

# What About Postcolonial Politics in Nepal?

*Surely, any field purporting to theorise the global conditions of colonialism/imperialism, decolonisation and neo-colonialism (let us agree to call it 'postcolonial studies') cannot but consider the complex interplay of 'environmental' categories such as water, land, energy, habitat, migration, with political or cultural categories such as state, society, conflict, literature, theatre, visual arts. Equally, any field purporting to attach interpretative importance to 'environment' (let us call it eco/environmental studies) must be able to trace the social, historical and material co-ordinates of categories such as forests, rivers, bio-regions and species.*

-- Pablo Mukherjee, 2006

## Introduction

This paper is a first attempt at thinking about what insights a postcolonial or settler colonial analysis might offer for thinking about Nepal. Although Nepal was never formally colonized, its history is nonetheless deeply entangled with the colonial histories and politics of South Asia. This paper looks at what such an analysis might help highlight that scholars of Nepalese history and politics might otherwise miss. As such, it is very much a work in progress.

I begin with a brief overview of Nepalese geopolitical history for those not familiar with the region. This is followed by a discussion of some key political dynamics relevant to such an analysis. I suggest there are some important political questions which a postcolonial analysis can draw out relating to how competing identities and ethnic politics were entangled with Gorkha and British East India Company politics, using the Anglo-Nepalese War (1814-16) to draw out this point.

Building on this argument, I suggest that while a postcolonial analysis in Nepal can help draw attention to certain issues, there may be some dynamics a postcolonial lens misses because of an emphasis on the "post". Here I explore whether a concept of settler colonialism may be more helpful to capture ongoing internal dynamics which cannot be fully explained by colonial histories. The initial review of Nepalese history and the Anglo-Nepalese War suggest there were a variety of political forces at work independent of, and prior to, British interventions into the area, and some of these dynamics remain relevant to Nepalese cultural politics. To help delve into this idea further I look at some of the history and politics of the Terai, the southern areas along the border with India, and the ways in which political and cultural identity have often

been seen as in opposition to the dominant politics emanating from the hills and capital of Kathmandu. For example, Nepalese living in the southern Terai region along the border with India, particularly the Madhesi and Tharu, have raised the issue of internal colonization by high-caste hill Hindus (*pahadis*), suggesting more complex colonizing narratives at work.

In the last section I explore how we might read social movements and political uprisings since the 1950s that involved Indigenous and ethnic nationalist arguments about political autonomy, land reform, ethnic federalism and constitutional politics through the lens of settler colonialism. What these movements share in common is a rejection of the hegemonic version of a unified Nepal as imposed by Hindu elites, although the specific forms of resistance varies widely in time and space, and within different groups. I end by reflecting on some of the potential tensions, benefits, and pitfalls of a settler colonial or postcolonial analysis of Nepal.



Nepal is a small Himalayan country sandwiched between India and Tibet--a “yam (gourd) between two stones”--as its founder Prithvi Narayan Shah described it.<sup>1</sup> Its population is around 29.5 million people, and its land is a mix of high mountains, deep mid-hill river valleys,

<sup>1</sup> Shah, Prithvi Narayan. *Divya Upadesh (Divine Counsels)*. Nepal Law Commission. 2015. <http://www.lawcommission.gov.np/en/documents/2015/08/dibbaya-upadesh-of-prithvi-narayan-shah.pdf>.

and low lying agricultural plains encompassing approximately 147,000 km<sup>2</sup> (56,827 mi<sup>2</sup>).<sup>2</sup> Nepal is currently a secular, federal parliamentary republic, a configuration that emerged from the collapse of the former Hindu monarchy following a ten-year Maoist insurgency (1996-2006). The majority of the population practice Hinduism, although Tibetan Buddhism remains an important influence, with roots dating back to before its founding in later 1700s. Many Nepalese practice a syncretic mix of Indigenous animism and Hinduism or Buddhism. The majority of the population continues to live a rural subsistence lifestyle, with agriculture dominating the southern Terai where flatter lands and warmer climates are ideal for cultivation. Agriculture remains the primary source of employment for 73% of the population, according to World Bank/ILO data.<sup>3</sup>

The rise of modern Nepal is generally dated to the capture of the Kathmandu Valley in 1768 by the King of Gorkha, Prithvi Narayan Shah. For a number of years the Gorkhali armies had been conquering or incorporating smaller principalities around the Kathmandu Valley under their rule, with Kathmandu itself as the final goal. With the downfall of Jaya Prakash Malla, the last of the Malla kings in the Kathmandu Valley, the ruling power shifted from the Mallas to the Shahs. The Kingdom of Gorkha (*Gorkha Rajya*) soon moved its capital to Kathmandu, allowing the Gorkhali rulers to consolidate their power in the surrounding areas. In addition to conquering the Baise and Chaubisi Rajyas, two confederations of smaller kingdoms in central and western Nepal to which Gorkha had once been a part, by the early 1800s the hill kingdoms of Lamjung, Parbat, Kaski, Tanahu, Makwanpur, Kumaon and Garhwal had also been conquered.<sup>4</sup> Thus the modern nation of Nepal was born through a combination of overt conquest and submission by the Gorkha rulers of more than fifty formerly independent princely states across the Himalaya.

While there were a number of political upheavals, including two major palace coups, power remained effectively in the hands of two major ruling dynasties--the founding Shah family and the later Rana family--from 1768 until the monarchy was formally abolished in 2008. The Shah family ruled from 1768 until 1846, at which point a palace coup brought the Rana family to power. The Ranas ruled through a hereditary Prime Minister position, while the Shah kings largely held a symbolic role. This dynamic continued until 1950, when the exiled King Tribhuvan, along with the Nepali Congress (NC) and support of newly independent India, negotiated a return of the king and the end of Rana rule. This situation lasts for roughly a decade, until the new King Mahendra imposed emergency powers in 1960, outlawing political parties and setup a thirty-year monarchical rule through the *panchayat* or "partyless" political system. The power of the crown was finally weakened by two mass uprisings, first in 1990 and again in 2006 (*Jana Andolan I and II*), plus a decade long Maoist insurrection (1996-2006). The first Constituent

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<sup>2</sup> Wikipedia contributors. "Geography of Nepal." *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*. 19 Feb. 2018.

<sup>3</sup> International Labour Organization, ILOSTAT database. "Employment in Nepal." Data retrieved in November 2017. <http://databank.worldbank.org/data/Nepal-Ag-2017/id/df1587fc>.

<sup>4</sup> Michael, Bernardo A. (2010). *Statemaking and Territory in South Asia : Lessons from the Anglo–Gorkha War (1814–1816)*. Anthem Press.

Assembly elections were held soon after the conflict ended, and by 2008 Nepal had abolished the monarchy and declared itself a constitutional, and ostensibly, secular republic (map below).

Although simplified, this is the basic outline of Nepal's official national history. I will problematize this official story in the later parts of this paper when I turn to questions of internal and historical colonization dynamics, but for now it provides a useful starting point before diving back into its early history.<sup>5</sup> During its period the Kingdom of Gorkha, and later the Kingdom of Nepal, was involved in a number of conflicts across the Himalaya involving the British East India Company, Tibet and China. A combined Chinese-Tibetan army nearly captured the capital of Kathmandu during the Sino-Nepalese War (1788-1792), but Nepal managed to prevail, and the Chinese forces withdrew. A second conflict in the early part of the 19th century with the British East India Company led to a loss of major territories that had been acquired by the Gorkhas.

### Anglo-Nepalese War (1814-1816)

There are a number of reasons behind the conflict which erupted in 1814 between Nepal and the British East India Company, but the two primary factors I will discuss here are control of land for agriculture and taxation, and access to lucrative trade routes between India and Tibet. The growing political influence of the Company in India after 1765, when it acquired taxation rights (*diwani*) from the provinces of Bihar and Bengal, heightened frontier contestations with Nepal.<sup>6</sup> As British interventions slowly grew across northern India and into the Himalaya, the Raja of Nepal, local Rajput princes and hill chieftains, and East India Company officials increasingly found themselves making claims to overlapping lands along the various frontiers.

