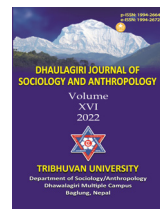


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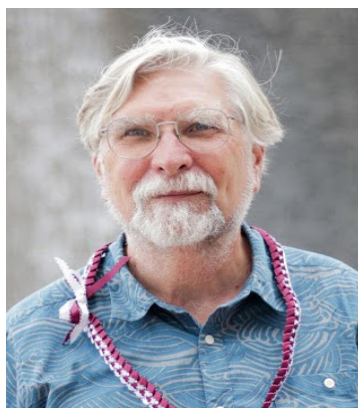


Dhaulagiri Journal of Sociology and Anthropology

Interview with Gregory G. Maskarinec

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(May 16, 1951-June 16, 2022)

Professor Gregory G. Maskarinec (May 16, 1951-June 16, 2022) was a member of the International Advisory Board of the Dhaulagiri Journal of Sociology and Anthropology and Professor and Director at the Office of Global Health and International Medicine, Departments of Native Hawaiian Health and Family Medicine and Community Health John A. Burns School of Medicine, University of Hawai'i. He came to Nepal, in 1977, as a Peace Corps Volunteer and served as a mathematics teacher in a school in the Jajarkot District. He explored Nepali society and culture and received his MA and PhD in *shamanism*. He has published several books and papers on *shamanism*, including "The Rulings of the Night: An Ethnography of Nepalese Shaman Oral Texts". In 1981, he won Tribhuvan University's Mahendra Scholarship and received a highly prestigious prize (the *Birendra Pranyalankar*) from the late King Birendra Bir Bikram Shah Dev. In addition to his significant contributions to Medical Anthropology, Prof. Gregory was a nature-lover, peaceful, devoted to generating and sharing knowledge, and supportive. He had good relationships with high-level scholars, literature artists, and politicians of Nepal. He also participated in literature festivals in rural areas and promoted local arts and artists. He had visited more than 70 districts of Nepal. Prof. Gregory suffered from cancer and had several operations done. He was also infected by COVID-19 in August 2020 and we thought it is better to record some of his ideas, thoughts, and understanding regarding anthropology, his works, and his personal life in the form of an interview. We are grateful for allowing us to publish his interview. He died on June 16, 2022. The interview captured his ideas, thoughts, understanding of anthropology, works in Nepal, and personal life. For the sustainability of the Dhaulagiri Journal of Sociology and Anthropology, at the end of his life, he donated US\$ 5000. The journal family is always grateful for his invaluable contribution.

Question 1: Could you describe your personal and family background?

Answer 1: Of Transcarpathian Byzantine Catholic ancestry, I am Gregory Gabriel Maskarinec, first son, as my name would tell you, were you familiar with Carpatho-

Rusyn culture, of Gabriel Maskarinec. I was born 70 years ago in May, 1951, named after Saint Gregory the Great, whose feast day occurs then. My ancestors were converted to Christianity by Saints Cyril and Methodius in the Ninth Century A.D. and the area, situated between Europe and Asia, became literate at that time; the two saints designed



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the Glagolitic script for the local language, Rusyn, a Slavic language that is a precursor of Russian and still used in our Byzantine church liturgy. Gabriel's father raised Hucul ponies in the mountain pastures, until A.D. 1905 when Cossacks raided and stole his herd. Destitute, the family migrated to North America and settled in the coal mining area of Western Pennsylvania. My father, who designed nuclear reactors for U.S. Navy submarines, moved us further west to Idaho, where the reactors were first built and tested in the remote Lost River Desert. Growing up in the shadows of the Grand Tetons helped inspire my life-long love of mountains.

My own family has continued a westward migration, and I now live in Hawai'i with my wife, Gertraud, who I met in Nepal in 1983. We have two daughters, Malika and Maya, both college professors, at the University of Bern (Switzerland) and University of Southern California (USC) respectively, in the departments of Germanistik and History, while my sons-in-law teach English and Classics. Each daughter has one son and one daughter. My wife, an M.D., MPH, PhD, is a full professor at the University of Hawai'i Cancer Center, where she conducts biostatistical research on breast cancer and diabetes. Myself, curiously, despite being a cultural anthropologist with no medical training, am now a full professor of medicine at the John A. Burns School of Medicine, University of Hawai'i in the departments of Family Medicine & Community Health and in Native Hawaiian Health - the only clinical department of indigenous medicine in the United States, in which I am the only white male on the faculty.

