Urban Studies
47(6) 1279–1299, May 2010

Nineteen Days in April: Urban Protest and Democracy in Nepal

Paul Routledge

[Paper first received, February 2008; in final form, October 2008]

Abstract

For 19 days in April 2006, Nepal witnessed a popular uprising against the royal-military coup staged by King Gyanendra in February 2005. The Jana Andolan II (People's Movement II) demanded a return to democracy, the establishment of a lasting peace in Nepal and more political and economic inclusion for the various ethnic and caste groups historically marginalised in Nepali society. Through an analysis of the Jana Andolan (particularly within the urban space of Nepal's capital, Kathmandu) and the subsequent peace process that has unfolded in Nepal, this paper will consider how and why the city was a key terrain for the prosecution of conflict by the people's movement, and how such protest entailed the articulation of particular democratic rights discourses. The paper will also consider the role of civil society within urban protest in order to reflect upon debates concerning liberal and radical democracy, and the 'politics of the governed'.

State of Reversal

On 22 April 2006, hundreds of thousands of people filled Kathmandu's 27 km long ring road, effectively encircling the city.[1] Amid road blockades, burning tyres, liberated spaces and destroyed police posts, the demand of the protestors was for a democratic republic, in a country that had experienced persistent political corruption, a ten-year Maoist insurgency and a royal-military coup. For 19 days in April 2006, Nepal witnessed a popular uprising against the royal-military coup staged by King Gyanendra in February 2005. The Jana Andolan II (People's Movement II, named after the first people's movement of 1990) demanded a return to democracy, the establishment of a lasting peace in Nepal and more political and economic inclusion for the various ethnic and caste groups historically marginalised in Nepali society. The movement was successful in toppling the King's direct rule of the country, forging the way for the reinstatement of political parties in

Paul Routledge is in the Department of Geography, University of Glasgow, East Quadrangle, University Avenue, Glasgow, G12 8QQ, UK. E-mail: Paul.Routledge@ges.gla.ac.uk.

0042-0980 Print/1360-063X Online

DOI: 10.1177/0042098009360221

the political life of Nepal, the establishment of an interim government and the holding of national elections (in April 2008).

A consideration of this "state of reversal" and "collective deliverance from the stings of command" (Canetti, 1962, p. 67) provides insights into the character of Nepal's transition to democracy. Through an analysis of the activities of the Jana Andolan (particularly within the urban space of Nepal's capital, Kathmandu) and the subsequent peace process that has unfolded in Nepal during 2006–08, this paper will consider how the city was a key target and terrain for the prosecution of conflict by the people's movement and how such protest entailed the articulation of particular democratic rights discourses. The paper will also consider the role of civil society within urban protest in order to reflect upon debates concerning liberal and radical democracy, and the 'politics of the governed' (Chatterjee, 2004).

In order to 'place' an analysis of the Jana Andolan and its aftermath, this paper will first consider certain debates regarding the practice of democracy, before proceeding to discuss the political economy of Nepal (and the importance, therein, of Kathmandu) since the initial transition to democracy in 1990 (including the delineation of caste power in the country, the effects of the Maoist insurgency upon the integrity of the Nepali state and the role of the monarchy). The paper will then consider how democratic practices have been articulated prior to, during and after the Jana Andolan of 2006 in the light of the theoretical debates concerning democracy and the role of civil society.[2] In so doing, the paper will consider the importance of the urban in the prosecution of conflict in Nepal.

Liberal Democracy, Radical Democracy and the 'Politics of the Governed'

Amongst the plethora of debates about the character of democracy, I want to draw out three strands that are pertinent to discussions about events in Nepal—namely, liberal democracy, radical democracy and what Partha Chatterjee (2004) terms the 'politics of the governed'. First, liberal interpretations of democracy envisage the practice of fair, competitive elections between individuals, organisations and political parties for political positions within the state; inclusive participation of all social groups; and civil liberties such as freedom of expression, freedom of the press and freedom of association. From the perspective of liberal democracy, civil society is a terrain of social action consisting of interest-groups that do not question the dominant social, economic or cultural values within society (Olesen, 2005, pp. 155–165).

Secondly, radical democracy, as espoused by Chantal Mouffe (1993, 2000, 2002, 2005), conceives of the political as premised upon a relational understanding of identity constituted through (for example, religious, ethnic and economic) difference and inequality. Radical democratic practice is open ended, permeated by inequalities of power and centred on conflict and contestation between adversarial collective political identities. Mouffe espouses an agonistic model of democracy, where 'enemies' are reconfigured as 'adversaries' who share common democratic values (for example, of equality and liberty) and whose differences (and the conflicts that arise from them) can be negotiated through democratic procedures (such as voting) that are accepted by the adversaries. Radical democracy views civil society in a Gramscian sense as an integral part of the state and as a sphere of hegemony, albeit a politicised arena of conflict and the development of contentious identities and counter-hegemonic claims (Olesen, 2005, p. 179).

Thirdly, the 'politics of the governed' (Chatterjee, 2004) is concerned with the relationship between political participation and forms of governance, in particular, the role the post-colonial state (in the global South) plays

in shaping its subjects. Focusing primarily upon subaltern politics in India, Chatterjee draws a distinction between two ways in which the modern state views people: as rights-bearing citizens, and as populations, or 'subjects' (in the Foucauldian sense) who are targets of government policy. He argues that the post-colonial state deals with its people primarily as governed populations and that this mode of operation has been reinforced in part through its expanded interventions conducted in the name of 'development', whereby groups of people have been classified (for example, by means of caste, ethnicity) into suitable targets for administrative, legal, economic or electoral policy. Chatterjee argues that, under such conditions, the politics of civil society is élitist, dominated by NGOs and other institutions that treat communities as subjects through discourses (and policies) of reform that serve to marginalise the politics of poor people. Therefore, lacking full citizenship, the marginalised make claims on the state from the political space of negotiation and brokerage that Chatterjee calls 'political society'. This is a space of possibility where new forms of democratic representation can be created and where the needs of the marginalised are voiced (for example, through social movements) and are sometimes met, but always as conditional claims rather than formal rights.

Urban Space, Protest and Democracy

Following the 1990 people's movement, there was a clear spatial outcome to the struggle for democracy in Nepal. Whereas, in the cities, people experienced greater freedom of expression and association, in rural Nepal these freedoms continued to be seriously compromised (Routledge, 1997). Given the temporary importance of the city—as terrain and target—for the articulation of protest by the Jana Andolan of 2006, it raises the question of the opportunities and limits of the urban for the prosecution of more lasting democratic change in Nepal and what kind of change that will be. Before discussing how various elements of the aforementioned interpretations of democracy are pertinent to an understanding of contemporary politics in Nepal, I shall briefly describe Nepal's political economy following the revolution of 1990.

The Political Economy of Nepal since 1990

Economic Liberalisation and the Role of Kathmandu

With the restoration of democracy in 1990, following the Jana Andolan I, a popular movement against the *panchayat* regime (see Routledge, 1997),[3] the new constitution confirmed the position of the King as a constitutional monarch, with political parties competing for electoral office. There have been three general elections (in 1991, 1994, and 1999) since 1990, and 12 changes of government between 1991 and 2002.[4]

Since the mid 1980s, there has been an ideological shift to economic liberalisation and market-led approaches to development, according to the conditions of donor aid and IMF structural adjustment programmes, through deregulating capital and labour markets, removing price controls, privatising state-owned enterprises, liberalising trade and introducing convertibility of the domestic currency (Sharma, 1997). Development functions have been increasingly 'contracted out' to non-government organisations (NGOs)—partly as a response to the failures of government institutions, but also contributing to their increased decline. The increasing privatisation of state enterprises has been supported both by the Nepali Congress (NC) and the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist) [CPN-UML] parties, the two dominant electoral political parties in the country until 2008 (Gellner, 2005).

However, as Rankin (2004) notes, foreign aid transformed Nepal's economy, as India, China and the US competed with each other for disbursements of aid.[5] Foreign aid financed infrastructure growth, such as motorable roadways, postal and telecommunications facilities, irrigation projects, schools, rural development projects, malarial eradication in the southern Terai region and economic development (such as import substitution industries).