To complicate matters further, in the early years of the 1800s Nepal was at the height of its own imperial expansions. This period is sometimes referred to by Nepalese nationalist as the era of "Greater Nepal," when areas under Gorkha control stretched from the Sutlej River in the west to the Tista River in the east (see map below). Bernardo Michael notes that "[n]ationalist historians of Nepal understand the creation of "Greater Nepal" as the outcome of a "glorious" phase of "unification" that was consummated in the creation of the Nepali nation-state. However, I steer away from such representations to argue that the period between 1744 and 1814 witnessed not the unification of Nepal, but the expansion of Gorkha, through its systematic incorporation of neighboring kingdoms."<sup>7</sup> Michael's caveat is important as it signals one of the

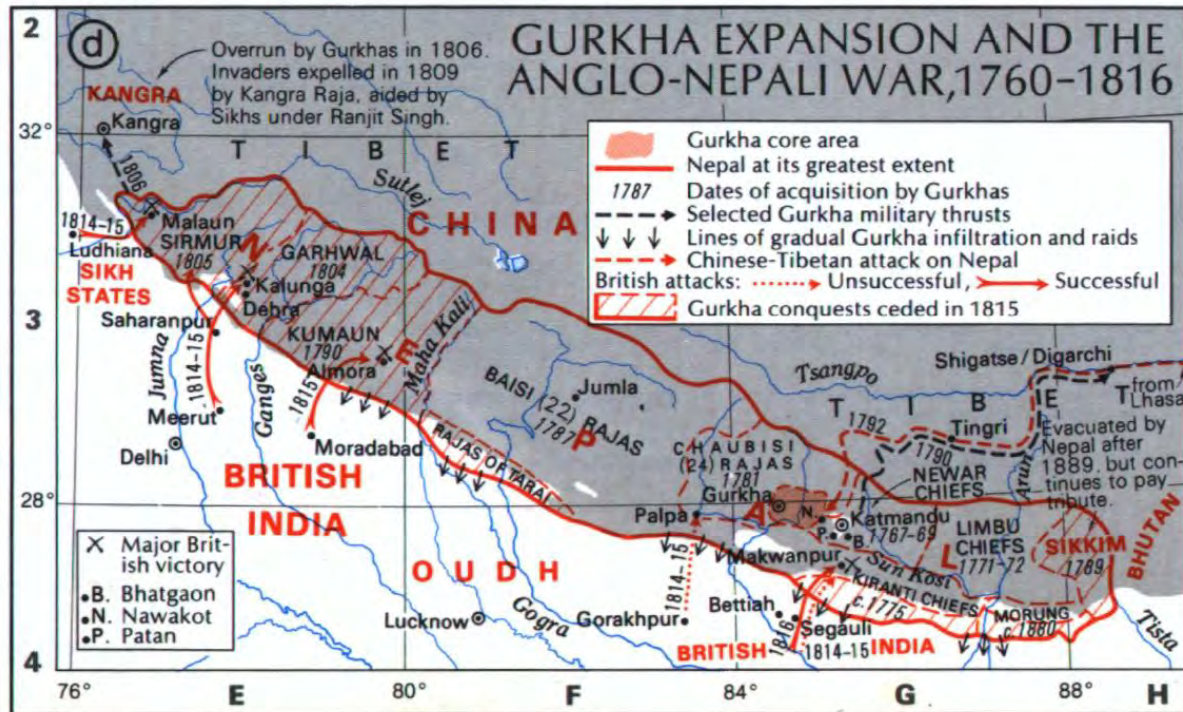
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<sup>5</sup> One minor but important point should be made here, which is that I am focusing primarily on the secular historical narrative of Nepal's founding. There exist several older mythological accounts of how Kathmandu was founded and the role of various Buddhist or Hindu divinities in establishing the first villages here. Many of the Indigenous nationalities (*adivasi janajati*) have independent origin stories which may or may not involve some of the same narrative threads found in the Hindu and Buddhist versions. In this paper I do not consider these other religious or semi-religious narratives.

<sup>6</sup> Michael, Bernardo A. (2010). *Statemaking and Territory in South Asia : Lessons from the Anglo-Gorkha War (1814-1816)*. Anthem Press. 12.

<sup>7</sup> Michael, Bernardo A. (2010). *Statemaking and Territory in South Asia : Lessons from the Anglo-Gorkha War (1814-1816)*. Anthem Press. 143-44

first moments where a postcolonial analysis must be attentive to which narratives we accept, lest we take the unity of Nepal as already given in this early period. As we will see, this was far from the case. In fact, an important political challenge faced by the Kingdom of Gorkha in this early phase of expansion was how to administer southern areas below the mid-hills, such as the Terai, and bring them into the fold of the growing sway of Gorkha rule and its hill-centric politics.

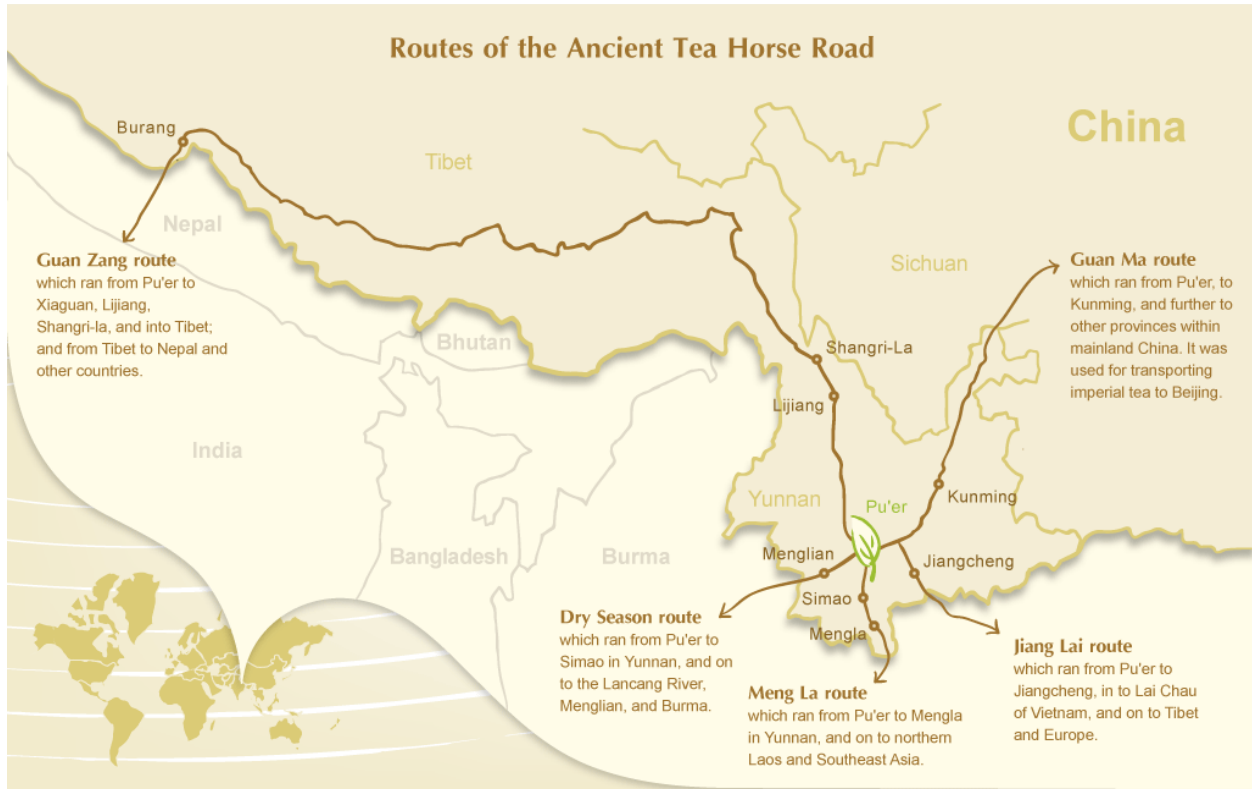


A permanent state of war on the part of Gorkhali forces allowed their armies to slowly annex much of northwest India under the Gorkha banner. “At the turn of the nineteenth century the Gorkha rulers referred to their territorial domain in terms of a Persian loanword meaning possessions (*muluk*) or, more precisely, ‘the entire possessions of the king of Gorkha’ (*gorkhā rāj bhar muluk*). In the administration of his possessions the king saw himself as a landlord (*mālik*) who classified exhaustively and exclusively his tracts of land according to tenurial categories and then assigned, bestowed, licensed, or auctioned the rights and duties over these tracts of land to his subjects.”<sup>8</sup> For the Gorkha ruler, consolidation of new lands and people not only allowed for his dominion to expand, but it also provided the fuel--in the form of new land to incorporate as payment to soldiers and functionaries--that kept the royal war coffers filled.