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union allowing for a genuinely independent Mongolia, I visited there to help restore the practices of shamans, who literally took their ancestors' drums and costumes out of the museums to resume using them. I showed them how to heat their drumskins over a small fire to achieve the right tone before playing them. Locals joked to me of my Carpathian heritage, "we conquered you, too." Which in fact they did, the 13th Century raids by the Mongol Golden Horde did reach my ancestral land, and, as a local priest in Maramures, Romania, told me on a visit there, afterward our churches were built smaller (entirely with wood to prevent lightning strikes) with doors too low for future invaders to ride their horses into them.

Question 2: What or who influenced you to opt for anthropology? Did you happen to imagine yourself as an anthropologist during your college days?

Answer 2: As an undergraduate at Reed College, Portland, Oregon, I majored in mathematics, and wrote my senior thesis on a foundation problem in Category Theory. I took only a single sociology-anthropology course in my second year to meet a college requirement, and while I learned something, I never imagined becoming an anthropologist nor a professor of medicine. Then, I hoped to become a calligrapher, having studied the art of lettering

by hand at Trinity College, Dublin, Ireland, copying from the Book of Kells. MIT published one 500-page book of number theory written by one of my professors, Joe Roberts (*Elementary Number Theory, a Problem-oriented Approach*, 1977) that I calligraphed completely, and I did various other projects, but, living in London after college, I failed to support myself at it. A college friend, upon his return from being a Peace Corps volunteer in Nepal, became a recruiter and convinced me to join. My first choice was French-speaking West Africa, since I could speak French, but he insisted that Nepal, where he had been, trying to introduce vegetables such as zucchini and broccoli, then rare in Nepal, to skeptical farmers, is where I should go, convincing me to choose Nepal. Teaching high school math in western Nepal, and finding myself in an inexplicable world where spirit possession was an everyday occurrence, both in school and for the family with which I lived, is how I ended up becoming an anthropologist.

Question 3: What types of theory and research trends were common at that time of your college days? What exciting experience did you get as a student of Anthropology during college and university as a student?

Answer 3: "No perceptions without conceptions." A profound insight, shortening Kant, four words of Marx's that summarize his early theory of phenomenology - the one thing I still remember from John Pock, the brilliant chain-smoking fast-talking sociologist who taught that one undergraduate course, which still provides a key to my first book, "The Rulings of the Night." Another key to understanding my work is Nietzsche's aphorism: "I fear we must always believe in God, since we still believe in Grammar." Marx and Nietzsche remain the foundational basis of my autodidactic anthropology, while the Upper Engadine Valley in Switzerland where Nietzsche lived and wrote, remains my favorite place in the world, one of the best places I know where one can think deeply and write clearly.

Sometime during the six years that I lived in Nepal, I learned from another volunteer of the East West Center (EWC) in Honolulu, and in 1983 I decided to apply to it. Even then, I wasn't necessarily committed to anthropology. My first choice was to study for a Ph.D. in Sanskrit, since the University of Hawai'i had an outstanding Sanskrit department with two experts on Vedic and Pāṇini, but the EWC wouldn't allow that. However, they agreed that I could study anthropology while working with the Sanskritists. That was simple enough, as I had already done "fieldwork," having collected, translated, and written commentary and translations of many shaman oral texts suitable for a Masters Degree before I even began anthro classwork, and had notebooks filled with observations and thoughts that eventually became my first book.

Works by Bronisław Malinowski ("*Coral Gardens and their Magic*," "*Magic, Science, and Religion*"),

J.L. Austin ("How to do Things with Words"), Ludwig Wittgenstein ("Philosophical Investigations," "Remarks on Frazer's Golden Bough"), Harold Garfinkel ("Studies in Ethnomethodology"), Richard Rorty ("Contingency, Irony, Solidarity," "Consequences of Pragmatism"), Susan Sontag ("Illness as Metaphor," "Against Interpretation"), Maurice Merleau-Ponty ("Cezanne's Doubt"), Clifford Geertz ("Notes on a Balinese Cockfight"), E.E. Evans-Pritchard ("Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande") and many others, including Max Weber, Walter Benjamin, Marshall Sahlins, Pierre Bourdieu, and Claude Levi-Strauss, have strongly influenced my thinking, and would form a core syllabus were I to teach again, but I continue to prefer an unsystematic, anarchic, non- methodologic approach to any particular school of social theory.

