional ideas of charisma would have it, but rather based on their knowledge of the teachings, their competence in managing the relationship with the Japanese counterpart, and their ability to fulfil the expectations of the other followers. The paper will also illustrate how their personal interpretation of Tenrikyō and their life-style not only constitute a model for the spiritual development of other members, but also significantly shape the identity of their particular branch church.

# CAPITAL AND LABOUR

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**Fraser Sugden (IWMI-Kathmandu/CNSUK)**

## **‘Unravelling the Paradox of “Super-Profits” under Semi-feudalism: New Perspectives on Migration and Pre-capitalist Agriculture in Mithilanchal’**

In an era of unprecedented global capitalist expansion, it is easy to overlook older pre-capitalist economic formations. This question is all the more important in eastern Tarai-Madhesh, and in particular, the larger *Mithilanchal* region, which has long been characterized by exploitative landlord-tenant relations and a stagnant agrarian economy. However, rising out-migration in the eastern Tarai and amongst the Maithili diaspora south of the border raises puzzles about the long term future of these older economic formations. By tracing two centuries of agrarian change in Dhanusha and Morang of Nepal and Madhubani of Bihar, it appears that far from being undermined, exploitative pre-capitalist relations are taking on new forms while indirectly contributing to the generation of ‘super-profits’ in the capitalist sector.

Semi-feudalism emerged in Mithilanchal with the expansion of centralized state formations in the medieval and colonial era, with the imposition of an agrarian tax collection hierarchy to the south and distribution of land grants, and subjugation of indigenous communities on the northern forest frontier. However, high rent for land, combined with population growth, fragmentation of holdings, and monetisation, was increasingly driving the marginal and tenant farmer majority into the labour market by the second half of the twentieth century. Labour migration has intensified in

recent years due to climate change and poor terms of trade for agriculture. Paradoxically pre-capitalist inequalities have been intensified due to this agrarian stress, as landlords prefer to rent out land and agricultural equipment rather than investing in their own land, passing on the risk, while some better-off overseas migrants are even emerging as a new landlord class. Migration has also spurred a growth in usury and other associated forms of surplus appropriation.

Although cropping patterns have changed due to migration, the marginal and tenant farmer majority continue to depend on the land to support families left behind. This is highly profitable for urban India and the capitalist petro-economies of West Asia, with low-wage (male) migrant labour being 'subsidized' by pre-capitalist (feminized) agriculture at home. At the same time, the pre-capitalist elites at a local level benefit from a share of the surplus through rent paid by tenants, an explosion in credit-debt relations and the lucrative manpower business. This articulation which is reproduced through the political and state structure at a central and local level represents a new manifestation of core-periphery relations in an era of globalization.

# GENDER

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**Sara Parker & Kay Standing (Liverpool John Moores)**

## **‘Inspirational Women in Nepal: Learning from the Global South’**

The paper examines the life histories of women in Nepal from a range of socio-cultural backgrounds who have challenged the existing structures of society to make a difference to the lives of women in their communities. It draws on our experiences through the British Council funded DelPHE programme between Liverpool, Kathmandu and Dhaka focussing on gender mainstreaming in the curriculum over the past decade. The link identified a dependence on Western literature and a lack of local material in teaching gender and development. Whilst there has been a rise in literature from the global south, and from a post-colonial feminist perspective, teaching in Nepal remained dependent on outdated discourses and representations. This gap led to the ‘Inspirational Women Project’ identifying and interviewing a range of women in Nepal from public, private, and NGO sectors.

Over 30 qualitative structured interviews have been conducted with women from a variety of backgrounds working in a range of areas from policy makers, environmentalists, journalists to NGO workers and activists. The interviews provide a unique and original insight into women’s lives and political participation in a post conflict society.

This paper gives an insight into their lives by asking each woman five very simple questions to identify factors and people who inspired them and to look for commonalities and differences between women's experiences. Key lessons can be drawn from these interviews such as the need for intersectionality to be considered, the importance of family support, and the need for men to be engaged in gender mainstreaming if gender equity is to be realised.

