



## Mark Turin

*What are the personal and academic reasons behind your becoming a Nepal researcher?*

In 1990, during the final year of secondary school in London, teachers informed me about the possibility of taking ‘a year off’ before university. I was applying to study modern languages at Cambridge, and was told that the university looked favourably upon students taking a year off by deferring their place, to travel a little, gain experience of the world outside of purely scholastic environments, and thus broaden their experience. My school was part of an organisation called Schools’ Partnership Worldwide (SPW) which was active in India, various African nations and was about to open up operations in Nepal. In a thinly-disguised modern colonial style, the idea was to send young British kids (aged between 17-19) out to developing countries and have us teach in local schools. While the postings in Africa and India didn’t really appeal, Nepal had more allure and conjured up images of mountains which appealed to me a great deal. I planned to go to Nepal with a close friend, and after finishing school we worked to earn the necessary money for our travels and also to raise some funds for equipment for the ‘host’ school in Nepal. We flew out in the cheapest way we could, in January 1991, with Aeroflot via Moscow, Tashkent and then on to Delhi. We travelled overland to Nepal where we met up with the fledgling organisation of SPW in Kathmandu, which was being run by Helen Cawley, a longtime resident of Kathmandu.

At this time, SPW Nepal barely existed (no office, no phone, no Post Office Box) and we would meet up with other students and staff at Rover Treks in Naxal. My friend and I had chosen a ‘remote’ posting, which turned out to be lower Mustang, rather than an ‘urban’ one which would have been Kathmandu, Pokhara or Baglung. We soon set off to Mustang with a few other volunteers, who were dotted all up and down the Kali Gandaki valley (Kalopani, Tukche, Marpha and Jomsom). We received a cursory few days of Nepali language instruction at the Mahendra Youth



Hostel in Lalitpur before we left, so were able to ask someone's name but no more. Quite how we were meant to teach with so little cultural understanding and linguistic ability is still a mystery.

My colleague and I took our posting considerably more seriously than many of the other volunteers. We returned to Kathmandu only once in the 9 months that we were there, and genuinely attempted to teach, but to no avail since we were just kids ourselves (some of the students were older than us). We had no teaching experience and no language ability in Nepali. The whole approach was utterly unstructured and largely pointless for the school and the kids we taught. I should add that the experience was wonderful for the likes of me, but not so positive for less independently minded volunteers who were quite literally at sea. I thrived, studying Nepali by myself and also learning basic Thakali, the language of the home and of most social interaction in Kalopani. Other volunteers retreated into their own worlds and read books or got ill (typhoid, mental breakdowns, etc.).

Despite my best efforts, the single class (Class Five) which I taught throughout in a focussed manner for the whole of the academic year all failed their English exams. I had tried to teach them English conversation and had quite early on dispensed with the atrocious *My English Book* series, but this turned out to be a major miscalculation. We were billed as teachers, not supplementary teachers or conversation instructors, and the students suffered at our hands on account of our inabilities. It took me 3 months, for example, to know enough Nepali to stop calling my students *tapai!* Whether they would have failed their exams without our assistance remains, of course, an untestable and rhetorical question. I did a fair amount of afternoon and evening tutoring, for free, and these sessions often ended up as general discussions or story telling about England, families and politics. I sincerely believe that we did more harm than good in the formal structures of the school, but that the lasting positive effects of our visit relate instead to the nebulous realm of cultural exchange. At any rate, the 9 months in Kalopani and Tukche completely changed my outlook and interests.

Three events in particular during my sojourn in Mustang helped to focus my interest in the direction of anthropology. First, I was confronted with a handful of possession and shamanic rituals, which are quite shocking to a British teenager. At one event in particular, I was asked to assist with any 'medicine' I had. I didn't think that aspirin would help with *boksi laagyo*. Instead, along with the rest of the village, I sat there watching the *jhaankri* practice his craft and was mesmerized. A second pull (or push) towards anthropology was the following: I was resident in lower Mustang just when upper Mustang opened up to foreign visitors, and I had the

good fortune to meet a number of senior scholars of and from Nepal who were conducting research in the upper reaches of Mustang. I became quite friendly with members of the Nepal German High Altitude Archaeology Project (Dieter Schuh and Charles Ramble in particular), and met many photographers and journalists who were off to document 'the hidden kingdom'. I was already slightly suspicious of such Orientalist rhetoric, although I didn't have the theoretical framework in which to articulate it, since it was apparent to me that a great deal of continuity existed between upper and lower Mustang. In other words, while there was something special about living directly under the Annapurna and Dhaulagiri massifs, the awe gradually gave way to a sincere interest in the social relations of everyday life. Through the foreign scholars whom I met on their way to Lo Monthang, I first heard of the discipline of anthropology. Third, the close personal relationships between myself and a handful of local teachers and villagers definitely steered me towards anthropology. I felt very privileged to have had an opportunity of making lasting friendships in a completely different cultural context by dint of being thrown together and sharing an experience (in this case teaching in the same school). I wanted to better understand the perspectives of my friends and colleagues, and anthropology seemed the right way of going about it. On returning to Cambridge, I promptly changed course from modern languages to Archaeology and Anthropology.