Nevertheless, economically, Nepal has low rates of growth and the heaviest reliance on agriculture of any country in the world (57 per cent of GDP and 80 per cent of the labour force) (Thapa and Sijapati, 2006). According to the UN Human Development Report of 2006, 38 per cent of Nepal's population are extremely poor and cannot meet their basic needs, annual per capita income is US$ 220 and Nepal is 142nd (out of 177 countries) on the UNDP's Human Development Index (HDI).[6] Life expectancy is 62.6 years and adult literacy 48.6 per cent. However, these figures mask regional disparities. For example, in the mountain regions of the far west of the country, life expectancy is only 42 years and adult literacy 37 per cent (Thapa and Sijapati, 2006).

Nepal is characterised by an economic dualism that is manifested in the position of Kathmandu, the nation's capital, where most of the political, economic and cultural (especially caste) power of the country is concentrated (see later). Like all cities, Kathmandu is a product of spatially specific relations (Massey, 2005). Nepal's capital is a product of a complex mix of caste, ethnic, economic and political relations that make it the locus where decisions are made regarding the appropriation, distribution and realisation of economic surpluses generated by production in the peripheral areas outside the Kathmandu valley (especially the Terai and the hills). The city's location—in a high fertile valley situated between the Himalayas to the north and the Gangetic plains to the south—has supported urbanised societies since the fourth century CE, has enabled the flourishing of a varied Newar culture and has situated the Kathmandu valley as a primary trade route between Tibet, China and India (Rankin, 2004). As a result, the urban centres within the valley, and Kathmandu in particular, came to dominate the economic life of Nepal. The city is the country's capital, home to the King and the government, the key site where political decision-making is undertaken and a key nexus of transport and telecommunications; the majority of Nepal's economic investment is made within the Kathmandu valley (Routledge, 1997; Thapa and Sijapati, 2006).[7] For example, Nepal's three key industries in the 1990s, carpets, garments and tourism, were all primarily located in Kathmandu.[8] The HDI for urban areas in 2000 was 0.616, far above that of rural areas (0.446) where over 80 per cent of the population lives (Thapa and Sijapati, 2006). The primary importance of the city in Nepal's political economy ensured that it would become the key target and terrain of resistance during the events of April 2006. The country's economic disparities are further accentuated by the concentration of political, economic and cultural power in a caste hierarchy.

Caste and Ethnic Power

There are more than 60 caste and ethnic groups in Nepal.[9] However, according to a gender and social exclusion assessment undertaken by the World Bank and DFID Nepal (2005), dimensions of exclusion, poverty and inequality cut across gender, caste, ethnicity and location. Broadly speaking, males have dominant social status over females; the Bahun (or Brahman, 12.74 per cent of Nepal's population), Chhetri (15.8 per cent of Nepal's population), Thakuri (1.47 per cent) and Sanyasi (0.88 per cent) castes are the culturally, politically and resource-dominant groups, with Dalits the most disadvantaged; those of Indo-Nepalese ethnicity have

dominant status over Janajati (indigenous) groups; and hill dwellers (Parbatiyas) have dominant social status over plains (Terai) dwellers (Madhesis). The Newar, an indigenous group from the capital, is also better-off economically and politically but faces cultural discrimination (Lawoti, 2007).

On all major indices such as poverty levels, per capita household consumption, incomes, health and education indicators, infant mortality and literacy, the Bahun/Chhetri hill Hindu groups fare far better than the marginalised groups (i.e. women, Dalits, Janajatis and Madhesis), although there are a wide range of variations (for example, high-caste women fare better than low-caste women; certain inequalities exist within Janajati and Madeshi groups) (World Bank and DFID, 2005). The restoration of democracy in 1990 saw an explosion of identity movements making claims regarding their historical marginalisation (Gellner, 1997; Pfaff-Czarnecka, 1999; Hangen, 2000).

The Bahun/Chhetri hill Hindu groups and Newars dominate Nepal's politics, the executive, judiciary, Parliament, civil administration, academia, industry and commerce, civil society, local government and educational and cultural leadership.[10] Although they jointly comprise 36.37 per cent of the population, in 1999 they were holding more than 80 per cent of the leadership positions in the important arenas of governance. Even the relatively more open realms such as the media and civil society demonstrate the high exclusion of traditionally marginalised groups. Women's presence in public positions, including that of Bahun/Chhetri hill Hindu women, has been insignificant as well. Women's representation never exceeded 6 per cent in the House of Representatives (HOR) formed in 1991, 1994 and 1999. Some of the cabinets had no women at all. Only one Dalit got elected to the HOR and not a single Dalit was made a cabinet member during the democratic epoch from 1990 to 2002 (Lawoti, 2007).

The weak representation of disadvantaged groups in the Parliament and the cabinet means that even when power is shared between legislature and the executive, disadvantaged groups do not get access to it. The dominant group members, who control the major political parties, have, effectively, shared power among themselves (Lawoti, 2007). Hence, the post-1990 democratic epoch in Nepal witnessed widespread corruption, grinding poverty, the politicisation of the administration and the continued exclusion of caste and ethnic minorities from the governance of the polity and the economic wealth generated in the country. It was against this backdrop that the Maoist insurgency was to emerge.

The Maoist Insurgency

Although the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) [CPN (M)] had been preparing their armed struggle for some years before, the Maoist insurgency was finally launched in February 1996 and was aimed at the overthrow of the political-economic *status quo*. It grew rapidly with the support and participation of a large section of the alienated population, including the excluded ethnic/caste groups particularly in the impoverished rural areas of the west and far west of Nepal and the Terai region (Lawoti, 2003).

The intention of the armed struggle was to confiscate the lands of feudal and landlord elements and to redistribute them amongst the landless and poor peasants (i.e. land to the tiller) and to effect a 'proletarian revolution' completely to reorganise and restructure the Nepali state. The Maoists pursued a three-pronged strategy, directly borrowed from Mao Zedong: to seize the enemies' arms; to encircle the cities from the countryside (which by the time the army was deployed against them in November 2001, they had largely achieved); and the waging of 'protracted war' in three stages. First, strategic defence (i.e. the waging of guerrilla war and the creation of popular fronts); secondly, strategic stalemate (i.e.

through control of the countryside, the state is reduced to protecting areas that remain under its control, particularly urban areas, and especially the Kathmandu valley); and, thirdly, strategic offence (i.e. the final military offensive against the state). By the end of 2002, the Maoists believed that they had reached the second stage and were preparing to launch their final offensive (Thapa and Sijapati, 2006). However, despite this military approach, the Maoists have frequently offered, or engaged in, negotiations with the state (for example, in 2001 and 2003, there were peace talks between the Maoists and the government).

There has been a huge economic and human cost to the insurgency. In 2001/02 Nepal's GDP contracted by 0.6 per cent compared with a growth rate of 4.7 per cent the previous year. Per capita income for the Nepali population for the same period dropped from £121 to £114. In 2000, tourism had generated £80 million a year to the Nepali economy. However, tourist arrivals declined by 17 per cent in 2001 and decreased a further 28 per cent in 2002. Health care centres, schools, community centres and local government offices were burnt down in over 300 communities. Telephone and radio towers were destroyed, leaving over 20 districts with limited, or no, communications. Frequent checkpoints, government curfews and booby-trapped roads have led to reduced transport within and between districts. Frequent general strikes (*bandhs*) have cost the economy RS630 million (£4.76 million) a day. However, despite its political and economic importance in Nepal, Kathmandu remained largely inured from the effects of the insurgency (Thapa and Sijapati, 2006). As a Maoist activist noted

> Kathmandu did not really suffer during the 10-year insurgency. Indeed, the capital's economy was booming at that time, favouring the Kathmandu establishment, that is the business and media élites, the class and caste hierarchies, and the mainstream political party establishment (interview, Kathmandu, 2007).

There has also been a massive increase in military spending—Rs1 billion in 1990/91 (£7.5 million) to Rs7 billion in 2002/03 in £52.8 million—so that, by 2006, the army and police consumed over 15 per cent of the total national budget (Thapa and Sijapati, 2006).