This strategy eventually allowed the Nepalese armies to reach as far as the fort at Kangra in northwestern India before they were driven back by Sikh armies under the command of Ranjit Singh (see map above). Had the Gorkha armies been able to hold onto these territorial gains in this period, Nepal would be nearly one third larger than it is today, incorporating most of

<sup>8</sup> Burghart, Richard. (1984). “The Formation of the Concept of Nation-State in Nepal.” *The Journal of Asian Studies*. 44:1. 103.

northwest Indian and Sikkim under its dominion. This would have had significant impacts on British activities in the region, and may have even led to the collapse of the East India Company influence over the region. But history had other plans. Tensions were growing along the southern frontier as the East India Company increasingly expanded its imperial tentacles.



For many years the Company had been looking for ways to access the lucrative Tibetan trade networks from their base of operations in India. Although British merchants had access to China via the ports, these were not practicable for most traders based in India who primarily operated via overland routes through the Himalayan mountains, some of which connected to the important Tea Horse Road and Silk Road trade networks in Central and South Asia.

It is known that by the fifth or sixth century B.C.E., Indian traders were regularly making their way to the Kathmandu Valley, which lies across one of the main pathways linking India with Tibet and the ancient east-west trade routes. The southern terminus of this route connects with two of the great Indian trade arteries, the Uttarapatha, which linked India with the Near East, and the Dakshinapatha, which flowed southward. Nepal became a gateway from China and the central Asian cities to the great monastic centers of India. Buddhist monks and teachers traveling the overland route between India and China would usually pass through Lhasa, the Tibetan capital. When it was secure, which was not often, the route through Tibet and the Kathmandu Valley was a preferred north-south highway for merchants and pilgrims alike because it was shorter than the safer

land and sea routes that linked the cities and monasteries of northeastern India, the Buddhist homeland, with Chinese urban centers.<sup>9</sup>

In the context of expanding and shrinking territorial claims between rival powers, expressions of sovereignty took many forms, from control over cultivated land and collection of tax revenues to the ability to impose various fees and labor obligations, in addition to the social status that came with certain forms of land tenure. Often the control and land and taxation went hand in hand, as local rulers or landlords had a clear incentive to ensure cultivators were under their sphere of influence when it was time for tax collectors (*jamindar/zamindar/taluqdars*) to make their rounds.

Although it is not a central focus in this paper, my previous research into the history and formation of the Nepalese state and agrarian social relations confirms how central agrarian entitlements were as a form of social and political power long before Prithvi Narayan Shah captured the Kathmandu Valley. In an era where land ownership not only conferred status and wealth but also power, to be a tenant farmer or worse, a landless peasant, was to live by the whims of powerful landlords whose chief concern was the extraction of as much surplus value as was possible from the land and the people. This was especially an issue for Nepal, as more than 90% of the population relied on subsistence agriculture well into the 20th century, making the people especially vulnerable to land-based forms of exploitation.

As far as the Company was concerned, the ideal scenario was for Nepal to limit its ambitions to the Siwalk/Churia Hills, a dense strip of east-west tropical forests and jungles spanning across Nepal which mark the shift from the lowland Terai to the start of the outer mid-hills. This view was made explicit in 1813 by the Governor General of Calcutta, the Marquis of Hastings, who since taking office in 1812 had been anxiously watching Nepalese influence grow in both the south and the west. "In May 1813, Hastings wrote to Kathmandu saying that he had adopted a "Principle of Limitations", whereby the Company would not interfere with Nepalese expansions in the hills, but Nepal must not take lands below the hills. [Prime Minister] Bhim Sen Thapa's reply rejected this outright, pointing out that the British East India Company had established dominion over India by the power of the sword, and, likewise, Nepal had acquired lands both in and below the hills by the sword."<sup>10</sup>

Officials in the Kathmandu Durbar (palace) were generally wary of British intentions towards Nepal. They had already dealt with Company officials and British soldiers in the past, and the British had never hidden their interest in the lucrative trade that passed through Nepal. Thus the Nepalese acted prudently in refusing, suspecting the British had ulterior motives for

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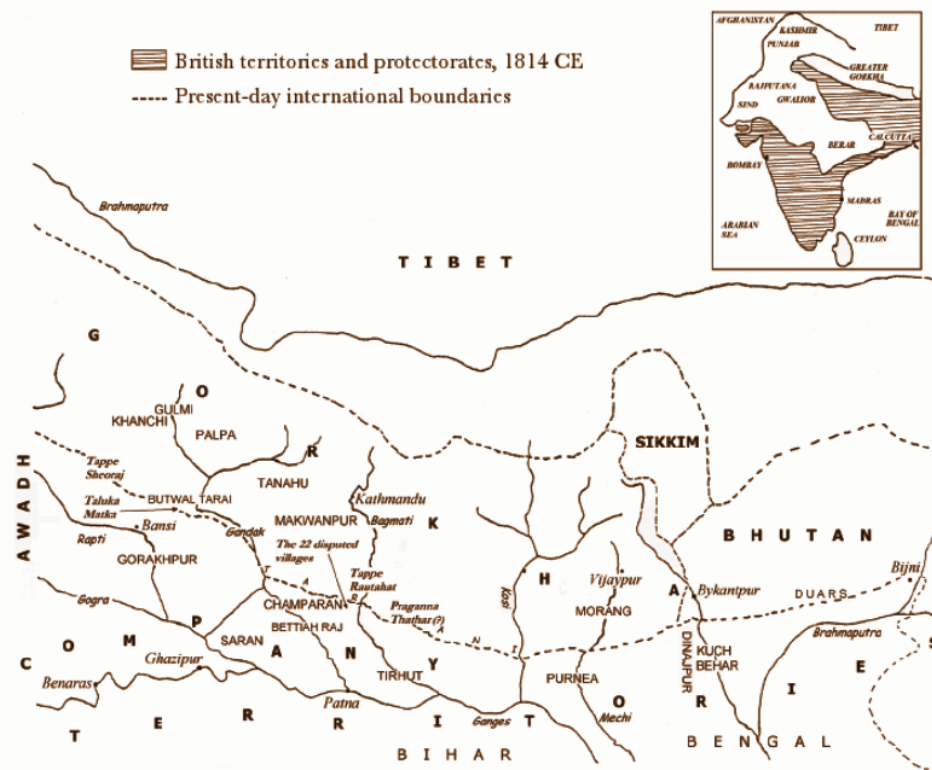
<sup>9</sup> Asia Society. (2003). "Buddhist Art and the Trade Routes." Web. Mar 19, 2018. [http://www.asiasocietymuseum.org/buddhist\\_trade/himalaya\\_nepal.html](http://www.asiasocietymuseum.org/buddhist_trade/himalaya_nepal.html).

<sup>10</sup> Mahler, Ferd. (1999). *Under the Painted Eyes: A Story of Nepal*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers. 408.

wanting Nepal to limit its role in the Terai. It was ostensibly this issue of contested control of land and taxes that eventually sparked a conflict with the British, leading to armed confrontations that began in the frontier areas of Gorakhpur and Butwal in 1814 but quickly expanded further.

In April 1814, Hastings reacted by putting a force into lands long occupied by Nepal in the Butwal and Rautahat areas near the Indian border. The Kathmandu Durbar was shocked, and Bhim Sen Thapa sent a force that drove the British out. This time Hasting's reaction was by no means confined to Butwal and Rautahat. He started war with Nepal, planning a campaign that would extend along much of the eight hundred kilometers of Nepal's south, a campaign into which he was to put nearly fifty thousand men.<sup>11</sup>

**Map 1.1** The Anglo-Gorkha frontier, 1814 CE



*This map is not drawn to scale. Boundaries and the locations of tappes, pragannas, and villages are approximate. Mapwork by Saramma and Sharon Michael.*

In his study of the conflicts in the Nepal-India frontier area Bernardo Michael notes that “when Gorkha and the Company state acquired the territories of these little kingdoms, they also inherited an older history of entitlements and territorial disputes whose significance for our understanding of the Anglo-Gorkha War has never been fully explored...The territorial disputes

<sup>11</sup> Mahler, Ferd. (1999). *Under the Painted Eyes: A Story of Nepal*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers. 408.



that led to the Anglo-Gorkha War reveal how struggles over agrarian entitlements and political power informed processes of statemaking and the constitution of territory.”<sup>12</sup>

As actions by both Nepalese and Company officials make clear, what was at stake was the right to assert sovereignty over specific territories that were deemed essential to both parties. As Mary Des Chene points out in her discussion about the opposing views on who could claim lands in the Terai, this was a “meeting of two expansionist states organized around different concepts of possession, and therefore likely to disagree about the limits to which each had a right to expand.”<sup>13</sup> This required not only the ability to demarcate spaces and claim political prerogative within those spaces (e.g. imposing taxes and labor obligations), but more fundamentally, the recognition from others that their claims to sovereignty were legitimate--or at the very least--they would not be contested by local armed resistance or military interventions. But as Mary Des Chene also makes clear, part of what sparked the conflict over these frontier areas was a different ontology of land and sovereign possession between the two parties.