In Cambridge at that time, there was considerable interest in Nepal. Alan Macfarlane, who worked among the Gurung community of Thak north of Pokhara, had recently been promoted to Professor of Anthropological Science in the Department, and he had a number of post-graduate students working in Nepal: Judy Pettigrew, Rachel Hinton, Alka Gurung (the daughter of Ambar Gurung) and Tek Gurung (from Lumle Agricultural Centre, in Cambridge studying for his MPhil). Even though I was a mere undergraduate, the graduate students were very welcoming to me and I gained an insight into what graduate studies would be like. I also met a fellow undergraduate, Rhoderick Chalmers, who had started out in French and Russian but changed to Indian studies after being in Nepal for his year off. Rhoddy was a brilliant student and became a close friend. We shared a passion for Nepal, and Rhoddy set me on the road to greater linguistic rigour and accuracy, something which anthropologists are not normally known for. Alan Macfarlane, while never teaching me one-on-one, was supportive and took an interest in my intellectual and personal development. The department in Cambridge was in period of great upheaval at that time, with Ernest Gellner retiring and Marilyn Strathern arriving from Manchester to whip the place into shape. The whole undergraduate

experience was therefore quite unsettling, and my sights remained firmly fixed on returning to Nepal as soon as possible.

The opportunity came after my second year, when I returned to Nepal in the summer holidays for three months of preliminary research on the Thakali language and issues of identity for my undergraduate dissertation. This was subsequently published in *Contributions to Nepalese Studies* (Turin 1997a). During this visit (summer 1994), I firmed up my interest in and passion for Nepal and improved my Nepali. I was lucky enough to bump into Michael Hutt, David Gellner, Pratyoush Onta, Krishna Bhattachan and various others in Kathmandu, and my conviction grew that I wanted to continue working in Nepal in some form. I should add that meeting Onta and Bhattachan was a real eye opener. Until then, my relationships with Nepalis could be characterised as ‘friendships’. I discussed my work and ideas, in the limited ways I could in Nepali or in English, but the conversations and context for our relationships were primarily personal, even with Thakalis who viewed my research interests as tolerable but quirky. I bumped into Pratyoush at Mandala Book Point, and he invited me home for tea, gave me a copy of Bill Fisher’s PhD thesis (for which I had been searching for months) and quizzed me. I came away genuinely inspired. Later that week I interviewed Krishna Bhattachan who countered my predictable and tedious questions about Thakali identity issues with thoughts about Foucault and sociological theory. He had recently returned from University of California Berkeley and was literally boiling over with ideas. With Onta and Bhattachan I could discuss the content of my research in a collegial setting, and draw on their advice, experience and deeper understanding of Nepal.

After I graduated from Cambridge, Alan Macfarlane created a job for me as his Research Assistant with the explicit aim of cataloguing and archiving the 16mm films of Nepal and India which had been shot by Professor Christoph von Fürer-Haimendorf of the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) and gifted to Alan a few years before Haimendorf’s decline. I worked for about 6 months viewing, logging and annotating the films, and concluded by piecing together a 40-minute video documentary about Haimendorf and his wife Betty using both the archival footage and excerpts of an interview Macfarlane had conducted with Haimendorf before his death. The film was entitled ‘A Tribute to Betty and Christoph von Fürer-Haimendorf’. Together, Alan Macfarlane and I wrote Haimendorf’s obituary (1996, 1997d).

During this time, I contributed a section on the Chenchu of the Indian Deccan to the *Cambridge Encyclopedia of Hunters and Gatherers* based primarily on Haimendorf’s work in that area over half a century earlier

(Turin 1999d). In October 1995, I half-heartedly applied to continue with a PhD in Cambridge. My misgivings were numerous. First, despite my First Class Honours, the funding opportunities were extremely limited. Second, I was told that it was advisable to move to a different university for one's PhD. Third, aside from Alan Macfarlane (who had always been more of a friend and mentor than intellectual guide) there was no one obvious to supervise me; and finally and most importantly, I was becoming frustrated by the limitations of reflexive anthropology (which had just hit Cambridge in a big way) and was becoming increasingly interested in language and linguistics. I was searching the Internet one day in 1995 for information about Himalayan languages and linguistics, when I came across a simple website in the Netherlands which mentioned a Himalayan Languages Project based at Leiden University which had funding for PhD students to do research on endangered languages of the region. Having a Dutch mother, speaking Dutch and feeling quite at home in the country, I went over to meet the director of the project, George (Sjors) van Driem, who offered me a PhD position on the spot. After a week of deliberation, I withdrew my application from Cambridge and accepted the PhD position in Leiden (which is more akin to a job than a studentship as one receives a pension, holiday pay, paternity leave and all kinds of rights as a civil servant). I moved to Amsterdam in August 1996, and started my PhD studies in September of the same year under the guidance of Dr van Driem as a supervisor.