There have also been numerous human rights violations committed by the army, the armed police and the Maoists. After 10 years of fighting, over 13 000 lives have been lost and there has been about £1 billion in infrastructure damage, as well as the displacement of millions to Kathmandu, and abroad to India. As the Maoist insurgency escalated, NC and CPN-UML governments have enforced press censorship, suspended civil rights and imposed a brutal counter-insurgency—eventually deploying the Royal Nepal Army (RNA) in late 2001. The deployment of the RNA against the Maoists was eventually to lead to a military stalemate between the two forces. The combined strength of the state forces was insufficient to launch an effective counter-insurgency and, as a result, significant numbers of troops were withdrawn to Kathmandu, for the protection and management of the capital, the country's economic and political heart (Cherian, 2006a).[11]

The Monarchy

The role of the king in Nepal has been a principal factor in the development of the country's polity. The House of Gorkha conquered different kingdoms, principalities and indigenous peoples from 1769 to form what would become the kingdom of Nepal. The monarchy weakened after 1846 for a century when the Rana family effectively assumed autocratic control of the governance of the country. The Ranas introduced a Civil Code in 1854 that imposed the Hindu caste hierarchy on non-Hindus. The Ranas were thrown out in 1951, through an armed movement led by the Nepali Congress party in alliance with King Tribhuvan, after which the polity remained open for a decade. The first

parliamentary election was held in 1959 but, after 18 months, King Mahendra (the son of Tribhuvan who had died in 1955) deposed the democratic government and introduced the *panchayat* system that lasted for 30 years. During these periods, the dominant ethnic/caste groups consolidated their position in the polity and society at the cost of other groups (Lawoti, 2007).

The *panchayat* system continued under King Birendra (Mahendra's son), until it was successfully challenged by the Jana Andolan I in 1990 (see Routledge, 1997). A multiparty democracy ensued with the King retaining much of his power (not least control of the army). A crisis developed when, on 1 June 2001, the entire royal family were massacred and the king's brother, Gyanendra, assumed the throne. A state of emergency was declared in November 2001 and the RNA replaced the armed police in the counter-insurgency against the Maoists. The King dissolved the House of Representatives (the Nepalese parliament) in May 2002 and, in October 2002, the King dismissed the Prime Minister and the elected government and assumed executive authority (see Thapa, 2007).

However, by the time the RNA engaged the Maoists, they found a guerrilla army that was battle hardened, while the army itself was not battle ready and, due to its UN commitments, unable to deploy as many troops as it would have liked. As a result, by the end of 2002, there was a military and political stalemate which continued until February 2005, when the King assumed complete control of the country: in effect, initiating a Royal-military coup. As one Informal Sector Service Centre (INSEC) activist noted

> Prior to the royal takeover, the presence of the mainstream political parties in the villages had been greatly eroded. The national-level leadership of the mainstream parties were absent in the districts; the villagers were terrified of the Maoists and the security forces; and the political party cadres had also vacated the villages due to the Maoist insurgency. As a result, the mainstream political parties had been politically weakened. Informed of this by military intelligence, the palace saw this as an opportunity to exert its influence, by dissolving the government and assuming control of the country (interview, Kathmandu, 2007).

There followed a clamp-down on civil and political society: leaders of political parties and human rights organisations were arrested; a ban was instituted on the media, including the arrest of journalists and the raiding of the offices of publications critical of the take-over; and there were travel restrictions imposed on movement throughout the country for a period of six months following the coup (INSEC, 2007).

Democracy in Nepal: The Prelude to the Jana Andolan

To understand Nepal's *movement* towards democracy requires a consideration of the role played by civil society in the country. The term *nagrik samaj* (civil society) dates back to the revolution of 1990 and the emergence of modern, urban, élitist and rights-based civil society organisations (CSOs). Unlike non-government organisations (NGOs), which have tended to define themselves in non-political terms, CSOs have sought to influence state actions and political processes (for example, concerning freedom of expression, association and assembly) while functioning within the bounds of the state-defined public sphere and while often closely collaborating with political parties, market institutions and Western aid donors (Dahal, 2006, pp. 4, 29, 33). However, as Dahal notes

> Civil society in Nepal is so variegated and disparate in terms of size, nature, function, character and identity, that it is difficult to develop a precise definition (Dahal, 2006, p. 21).

Civil society in Nepal is certainly dominated by élitist NGOs and CSOs as Chatterjee (2004) has argued. However, in the context of the Jana Andolan, this has not marginalised the poor. While some organisations have acted within a liberal interpretation of civil society (as a terrain of social action that does not question dominant societal values), other organisations have viewed civil society as a politicised terrain of counter-hegemonic claims. This latter interpretation was particularly apparent as resistance to the coup developed. Through the Jana Andolan, the marginalised were able to make claims on the state, but did so in collaboration with more élitist civil society actors and political parties, as noted in what follows.

Despite the restrictions implemented as a result of the coup, a range of civil society organisations (CSOs) (for example, INSEC) and NGOs (for example, the NGO Federation) had been still working in rural Nepal, through their networks of support, filling the void created by the absence of the mainstream political parties. After the travel ban was lifted, the CSOs formed a temporary coalition (which included a range of organisations including the Civil Movement for Democracy and Peace, the National Federation of Indigenous People, the Nepal Bar Association and the Federation of Nepalese Journalists) that held public meetings across Nepal concerning the royal take-over and its threat to human rights in the country. They also initiated contacts with foreign diplomats concerning the royal take-over (interviews, Kathmandu, 2007). One outcome of the work of CSOs such as INSEC was the declaration of human rights for Nepal (known as Agenda 19) that received the support of 92 per cent of the members of the dissolved House of Representatives, including the signatures of the mainstream political party leaders. Agenda 19 was translated into Nepali and distributed across Nepal, generating a discourse of people's fundamental human rights that gave momentum to the emerging resistance to the royal regime (interviews, Kathmandu, 2007). The mainstream political parties put aside their political differences and formed the Seven Party Alliance (SPA), a coalition of seven Nepali political parties seeking the re-introduction of democracy in Nepal.[12]

Meanwhile, the Maoist response to the coup during February and March 2006, included a succession of general strikes, shutdowns and blockades at the local and regional levels (Cherian, 2006a). At the international level, foreign governments and international aid agencies cut crucial financial and military aid to Nepal. For example, on 25 February 2005, the World Bank informed the Nepal government that it was suspending its US$70 million budgetary support for the current fiscal year. The US, India and the UK, Kathmandu's principal military backers, suspended arms supplies to Nepal (Cherian, 2006b, 2006c).

However, the most important political development was to be the decision, by the Maoists, to abandon the 'people's war' and join mainstream multiparty politics. A three-month ceasefire was announced by the Maoists on 3 September 2005. During the autumn of 2005, both mainstream political parties, the Maoists and CSOs held meetings in New Delhi, India, with Indian and other foreign diplomats concerning the situation in Nepal. The result was that, on 22 November 2005, the SPA and the Maoist leadership announced a 12-point agreement, that committed all signatories to oppose and end the 'autocratic monarchy' through a people's movement; to form an interim government composed of all signatory political parties in order to hold constituent assembly elections (a long-term Maoist demand);[13] to place the Maoist armed forces and the RNA under the supervision of the United Nations; to establish a peaceful, competitive multiparty system of governance, civil liberties, press freedom, human rights and the rule of law within Nepal; and to call upon civil society, professional

organisations, the press and intellectuals, and people of all communities and regions, to participate actively in the people's movement.[14]

In the words of senior Maoist, Baburam Bhattarai

> The new objective reality of the country is that the new 'two pillars' of parliamentary and revolutionary democratic forces join hands to uproot the outdated and rotten third 'pillar' of monarchy (quoted in Sahni, 2006).

More cynically, an activist in the Citizen's Movement for Democracy and Peace claimed: "It was a marriage of convenience for all of the signatories" (interview, Kathmandu, 2007). Certainly, for the mainstream political parties and CSOs, the agreement began the process of bringing the Maoists back into the mainstream political process, which all parties favoured. For the Indian government, faced with a Maoist insurgency of their own (that had links with the Nepali Maoists), the end to the armed struggle in Nepal was important geopolitically. For the Maoists, the agreement presented a possibility to move their political agenda beyond the stalemate that their armed struggle had reached. Moreover, the coalition between the SPA and the Maoists, prepared the ground for the emergence of the Jana Andolan. As an activist in the General Federation of Nepalese Trade Unions (GEFONT) commented

> Immediately after the 12-point agreement, the mass meetings of the political parties took on a different flavour, because with the Maoists brought in, the hope could be for democracy and peace. The numbers at public and party meetings suddenly surged (interview, Kathmandu, 2007).