The paper will critically reflect on how the participants were selected and highlights the contested meanings of 'inspirational'. The material has been used in both undergraduate and postgraduate level in teaching sociology, geography, and social work both in the UK and in Nepal. Through analysing and sharing these narratives insight is also gained into the importance of listening to voices from the Global South. The research process has generated a debate around who is inspirational, what are the key factors that support or prevent women achieving their potential, and the importance of generating local material to embed within the curriculum in the Global South and to share with the Global North.

**Marina Korzenevica (Copenhagen)**

### **'Gendered Mobilities and Young People's Absence from Local Politics in Rural Far East Nepal'**

In today's context of rural far Eastern Nepal there are almost no young people involved in the process of local decision-making; young men are trying to gain social opportunities and position through knowledge and experiences gained by engaging in international labour mobility, while young women are trying to study in order to gain respect and to become a full member of the community. Thus, women are slowly becoming the most educated layer of the society. However, why does this change not develop

into women taking roles in processes of local politics and development?

I examine this paradox by presenting a few typical scenarios of a young woman's life-course development, specifically capturing the pre- and post- marriage habitual setting and personal aspirations that exemplify women's access to civic engagement within the community. I discuss young women's hopes, shame, and resistance in the form of striving for education to overcome spatial fixity and to get involved in the community.

My conclusion is that socio-political changes due to the recent conflict, access to schools as well as increased labour mobility of men in the rural Far-East have resourced women to gain capitals and capabilities; but it has also historically and culturally transformed women's immobility. This renewed immobility of women deprives them of educational opportunities that men with lesser formal education are gaining from their labour or other mobilities. This inequality thus creates significant obstacles for young women's involvement in local political space.

The discussion is developed through analysis of: 1) Gendered access to civic engagement of young people in rural post-conflict Nepal; as well as 2) how mobility becomes an education itself and how that fosters civic engagement. By assessing meanings of and correlations between these phenomena I make a broader analysis of gendered political environment and the role of young people as potential builders of it.

## Kumud Rana (the Hague)

### **‘Ethnicity, Gender and Nationalism: Political Debates over Citizenship through Naturalization in Nepal (2008-2012)’**

This study presents findings from a constitutional debate over citizenship provisions for foreign men and women within the context of writing a new constitution in Nepal. It focuses on the debate within the Constituent Assembly between 2008 and 2012 in order to show how the political context created intersections between gender, nationalism and ethnicity in claims made by those proposing equality on the basis of neutral treatment between men and women, versus those proposing special privileges for (foreign) women. The debate in the *Realpolitik* of Nepal has been a play of power in claims to representation. By adopting a principle of equality alongside a masculine subjectivity regarding interpretations of national or cultural belonging (either as a Nepali or Madhesi, respectively), hill caste/ethnic women (as well as men) have actively constituted Madhesi women (and men) as the Other. An intersectional method of analysis supports this argument since it reinforces the point that gender intersects with other subjectivities like ethnicity to create forms of oppression that are different in different contexts. However, the opposition between proponents of the women’s movement in Nepal (represented by hill women from hill-based political parties) and Madhesi women point to a denial of multiple subjectivities, needs and interests. The former’s claim to universal rights to equality has given them the legitimacy to frame their feminist agenda to serve a nationalist interest; while the latter’s claim to special protection for women under essentialist and patriarchal institutions of marriage have further complicated matters, stalling any formal consensus.