*What is the thematic focus of your doctoral research? Also explain if any national or disciplinary traditions were important in your selection of the topic.*

My PhD research is explicitly in the discipline of descriptive linguistics. The requirement of the Himalayan Languages Project is that each and every researcher produce a grammar of a little-known, endangered and hitherto undescribed language of Nepal, India, Tibet or Bhutan. I first wanted to work on the Thakali language, Thakali culture being the context for the only real experience of Nepal which I had built up to date. Van Driem informed me that a linguist by the name of Stefan Georg had just completed a grammar of the Marpha dialect of the language, which was in press (now published as Georg 1996), and that there was little utility in describing the Tukche dialect as well while so many of Nepal's endangered languages remained undocumented.

While looking at an ethnolinguistic relief map of Nepal, van Driem and I decided that I should work on the Thangmi language (known in Nepali as 'Thami') since it was located in the higher hill regions and seemed

poorly known. I should add that there were plenty of possibilities to work on languages in the lower hills or Tarai belt, but that I was less eager to do so. I freely admit that my preference and interest was more in Tibeto-Burman languages rather than Indo-Aryan ones, and towards the hills rather than the plains. I think that I can confidently say that this prejudice was built exclusively on my prior exposure to Mustang and Thakali culture. My preference was not conditioned by any dislike of the lower altitude and hotter belt of Nepal, since I was completely ignorant of these regions, but rather predicated on the comfort I felt in lower Mustang and my desire to replicate that experience somewhere else in Nepal.

Being a descriptive linguist is rather like being a car mechanic for language: your task is to dismantle a working language, analyze its component parts, puzzle out how it works, and then reassemble it. Theoretical linguistics is more like car engineering: you analyze how languages, like cars, could run more smoothly or efficiently, and then you construct abstract models to test these hypotheses. This latter approach interested me far less. I was (and still am) fascinated by ethnographic details, and somewhat paradoxically descriptive linguistics ended up serving my interests better than anthropology.

As to the second component of your question, I found myself sharing interests and approaches with an older generation of British Nepal scholars. After Chomsky, descriptive linguistics was effectively killed off in the UK. The only person in the UK who had pursued similar interests in Nepal was Nicholas (Nick) Allen, who held the South Asia position in the Institute of Social and Cultural Anthropology at Oxford and had supervised some Nepal-related PhDs (such as Charles Ramble). He was an anthropologist by training, but in the course of his PhD research among the Thulung Rai, had also learned the language and had described it as best he could. His grammatical sketch was subsequently published (Allen 1975). I finally had the pleasure of meeting and conducting a two hour video interview with him (together with Alan Macfarlane) just as he retired from Oxford in 2002 and before he set off for a year in India. He is the foremost linguistic anthropologist who has worked in the Himalayan region (Martin Gaenzle is a prominent contemporary scholar informed by similar interests) and has written seminal articles such as Allen (1972). In terms of other influences or traditions, before leaving the UK for the Netherlands I had met with Michael Hutt and Lionel Caplan (both at SOAS). I would have been happy to work with Lionel, but he was soon to retire and made clear that while I would start under his guidance, I would likely continue under someone else's umbrella. Older colonial era studies, by the likes of Brian Hodgson and George Grierson, provided an excellent backdrop in which to frame the

present analysis of the Thangmi language, since a word list of Thami had been collected from Darjeeling in 1901 under the auspices of the *Linguistic Survey of India*.

I started linguistic fieldwork among Thangmi speakers in January 1997, in Dolakha and Sindhupalchok. The first task was to survey the linguistic area and establish approximately how many speakers there were, their physical location and dialect group, and also to choose a field site. I settled in a small village called Damarang, in Suspa VDC, an hour walk from Dolakha bazaar. I lived with a family I had met on my wanderings through the district and within a couple of years we had together reconfigured the house so as to have a room in which I could sleep and work during my residence in the village. Spending time in Thangmi villages was at first a bit of a shock on account of the abject poverty I saw around me. I had been spoiled by my sojourn in Thakali villages in Mustang, and was not prepared for *kodo-ko dhedo* (millet paste) and *sishnu* (nettle soup) rather than refined *daal bhaat*. Moreover, access to material resources and technology is very minimal in Dolakha, and many families still use a *chakmak* and *dalsing dhunga* (flint stone and striking iron) to start a fire or light a cigarette, while older men and women wear clothes made from *allo sishnu* (wild Himalayan nettle).

*When do you intend to finish your PhD? Are you doing any other research/work in the meantime? Also what are the linkages between your research interests in Nepal and theoretical debates in your discipline and/or political and social developments in Nepal?*

I am completing the writing up stage of the PhD at present. In the Netherlands, it is imperative to publish the thesis and have a public defense, so the thesis has to be a book rather than a manuscript. I have provisional acceptance from four internationally-respected publishers, and must now complete the final chapters and have my supervisor read the final version. I intend to submit in the fall of 2003, and get the degree in 2004.