Democracy in Nepal: the Jana Andolan II

From the beginning of 2006, the agitation against the King began to take shape across Nepal. The principal actors in the movement were: the political parties; CSOs such as the Citizens' Movement for Peace and Democracy (CMPD) and the Professional Alliance for Peace and Democracy (PAPAD) comprising lawyers, teachers, engineers, professors, doctors and journalists, and the charismatic individuals who fronted these organisations; NGOs; a coalition of four trade union confederations;[15] the Maoists; and a range of women's groups including such human rights organisations as the Women's Rehabilitation Centre (WOREC), Women's Security Pressure Group, Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRD) and the Alliance Against Traffic in Women in Nepal (ATTWIN). In addition, the women's wings of each of the principal political parties, trades unions and peasant organisations were mobilised such as the All Nepal Women's Association (sister organisation to All Nepal Peasant Federation) and the Centre Women Workers' Department (women's wing of GEFONT).[16]

Confronted by demonstrations across Nepal, and aware of the importance of the capital to the maintenance of royal control, the government responded with a ban on mass meetings, assemblies, rallies and sit-in programmes within Kathmandu's ring road (see Figure 1), a curfew between 11pm and 4am, and the cutting of telephone and mobile phone connections. Municipal elections (held on 8 February 2006) were boycotted by the SPA and faced a general strike organised by the Maoists. As a result, average voter turnout was under 20 per cent, with Kathmandu witnessing a 14 per cent turnout (Cherian, 2006b).[17] The Maoists increased armed attacks on security personnel in urban centres such as Nepalgunj, Biratnagar and Pokhara.

Joint Jana Andolan Co-ordination Committees (consisting of members of the SPA but liaising with CSO cadres, NGOs and villagers) began to organise a new

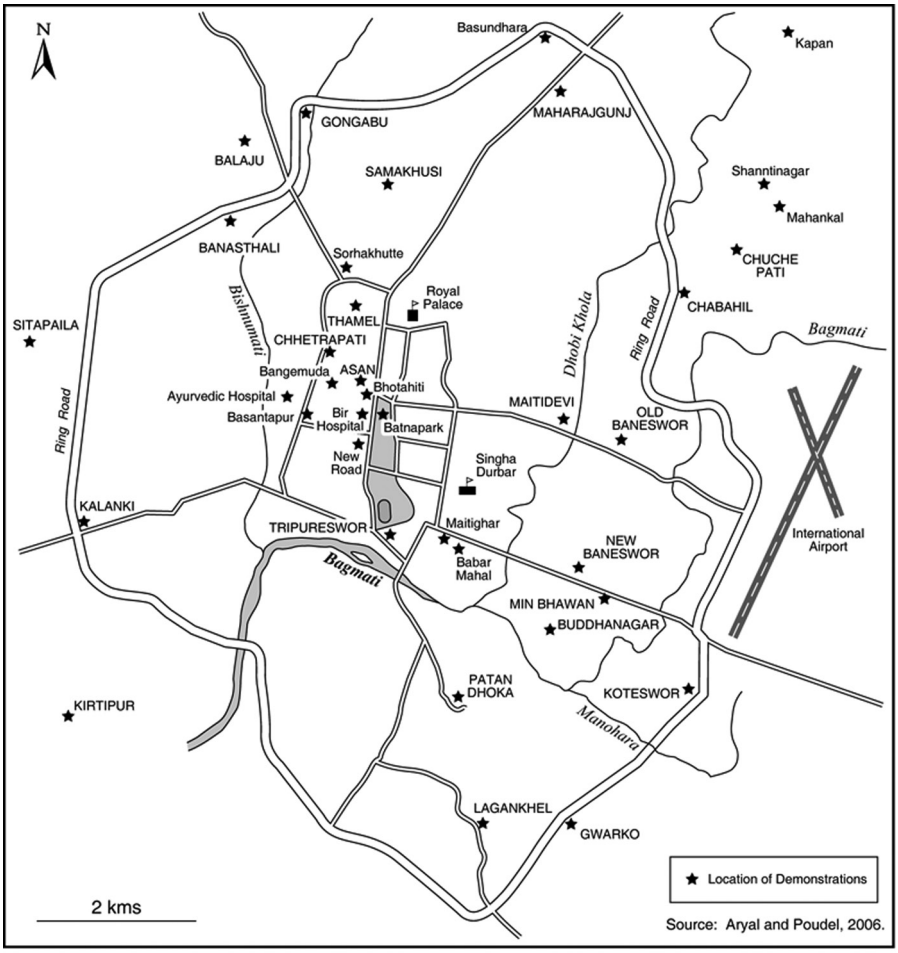

Figure 1. Kathmandu: sites of urban resistance during April 2006. Source: Aryal and Poudel (2006).

phase of programmes from 13 March 2006, with a 'Let's go to Kathmandu' campaign and a nation-wide protest against price rises (Aryal and Poudel, 2006). Further, the Maoists announced a unilateral cease-fire in the Kathmandu valley with effect from 3 April 2006. As an activist in PAPAD commented

> When the Maoists stated publicly that they supported the movement, they would participate and they would not restrict people from participating in the agitation, it gave a great boost to the movement as it removed the fear (for example, to travel) from the villagers (interview, Kathmandu, 2007).

However, the Maoists continued to launch armed attacks on security installations and government offices in various other parts of the country (Cherian, 2006c). Protests and strikes took place across rural and urban Nepal, in particular in cities such as Pokhara, Janakpur and Biratnagar.

Urban spaces constituted the key arenas in which to bring together the diverse groups that comprised the Jana Andolan's

participants. They provided accessible places for bringing marginalised groups (such as peasants) into public activism and they also provided key sites for broader mobilisations (Sites, 2007). Indeed, urban-based activism has benefited from the presence of mobilising structures and resources (for example, universities, media, state facilities, industries, ethnic and religious organisations). In addition, the Maoist insurgency had forced many opposing activists to migrate to the cities and, in particular, to the capital (Karki, 2006).

The subsequent targeting of Kathmandu had a particular spatial and political resonance, since the capital—as a product of particular political-economic relations that had favoured its development relative to the rest of the country—was the locus of royal, political, administrative and economic power within Nepal. The central offices of the national political parties, and of many NGOs and CSOs, are located in the capital.[18] Moreover, the dense concentration of population within the city (800 000) and the Kathmandu valley (1 600 000) facilitated mass mobilisations against the regime. As a CPN-UML activist argued

> The main aim of the movement was to capture the cities and paralyse the system. Therefore the agitations focused mainly on the cities throughout Nepal and particularly Kathmandu, since this is where the power of the regime was located (interview, Kathmandu, 2007).

The united front between the SPA and the Maoists called for a four-day nationwide general strike on 5–9 April 2006 and the Maoists called for a cease-fire in the Kathmandu valley. A curfew was announced by the government on 8 April. On 9 April, the SPA announced that it intended to continue its protests indefinitely and called for a tax boycott. In Kathmandu, CSOs and SPA party cadres went door-to-door organising people to participate in the movement, through public meetings, rallies and demonstrations. In Nepal's villages, where there were few cadres, the people took the initiative. Indeed, according to many activists, demonstrations were as much spontaneously organised (by individuals and communities) as they were by the SPA (interviews, Kathmandu, 2007). Moreover, women's groups helped to mobilise the urban population of Kathmandu particularly after political party leaders were arrested, as noted by a female activist from GEFONT

> We came together and organised separate action programmes for women, speaking in different places, distributing handbills and taking part in demonstrations and strikes. Tens of thousands of women protested on the streets and organised all-women's rallies, and comprised about half of the total people mobilised. Women were arrested and beaten by the police, and the women were also killed (interview, on-line, 2008).

The Joint Jana Andolan Co-ordination Committees also used the government's propensity to arrest demonstrators for their own purposes, as one Committee member noted

> One tactic was to get the SPA personalities arrested—who would be recognised by the media and the people—to act as an incentive to the movement. Meanwhile, other activists deliberately avoided arrest so that they could organise the agitations (interview, Kathmandu, 2007).