Within the Department of Native Hawaiian Health, I have most recently offered sessions of "mindless painting," spontaneous unplanned watercolors using only a single color, a corrective, I suggest, to excessive personal responsibility for one's well-being now attached to productivity-co-opted "mindfulness," when "mind," after all is not something that is, "mind" is something that you do. The world being what it now is, practicing less mind, not more, may help us achieve more pure consciousness, freedom from our culture-bound ideologies and greater personal liberty.

Question 4: You visited Nepal as a Peace Corps volunteer, and you worked in Jajarkot, one of the remote districts of Nepal. What were the reasons for coming to Nepal and who influenced you to work in Nepal at that time?

Answer 4: As already mentioned, I was recruited by a friend in 1977 to join the US Peace Corps. We had three months of language training in Arghaun, then a small, non-developed Bahun-Chhetri farming village east of Pokhara near Begnas Tal, where in 1977 you could rent a dug-out canoe from the fishermen for one mohar (one half a Rupee) a day. Then, there were no buildings near the lake, other than some fishermen's shacks; it was a true spot of Himalayan beauty, as were the other nearby lakes. In Arghaun I lived and ate with a local Chhetri family and a Newar language instructor from Lalitpur, Mohan Gopal Nyachhyon, who forty-five years later remains my closest friend (mīt) and husband of my Newar bahini, from whom I receive tika each Tihar, even when I cannot attend, when a mandala substitutes for my physical presence. When in Nepal Mohan Gopal and I also perform together the unique Newari mha pujā to oneself.

I volunteered to become a high school mathematics teacher in Jajarkot Khalanga because it was the most remote posting offered that year and had never had a Peace Corps volunteer posted there before. For the six years that I lived in Jajarkot, the district, without roads or electricity, could only be reached on foot from Nepalganj, by the postal path from Pokhara, or, by using the impressive

suspension bridge over the Bheri River commissioned by Chandra Sumsheer Rana after an infrequent Twin Otter flight to Chaurjahari in the adjacent district of Rukum from Kathmandu or Nepalgunj. Cows and goats needed to be cleared from a grassy field by an initial flyover to allow for a safe landing. Parts for the suspension bridge, the first in Nepal to be built outside of the Kathmandu Valley, were delivered by elephants from India; its construction was supervised by a English engineer, who was not allowed up the hill to visit Khalanga. The suspension cables were carried from the Indian border to the bridge site on the shoulders of long lines of slaves, who marched to the beat of accompanying kettle drums. Officially, slavery had been abolished in Nepal a decade earlier but persisted with the royal families of Nepal's remote west much longer; Jajarkot remained a traditional feudal, caste-structured society throughout the time I lived there, in which a member of a 'higher caste' family would be degraded and banished for marrying an "untouchable" woman.

Despite having an area of 230 km² (860 square miles) and a population of approximately 90,000 in the 1970s, Jajarkot then had only a single high school in the entire district. Promising village students boarded, as each area needed someone besides the local money lenders who could read and write, though no student had passed the School Leaving Certificate (SLC) for several consecutive years before my stay.

In Jajarkot, I lived in one room of a newly built small four-room house belonging to a Shah family part of local "royalty," just down the hill from the palace's khopi, and I ate my meals in the doorway to the Shah's kitchen; after a year, we were visited by the rānī saheb's brother, who invited me into the kitchen to sit and eat next to him, after which I was allowed to enter the kitchen on a regular basis - a privilege I lost once I began to visit the homes of 'untouchable' Kāmī as they self-identified at the time before the designation became socially unacceptable. Still later, I regained and now still have the privilege after a photo of King Birendra shaking my hand was published on the front page of the Gorkhapatra, as that restored my "purity."