For the Gorkhalis, it was tenurial authority—the ability to exact revenue—that defined the limits of the king’s possessions, and not any predetermined territorial boundary. Rights in land inhered to the state and were distributed to its subjects by the authority of the king. Thus the king’s possessions could and did contract and expand in concert with his influence at the periphery. Not only were borders fluid, but possessions might even overlap if two kings could both exert their tenurial authority at the boundaries of their possessions. One village might thus be subject to the revenue claims of two neighboring kings...If the king’s tenurial authority was recognized by the submission of revenue, this physical separation from the rest of his possessions made no difference. Neither the idea of connected territory nor the concept of a “line of frontier” entered into the Gorkhali understanding of possessions.<sup>14</sup>

But even more important than a different ontology of possession was the issue of military supremacy in the region--something the British colonial powers placed utmost importance on. Beyond the general necessity of having military might to enforce colonial politics, a deeper worry was behind the British concern about rival powers in the region at this exact moment.

It is worth recalling here for a moment, lest we forget the larger geopolitical dynamics at play, what was going on elsewhere in the British sphere of influence. The British had just suffered a crippling defeat at the hands of a colonial rebellion in North America a little more than a decade earlier, a loss which had deprived the British of a critical colonial resource it had invested major financial and human capital into trying to maintain. Concurrently, the Napoleonic

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<sup>12</sup> Michael, Bernardo A. (2010). *Statemaking and Territory in South Asia : Lessons from the Anglo–Gorkha War (1814–1816)*. Anthem Press. 4,11.

<sup>13</sup> Des Chene, Mary. (1991). *Relics of Empire: A Cultural History of the Gurkhas 1815-1987*. Unpublished PhD Manuscript. Standard University. 32.

<sup>14</sup> Des Chene, Mary. (1991). *Relics of Empire: A Cultural History of the Gurkhas 1815-1987*. Unpublished PhD Manuscript. Standard University. 29-30.

War was still underway, and in the summer of 1812, just as new Governor-General Hastings was settling into his position in Bengal, the young American republic once more declared war on Britain in response to naval blockades of French ships and American ports and the impressment of American sailors by the Royal Navy--better known as the War of 1812 in US history. In August of 1814, British forces raided the US capital in Washington D.C. and set it on fire. Barely three months later, in October of 1814, while the Treaty of Ghent was still being negotiated by US and British diplomats, the East India Company's armies launched the first major attack on Nepalese forces at Nalapani in northwest India near modern-day Dehradun.<sup>15</sup> Undoubtedly these foreign entanglements made Britain more concerned to secure whatever territories it still had, and thus securing control over Indian imperial holdings took on even more significance.

This context helps shed light on British war motivations since from the perspective of anticipated trade revenues or increased military costs that would be incurred, another war made no sense. "The motivations for war with Nepal, and the real stakes as conceived by the British, were dictated not by the concerns of trade and commerce, but by the interests of a fledgling empire. Any large indigenous state was seen as a threat to the exercise of British hegemony. Thus the British sought to reduce the Gorkha state to one small hill principality among others, with whom the British could negotiate from a undisputed position of superior power."<sup>16</sup> In addition to these legitimate imperial fears about Nepalese challenges to British dominion in India, there was a growing concern that Nepal might join forces with the Sikh princes and Mahrattas, and together form a large "Hindu confederacy" which the British forces in India would be unlikely to defeat. Nepal did actually make diplomatic overtures to the Sikhs but were turned down by Ranjit Singh. All of these worries gave extra weight to the British interests in Nepal.

Des Chene also raises one other important point here I want to dwell on regarding the role of the former rulers in the Terai and mid-hills who had been conquered by the Gorkhas. Official records show that part of the Company's strategy prior to entering the war was focused on how to sow dissent among former rulers in the Terai and other areas conquered by the Gorkhas. The fact that anti-Gorkha hostility existed gives us some indication why issues of ethnic nationalist claims in the Terai continue to resonate even today. Some of these cultural identities that have pre-Gorkha roots remained intact despite the various conquests by both Gorkha and later British parties, and as early as the 1950s fragments of calls for Madhesi autonomy were already starting to appear. These sentiments intensified in the 1990s with the *Jana Andolan I* (People's Uprising) and the later 2007 *Madhesi Andolan* (Madhesi Uprising) when calls for one or more autonomous provinces became major focal points for ethnic mobilizations across the Terai. This is an important point I will return to in more detail later.

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<sup>15</sup> Wikipedia contributors. "War of 1812." *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*. 10 Mar. 2018.

<sup>16</sup> Des Chene, Mary. (1991). *Relics of Empire: A Cultural History of the Gurkhas 1815-1987*. Unpublished PhD Manuscript. Standard University. 33.

With preparations for war now moving ahead at full steam, the British government in Bengal wrote to Colonel Ochterlony in December of 1814 and stated that “it would be satisfactory to the Governor-General to receive accurate information relative to the political divisions of the country, the number and names of the ancient principalities, the names and present situation of the chiefs expelled by the Goorkas, and the best means of rendering their aid useful, in the prosecution of the measures which it will probably be necessary for Government to adopt for the overthrow of the Goorka power. The restoration of the ancient Hill Chiefs will probably be a part of that system of measures, and, at a proper time, you will be authorized to signify this intention to them, and call on them to exert themselves in recovering their ancient possessions.”<sup>17</sup> Even before the war began Company officials had been in touch with many of these local rulers for reasons of trade or settling land and legal disputes, so it would have been relatively easy for Company officials to try and redirect these relations to more explicitly military aims, especially if this included the promise to local chiefs of possible repatriation to their former elite status.

Besides cultivating these local elites, the Company’s military propaganda efforts were also directed at the local civilian population. Attempts were made to paint the British as liberators who had come to free the poor people of the Terai from under the yoke of Gorkha oppression. The following excerpt comes from a British letter produced for distribution to hill chiefs, with similar localized versions distributed across the various fronts of the war.

Having now been compelled, by a series of unprovoked and unjustifiable encroachment [sic] and violence on the part of the Goorka power, to take up arms in defence of its rights and honour, the British Government eagerly seizes the favourable occasion of assisting the inhabitants of the hills in the expulsion of these oppressors, the recovery of their national independence, and the restoration of the families of their legitimate and ancient Chiefs. The inhabitants of the hills are accordingly invited, and earnestly exhorted to cooperate with the British troops in the powerful exertions which the latter are prepared to make, for enabling them to accomplish those laudable and patriotic objects. The Commander of the British troops is authorized and directed by his Government to promise, in its name, a perpetual guarantee against the Goorka power, and to assure the chiefs and inhabitants of the hills of its scrupulous regard for all their ancient rights and privileges. The British Government demands no tribute or pecuniary indemnification whatever for its assistance and protection. All that it requires from the inhabitants of the hills, in return for those benefits, is their zealous and cordial co-operation during the continuance of hostilities against the Goorkas, and their services hereafter, if circumstances should again demand the employment of a British force in the hills, against its enemies and their own.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Adams, John. (1824/1983). “Proclamation to the Chiefs and Inhabitants of the Hills between Suttleje and the Jumna.” *Military History of Nepal. Vol II*. New Delhi: Bimla Publishing House. 20-21.

<sup>18</sup> Adams, John. (1824/1983). “Proclamation to the Chiefs and Inhabitants of the Hills between Suttleje and the Jumna.” *Military History of Nepal. Vol II*. New Delhi: Bimla Publishing House. 66-67.