# NATURE AND ENVIRONMENT

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**Sangeeta Rajbhandary, M. Watson, & C. Pendry (Royal Botanic Gardens, Edinburgh)**

## **‘Ferns of Nepal’**

Pteridophytes are most diverse in the tropics, and in Nepal they form an attractive component of the vegetation of its hills and forests with terrestrial, epiphytic, tree ferns, hanging club mosses, lithophytes, climbers and aquatic ferns. Ferns are a major component of biodiversity and indicators of healthy ecosystems in Nepal. Despite their prominence, knowledge of Nepalese ferns is very poor - there is no comprehensive documentation of the 534 known species, and few people can identify them. Studies of ferns and fern allies lag far behind those of the flowering plants. This paper will highlight the work being done to produce a photographic field guide and web resource for the ferns of Nepal to aid identification. This will raise awareness and build in-country capacity for fern research and conservation, and enable environmentalists to include ferns in their studies.

**Om Kurmi (Oxford), Hubert Lam, Mohan Shrestha and Jon Ayres**

## **‘Household Air Pollution and Risk of Cataract in Hilly and Terai Regions of Nepal’**

Background: Biomass smoke during cooking has been reported to cause eye irritation and is potentially associated with increased risk of cataracts, the commonest cause of blindness in Nepal. It is

also plausible that other common eye diseases in Nepal (e.g. uveitis, trachoma and dry eye, a cause of corneal scarring) could be related to biomass smoke exposure. We carried out an eye disease screening program in two different Nepalese areas (hills and Terai) to examine the relationships with different types of fuel (wood, cow dung (CD), mixed biomass (MB), liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) and methane gas (MG)) used.

**Methods:** Women (n=784) aged  $\geq 20$  years from Nuwakot and Sarlahi districts participated in the study. Participants underwent an interviewer-administered questionnaire on socio-economic status, fuel history, smoking history, general health and previous eye problems and a detailed eye examination by an ophthalmologist.

**Results:** The presence of cataract increased with age (2% in 20-30 (n=157), 8% in 31-40 (n=217), 42% in 41-50 (n=177) and 91% in  $>50$ , p for trend $<0.001$ ), and was more likely to be found in those using CD (28%, n=69), MG (37%, n=154), wood (44%, n=457) and MB (67%, n=9), compared to LPG users (24%, n=86). Adjusted for smoking, income and age, those exposed to wood smoke were 3 times more likely to have cataracts (p=0.016) compared to those using LPG. The cataract risk was 50% lower among those with an annual income of £800 compared to those with £200 (p=0.032). Alarmingly, a 3.7-fold increase in risk was seen in women aged 31-40 compared to 20-30 (p=0.041). Smoking doubled the prevalence risk of cataracts (p=0.011).

**Conclusion:** Exposure to wood, smoking and lower socio-economic status are associated with increases in cataract prevalence, an effect which is even detected in the relatively younger age group of 20-30 years.

## **Hanna Ruszczyk (Durham)**

### **‘Local Knowledge of Community Resilience in Earthquake-prone Nepal’**

The concept of resilience is receiving increasing attention amongst academics, policy-makers, and practitioners. International frameworks have been developed, position papers drafted, and donor projects formulated with the aim of building community resilience. However this is being undertaken without a clear understanding of what community resilience is, if and how it can be enhanced.

My Masters by Research thesis set out to address this knowledge gap, by focusing on local understandings of community resilience to earthquakes in urban Nepal. Underpinned by theoretical engagement with everyday geographies, resilience research and disaster risk reduction, this research set out to address:

1. How is the concept of resilience understood by community members at the local level; and what, in local terms, are the characteristics or components of resilience?
2. How do local, academic and practitioner understandings of resilience vary?
3. Can resilience be enhanced or supported through external intervention? And if so, what form might these interventions take?

Drawing on interviewees and focus group discussions with a range of stakeholder groups, the findings highlight the importance of embedding earthquake risk reduction interventions in the everyday lived experience of urban communities. However, how communities are defined in urban settings is complex based on migration trends resulting in extended family networks between

the rural and urban settings. Building urban resilience therefore requires a more inclusive approach. While the case study communities were found to have a high level of resilience to everyday risks, building resilience to infrequent high magnitude events such as earthquakes requires support from local (ward and municipal level) and central government. This presents particular challenges due to fragmented governance arrangements in this post-conflict state.