At the school, I had joked that King Birendra's photo didn't hang in the office, there was only one of Jajarkot's own king, Prakash Bikram Shah (known as the "pāgal pilot," infamous for making the first night-time landing in Kathmandu to fly Mahendra's wounded wife from Chitwan after Mahendra had shot her), an oversight quickly remedied by the headmaster. Not really an oversight, however; in Nepal's 1950 constitution, Jajarkot's king was one of Nepal's four erstwhile kings to get the rājā title officially. About 200 years ago the ruler of Jajarkot had become a mīt of Pritvi Narayan Shah, and they joined kingdoms as allies, an arrangement that preserved Jajarkot's quasi-independent status with its own line of kings for the next two centuries.

The school also had a "Rā Bi Se" (National

Development Service) teacher for one year, at the time a required assignment to a remote village before completing any advanced university degree, a policy instituted by Mahendra that to me seemed very progressive but hated by those so assigned. Similarly, the school also had a teacher deputed under Compulsory Teaching Service (CTS), a program that made teaching in a school for a year prerequisite for agricultural graduates in order to be employed. I quickly realized that the distance from the developed west to Kathmandu was much shorter than that from Kathmandu to places like Jajarkot. Inhabitants of "Nepal," that is, the Kathmandu Valley, had no idea what life in remote areas of the country was like 50 years ago; now, in two generations, that is only a fading memory shared by very few. The CTS teacher Bishnu Dayal Singh was a Tharu, teased daily by the other teachers over his caste and their impure food habits, as of course was I, too.

Our Peace Corps allowance was 900 rupees a month (the exchange rate in 1978 when the gold peg was removed) was 12.50 rupees to a U.S. dollar, so 900 rupees was considered a fortune locally, as I paid 400 rupees monthly for room and board (two meals daily of dalbhat, while rice daily was a luxury in Jajarkot, in villages children sang a song when fed rice). A porter sent to Nepalgunj to purchase a tin of kerosene for my lamp would charge 100 rupees walking the round trip, five days each way, and carrying back the tin, which supplied me for a year. Secondary school teachers with a B.A, B.Sc or B.Ed were at the time paid less than half what I was receiving.

Living in Jajarkot, it quickly became apparent to me that our consciousness is shaped by our culture, that there are multiple realities that could be considered rational, and that Nepal offered me a chance to experience a genuinely different world, to see how social existence can be constructed in different ways. It prompted me to teach myself social theory, seeking an intellectual structure that might help me comprehend this new reality. I remain a proponent at least some forms of linguistic relativity (I've taught university seminars in four languages and what I teach differs by which language I use) and to defend the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis that the language that we use shapes our perception of the world in which we live.

One incident in particular remains vivid in my memory: soon after moving in the little house, otherwise unoccupied, I woke one night to see, by moonlight through my open window, a very small old man sitting cross-legged on the floor, smoking a chilum (a straight conical smoking pipe traditionally made of clay) and looking at me. Bald or shaven-headed with green iron oxide colored splotches on his arms and legs, wearing a dhoti, who tells me that he is not responsible for my pillow falling off the bed. He explains that he is not a "bhūt," and gives me a long name and explanation of who he is that I am unable to understand. I do manage to learn that he died at the water tap above the small house where I was living, and that this newly built house is directly on his path to the river below

(or down into the earth, it wasn't clear what he meant by "down." He tells me that there are many others who travel this way, who also like to visit the town at night, and he offers to introduce me to them. I declined, and he vanished. The smell of smoke remained and I stayed awake the rest of the night. At school the next day, I told the teachers about my nocturnal visitor, and the headmaster got very excited. "Kāile Nar!" he exclaimed (though the dwarf had introduced himself by a different, much more complicated, name), and he explained that Kāile Nar was a well-known bīr [powerful, demanding, demonic entity] who most often troubled young women but could be pacified by a ritual offering of miniature household utensils, and he told me I had better do the same. The puḷā was arranged, but from then on, no one dismissed as backward superstitions local beliefs in the various bīr or the many other ordinarily unseen or invisible inhabitants of the area, of which, as I was soon able to learn, there were many.