At present, I occupy myself with various smaller jobs, all of which are part time. I am the co-founder and director of Digital Himalaya, a pilot project to develop digital collection, archiving and distribution strategies for multimedia anthropological information from the Himalayan region. Based at the universities of Cornell and Cambridge, the project began in December 2000. The initial phase involves digitizing a set of existing ethnographic archives comprised of photographs, films, sound recordings, fieldnotes and texts collected by anthropologists and travellers in Tibet, Nepal, Bhutan and the Indian Himalayas from the beginning of the 20th century to the present. The project has three long-term objectives: (a) to

preserve in a digital medium valuable ethnographic materials that are degenerating in their current forms; (b) to make these resources available in a searchable digital format to scholars and the Himalayan communities from which the materials were collected; and (c) to develop a template for collaborative digital cataloguing that will allow users to contribute documentation to existing collections and eventually link their own collections to the system, creating a dynamic tool for comparative research. More information is available at <[www.digitalhimalaya.com](http://www.digitalhimalaya.com)>. For the project, I split my time between Cambridge and Cornell now, and have secured a three-year US Department of Education grant which is shared with the Tibetan and Himalayan Digital Library (THDL) based at the University of Virginia. In many ways, I think that the Digital Himalaya Project comes at the right time in terms of Nepal scholarship. The return of cultural property and dissemination of information are issues extremely pertinent to Nepal, and it's exciting to be involved in a process which may be of some direct utility and interest to Nepalis (rather than theoretical or purely academic projects which are often more for the gratification of the researcher).

In terms of my own research, I have become increasingly interested in ethnolinguistic issues and the politics of language as played out in Nepal. Building on the Thangmi case study, I am interested in the manner by which minority ethnic groups and language communities construct their identity in modern nation states. The Darjeeling and Sikkim connection has been one which I explored of late, and recent trips there and interactions with the dynamic Thami Welfare Association have added a very different spin to my understanding of ethnic language politics in Nepal. While in Nepal, ethnic issues are highly politicized and I have found national political opinions acted out within the various Thangmi cultural committees (some are UML, others Congress, etc), in Darjeeling ethnic activism rather appears to be related to attaining the status of OBC (Other Backward Class) or ST (Scheduled Tribe) which then provide the community with a quota of positions in the administration of Government of India. In short, though, since I am still embroiled in the writing up stage of the PhD, I have not commenced a large new research project. I am also very interested in working in other parts of the Himalayan region, including Sikkim but also Tibet and Bhutan. I am learning some Tibetan at present, and plan to spend the summer in Lhasa filming with a team from the Tibetan and Himalayan Digital Library. A few specific mini projects on which I am working include a re-study of the nunnery at Bigu, first documented in detail by Christoph von Fürer-Haimendorf (1976) with updated household surveys and census information and an article similar to Holmberg, March

with Tamang (1999), but from the Thangmi perspective of land appropriation and exploitation.

To the final component of your question, there has indeed been a shift in the political and social developments of the region in Nepal where I work. These changes have shaped and transformed my research. When I started working among the Thangmi communities of Dolakha and Sindhupalcok, the Maoist insurgency had not yet really reached the region, but by the time of my concluding field visits, many Thangmi friends and villagers had joined the movement. Sara Shneiderman, my partner and a fellow anthropologist, and I became accidental ethnographers of the Maoist movement in these districts as the political activities unfolded. Recent conference presentations and articles have reflected this shift. Sara and I present a local-level viewpoint from the ground of the People's War, specifically from the Thangmi perspective (if there can be such a thing). Through watching the conflict unfold, we have become interested in political consciousness and conflict, I from a social and linguistic viewpoint, and Sara rather more from a position informed by anthropological theory and comparative studies of other conflict zones. To this end, we have participated in various discussions, round tables and conferences about the insurgency in Nepal. In April 2003, we are participating in two such meetings: 'The Civil War in Nepal', lectures and seminars at Hampshire College, and 'Andean and Himalayan Maoist Movements' at Cornell University.

*Do you operate from a traditionally defined department or from an area studies centre?*

Yes, both my institutional homes (Cambridge and Cornell) are in the respective Anthropology departments of these two universities. While my appointment in the States is in part through the Cornell University Library, as an attempt to get some institutional support from the digital libraries people for the Digital Himalaya Project, I am physically located in the anthropology department.

Although I am most comfortable in the presence of anthropologists, and particularly among fellow scholars of the Himalayas (Kathryn March and David Holmberg at Cornell, Alan Macfarlane, Caroline Humphrey and Hildegard Diemberger at Cambridge), I don't necessarily see anthropology as my long term or future home. My disciplinary interests, which started out in languages, moved to anthropology (BA), then to descriptive linguistics (PhD) and have now come to the middle way of anthropological linguistics or linguistic anthropology. Alan Macfarlane once advised me to study 'problems and issues rather than disciplines', and I have

increasingly found that Nepal in particular and the Himalayas in general continue to fascinate me, but not in strictly disciplinary ways. For example, recent archaeological discoveries by members of the Kohla Project (based at Cambridge University, involving Judith Pettigrew and Chris Evans) in the Annapurnas, are of particular interest from linguistic and ethnohistorical perspectives (see Pettigrew and Tamu 1999). In many senses, I can imagine ending up in a South Asian Studies centre where I am surrounded by scholars of different disciplines all interested in the same region. Unfortunately, however, such units are less well endowed than Departments and also don't often have permanent positions (more based on temporary affiliations or one-year sabbaticals).