While the promise of these many benefits with no strings attached was an obvious deception on the part of Company officials who needed to win the war at any cost, it nonetheless highlights one of the ongoing challenges which Nepal would face over the years-- how to keep a diverse patchwork of different peoples and cultures unified under one nation.

Since my focus here is not on the actual war itself, we can skip over the specifics of the battles. During most of 1814 and into early 1815 the Company forces were either defeated or repelled by a combination of better trained Gurkha soldiers and strategic Nepalese hill forts. However by the middle of 1815 the British finally began to gain the upper hand, capturing a number of forts and strategic positions which allowed them to better use their superior firepower and slowly turn the tide of war in their favor. A draft peace treaty was sent by Company officials in 1815, but the Kathmandu Durbar rejected the subordinating terms of the treaty and refused to sign. By the end of 1815 the British had gained a considerable advantage over Nepalese forces, including the capture of a number of key hill forts. Realizing they would not be able to defeat the Company forces in an extended war, Nepalese leaders finally agreed to treaty negotiations. The final outcome was the ratification in 1816 of the Treaty of Sugauli, a disastrous treaty for Nepal that ended once and for all the dreams of Gorkha dominion over the Himalaya (see map below).



Nepal forfeited all of the lands it had conquered since the early 1800s, as well as a significant portion of Terai lands in the east and west, effectively fixing its modern boundaries between the Mechi and Mahakali Rivers. On top of this, Nepal was forced to accept a permanent British Resident based in Kathmandu, to open their borders to Company trade, to allow the British to recruit the highly valued Gurkha soldiers into British army service, and an

agreement not to work with former British enemies, such as France or the United States, to train Nepalese soldiers.<sup>19</sup>

This was as close to formal colonization that Nepal came with regard to European imperial powers. Some of the lands in the eastern and western Terai were returned in the course of the first half of the 19th century as a show of good will to the Rana regime for its assistance in putting down the Sepoy Mutiny in 1857-59. The Ranas, who came to power in 1846 following a palace coup led by the young military officer Jung Bahadur Rana, quickly strengthened the ties between Nepal and British India. For the duration of Rana rule, which finally came to an end in 1951, Rana political elite relied heavily on British imperial support for their oppressive rule. The historical relations with India--both real and historical revisionist imaginings--are often used as a political cudgel by nationalists against their opponents who seem more open to cordial relations with India. These tactics tend to escalate during times of conflict with India or in the lead up to elections. Irrespective of intra-party debates and nationalist rhetoric, it is certain that the relations between the Rana rulers and the British empire were quite close and largely cordial.

Early on this relationship was fostered for the benefits derived from recruiting Gurkha soldiers for the British armed forces, as well as some preferential trade relations. Because of Nepal's landlocked position, access to goods via the Bay of Bengal and Calcutta have always been a strategic necessity for Nepal. Even today India remains a primary export destination for Nepalese goods, as well as the primary source of foreign imports. When necessary, India has used this strategic control over Nepalese trade as a political leverage tool, as was evident in 2007 and again in 2015 when Madhesi protests were given tacit support from India by border slowdowns and/or trade stoppages. As Communism slowly gained ground in South and East Asia at the start of the 20th century, Nepal's value as a political buffer and shield between India and Communist China was another important asset for the British. But these colonial dynamics changed dramatically by 1950 as Britain ended its imperial role in India and the Nepalese people rose up and ended a century of Rana oligarchic rule.

### **Settlement & Colonization in the Terai**

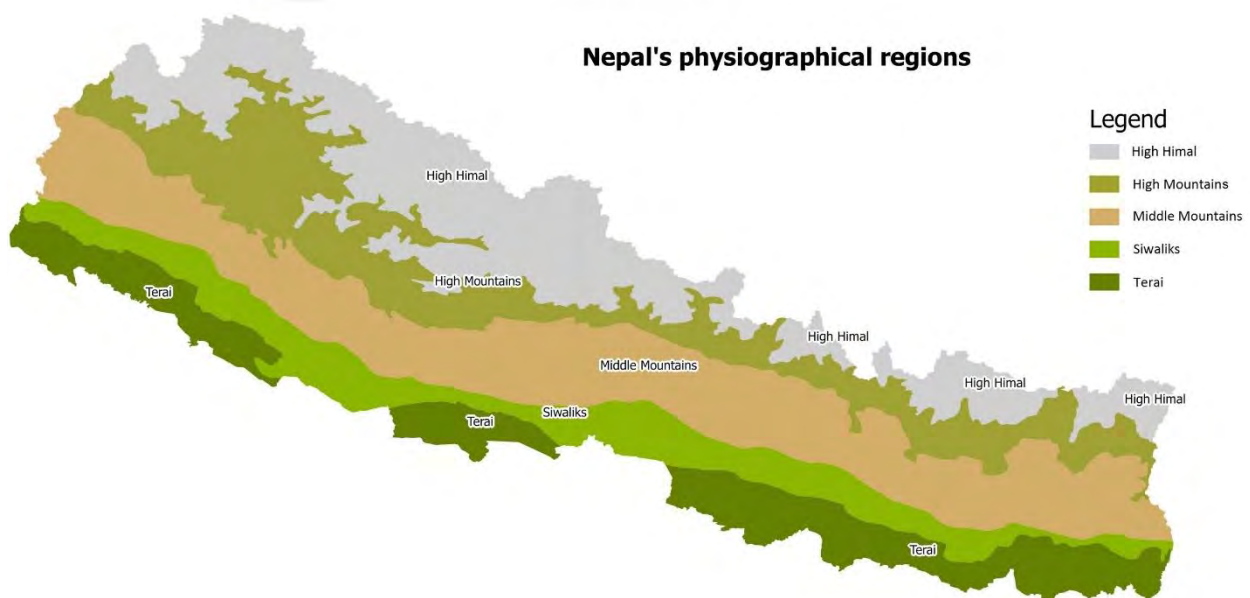
Nepal had developed a complex land tenure system by the early 1900s, and in the Terai the *Birta* land tenure system was extensive, owing to its association with large landowning elites. *Birta* owners tended to represent the most privileged classes in Nepal, either with direct ties to the ruling Rana regime, their status as high-caste Hindus, or in some cases their historical ties to local chiefs or village headmen from the period before Gorkha conquests. Whatever their status, these large landowners were often reviled by low-caste Hindu and Dalit

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<sup>19</sup> Treaty of Sugauli. (1816).

peasants who were barely subsisting on the land—land which in most cases they would never be able to own themselves. In addition, many of the Indigenous communities in the mid and far-western parts of the Terai, such as the Tharu and Raute, have been displaced from their ancestral lands in the Terai forests and forced to work as bonded farm laborers (*kamiyas*) for high-caste hill Hindus who became the new landowners. As Jana Fortier notes in the case of the nomadic Raute forest peoples of far-western Nepal, they “experienced more pressure to settle, even receiving land parcels from the government of Nepal. These communities have subsequently lost their lands to elite farmers, and many of their families now survive through tenant farming combined with part-time foraging.”<sup>20</sup> This is just one example of a much larger process of social reordering which has taken place across the Terai since the early 1900s.

As the population in the mid-hills continued to increase through the late 1800s and into the early 1900s, there was a need for new land to settle and cultivate. Despite the small area of the Terai (26.1% of the total area of Nepal), its geography and abundant rainfall make it ideal for farming, and over 90% of Nepal’s cultivated land is found here, despite the hill areas accounting for nearly 74% of the total land.<sup>21</sup> Expanding northward from the mid-hills into the Himalaya was not a viable option, so internal migration inevitably flowed south into the Terai. “Up to 1950, the whole region of Nepal Tarai was called *kala pani* (black waters) or the “death valley” by the Hill people. Settlement in the area was avoided by Hill people because of the black waters, and particularly high incidence of malaria.”<sup>22</sup>



<sup>20</sup> Fortier, Jana. (2009). *Kings of the Forest: The Cultural Resilience of Himalayan Hunter-Gatherers*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press. 5.

<sup>21</sup> Regmi, Mahesh Chandra. (1963). *Land Tenure and Taxation in Nepal (Volume I), The State as Landlord: Raikar Tenure*. Berkeley: University of California. 4, 9.

<sup>22</sup> Dahal, Dilli Ram. (2008). “The ‘Madhesi’ People: Issues and Challenges of Democracy in the Nepal Tarai.” David Gellner and Krishna Hachhethu (Eds.). *Local Democracy in South Asia: Microprocesses of Democratization in Nepal and its Neighbours*. London: Sage Publications. 132.