In response, the government announced plans to step up its enforcement of the curfew and claimed that the Maoists had infiltrated the protests. The Ministry of Home Affairs issued a statement on 5 April 2006, alerting the country to the involvement of "the terrorist group" (i.e. the Maoists) in the "anti-people so-called general strike" and requested Nepalis to: postpone trips to their capital; not participate in the strike; carry identity cards; and notify

security forces of any suspicious 'terrorist' activities. In the half-page announcement, the word 'terrorist' was mentioned seven times (Aryal and Poudel, 2006, p. 216). As Mitchell (2003) notes, the constriction of public space becomes part of a wider attack on civil liberties and progressive politics, etc. The government's discourse of terrorism was deployed to deny others the right both to the city (particularly Kathmandu) and to all public space within Nepal.

However, protests continued in the following days, with crowds increasing to sizes estimated at 100 000 to 200 000 in Kathmandu in various estimates—more than 10 per cent of the city population. According to an activist in the CMPD

> In the climax of the movement, there were 5.5 million people on the streets of Nepal. Every village was on the streets, people were organising themselves, no-one had an organised plan, although youths were at the forefront in all the villages (interview, Kathmandu, 2007).

In such circumstances, the struggle for democratic rights in Nepal predictably produced a landscape of conflict. In Kirtipur, located in the Kathmandu valley and the location for Tribhuvan University, university professors and student leaders organised the residents to blockade the entry to the town and to 'liberate' it (from army or police incursion) for the 19 days of the rebellion (interviews, Kathmandu, 2007). Elsewhere, road-blocks were organised by protestors, police posts were set aflame and martyrs of the movement (i.e. those killed by security forces) were commemorated at road intersections with flowers, the burning of incense and the displaying of photographs of the deceased. Frequent protests within the ring road of the capital further challenged the government's authority (see Figure 1). The entire country observed the *bandh*, as a Nepali Congress affiliated student activist acknowledged

> Peasants locked up their homes and came to the city. Schools, shops, businesses and government offices were closed for 19 days (interview, Kathmandu, 2007).

On 22 April, as noted at the beginning of this paper, protestors filled the ring road, in effect encircling the capital, in an (albeit unintentional) symbolic echo of the traditional Maoist strategy. The symbolism went further: Kathmandu, the site of economic, caste and political power in Nepal was *gheraoed*[19] by protestors demanding 'democracy', 'peace' and a republic. The conflict was played out across Nepal, but took on a particular relevance in Kathmandu (and other key urban centres), as protests reflected the wider struggle for a just and democratic polity. In such urban spaces, civil society became both the terrain and target of public intervention where different interest-groups challenged the political, economic and cultural values enshrined in the coup. An activist with the CPN UML-affiliated All Nepal Peasant's Federation argued

> Peasants coming from the rural areas comprised the majority of the demonstrators on the ring road and were the major force of the Jana Andolan. They were organised by the SPA and the Maoists. The encirclement of Kathmandu, on the ring road, showed that a mass invasion of the city was possible, that there was a potential for people to enter the city and do what they liked, such as march on the palace. It also symbolically showed the solidarity between the people and boosted their spirit. The movement would not have succeeded if this had not happened. They were the main pillar of the success of the Jana Andolan (interview, Kathmandu, 2007).

As a counter-hegemonic practice, and following Chatterjee (2004), I would argue that the Jana Andolan represented a space of political possibility where new forms of democratic representation were demanded and where the needs of the politically, economically and culturally

marginalised were voiced. However, *contra* Chatterjee (2004), the Jana Andolan represented a politics of the increasingly ungovernable, as the movement pressed for formal democratic rights—epitomised by the demand to end the coup, abolish the monarchy and reconstitute Nepal's polity—rather than conditional claims.

An initial royal offer of compromise on 21 April was rejected by the SPA as demonstrations continued throughout the country. The king finally succumbed to the demands of the Jana Andolan and reinstated the House of Representatives that he had dissolved in 2002 (Aryal and Poudel, 2006). The Jana Andolan succeeded in toppling the coup and undermining the position of the monarchy in Nepal, at the cost of 25 killed, 5000 wounded and 15 000 arrested (INSEC, 2007).

A new government was established on 24 April 2006. On 27 April 2006, the Maoists announced a unilateral three-month truce. In the face of popular protest against government delays in instituting the demands of the Jana Andolan, one of the first acts of the new government was to declare areas around Singh Durbar in Kathmandu prohibited for demonstrations. The District Administration office for the capital prohibited the organising of assemblies, rallies, sit-ins, hunger-strikes and *gheraos* in parts of Kathmandu. The government also banned broadcasts of *saarbajanik sunuwai* (public hearings) on Nepal television, thereby curbing citizen rights to criticise the government (INSEC, 2007).

On 18 May 2006, the newly constructed House of Representatives (i.e. the parliament) unanimously voted to strip the King of many of his powers, depriving him of any role in the state, and brought the army under civilian control.[20] On 16 June 2006, an eight-point agreement between the SPA and the Maoists committed all parties to: a competitive, multiparty democracy; the upholding of civil liberties; the rule of law; and a request to the United Nations to assist in the management of arms and armies in the peace process. An interim constitution was framed in order to form an interim government with the intention of restructuring the state to "resolve class-based, racial, regional and gender-based problems, through the election of a constituent assembly" (INSEC, 2007, pp. 342–343).

Certainly, women activists, particularly in the women's wings of all of the major political parties, pushed for changes in the law that discriminated on the basis of gender. Indeed, on 30 May 2006, the House of Representatives declared a 33 per cent reservation for women in all political bodies as well as the abolition of untouchability in Nepal. Women's groups agitated for the restructuring of social, economic and political structures in Nepal to eliminate gender discrimination. As one female activist in GEFONT noted

> Women identified a women's agenda and created space in the political process. They created a base for restructuring Nepal, for deciding what and how it could make a difference to women's lives. Such issues as abolishing patriarchal values and feudalism, and questions of landownership, head of the family, women's leadership and economic opportunities (interview, on-line, 2008).

As an outcome of the 12-point agreement and the Jana Andolan, the interim constitution adopted some of the key issues of the Maoist agenda. In November 2006, a peace agreement was reached that effectively ended the Maoist 'people's war'; two months later, an interim constitution was promulgated and an interim legislature was convened, with the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) as a major presence. The definition of the country's very identity was reconfigured to reflect its demographic plurality, through actions such as dropping the controversial provision that declared Nepal to be a Hindu country and a promise to redress the exclusion felt by many social groups. The Constituent Assembly (CA) elections were arranged for June 2007, postponed until November 2007 and then postponed again, finally taking place in April 2008. These

elections would determine amongst other issues, the future of the monarchy. In addition, the CA would: restructure the Nepali state as per the Jana Andolan mandate; ensure proportional representation (PR) at all levels of the state administration; institutionalise people's sovereignty and rights; and formulate and enforce the law of the land.[21]

While the primary issue for the movement was to challenge the coup, other issues concerning ethnic rights and the meaning of democracy simmered below the surface. Despite the movement articulating broad demands for 'peace' (i.e. against Maoist and state violence) and 'democracy' (i.e. against the royal-military coup) different notions of democracy compete with one another in Nepal.

Discourses of Democracy

Democratic rights discourse in Nepal has involved four broad understandings of democracy (Gellner, 2007a), all of which are articulated *in some way* in contemporary Nepali politics. The practice of politics in Nepal involves elements of liberal and radical democracy and the 'politics of the governed'.

First, under the constitutional monarchy, democracy was translated as *prajātantra* (literally rule by the subjects [of a king]). The 'people' here were understood (by the protestors) as a subjugated, dominated people (as in Foucault's terms) and hence in the Jana Andolan alternative understandings of democracy gained currency, particularly *ganatantra* (understood to mean republicanism in Nepal—i.e. abolishing the monarchy), and *loktantra* ('rule by the people') (Gellner, 2005, 2007a; Dixit, 2006; interviews, Kathmandu, 2007). The two terms were also joined (*loktrantik ganatantra*), to denote a democractic republic with the monarchy abolished (Dixit, 2006). Indeed, in December 2007, Nepal's Parliament passed the third amendment bill in the Interim Constitution by an overwhelming majority, declaring Nepal a federal democratic republic (thereby abolishing the monarchy), subject to endorsement by the first meeting of the Constituent Assembly.