*Do you teach and if so, at what level? What kinds of courses do you teach (or have taught in the past) and what Nepal-related content are included in those courses?*

I lecture in two undergraduate courses at the University of Cambridge: linguistic anthropology (language and society/sociolinguistics) and visual anthropology. I incorporate a great deal of my own fieldwork observations, findings, anecdotes and footage (video, images, sound recordings) in these two courses, illustrating abstract problems with tangible examples. I may well teach a course in Himalayan anthropology at Cornell in the coming two years, but this is as yet unconfirmed. I have also done a fair amount of Nepali language teaching, which I have described in detail in a later question.

*Where have you published your Nepal-related books, articles and essays?*

For a number of reasons, I am firmly committed to publishing my Nepal-related work in Nepal. First, the prohibitive cost of journals and books published in the West, together with the lack of easy ordering and access for scholars in most of South Asia, make such publications more about prestige than academic information dispersal. Second, Nepali publishing has come very far in the last 12 years, with a well-instituted system for ISBN numbering, excellent binding, good colour separation and competitive pricing. The number of books, journals and magazines has blossomed, and many are of high quality both in terms of content and production. Third, all Western scholars interested in or working on Nepal can purchase copies of books published in Nepal for a few hundred rupees, and we often go back to our homes in Europe and the US with suitcases full of published materials. The idea that publishing in Nepal somehow consigns an article or book to immediate death is ridiculous: in fact, the opposite may even be the case. Distribution, both within Nepal and outside, remains

the sticking point. According to friends and colleagues in the book business in Nepal (Mandala, Ratna Pustak and Himal Books), the government at present prohibits Nepali publishers from sending large quantities of books abroad. If and when this changes, and with the advent of secure online ordering (and a more efficient and reliable postal network), Nepali publishing will be global. I receive far more feedback about articles published in Nepal than I do about those published in the West.

I am particularly interested in what I refer to as para-academic journalism, and am a frequent contributor to the *Nepali Times*, *Himal South Asian*, *Himal Khabarpatrika* and *The Kathmandu Post*. In terms of academic outlets, in Nepal I have written for *Contributions to Nepalese Studies*, *Nagarik* (Citizen), *Haakaa-Haaki* (Face to Face), *Janajati: Journal of Nationalities of Nepal*, publications by the Royal Nepal Academy (*The Journal of Nepalese Studies* and *The Journal of Nepalese Literature, Art and Culture*) and a few others. My next major article will be for *Studies in Nepali History and Society* (SINHAS), the only thoroughly peer-reviewed journal of any standing in Nepal. Through writing for the academic and popular press, in Nepal I have formed close friendships with editors, particularly with Deepak Thapa of the *Himal Association* (formerly *Himal South Asian*, *Nepali Times* and now *Himal Books*) and Nirmal Man Tuladhar, now Executive Director of The Centre for Nepal and Asian Studies (CNAS). The strength of these friendships is in part due to the fact that a social relationship is re-enforced by a professional one: over dinner we discuss Nepali politics, contemporary research and future plans.

Outside of Nepal, I have written for *The IAS Newsletter* (out of Leiden), *Mare* (the Leiden University Newspaper, in which I have a column), *Newāh Vijnāna* (The Journal of Newar Studies) and for the *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*. I have also contributed chapters to various books published in the UK, the US and the Netherlands. I have just completed the writing and editorial process of two books, both collaborative: one just published by Eco-Himal through Mandala Book Point and the other a joint venture between Tribhuvan University and the South Asia Institute of Heidelberg University (SAI) which is now in press. The latter, the proceedings of a conference organised in Nepal, I co-edited with the linguist Dr Tej Ratna Kansakar, Professor Emeritus at Tribhuvan University. Kansakar is a sincere and excellent scholar of the old school, truly international in experience and very widely read. It was a pleasure to work with him on this project, and to see the book through production (with significant help from Nirmal Man Tuladhar). Both of the books described above are referenced in the publications list given at the end of this text. That both of these books are published in Nepal is in part due to

my insistence to the co-editors that the quality of publishing in Nepal is high and the relative cost impressively low. Readers can find more details about my writings, as well as free downloads of many of my articles, by visiting my website: <http://www.iias.nl/host/himalaya/turin.html>

*Do you converse productively with colleagues doing research and other works related to Nepal in the UK, other European countries, the US and Nepal? If so, how (via email, letters, face to face conversations, exchange of draft written works, etc.)?*

Yes, to all of the above. Both when I am in Nepal, and when I'm back in Europe and the US, a significant portion of my time is spend communicating with Nepali colleagues, principally Nirmal Man Tuladhar, Tej Ratna Kansakar, Yogendra Prasad Yadava, Deepak Thapa, Kanak Dixit, Kunda Dixit, Pratyoush Onta, Basanta Thapa and Kesar Lall (Shrestha).

Himalayan linguistics is a pretty narrow field, so after a few years you know all the players either in person or by name. Since it's clear who collected which bit of data on which language, there is a fair amount of sharing of preliminary findings among colleagues. Linguists, particularly American ones, are very computer literate as is manifested by the fact that they produce their own custom fonts, write little programmes to help with the mundane sorting or analysis, and are increasingly interested in sharing information in new digital ways (online databases, searchable bibliographies on the web, etc). Of my work, ethnographic descriptions of the Maoists in Dolakha and Sindhupalcok appear to be of greatest interest, and I am in contact with human rights organisations who ask for copies of my writings on the topic. My contact with development agencies and units has been largely negative: I have been asked to consult and have refused, and have written articles critical of development dabblings in Dolakha, particularly the motorable road from Dolakha to Singati which was funded by GTZ and WFP (Turin 1998b). I have been interested by the speed of email take up in Nepal, and write on this topic (2000b, 2001b).