As another report noted, these “dense Sal forests of Terai with substantial populations of elephants, rhinoceros, tigers and other large mammals resisted settlement and logging for centuries due to the prevalence of endemic malaria throughout the region. Before the 1950s, only a small number of indigenous people, primarily the Tharu community who developed some resistance to the disease lived in the area, practicing hunting, gathering and shifting cultivation.”<sup>23</sup> There had been various early attempts by the state to promote settlements and the opening of new agricultural areas in the Terai, such as giving out wasteland and forests for free or at minimal cost to settlers willing to develop the area, by encouraging Indian migrant to settle and work the land, or by waving and land taxes for a set number of years, but as Durga Ojha notes these efforts stopped with the Anglo-Nepalese War, and did not resume again until the 1920s.<sup>24</sup>

What had once been seen as undesirable land with marginal value for settlements by hill communities became in the 1920s and 1930s the focus of new state-sponsored development and resettlement projects driven by population pressures in the hills. These dense forests, alternately referred to as the Siwaliks or Churia hills (see map above), had acted as natural barriers for invasion of Kathmandu. But times change, and now these barriers were an obstacle to progress and development and needed to be removed. Government efforts at settlements began in the 1920s in the Terai, most notably in the Rapti (midwest) and Morang/Koshi (eastern) areas of Nepal, where official government settlement projects were attempted. Durga Ojha provides a useful glimpse into what one of these Terai resettlement plan looked like:

According to the plan, forests were to be cleared under the supervision of the Forest Office. Settlement was to be supervised in Rapti valley by the Agricultural Office and in Morang by the Governor. Settlers were to be allotted land in the chronological order of their application and were to receive as much land as they could reclaim. They were also to be provided with credit, food supplies, health services and medicine, and free timber for construction in addition to exemption from land tax for seven years in Rapti valley and for ten years in Morang, and only a minimal tax for a number of years thereafter. Settlement leaders and other persons who brought in settlers were to be rewarded with personal land grants from the reclaimed area. Escaped criminals and convicts were to be granted amnesty if they returned and reclaimed land in these settlement areas.<sup>25</sup>

Despite these various incentives, most hill people were still reluctant to relocate into the Terai, and preferred to reap the benefits of exploiting the Terai from a distance, rather than up close. Although some new settlements and clearing of agricultural lands did occur, many

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<sup>23</sup> Satyal, Pravat, P. (2004). “Country Profile Report - Forestry Sector in Nepal”. Forests Monitor. Web. [http://www.forestsmonitor.org/uploads/2e90368e95c9fb4f82d3d562fea6ed8d/countryprofile\\_nepal.pdf](http://www.forestsmonitor.org/uploads/2e90368e95c9fb4f82d3d562fea6ed8d/countryprofile_nepal.pdf).

<sup>24</sup> Ojha, Durga P. (1983). "History of Land Settlement in Nepal Tarai". *Contributions to Nepalese Studies*. 11:1. 25.

<sup>25</sup> Ojha, Durga P. (1983). "History of Land Settlement in Nepal Tarai". *Contributions to Nepalese Studies*. 11:1. 25.

Nepalese peasants saw little in the way of tangible benefits from such schemes, and found it preferable to leave Nepal entirely, rather than migrate to the Terai.

Here again I want to pick up the postcolonial thread I have been pulling on, as this part of the story highlights another entanglement of Nepalese and British colonial histories. This particular thread involves J.V. Collier, an official with the Indian Forest Service who played an important role in forest management in both India and Nepal. Collier's role highlights the ongoing impact of British colonial policies on Nepal in the early part of the 20th century, as well as the continued close ties with the Rana regime. Besides being a British forest official, Collier was involved in helping Nepal set up its first narrow-gauge railway system in 1923, the purpose of which was to facilitate the removal of trees cut from the Terai forests.<sup>26</sup> Collier was tasked with management of the Nepal forest department by Prime Minister Chandra Shamsheer Rana from 1925-1930, and during this time Collier was involved in encouraging new settlements and improving timber harvests in the Terai. "Mr. Collier was entrusted with the task of extracting from Nepal 200,000 railway sleepers offered by the Government of Nepal to British Government as a war gift," a move which Ramesh Sivanpillai argued "brought tremendous wealth to Rana rulers but also paved the way to reckless destruction of forests in Nepal."<sup>27</sup> Collier argued that "Nepal, with her growing population and with the tendency of her surplus manhood to emigrate into India must adopt and press forward a policy of tree felling in all localities where crops could grow and men live happily," including the "reclamation of large tracts of the Tarai, especially in the districts of Morang, Mahottary, Sarlahi, Chitawan, Surkhet and Kailalai-Kanchanpur."<sup>28</sup>

At the time Collier argued that the Terai forests held an endless supply of trees, and the risk of too much logging in the process of clearing the forest for cultivation and commercial timber was never a serious concern. "This policy must be pursued for many years before there need be the slightest grounds for fearing that sufficient forest will not remain."<sup>29</sup> Historical hindsight proved this claim to be false and nothing more than a convenient lie to justify the continued resource extraction needs of the British empire. As one study noted about these forest policies at the time, the "Nepalese had little control over the exploitation of their forests and the flow of profits to the British in India."<sup>30</sup> Surely having a British forest office overseeing the process of forest management and timber extraction did not help with keeping revenues

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<sup>26</sup> Wikipedia Contributors. "Nepal Government Railway." *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*. 7 Feb. 2018.

<sup>27</sup> Sivanpillai, Ramesh (Ed.). (2015). *Biological and Environmental Hazards, Risks, and Disasters*. Amsterdam: Elsevier. 341.

<sup>28</sup> Kosinski, L.A. and K.M. Elahi (Eds). (2012). *Population Redistribution and Development in South Asia*. Holland: D. Reidel Publishing Company. 113.

<sup>29</sup> Collier, J.V. (1928) "Appendix XIX, Forestry in Nepal" in Perceval Landon. *Nepal. Volume 2*. London: Asian Educational Services. 253.

<sup>30</sup> ICIMOD. (Undated). "MNR Discussion Paper No. 96/3". 3. [http://lib.icimod.org/record/24360/files/c\\_attachment\\_331\\_2344.pdf](http://lib.icimod.org/record/24360/files/c_attachment_331_2344.pdf).



within Nepal, but it is highly unlikely this would have been a major concern for the Ranas who benefited from these relationships with the British.

While growing unrest with the Rana regime had not boiled over yet in the 1920 and 30s, Ojha argues that the failure of these settlement plans in this early period suggests that “malaria was not the only deterrent for settlement in the Terai. The only plausible explanation is that the Hill people wanted to escape the oppression within the country which may not have been possible to avoid simply by migrating to the Tarai for settlement.”<sup>31</sup> Given the dynamics of land ownership in the Terai as we have seen, Ojha’s explanation makes sense. Similarly, Adhikari and Dhungana argue “an essential part of this transformation [of the Terai] was an extension and entrenching of state sovereignty into the acquired territory through the appropriation of land (including forest land),” and that “a sustained aspect of state policy over the Tarai forestland was to generate resources for the ruling elites and for the consolidation of regimes that prevailed at a particular time.”<sup>32</sup> Kosinski and Elahi make a similar case when they state that land development in the Tarai “benefited the ruling class, their supporters and their favourites rather than the masses. The Rana regime saw emigration from among the ever growing Nepalese hill population as a safety valve which would help postpone the population crisis in the region.”<sup>33</sup> Such actions also allowed the Ranas to try and reduce dissent around the capital by dispersing people into more remote areas of the Terai where organized political resistance would be much harder, or at least so they hoped. But for majority of poor and landless peasants who had suffered under the excesses of corrupt landowners for generations, it was only a matter of time before Rana oppression became untenable.

Because of its status as the breadbasket of Nepal, the Terai had the greatest concentration of *Birta* landholdings, many of them controlled by large absentee landlords from the hills with ties to the Rana regime. Indian political scholar S.D. Muni has argued this dynamic was a central factor behind the 1996 Maoist uprising and helps explain their large base of support in western Nepal. “Anti-feudal sentiment has been strongest in this region because of its political economy. This region is poorest and most underdeveloped, and is also inhabited by tribal and backward social groups who have felt exploited and discriminated against at the hands of the upper castes.”<sup>34</sup> When early Communist political movements in the 1950s began calling for the seizure of large landed estates and the redistribution of the land to poor and

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<sup>31</sup> Ojha, Durga P. (1983). "History of Land Settlement in Nepal Tarai". *Contributions to Nepalese Studies*. 11:1. 27.