Secondly, *loktantra* has been adopted by those advocating liberal democracy (i.e. the mainstream political parties). As noted earlier, liberal democracy presupposes that there should be competing parties, a free market, private property and an independent judiciary (as noted in the 12-point agreement). Basic rights (for example, freedom of speech and assembly, the rule of law) and facilities are guaranteed by the state and a leading role in the economy is given to private enterprise. The third interpretation of democracy comes from the Maoists, which they term revolutionary, or 'people's', democracy. According to this model, democratic institutions are inevitably a front for middle-class interests. For example, the Maoist leader, Prachanda, noted in 2004: "democracy for the entire people is nothing other than the hypocrisy of the bourgeois class to confuse the working masses" (Prachanda; quoted in Gellner, 2005, p. 4). In the revolutionary model, democracy consists of the rule of the working class, the majority, as represented by vanguard parties. Their task is to remove poverty and the exploitation that is associated with feudal relations of dependence (Gellner, 2005, 2007a). In discussion, one of the advisors to the CPN (Maoist) central committee argued

> For us, people's democracy comprises reducing poverty in Nepal, improving education and health, reducing the capture of Nepali markets by multinationals, and the abolition of the king and feudal exploitation (interview, Kathmandu, 2007).

However, as noted, the Maoists agreed to participate in national elections and, despite their differences with the mainstream political parties concerning the post-Andolan political process, they appear to accept the broad contours of the liberal democratic model. As

a key advisor to the Maoist central committee argued

> We need to develop a mixed economy, through both the state and private sectors, based upon Nepal's biodiversity and natural resources. We recognise this is a capitalist democracy but it can move towards a people's democracy through the establishment of a republic and a democratic system of rights. We have not given up on the people's war or given up our weapons, but we believe that we can go ahead with *shanti kranti*—a peaceful revolution. People's expectation, the need of the hour, is that the Maoists and the SPA work together. This is the product of the Jana Andolan (interview, Kathmandu, 2007).

One of the top Maoist leaders, Dr Baburam Bhattarai, concurred

> The political order we want to establish is a kind of capitalist order in which discrimination against region, gender and ethnicity no longer prevails (Himalayan News Service, 2007b, p. 3).

Given the Maoists acknowledgement of inequalities of power within Nepali society and the conflicting interests and values inherent in such difference, the undertaking of the Nepali elections appears to reflect Mouffe's (2005) agonistic model of democracy, where former political 'enemies' (i.e. the Maoists and the mainstream political parties) are reconfigured as 'adversaries' who seem to share common (liberal) democratic values and whose differences were negotiated through the democratic elections of 2008. However, as Barnet (2004) and Featherstone (2007) note, Mouffe's focus on democratic (electoral) conflict excludes concerns with the situated practices of articulation, formation and intervention of counter-hegemonic politics as evinced by the Jana Andolan—i.e. that which played an important role in bringing Nepal's current model of democracy into being.

Indeed, a fourth interpretation of democracy is also at work in Nepal. During the Jana Andolan, another term was also articulated—namely, *sanghiya* (or federalism) meaning to abolish racial exploitation and the economic marginalisation of ethnic groups—in effect, a demand for the recognition of identity politics, through ethnic rights (interview, Kathmandu, 2007). Gellner (2007a, p. 55) terms this interpretation 'multicultural' in that each cultural group in Nepal should have political representation in proportion to its size in the country, and indigenous languages and cultures should be protected from the effects of globalisation.

Certainly, the success of the Jana Andolan raised political expectations amongst many different interest-groups in Nepal, particularly for the elections for a constituent assembly. As a prominent journalist, active in the Jana Andolan commented

> The constituent assembly was a frame given by the political parties to the demands of the people's movement, because the 12-point agreement pinpointed the constituent assembly as the direction to take. The constituent assembly is seen as a touchstone for all marginalised and disenfranchised groups to wrong historical ills. The constituent assembly comes up from the people. That is the model of democracy for Nepal (interview, Kathmandu, 2007).

The Maoists had adopted the issue of the underprivileged as a key organising tool during their insurgency and used group grievances to their fullest potential to rally support for their cause. Thus, within a few years, groups that have been discriminated against and remain underrepresented across all spheres in Nepal—for example, Dalits, Janajatis, Madhesis, and women—were being mobilised both by their respective community organisations and by the Maoists to assert their right to citizenship (Gellner, 2007b; Thapa, 2007). The Jana Andolan had given rise to expectations among Madhesis and other disadvantaged groups that they would finally be recognised as equal citizens and would find space in the national polity (Jha, 2007). In the

final section, I will discuss how this post-Jana Andolan process played out in Nepal.

Democracy in Nepal: In the Aftermath of the Andolan

Concerning the opportunities and limits of the urban for the prosecution of more lasting democratic change in Nepal, the struggles waged upon the streets of Kathmandu and other urban centres confirmed the importance of the physical occupation of urban space as an integral part of the challenge for democratic rights in Nepal. Material urban space had to be contested, occupied and ultimately won in order successfully to challenge an unjust polity. This was because the capital—a privileged economic and political space within Nepal that had remained relatively inured from the effects of the Maoist insurgency—was the locus of royal, political, administrative and economic power within the country, and of many opposition political parties, NGO and CSO offices. Moreover, mass mobilisations could be better facilitated given the city's (and the Kathmandu valley's) dense concentration of population. Kathmandu's privileged position ensured that it became the primary target and terrain of the Jana Andolan in their attempt to paralyse the coup.

However, when considering the territoriality of social change in Nepal, it is important to recognise that the events of the 19 days in April took place within the context of a 10-year rural insurgency that had precipitated the coup, and continued to drain the power of, and popular support for, the royal regime. Within this context, and together with the 12-point agreement between the SPA and the Maoist leadership, urban space became the site of the 'tipping-point' in the struggle for democracy in Nepal. Only with the cities paralysed—symbolised by the encirclement of Kathmandu—could the royal regime finally be toppled and the stage set for democratic elections.

However, despite the toppling of the coup, the interim constitution was silent on two of the major demands of the Madhesi and Janajati communities—a federated state and a full proportional electoral system. As a result, in January–February 2007, an emergent Madhesi agitation in the Terai region saw over 30 people killed, most of them in police firing. Madhesi groups involved included the Madhesi Janadhikar Forum (MJF)—a cross-party intellectual forum—and the Janatantrik Tarai Mukti Morcha (Democratic Terai Liberation Front, JTMM), an armed splinter group of the Maoists that has since fractured into two (Jha, 2007). This agitation might be conceived of, in part, as a 'politics of the governed' in that the voices of the marginalised were raised in illegal ways in order to make claims on the state, demanding new (inclusive) forms of democratic representation. However, again, the demands of the marginalised concern formal democratic rights rather than conditional claims.

Indeed, the government responded to two of the MJF's major demands. Prime Minister Koirala declared that the interim constitution would be amended to make Nepal a federated union and that the number of electoral-constituency seats in the Terai (as well as the mid-hills and the mountains) would be increased in proportion to the respective population distributions (Thapa, 2007). Despite this response, the government's failure adequately to address Madhesi concerns resulted in Minister for Science, Technology and Environment and senior Nepali Congress leader Mahantha Thakur and three other MPs resigning from their respective posts in the interim parliament to form a separate Madhesi regional political party in December 2007 (Himalayan News Service, 2007c). Moreover, violence from various ethnic groups continued through 2007.

On April 10th 2008, the CA elections were held in Nepal and were won by the Maoists.[22] According to Jha (2008), the Maoists received

considerable support from a diverse voter base, including the indigenous communities (such as the Tharu) in the Terai, ethnic groups in the hill region, Dalits and the landless across the country. Having controlled much of rural Nepal for a decade and having claimed to represent the interests of many of the marginalised, the Maoists were in a powerful position to benefit from such constituencies in the election. This contrasted with a relative lack of rural mobilisation by the mainstream political parties. As an activist in the Nepal Bar Association noted before the election

> *Loktantra* means one Nepal, with rights and privileges to the people, but no leader has gone to the rural Nepal where the problems lie. The leaders remain in Kathmandu and give meaningless speeches on television. The state has not taken any responsibility to educate the people concerning the constituent assembly election, and receive opinions from Nepali society. This is not a lacunae, it is a blunder (interview, Kathmandu, 2007).

Meanwhile, the MJF electoral success in the Terai seemed to point to an agonistic (rather than armed) representation of Madhesi identity politics.[23] On 28 May 2008, the CA voted to abolish the monarchy and declare Nepal a democratic republic—a position that all of the major political parties had agreed to prior to the holding of the elections. Whether the Jana Andolan process entailed private agreements between the mainstream parties and the monarchy to retain the latter in some form after the CA elections seems moot at this point. The Jana Andolan raised popular expectations for both peace and a democratic state free from royal interference—for some form of *loktantra* and *sanghiya*—and it appears that the electorate decided that the Maoists were most likely to deliver these.