The communication possibilities for Nepali scholars have mushroomed since the Internet has become available in Nepal. It is a great pleasure to be in frequent contact with Nepali scholars, journalists and friends through this medium, and the recent developments in terms of Nepali fonts (Unicode) and the online databases of the Nepali press (albeit incomplete) are extremely exciting developments.

*What institutional and human resources are available to you as a graduate student?*

Leiden University has a decent (but not great) library for Himalayan studies, but is open to buying more books should you need them. My supervisor has a complete Himalayan linguistic library which he opened to his PhD students (we all had keys to his office), and we were encouraged to browse and sit there. However, my work was so empirical that once I had a couple of dictionaries and the background references, I was on my own. An excellent library was therefore not so important as for graduate students in social science.

*What kinds of funds are available for your graduate studies and for field research in Nepal as well as for the final write-up of your dissertation? What are the institutional and funding resources in the UK (outside of UK as well) that you have tapped into or will be doing so to continue your research in Nepal?*

My PhD situation in the Netherlands was very different to the experience of an average British PhD student at a UK university. In the Netherlands, you are not a student but rather an independent and affiliated academic researcher with the rights of a civil servant. I received a salary every month, not a quarterly stipend, and had to pay taxes over my income. All fieldwork costs were defrayed by the Dutch Research Council called NWO (rather like the US National Science Foundation, the NSF), including flights, equipment and local costs. In short, it was a very luxurious PhD process. Funding was for 4 years, and after that they help to find you bits and pieces to write up. More recently, as the Director of the Digital Himalaya Project I have applied for money from the Frederick Williamson Fund (which supports research in the Himalayas and is based at Cambridge), the British Academy and the Royal Anthropological Institute. I have as yet not needed to apply for any direct research money from British funding sources.

*What are your job prospects once you finish your PhD?*

Since I am at present not looking for a permanent position, and content to continue with shorter contracts and project work, I am not in a good position to answer this question. I think that anthropology graduates (with PhD in hand) are increasingly expected to work on one area and have at least one subfield in which they are an authority, such as AIDS in Congo, or ethnicity in Nepal. The expectation would then be that you might lecture on general South Asian topics, but also teach an ethnicity paper which draws on ethnographies from all over the world. Unlike the French CNRS, or the Max Planck institutes in Germany and the Netherlands which are explicitly geared towards original research, the scholarly

possibilities in the UK are primarily jobs in universities or development. If one markets oneself as a scholar of Nepal only it may be hard to compete for jobs outside of anthropology departments in which Nepal is already known.

*Is a new generation of Nepal researchers being produced in the UK? If so, how is the next generation being mentored in the field?*

Yes, and people like myself and Rhoderick Chalmers are very much part of this process. There are a number of features which are worth noting. First, many of us (the newer generation) first travelled to Nepal soon after leaving secondary school and thus started learning Nepali and being exposed to the country in our teens rather than in our 20s. This has already given us, at a very young age, a time depth of experience and exposure to Nepal of more than 10 years. Unlike previous generations of scholars, many of whom first came to Nepal through India or after travels in Afghanistan, we came specifically and explicitly to Nepal and only thereafter broadened interests to India or Tibet. Second, since many of us came to teach English in schools or other similar such projects, we were immediately taken in by rather random communities across the country. A whole generation of British scholars of Nepal will have SPW and the Gap programme to thank, while similar-aged US scholars would have come through SIT (School for International Training), Wisconsin, the Cornell-Nepal Study Abroad Programme or Sojourn Nepal. Third, I think that relationships that our generation have with Nepalis is often (although by no means always) more equal and collegial. There are many factors which combine here, in part the growth in communications technology and cheap travel which means that we all now have Nepali friends in the UK, Europe and US, but also a greater sense of being global citizens experiencing events similarly through different coloured glasses. That so many of my peers and friends should have married Nepali men and women is but an indication of this.

Somewhat glibly put, I think one generation back we see adoptions of ethnically Nepali children and the employment of young women from 'the village' as nannies in Kathmandu and the West. Further back than that (Haimendorf, David Snellgrove etc.), we see more the employment of promising young Nepali men (such as Dor Bahadur Bista) both in Nepal and afterwards in England. These people often went on to make huge contributions to Nepali scholarship. Finally, I think that these days more of us are committed to learning good Nepali (spoken and written) as well as the ethnic languages of the areas in which we work, and this is an indication of the growth of the public Nepali language intellectual sphere and a recognition on our part that studying in Nepal can no longer just be

working with ‘one people’ without taking into account the functioning of the modern nation state. Since I know that what I write here will be made public, I want to make clear that what I write is not a criticism of our senior colleagues but more of a reflection on the changing nature (and expectations) of cross-cultural relationships. I have no doubt that our students, in 10-20 years from now, will have evolved newer ways of interacting with Nepali peers and colleagues which our generation will have difficulty adjusting to. It is this inherently historical perspective which makes me more tolerant than others of the explicitly colonial terminology which is still employed by some senior scholars of Nepal.