<sup>32</sup> Adhikari, Jagannath and Hari Dhungana. (2010). "The State and Forest Resources: An Historical Analysis of Policies Affecting Forest Management in the Nepalese Tarai". *Himalaya, the Journal of the Association for Nepal and Himalayan Studies*. 29:1. 43.

<sup>33</sup> Kosinski, L.A. and K.M. Elahi (Eds). (2012). *Population Redistribution and Development in South Asia*. Holland: D. Reidel Publishing Company. 113

<sup>34</sup> Muni. S.D. (2003). *Maoist Insurgency in Nepal: The Challenge and the Response*. New Delhi: Rupa & Co. 11

landless peasants, it was easy to rally their support. And as Arjun Karki notes, the failure to seriously address the issue of agrarian reform helped to plant “the seeds of class conflict and contradiction and thus rebellion in the rural agrarian economy of Nepal.”<sup>35</sup> These seeds began to sprout in 1950, and then fully bloomed after 1990 with the *Jana Andolan I*, followed by the Maoist uprising in 1996.

With the collapse of the Rana regime all the political activities which had been suppressed, organized underground or across the border in India, now burst into the open. The space created in 1950 by both center and left political parties in Nepal placed new demands on the nation--demands for political inclusion and representation--both in the social and political identity of the nation. It was during this decade that the first organized peasant agitations began, with land reform as a central demand. Exploitation and tensions between large landowners, most of whom were high-caste hill Hindus (*Pahadis*), and local peasant populations, who were a mix of low-caste Hindus, Dalits, Muslims and Indigenous *adivasi janajati* such as the Tharu, fueled these movements for reform in the early 1950s.

## Conclusion

As we have seen, there are several different colonial histories in Nepal which can be mapped. The conquest over the various independent hill tribes and kingdoms (e.g., Baise and Chaubisi Rajyas and the kingdoms of Lamjung, Parbat, Kaski, Tanahu, Makwanpur, Kumaon and Garhwal) by the Kingdom of Gorkha constitutes one possible thread for a postcolonial politics. A second involves the discourse of internal colonization of the Madhesi (and other marginalized communities) in the Terai by Pahadis from Kathmandu and the mid-hills. This thread draws upon both historical narratives about the conquests by Gorkha and later agrarian land dynamics and government resettlement projects, some of which I have explored. A third involves the relationship between the Indigenous nationalities (*adivasi janajati*) who constitute a significant portion (42% by NFDIN's estimate) of the Nepalese population, but have historically been excluded and marginalized from political power. There are 59 officially recognized Indigenous nationalities (*adivasi janajati*) which the Nepalese government delimited through the National Foundation for Development of Indigenous Nationalities Act of 2002, with 18 groups from the mountains, 24 from the hills, 6 in the inner Terai, and 11 in the Terai.<sup>36</sup> Many of these groups have raised arguments about internal colonization and political subordination by the state, and this last thread remains an important factor behind contemporary identity politics and ethnic nationalism in Nepal today for everyone other than high-caste hill Hindus (Brahmins and Chhetris), who have continuously held all real political power in Nepal since 1768.

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<sup>35</sup> Karki, Arjun K. (2002). “Movements from below: land rights movements in Nepal.” *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*. 3:2. 2.

<sup>36</sup> NFDIN. (2003). *National Foundation for Development of Indigenous Nationalities (NFDIN), An Introduction*. Kathmandu: NFDIN. 6-8.

The first perspective is likely the weakest from my view, since I have not come across anyone today arguing that Nepal should dissolve and return to its former pre-Gorkha political configurations, assuming such a thing were even possible (which I strongly doubt). While there may remain some idiosyncratic historical grudges within certain families who trace their family lineage back to a former golden period of princely glory before Gorkha rule, these hardly constitute a serious foundation for a postcolonial critique of the current Nepalese state.

The second thread involving the Terai, which I have traced in more detail, suggests a far richer source for a postcolonial critique, yet there is a fundamental tension at play. If we accept the critique commonly heard from Madhesi activists that the hill elites have treated the Terai as in internal colony, with Madhesis seen as foreign Indian invaders rather than Nepalese citizens, a postcolonial analysis may obscure this point. Instead, I want to suggest that perhaps a settler colonial analysis might be more appropriate for this context where those making the political critiques are speaking about an ongoing process. As settler colonialism scholar Patrick Wolfe noted, the “primary object of settler-colonization is the land itself rather than the surplus value to be derived from mixing native labour with it...invasion is a structure not an event.”<sup>37</sup> Gaining control of Terai lands for hill elites was always a central part of Gorkha politics and remains a key goal of Kathmandu elites today. And it is beyond doubt that the land tenure policies adopted and enforced under Gorkha rule fundamentally transformed the structure of landed relations in the Terai, both of which Wolfe calls attention to in his analysis of settler colonial dynamics.

One problem with such an analysis is that we should expect to see Kathmandu or hill elites trying to erase Indigenous and Madhesi groups from the Terai and replacing them with *pahadi* migrants, until traces of the former Terai inhabitants were gone. This is the historical trajectory which settler colonial practices have generally followed in relation to Indigenous communities. As postcolonial studies scholar Lorzeno Veracini describes this process:

The successful settler colonies ‘tame’ a variety of wildernesses, end up establishing independent nations, effectively repress, co-opt, and extinguish indigenous alterities, and productively manage ethnic diversity. By the end of this trajectory, they claim to be no longer settler colonial (they are putatively ‘settled’ and ‘postcolonial’ – except that unsettling anxieties remain, and references to a postcolonial condition appear hollow as soon as indigenous disadvantage is taken into account). Settler colonialism thus covers its tracks and operates towards its self-supersession.<sup>38</sup>

In the case of Nepal it seems more accurate to say that the ruling high-caste Hindu elite have made every effort to tame the Terai wilderness and repress and extinguish Indigenous and Madhesi alterity, but that this project has only been partially successful. Since 2008, some of the

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<sup>37</sup> Wolfe, Patrick. (1999). *Settler Colonialism and the Transformation of Anthropology: The Politics and Poetics of an Ethnographic Event*. New York: Cassell. 163.

<sup>38</sup> Veracini, Lorenzo. (2011). “Introducing Settler Colonial Studies.” *Settler Colonial Studies*. 1:1. 3.

earlier successes have come under challenge, particularly in relation to the unitary vision of Nepal as an idealized Hindu nation. While Hinduism remains an important cultural force, Nepal is no longer a Hindu kingdom with a divine Raja ruling from on high with absolute power. This Hindu hegemony first came under assault in the 1990s with Jana Andolan I, and was further disassembled during the decade-long Maoist struggle, which has ostensibly hostile to religion. More recent political movements since 2008, when the monarchy was formally abolished, have further enshrined the value of secular, democratic politics.

However this trend has also been opposed by both Hindu fundamentalist and various Terai and Madhesi organizations, since the vast majority of Nepalese living in the Terai still identify as Hindu. Gauri Nath Rimal provided some useful reference data for this question in his atlas mapping ethnic diversity in Nepal. As we can see from Rimal's data on ethnic groups and representations from 2007, at least 38% of Terai residents are Hindu, with possibly more depending on certain Tharu and ethnic communities and their self-identification since then.