However, despite the Maoist victory, the restructuring of the Nepali state will take place under the watchful eyes of the élite castes. As one UML affiliated activist argued

> It's true that the bureaucracy and political parties are dominated by the Bahun caste, but we are creating a new democracy this time, which will be participatory and inclusive. However, the transition must be run by those who can handle the process, those competent to run affairs (interview, Kathmandu, 2007).

An important question is, of course, just how 'new' or radical will Nepal's democracy be? Radical democracy requires the effective participation of all groups in the decision-making process and public policies that address the needs and aspirations of different interest-groups (Dryzek, 1996; Young, 2000; Lawoti, 2007). However, according to human rights commentators, the issues of the rights (such as those concerning the recognition of ethnic identities, equality and justice) for Madhesis, Dalits and women have remained largely ignored (witness the Terai agitations) prior to the elections and the peace process was effectively colonised by the SPA and the Maoists, thereby undermining the roles of civil society actors, including women activists, in the process (INSEC, 2007; interviews, Kathmandu, 2007). Meanwhile (and partially confirming Chatterjee's (2004) critique), an élite interpretation of politics pervades Nepal's civil society as well, summed up by an INSEC activist who argued that

> Sometimes in the movement people repeat the slogans without understanding the meaning and sentiment (interview, Kathmandu, 2007).

The concern of hitherto marginalised groups is that the country's emerging model of democratic rights will be inevitably refracted through the place-specific caste relations of Nepal. As an activist in the CMPD argued

> Democracy in Nepal means governance through the consent of the people, through elections, pluralism and multiparty politics, with the weaknesses of a Bahun-centric state, a Bahun-centric media and a Bahun-centric bureaucracy. This is one of the biggest hurdles

> that we have to overcome to make Nepal an inclusive state (interview, Kathmandu, 2007).

Moreover, the (Bahun-controlled) political parties are deemed to represent the aspirations of the Jana Andolan and, by extension, those of the Nepali population as a whole—the same parties (and politicians) who presided over Nepal during the 1990s. For example, the 12-point agreement states that "the people and their representative political parties are the real guardians of nationality" (http: //www.peace.gov.np/admin/doc/12-point%20understanding-20%20Nov%202005.pdf) thereby defining Nepali democracy within the confines of a representative system controlled by the political parties. As one Maoist activist argued

> the political parties are the representatives of people's sovereignty, but those parties need to be transformed: ideologically, theoretically and politically (interview, Kathmandu, 2007).

In addition, the principal decisions affecting the country will continue to emanate from the capital, the seat of government and the location of the majority of political party headquarters.

The broad contours of Nepali democracy appear to favour the liberal democratic economic model, but one with an agonistic negotiation of political differences, between erstwhile enemies now reconfigured as adversaries, embodied as the political parties. Within these democratic contours, the on-going marginalisation of various ethnic, tribal and women's groups might generate the conditions for a politics of the governed—whereby the marginalised make claims on the state from the political space of negotiation and brokerage, questioning the caste-inflected character of dominant democratic discourses. However, Chatterjee's (2004) terming of such a space 'political society' is perhaps less helpful in the Nepali context, since this space is more of a hybrid version of civil society that incorporates elements of both liberal and radical democracy—an integral part of the state and a sphere of hegemony wherein consent is manufactured (albeit through extremely complex mediums, diverse institutions and constantly changing processes), but also an arena of social action and of potential conflict and the development of contentious identities and counter-hegemonic claims. For the country's predominantly rural marginalised, it is yet to be seen whether Nepal's predominantly urban-based civil society will provide the political space from which to address the ethnic, gender and caste inequalities that have plagued the country for centuries.

Notes

1. Estimates range from 300 000 to 1 million people (interviews, Kathmandu, 2007).
2. This research was based upon 30 interviews conducted in Kathmandu, Nepal, during the autumn of 2007. Interviews were conducted with male and female members of some political parties, peasant organisations, civil society organisations and NGOs. Given that much urban activism in Nepal is sustained by English-speaking élite groups such as the Bahun and Chhetri castes (Karki, 2006), many of my interview sources derived from these sources. Where this was not the case, interpreters were used. Respondents were male unless otherwise noted in the text. The ethnicity of my respondents was not ascertained.
3. The *panchayat* system, a 'guided democracy', was a pyramidal system of political power with the King at the apex, as the ultimate source of that power, and political parties banned (for 30 years until the people's movement of 1990).
4. After 1999, successive governments were unable to conduct elections across the country due to the on-going Maoist insurgency.
5. India (at 37 per cent) and the US (at 13.6 per cent) together account for over half of all foreign investment in Nepal (GEFONT, 2006).
6. The Human Development Index (HDI) is a measure of development in terms of life expectancy, literacy, education and

standard of living. An HDI below 0.5 is considered to represent low development, while an HDI of 0.8 or more is considered to represent high development. Nepal's HDI was calculated for 2006/07 as being 0.527 (UNDP, 2006).

7. Approximately 45 per cent of all joint ventures and multinational corporations operating in Nepal, and 58 per cent of all foreign-invested industries, are located in the Kathmandu valley (GEFONT, 2006).
8. For example, hand-knotted 'Tibetan' carpets (using cheap, often child, labour) comprised 57 per cent of all exports in 1994 (although the industry was subsequently destroyed by the Maoists); and tourism was the third-largest generator of foreign exchange between 1986 and 1996 (Rankin, 2004).
9. According to the 2001 census, 31 per cent of Nepal's population comprises Bahun, Chhetri, Thakuri and Sannyasi castes; 36.3 per cent of the population are Janajati (indigenous people); 15 per cent are Dalit (literally, 'the oppressed', being those born without caste); and16.5 per cent of the population are Madhesi (excluding *adivasis* and Dalits)—i.e. those ethnic groups who live in the Terai (plains) region (Lawoti, 2003).
10. Representation in parliament and the civil service of the Bahuns and Chhetris in the three parliaments of 1991, 1994 and 1999 was 55, 63 and 63 per cent respectively. In 2001, 98 per cent of those who passed the civil service examination were from these two castes (Thapa and Sijapati, 2006).
11. The RNA has an estimated strength of 80 000 personnel, the Armed Police Force has 17 000 personnel and the Police Force has 47 000 personnel. The Maoists have an estimated strength of 8000 to 10 000 armed personnel and an estimated 25 000 moderately armed militia (Cherian, 2006a).
12. The SPA consisted of the Nepali Congress, Nepali Congress (Democratic), Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist), Nepal Workers and Peasants Party, Nepal Sadbhawana Party (Anandi Devi), United Left Front and People's Front. Actually, the SPA is a misnomer, since one of its members, the United Left Front is an alliance of three parties, and the two largest members, the Nepali Congress and the CPN-UML are each much larger than the rest of the members put together.
13. The issue of a constituent assembly was first articulated by the Communist Party of Nepal during the 1960s (Thapa, 2007). Maoist demands for an elected constituent assembly, an interim government prior to constituent assembly elections, a new constitution and the establishment of a republic were considered unacceptable to the successive Nepali governments prior to the agreement (Sahni, 2005).
14. See http://www.kantipuron-line.com/kolnews.php?andnid=57858.
15. These were the General Federation of Nepalese Trade Unions (GEFONT), the Nepal Trade Union Congress (NTUC), the Democratic Confederation of Nepalese Trade Unions (DCONT) and the Confederation of Nepali Professionals (CONIP) (interview, Kathmandu, 2007).
16. Each political party has its own affiliated trade unions, student organisations and peasant organisations that were also involved in the movement.
17. Voter turnout had been around 60 per cent in the local elections of 1992 and 1997 (Cherian, 2006b).
18. For example, of the 50 organisations that are members of the National Federation of Indigenous Nationalities (NEFIN), 30 have their head offices in Kathmandu (Karki, 2006).
19. The non-violent tactic of surrounding one's opponent.
20. The bill included: placing 90 000 troops under Parliamentary control, with the National Security Council under the chair of the Prime Minister to control, use and mobilise the Nepalese army (INSEC, 2007); placing a tax on the royal family and its assets; ending the Raj Parishad, a royal advisory council; eliminating royal references from army and government titles; (v) declaring Nepal a secular country rather than a Hindu Kingdom; abolishing the national anthem until a new one can be created; and abolishing the king's position as the supreme commander of the Army (Thapa, 2007).