**Sangita Shrestha (Surrey/CNSUK)**

### **‘Constructions of the Environment in Nepal: Environmental Discourses on Air and on the Ground’**

While analyses of media constructions of the environment are proliferating, there has been very limited research conducted on environmental media communication in Nepal. This research aims to explore mass-mediated and local constructions of the environment in Nepal so as to compare constructions of the environment both in the media and in local contexts. Media analysis focused on episodes of the *Batabaran Dabali* programme on Radio Sagarmatha (broadcast from May 2009 - April 2010), while local constructions were accessed via eight focus group discussions held with 80 participants in Nepal. Analysis employed both content and discourse analytic approaches, although precedence was given to the discourse analysis as the study is mainly focused on exploring contested constructions of the environment. The content analysis of *Batabaran Dabali* identified climate change as the most newsworthy story. The analysis indicated that the programme supported many news values despite being a predominantly non-news programme. Discourse analysis revealed that the construction of the environment is contested among members of a variety of public spheres which are not unified. In the media, the environment was characterised as complex, linked to constitutional, political, legal, economic and

cultural systems. In local contexts, the environment was also framed in multiple ways: as something concrete which can be experienced in daily lives, and also as complex and relating to environmental science.

The study clearly showed that elite experts used the media as a discursive terrain while marginalising the contribution of other publics to the construction of environmental agendas in Nepal. Thus, the study not only raises a concern regarding the elitist nature of environmental media discourses but also questions the possibility of the enhancement of environmental communication in Nepal if the same top down approach of communication continues.

# TOURISM

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**Kalyan Bhandari (Western Scotland)**

## **‘Cultural Tourism and Geopolitical Conflict in the Buddhist Heritage of Lumbini, Nepal’**

My paper explores the clash of international politics in the Buddhist heritage of Lumbini in Nepal. Listed as a World Heritage Monument in 1997, Lumbini has recently seen the collision of international geopolitics, notably between India and China. The development of Lumbini began in the late 1960s as a UN project. However, the realisation of goals set up in the original Master Plan has been abysmally slow. Acknowledging this, in 2011 a Chinese NGO came forward to develop Lumbini as a premier tourist destination with a proposed investment of £3 billion, allegedly funded by the Chinese government. The Chinese initiation has created an uneasiness on the part of India because Lumbini is less than 4km away from the Indian border. For the Chinese, on the other hand, the increasing presence of Buddhist associations affiliated with the Dalai Lama is a serious cause of concern, as Nepal is seen as a 'gateway' to Tibet. The proposed plan is viewed as an example of the increasing geopolitical race in the region. There has also been strong international lobbying to secure the UN endorsement of this project. However, this has been prevented and the UN Secretary General had to cancel his visit to Lumbini on two occasions owing to street protests and strong media lobbying against it in Nepal and in India. In this paper, I will delve deeper into this case and try to explain the intricacies of international geopolitics, Buddhist heritage, and religious tourism in Lumbini.

## Ken Ishikawa (Oxford)

### **‘The Souvenir Embroidery for Foreign Travellers in Kathmandu’**

Souvenir embroidery for particular types of foreign travellers flourished in Kathmandu during the late 1990s and early 2000s. This is characterized by certain imagery and iconography that suited the preferences of foreign travellers, including trekking maps, Om, Buddha eyes, ying-yang, *dharmacakra*, Tibetan endless knot, *maṇḍalas*, ‘Kathmandu’ dragons, yaks, Yetis, Celtic knots, cannabis leaves, or magic mushrooms. They commissioned such permanent embroidery works onto their T-shirts, shirts or jackets, as reminders and/or public displays of their trip to Nepal.