*What is the attraction for members of your generation to study Nepal?*

While many of the standard old answers are still alive and well, such as beautiful scenery, an apparently welcoming ambiance in many parts of the country and a great many distinct cultures and languages, I do think that perspectives, expectations and impressions are also changing. These days, fewer students come to work on the traditional arts, architecture and livelihood of Kathmandu, in part due to the air pollution (which has an internationally bad reputation) and in part due to the surface modernization. Developing a research project in Kathmandu now often includes something about oppressed minorities (*sukumbasi*, *dalits*, street sweepers, street kids etc.) or about modernity and change (email, technology, dance bars, etc). Another wave of more politically minded social scientists, both Marxian and Marxist, have become intrigued with Nepal as a place to watch the unfolding of the first Maoist insurgency of the 21st century. There is also a sense of being able to make a difference, a sense of a calling, and developing a lifelong relationship with a particular place. Many of us feel that we must stand by Nepal while the country is going through this difficult time, and accurately represent it to the public and the wider scholarly community (Michael Hutt and David Gellner are often on the BBC about the Royal Massacre or the Maoists).

Our commitment may be in part because of the young age at which we came, combined with the extreme excitement of being in Nepal as things unfold and grow (media, publishing, public debate etc). I think that this is most acutely felt by UK scholars who commonly see their own country as being in a slow and irrevocable post-imperial decline. It’s thrilling being in Nepal, and while as foreign Nepali-speaking scholars we are almost universally well-received (which is of course a pleasant feeling), the real excitement comes from forging close and open relationships with intellectual equals and superiors in Nepal, and trying to hold one’s own in such contexts. The emergence of discussion forums, such as Martin

Chautari, and the growth of Himal Media, provide frequent opportunities for debate. A further thought about Martin Chautari: many foreign students and scholars active in Nepal are wary of either attending the talks or of presenting their findings since the attendants at the meetings have secured themselves a reputation of aggressive questioning and critique. Personally, I have only positive experiences of Martin Chautari and support the idea of challenging scholars (both domestic and foreign) on their findings. I am also suspicious of foreign students, often from the US, who after 4 months in Nepal have formulated a plan of action for some entrenched social ill or present themselves as the authority on a specific cultural topic. That these individuals are given short shrift by the audiences at Martin Chautari I find entirely understandable.

*Do you communicate about your research with the national public at large in the UK and in other countries of the West? If so, how do you do it and how often?*

In Nepal, as I mentioned above, I like to use the English language (and sometimes Nepali language) press to communicate my thoughts and experiences. I also write for ethnic activist magazines with whom I sympathize but often disagree in terms of agenda or content. In the West, I have done a fair amount of teaching Nepali, a little in the UK but particularly in the Netherlands where I taught medical staff who were setting off to work on projects in Nepal. Together with a colleague, I wrote a 100 page introductory self study guide in Dutch to learn Nepali, about which I get on average 2 requests a week (2001). I also give public lectures, some of which are less explicitly academic and more anecdotal. I look forward to putting some of these accounts down on paper and perhaps writing an anthropologically-informed travelogue. Many of my journalistic writings in the UK, USA and Holland are about communicating general issues about Nepal.

During my residence in the Netherlands, I was for a period of time the only bilingual Dutch-Nepali speaker registered with the Nepali Consulate in Amsterdam. As a result, when asylum seekers from Nepal or Bhutan arrived at Schiphol International Airport (fleeing either Bhutanese refugee camps or Maoist/Police battles), I was called in to interpret and translate for them. The experience was challenging and interesting, and I hope that I served my clients well.

*What is the relationship between your research interests and discussions in the various Nepali public spheres? Do you find that there is a tension between representing Nepal to your colleagues in Europe and making*

*your research theme and conclusions 'relevant' and accessible for discussions in Nepali society?*

Many interesting questions rolled into one! The first thing to say is that I know that I am being consciously and willfully manipulated by the various Thangmi ethnic communities when they ask me to come to their meetings, give speeches or write articles for their magazines. I don't react against this, and rather find the process both natural and interesting. Linguistics is obscure enough that most people remain excluded by the jargon, which I find to be a regrettable if genuine problem, so I endeavour to communicate my ideas in different forms. Issues such as ethnonyms, population statistics, political affiliation and origin tales are hot topics for anthropologists and ethnic awareness groups alike, and I have had many heated disagreements with Thangmi colleagues about these issues. The idea of sharing and returning cultural information is the premise behind the Digital Himalaya Project, and my own work is informed by the same perspective. It is a requirement of Leiden University that my thesis be published, and this will most likely happen in Europe, but I have recently applied for funding (from the Alice Cozzi Heritage Language Foundation and the National Council of Organizations of Less Commonly Taught Languages) for a modest grant to produce a Thangmi-Nepali-English word list and phrasebook for the community in Nepal. This dictionary project has three primary objectives: (1) to describe and document this important endangered tribal language of Nepal for ethnolinguistic posterity; (2) to return the collected linguistic data on the Thangmi language to the ethnic community in a form that meets their needs; and (3) to publish an affordable and pocket-size mini-dictionary in the Devanagari script for use by development workers, Peace Corps volunteers, healthcare professionals and other concerned individuals who are active in the Thangmi-speaking area. A further project in which I am involved is the *Indigenous Fellowship Fund*, established by Judith Pettigrew and Piers Vitebsky, to secure funds for indigenous scholars to receive a stipend to document their own knowledge. I serve on the advisory board to the Fund.