21. As constituted in October 2007, the CA will have 497 seats: 240 seats via PR; 240 seats through a first-past-the-post (FPTP) system; and 17 seats nominated by the Government cabinet (*Himalayan Times*, 17 September 2007).
22. There was a 61 per cent voter turnout. Of the 240 direct constituency seats, the Maoists won 120 seats, the Nepali Congress 37 seats, the CPN-UML 33 seats and the MJF 30 seats. Of the proportional representation seats, the Maoists won approximately 100 seats, the Nepali Congress 73 seats and the CPN-UML 70 seats (Jha, 2008).
23. How essentialised such identity politics become in Nepal is, as yet, unknown.

References

Aryal, K. and Poudel, U. K. (2006) *Jana Andolan-II: a witness account*. Informal Sector Service Centre (INSEC), Kathmandu.

Barnett, C. (2004) Deconstructing radical democracy: articulation, representation, and being with others, *Political Geography*, 23(5), pp. 503–528.

Canetti, E. (1962) *Crowds and Power*. London: Penguin.

Chatterjee, P. (2004) *The Politics of the Governed: Reflections on Popular Politics in Most of the World*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Cherian, S. (2006a) Nepal: the state retreats, the Maoists pursue, *South Asia Intelligence Review*, 4(25) (http://satp.org/satporgtp/sair/Archives/4_25.htm#assessment2; accessed 5 November 2007).

Cherian, S. (2006b) The 'clouds of pessimism' darken, *South Asia Intelligence Review*, 4(31) (http://satp.org/satporgtp/sair/Archives/4_31.htm#assessment2; accessed 5 November 2007).

Cherian, S. (2006c) The Maoist script unfolds, *South Asia Intelligence Review*, 4(39) (http://satp.org/satporgtp/sair/Archives/4_39.htm#assessment1; accessed 5 November 2007).

Dahal, D. R. (2006) *Civil society groups in Nepal*. Support for Peace and Development Initiative, UNDP, Kathmandu, Nepal (http://www.nepaldemocracy.org/conflict_resolution/Peacebuilding.pdf).

Dixit, K. M. (2006) *Nepal: the rising* (http://www.opendemocracy.net/democracy-protest/nepal_rising_3471.jsp; accessed 3 September 2007).

Dryzek, J. S. (1996) Political inclusion and the dynamics of democratization, *The American Political Science Review*, 90(3), pp. 475–487.

Featherstone, D. (2007) *Contesting the Political*. Book Review Forum, *Area*, 39(1), pp. 131–132.

GEFONT (General Federation of Nepalese Trade Unions) (2006) *Focus to MNCs*. GEFONT, Kathmandu.

Gellner, D. N. (1997) Ethnicity and nationalism in the world's only Hindu state, in: D. N. Gellner, J. Pfaff-Czarnecka and J. Whelpton (Eds) *Nationalism and Ethnicity in a Hindu Kingdom: The Politics of Culture in Contemporary Nepal*, pp. 151–184. Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers.

Gellner, D. N. (2005) *Public order, inclusion, hybridity: preconditions of democracy in Nepal* (http://www.uni-bielefeld.de/midea/pdf/darticle1.pdf; accessed 30 June 2007).

Gellner, D. N. (2007a) Democracy in Nepal: four models, *Seminar*, 576, pp. 50–56.

Gellner, D. N. (2007b) Caste, ethnicity and inequality in Nepal, *Economic and Political Weekly*, 19 May, pp. 1823–1828.

Hangen, S. I. (2000) *Making Mongols: ethnic politics and emerging identities in Nepal*. PhD thesis, University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Himalayan News Service (2007a) Maoists may takes up arms again, says Prachanda, *The Himalayan Times*, 25 November, p. 1.

Himalayan News Service (2007b) CPN-M wants to establish capitalist order: Bhattarai, *The Himalayan Times*, 9 December, p. 3.

Himalayan News Service (2007c) Minister Thakur, 3 MPs resign over Tarai turmoil, *The Himalayan Times*, 11 December, p. 1.

INSEC (Informal Sector Service Centre) (2007) *Human Rights Yearbook 2007*. Kathmandu: INSEC.

Jha, P. (2007) Madhes rises, *Himal* (http://www.himalmag.com/2007/august/madhesi_movement_nepal_prashant.htm; accessed 4 September 2007).

Jha, P. (2008) Understanding the Nepali mandate, *Himal*, 21(5) (http://www.himalmag.com/2007/august/madhesi_movement_nepal_prashant.htm; accessed 1 June 2008).

Karki, M. B. (2006) Social networking and the recruitment process among activists in Nepal, *Contributions to Nepalese Studies*, 33(1), pp. 33–72.

Lawoti, M. (2003) Maoists and minorities: overlap of interests or the case of exploitation?, *Studies in Nepali History and Society*, 8(1), pp. 67–97.

Lawoti, M. (2007) Political exclusion and the lack of democratisation: cross-national evaluation of Nepali institutions using a majoritarian-consensus framework, *Commonwealth & Comparative Politics*, 45(1), pp. 57–77.

Massey, D. (2005) *For Space*. London: Sage.

Mitchell, D. (2003) *The Right to the City*. London: The Guilford Press.

Mouffe, C. (1993) *The Return of the Political*. London: Verso.

Mouffe, C. (2000) *The Democratic Paradox*. London: Verso.

Mouffe, C. (2002) *Politics and passions: the stakes of democracy*. Centre for the Study of Democracy, London.

Mouffe, C. (2005) *On the Political*. London: Routledge.

Olsen, T. (2005) *International Zapatismo: The Construction of Solidarity in the Age of Globalization*. London: Zed Books.

Pfaff-Czarnecka, J. (1999) Debating the state of the nation: ethnicization of politics in Nepal—a position paper, in: J. Pfaff-Czarnecka, D. Rajasingham-Senanayake, A. Nandy and E. Terence Gomez (Eds) *Ethnic Futures: The State and Identity Politics in Asia*, pp. 41–98. New Delhi: Sage Publications.

Rankin, K. N. (2004) *The Cultural Politics of Markets: Economic Liberalization and Social Change in Nepal*. London: Pluto Press.

Routledge, P. (1997) A spatiality of resistances: theory and practice in Nepal's revolution of 1990, in: S. Pile and M. Keith (Eds) *Geographies of Resistance*, pp. 68–86. London: Routledge.

Sahni, A. (2005) War by other means, *South Asia Intelligence Review*, 4(8) (http://satp.org/satporgtp/sair/Archives/4_8.htm#assessment1; accessed 5 November 2007).

Sahni, A. (2006) Last call for democracy, *South Asia Intelligence Review*, 4(41) (http://satp.org/satporgtp/sair/Archives/4_41.htm#assessment1; accessed 5 November 2007).

Sharma, S. P. (1997) Market-led development strategy in Nepal, in: K. B. Bhattachan and C. Mishra (Eds) *Nepal development practices in Nepal*, pp. 53–68. Central Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Tribhuvan University, Kathmandu.

Sites, W. (2007) Beyond trenches and grassroots? Reflections on urban mobilization, fragmentation, and the anti-Wal-Mart campaign in Chicago, *Environment and Planning A*, 39(11), pp. 2632–2651.

Slater, D. (2002) Other domains of democratic theory: space, power, and the politics of democratization, *Environment and Planning D*, 20, pp. 255–276.

Thapa, D. (2007) Towards 22 November, *Himal* (http://www.himalmag.com/2007/august/22_november_nepal_election_deepak_thapa.htm; accessed 4 September 2007).

Thapa, D. and Sijapati, B. (2006) *A Kingdom under Siege*. London: Zed Books.

UNDP (United Nations Human Development Proegramme) (1999) *Nepal Human Development Report*. South Asia Centre, Kathmandu, Nepal.

UNDP (2006) *Human Development Report 2006*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

World Bank and DFID Nepal (Department for International Development Nepal) (2005) *Unequal Citizens: Gender, Caste and Ethnic Exclusion in Nepal*. Kathmandu: Wordscape.

Young, I. M. (2000) *Inclusion and Democracy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.