After school, I tutored Euclidian geometry to a small group of really bright, highly motivated tenth graders, and I imagined them growing up to study patterns in the night sky while herding goats. Instead all but one became Maoist revolutionaries. The most promising one, Kali Bahadur Basnet, was shot and killed by police even before the insurgency got underway, after he decorated Jajarkot's corrupt member of parliament, the district's most usurious moneylender, with a faceful of soot and a juttāko mālā. The police chased him into the higher ridges toward Jumla and shot him when he was captured. Another of my tutorial group advanced to become a commissar in the Maoist army and later an elected member of parliament; years later he told me that the geometry I taught them was useful for planning attacks. The one exception among my students to joining the insurgency instead became a demolition expert for the Nepali army, traveled widely as a U.N. peacekeeper, and retired as a one-star general. Another student rose to be Nepal's Maoist home minister during Puspa Kamal Dahal's (Prachanda) government, while another has become a district judge. Maoists from Jajarkot still address me as "comrade," Shahs as "Hajur," (formerly rarely used, not any more), former students as "guru," and though I cringe at all three a more neutral term doesn't seem to work.

The Nepali language has evolved remarkably in the last 40 years, adding so much more Hindi and English; 40 years ago, "Namaste" was a deeply religious word in Jajarkot, almost never used as a greeting, said as a ritual prayer with the head bowed and the palms pressed together to salute the god in someone, not the ubiquitous, superficial "hello" it has now become.

Question 5: In your doctoral research in cultural anthropology, you focused on Shamanism. What were the reasons for selecting shamanism in your PhD work?

Answer 5: Jajarkot District is home to one of the twelve brothers Masta, oracular gods of the Karnali/Bheri basin.

As a result, and because spirit possession was so common, my interests initially focused on Masta and associated oracular mediums. Along with supplicants from as far away as Dang and Surkhet, I would walk the 25 kilometer trail to his temple in the village of Paink twice a year, on Jeth and Bhadau pūrnimās, when other dhāmis would gather and dance together when possessed. Most supplicants were childless couples wishing for a son, and many would return later to dedicate the new born boy to Masta.

In the Kathmandu Valley ("Nepal" as everyone in Jajarkot then called it) Nepalis still confuse oracular dhāmis with shamanic jhāngris (local dialect; standard Nepali jhākri) - and commonly speak of dhāmi-jhākris with little understanding of the radical differences between them. Dhāmis are oracles who serve a single spirit and are possessed by that spirit on a regular lunar cycle, when the dhāmi, possessed by his god, sits on the spirit's throne and blesses supplicants. Despite blood sacrifices to their spirit they host, dhāmis insist that they are pure enough to wear a sacred thread. Jhāngris are impure members of the 'lowest castes', usually blacksmiths who can control fire, air, and water to metamorphize ores into metals, after all a nearly magical feat in itself. Jhāngris contemptuously command an entire hierarchy of spirits, those of dead humans, of ghosts, witches, demons, nature sprites of springs and waterfalls, sometimes even important gods like Masta. "Come when I say come, go when I say go!" begins the mantra to summon them. Jhāngris insist that their power is greater than that of any of the unseen forces, and they control those forces to curse as well as to cure. It was only when I discovered that they are not only, as Michael Oppitz puts it, "Singers of Ten Thousand Lines," but that they also use dozens of mantra, and that surprisingly those too are meaningful, that began to record them. After about three years of living in Jajarkot (by then I had moved to Paink to concentrate on Masta), I realized that the mantras made sense, and my Jajarkoti dialect (a close relative of the original Nepali from Sija) was good enough to understand them. I could translate both their mantras and their remarkable oral recitals, which tell of the world's origin, the creation of humans, of the original shaman and the original witches, and many other fascinating stories, a comprehensive mythical epic cycle that remained undocumented, and which became the focus of my research. As a result of this detour, my study of Masta and his dhāmi remains unfinished, with many untranslated tapes of his pronouncements (which often needed commentary by an his assistant to be understood by supplicants).