In Kathmandu, the craft specialization in souvenir embroidery is practised predominantly by the local Muslims. At its zenith, there were over 200 souvenir embroidery ateliers/shops mostly centred in the tourist hot spots of Thamel and Freak Street. The embroidery craftsmen use the side-swing free-motion sewing machine with a speed control foot pedal, which was exclusively designed for embroidery. This technology was initially developed in post-World War II Japan, when Japanese craftsmen produced so-called ‘tour jackets’ or ‘souvenir jackets’ for the American occupiers as mementos. These were heavily embroidered with Japanese traditional designs onto the Western-style shirts/jackets in a similar way to the souvenir embroidery in Kathmandu.

During my fieldwork in Kathmandu, I documented and acquired numerous early samples of souvenir embroidery, which were displayed on the shop walls as ‘sample designs’. I was able to recover some original iconography from the hoards of these early samples, and came to know that this souvenir embroidery culture is currently in decline thanks to the introduction of modern tourism and changes in the nature of tourists. I thus outline and explore the material culture of souvenir embroidery in Kathmandu from the perspective of contemporary archaeology.

# HEALTH, DIASPORA

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**Ram Prasad Mainali, V. Serra-Sastrey, & G. Montes-Rojasz  
(City Univ. London)**

## **‘Caste Inequity in Health Care and Health: Evidence from Nepal’**

This study examines inequity in health care utilization and evaluates the determinants of self-reported health status across castes in Nepal. Our empirical evidence suggests that, in a social setting of caste classification, the historically discriminated against groups - low castes - face inequalities in both healthcare utilization and health outcomes. Both types of inequity are decreasing over time. Furthermore, this study did not find statistical evidence in favour of the effectiveness of government health-policy interventions that aim to support poor and vulnerable individuals.

Keywords: Caste; Equity; Self-assessed health; Out-of-pocket expenses. JEL classification

**Premila van Oomen (SOAS)**

## **“‘Bring Your Dad Along!’ From Heterotopias to Halls: Rocking Generations in a Nepalese Diaspora’**

Around London sporadic bursts of Nepalese rock music events take place in the usual suspect venues: pubs and bars. At other gigs, distorted guitars echo past a headbanging crowd all the way to the audience in the back; they are mothers and sisters, uncles

and old grandfathers. Through observations in this rubric of different, often unrelated crowds and spaces, this paper asks, what can a study of the Nepali rock scene in the UK reveal to anthropology about the relationship between music and the development of diasporic identities?

Pink Floyd continue as musical deities for a new generation in the UK who also find inspiration in the Kpop world. Many songs composed barely have Nepali notes as youngsters prefer to cover Nirvana rather than rework *adhunik git*. Theorists in music have moved beyond early notions of subculture to hybridity, appropriation and glocalisation. How do we place a diasporic musical scene that sounds western in all ways except language? When songs are in English, how do you describe them as Nepalese? How do we conceptualize creativity that doesn't seem hybrid? Must diasporas necessarily produce hybrid music?

Furthermore, how does the community as a whole help in the development of this musical scene. How is that rock shows have elders playing key organizational roles? Are there musical continuities between the diasporic youth and the homeland? This paper presents some outcomes from some different spaces of this musical development against generational anxieties, issues and relationships to seek ways components of diaspora identify itself.

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## Directions on foot from the station to the venue

School of Anthropology and Museum Ethnography  
University of Oxford.  
64 Banbury Rd, OX2 6PN, Oxford



Oxford  
Station

**Deadline to register for those who are not presenting a paper but want to participate in the Nepal Study Days: 22 April 2014**

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**To book your place or for further information please email us at  
[bnacstudyday@gmail.com](mailto:bnacstudyday@gmail.com)**



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The Britain-Nepal Academic Council was established on 23 May 2000 at a large meeting at the School of Oriental and African Studies in London of British academics and researchers interested in various aspects of Nepal. The objective of the Council is to promote academic and scholarly links between Britain and Nepal through, inter alia, collaborative research, exchange programmes and organisation of annual lectures, and seminars on areas of mutual interest to both British and Nepali academics and researchers.

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