In terms of any 'tension' between representing Nepal to European colleagues versus Nepali or local colleagues in Nepal, no, I don't have problems with this. On occasion, articles I have written which were published outside of Nepal are later republished in Nepal, and this is another way that many scholars succeed in both getting the required academic credit for their work, but also achieve dissemination in Nepal. The bigger problem now is finding a way to discuss the details of the Maoist activities and sympathies at a local level without endangering specific individuals or being misrepresented as a Maoist sympathizer on

account of taking the time to evaluate local motivations for joining the movement.

Finally, a thought about encouraging research within Nepal by Nepali students. For the proceedings of the 5th Himalayan Languages Symposium which I co-edited with Professor Tej Ratna Kansakar (2003b), we received a full publishing subvention from Tribhuvan University and the South Asia Institute at Heidelberg. The result is that we have no need to make any financial return on the book, and the proceeds which result from the sale of this volume will go into a fund to which Nepali graduate students in linguistics are eligible to apply to cover fieldwork costs. By reinvesting in linguistic scholarship in this manner, we hope to encourage aspiring students and researchers in Nepal to pursue their interests in language documentation.

*How has the availability of many Nepali newspapers in the Internet impacted your work as a Nepal researcher? Are their contents of research value?*

It has made a great difference, one result of which is that a certain amount of archival work can now be conducted online rather than in a library. A paradoxical feature of online newspaper archives is that they are both more permanent than an individual issue of a Nepali newspaper, which may be poorly printed and then poorly archived in the publishers own vaults, but also less permanent in that the link may be down, the server may not be responding, or a whole year (as happened with *The Kathmandu Post*) is suddenly removed with neither prior notice nor explanation. I often print out Nepali news items with a header using a web browser, because you never know whether the same article or link will be up there tomorrow. Another important point: for many anthropologists, the 'local news' pages of a newspaper are of more importance than the headline news, at least in terms of gathering information about regional events and the ways in which they are portrayed. Sadly, these articles are often not available online, even though the headlines are. Few people read yesterday's headlines, many more read the features which have a longer shelf life. A further benefit for younger scholars, particularly for students who are going to Nepal for the first time, is that they are able to find out about things like local flights, weather reports, currency exchange rates and the like much more efficiently. With a broadband Internet connection, a handful of Nepali fonts installed and decent computer speakers, you can be based in Utah and be in touch with Nepali news, radio, TV and culture. Remote anthropology is almost here: fieldwork by modem!

*How do you evaluate the state of Nepal Studies in the UK at the moment? Do researchers on Nepal languish at the margins of South Asian Studies in the UK?*

If one can speak of Himalayan studies, rather than just Nepal studies, the UK is doing extremely well. The three old universities, Cambridge, Oxford and London all have senior and highly productive scholars writing and teaching about Nepal and Tibet, and there at least 10 graduate students in these three universities working their ways to PhDs which relate to Nepal in some way. Charles Ramble's position in Oxford (University Lecturer in Tibetan and Himalayan Studies) is an exciting new arrival, and has led to a genuine upsurge in interest in high Himalayan scholarship (you can now study Tibetan at Oxford as well as in London). Naturally, David Gellner's appointment to Oxford only strengthens this, and brings one of the most prolific and active writers on Nepal to Britain's oldest university. Michael Hutt's position at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) has long been the focus for Nepal-related activities, and it's a credit to him that he has managed to sustain the energy in terms of teaching and publishing to keep Nepal Studies alive in London.

*There is a general sense that support for social science research is declining in the UK. If you agree with this reading, can you suggest some ways to arrest this trend so that its negative impact on Nepal Studies can be reversed?*

What is very clearly happening is that funding for social science in the UK is not growing commensurately with funding for 'hard' science, and that we find ourselves left behind in terms of computers, facilities (anthropology departments are often squeezed into disused buildings to which other departments have turned up their noses). At the same time, the idea that anthropological research must somehow 'do' or 'achieve' something, and preferably something which is measurable, has seized the funding councils with its pernicious grip. This has resulted in our generation of students and scholars of Nepal having to be a little more calculating, or pragmatic if you will, in terms of how we apply for research funds. It's no longer sufficient to write 'I want to do this because it's fascinating'. Instead one must qualify and quantify the shape and size of the findings of the research. There is more accountability, some of which is probably quite sensible, much of it sadly not. However, one could argue (somewhat expediently) that the recent high profile case on Gurkha pensions in the UK courts, combined with public discussions on the Maoist insurgency, may help to propel Nepal a little further up the ladder of national (and scholarly) importance and interest.

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