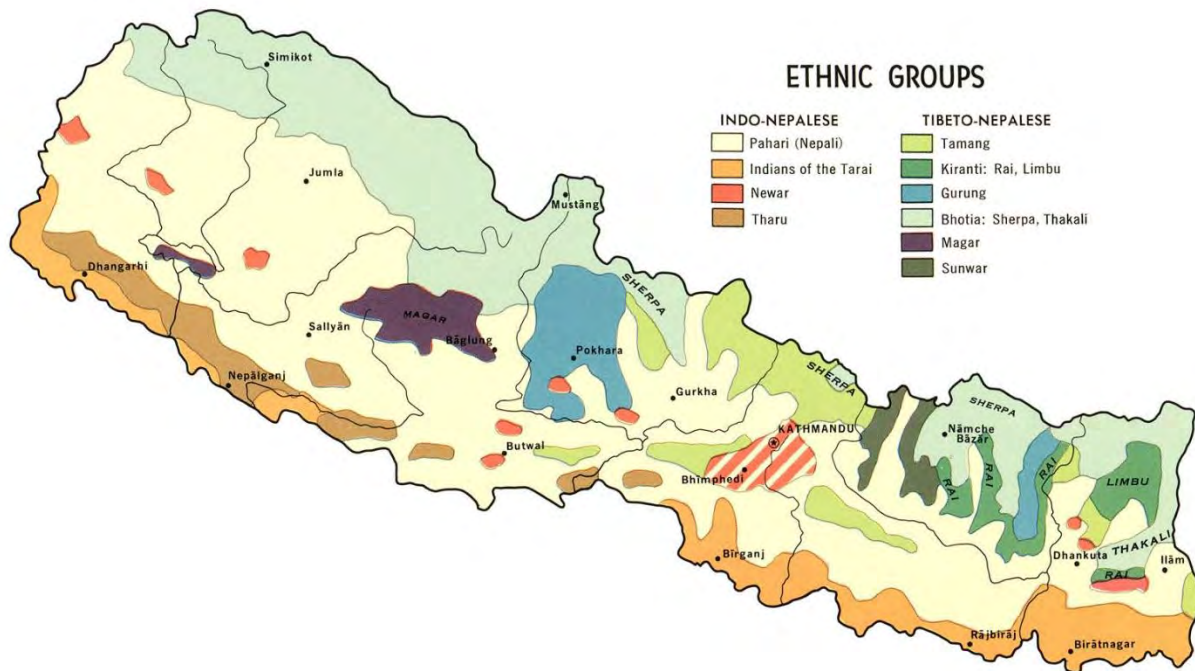
Almost half of Nepal's total population (48.51%) live in the Tarai. In the 20 Tarai districts the Tarai Madhesi cohort constitutes about 64.22% of the Tarai population while the hill-mountain cohort is about 35.78%. The Tarai Madhesi cohort comprises Tarai upper caste (28.36%) and Tarai Dalits (9.53%) making a total of 37.89%. Tharus constitute about 13.30% and Muslim 8.38%. The rest is about 4.65%. The hill-mountain cohort consists of hill upper caste 19.26%, hill ethnic 11.51%, hill Dalits 3.76%, mountains ethnic 0.19% and Inner Tarai ethnic (1.06%).<sup>39</sup>

The following map helps illustrate the larger distribution of different ethnic and caste groups across the country. The large swatch of lighter yellow across the central area of the country represents the heartland of the many Hindu hill kingdoms which were conquered by Gorkha in the 1700s. This map is also germane for our discussion at two levels. First, it separates out the Tharu in the Tarai but defines the Madhesi as "Indians of the Tarai," a clear reflection of the nationalist rejection of Madhesi as authentically Nepali citizens that was prevalent in the 1960s when this map was made (1968). Second, it refers to "Pahari (Nepali)" as

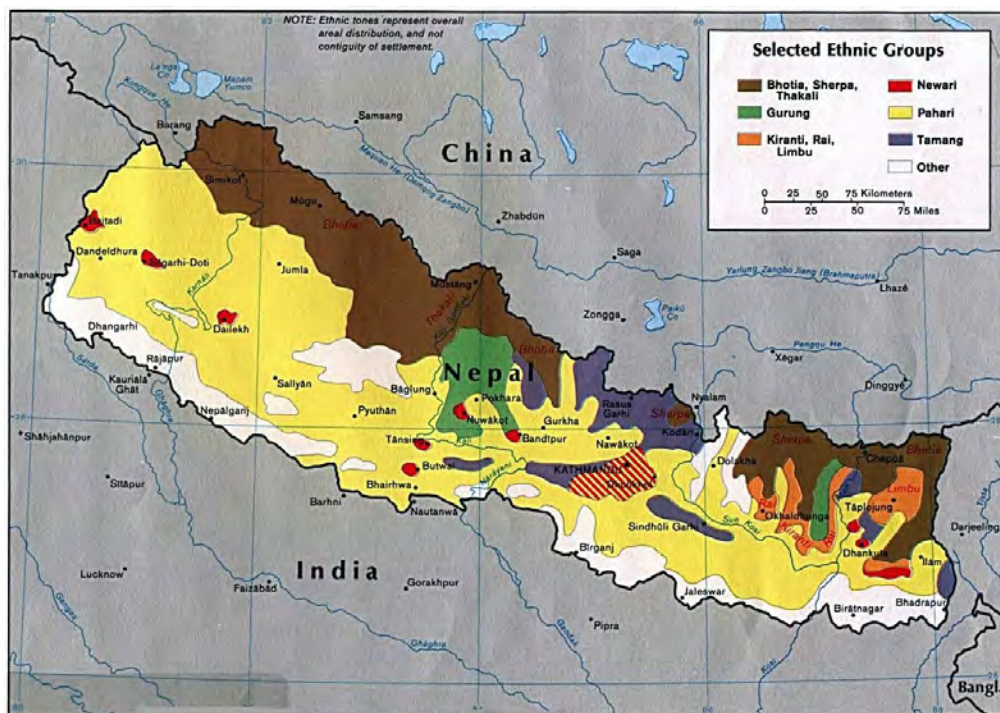
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<sup>39</sup> Rimal, Gauri Nath. (2007). *Infused Ethnicities: Nepal's Interlaced and Indivisible Social Mosaic*. Kathmandu: Institute for Social and Environmental Transition-Nepal. 13.

a single group, suggesting that only hill people are truly Nepali, in contrast to the “Indians” in the Terai. These are precisely the types of exclusionary practices that Madhesi have long protested.



Another ethnic distribution map from the 1980s takes this exclusion of Terai groups a step further. Here the “Pahari” are shown as the dominant group across most of Nepal, similar to the earlier map, but now the Tharu and Madhesi groups have been relegated to a colorless “Other” category, and all trace of their identities have been completely erased from the map. This is precisely the kind of erasure practices we should expect to see from settler colonialism.



Clearly much deeper analysis would need to be done to trace out a more coherent and detailed argument about settler colonialism in relation to Madhesi groups in the Terai and different *adivasi janajati* communities across Nepal. I have barely scratched the surface here in terms of looking at the popular movements in the 1990s-2000s, and this would be an essential period to look at the critiques of internal colonization and ethnic and *adivasi janajati*, Madhesi and Tharu struggles for political representation. Particular attention would need to be paid to the different historical experiences of various Indigenous groups, since the experience of Sherpas, Gurungs, Limbus, Newars, Tamangs and Kirats, to just name a few, have been significantly different over the course of the past 150 years, as anthropologists have clearly documented. A more productive approach might involve developing analyses of one or two distinct sites, such as the Tharu around Nepalgunj, rather than trying to develop a comprehensive national picture.

It would also be important for a settler colonial analysis to parse out the complex ways in which Indigenous animism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam and syncretic forms of Nepalese religious identity cleaves to different identities and social positions, and what role caste, gender, language, geography and political parties may play in shaping these dynamics. As Kalyan Bhakta Mathema notes in his study of the *Madhesi Andolan*, the “rise of identity-based religious movements could make the Terai more dangerous as people who become involved in religious activism think they are working for a cause that is bigger than them.”<sup>40</sup>

This question of identity is critical for any settler colonial analysis, since many Madhesi, Tharu, and *adivasi janajatis* have embraced a politics of ethnic federalism and called for maps of federal districts and administrative zones to be redrawn to reflect ethnic majorities in different parts of the country. Attempts during the drafting of the latest Nepalese constitution, which was adopted at the end of 2015 have left this issue unresolved. It remains a major issue for many groups today, in particular for the Tharu and Madhesi activist groups in the Terai. Whether these issues lead to a politics of ethnic separation and secession, as some fear, or to a new form of plurinational politics, as have happened in parts of Latin America, remains to be seen.

Given that political tensions between Madhesi communities and political elites in Kathmandu remain strong in 2018, and issues of economic exploitation and political exclusion are still very real phenomenon, particularly among poor peasant farmers, Tharu indigenous groups, and Terai Dalits, there appears to be no shortage of issues for a settler colonial analysis to delve into and develop further. And although I have only hinted at it here in relation to agrarian issues and forest management, there is a complex environmental history that a settler colonial analysis may also help to uncover.

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<sup>40</sup> Mathema, Kalyan Bhakta. (2011). *Madhesi Uprising: The Resurgence of Ethnicity*. Kathmandu: Mandala Book Point. 89.

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