After teaching for three years, I had the opportunity to write reports for a year on potential sites for new Peace Corps volunteers, allowing me to visit more than 70 districts of Nepal and to evaluate how suitable newly created village schools might be for a volunteer teacher. Meanwhile, the oral stories that I collected and translated by then were sufficient to be awarded Tribhuvan University's Mahendra Scholarship for 1981, its monthly stipend of 500 rupees

less important than the year-long visa it provided, which enabled me to remain in Nepal for two more years and finally feel confident that I was beginning to grasp Nepal's cultural complexities. True, I had no previous academic training in social theory, but it was only around my fourth or fifth year in the country that it became apparent that many of my earlier observations were superficial, that much of what I thought I knew about Nepal was wrong, and that much that had published about Nepal by foreigners by that time was also of no value. Living in the hills for six years, from 1977 until 1983, and regularly returning for 40 years since then, still finding new details of social complexity and encountering my own early misunderstandings has certainly made me a skeptical reader of ethnographies relying on a year or two of "fieldwork," clearly insufficient time to become fluent in local languages and unable to report accurately on another culture.

Question 6: You are known as a medical anthropologist. What paradigm (ontological, epistemological, axiological) shift have you have observed in the field of medical anthropology since you began to study and to date?

Answer 6: The fact is I consider myself a cultural anthropologist who studies the cultures of various medical systems, and regard as "medical anthropologists" those who study specific manifestations of or responses to some form of disease, distress or illness, ordinarily within a specific (allopathic, osteopathic, naturopathic, ayurvedic, unani, or other systems) medical system, or within those practiced in a specific country or region (Chinese, Tibetan, etc. - though geographically those regions, of course, have a plurality of medical systems). The best medical anthropologists need, I believe, to have studied for a M.D., D.O., or MBBS, or done advanced work in Public Health, that is, to have participated in some formal training in health care. Paul Farmer's latest work, *Fevers, Feuds, and Diamonds: Ebola and the Ravages of History* is a good example, or one of my favorites, Arthur Kleinman's *Patients and Healers in the Context of Culture: An Exploration of the Borderland Between Anthropology, Medicine, and Psychiatry* are good examples of medical anthropology by medical anthropologists who are also physicians.

Sometimes I wonder whether I should be called an anthropologist at all, as my training and publications in anthropology remain entirely irrelevant to my current employment. At the medical school, I am regarded vaguely (and incorrectly) as a "behavioral scientist."

I might add, to correct a misconception I have encountered in Nepal, that royalties from my books have not yet totaled \$100, and that my employment is completely unrelated to Nepal - I mention this because my Jajarkot friends have commented that they are really glad I never became a "development advisor," never turned my Peace Corps experience into an INGO career as did others. I am hopeful that my respect for Nepal has never allowed

me to exploit my experience there for personal gain.

It was another of Marx's aphorisms, his 11th Thesis on Feuerbach - "Until now, philosophers have only described the world, in various ways; the point is to change it," that led me into the medical school more than 20 years ago. I was lecturing on social suffering - how different cultures configure and respond differently to pain and suffering, and my best student was a young doctor who had just joined the new Department of Family Practice and Community Health, moving to Hawaii from Saipan. Think "praxis," he insisted, quoting Marx, and convinced me to join part-time the new department. As I knew nothing of allopathic medicine, I found it fascinating to be trying to train resident physicians as their "cultural attending," and while my position never amounted to much, and I still need to have my contract renewed every year, with no tenure, it has proven to be a surprisingly interesting choice.

Question 7: You were awarded Fulbright Scholar grants two times and both the time you taught and conducted research in Nepal. How do you assess the academic and research practices in Nepal?

Answer 7: Between my two grants, Tribuvan University's Department of Sociology and Anthropology was divided into separate departments for each field, much to anthropology's detriment, I fear, though in the six years since I last taught at TU, perhaps things have improved. Both departments have much to offer Nepal, but inadequate faculty salaries remain a serious limitation to anyone at TU achieving their full potential as social scientists, with faculty forced to take second jobs to supplement their income, and while I am in favor of informed political commitment, militant student extremism can often be counterproductive to good academic work when it focuses too narrowly on the university and not the government running it.

During the second Fulbright, I attempted to understand the remarkable non-violent efforts to improve Nepal's medical care and education by Dr. Govinda K.C. and his series of fasts-unto-death. With the help of Madhusudan Subedi, his daughter Prativa, and Dr. Arjun Karki, we did a series of interviews of prominent individuals involved, such as TU's former Vice Chancellor, Kedar Bhakta Mathema, whose "Mathema Commission" remains a key document on the future of healthcare in Nepal. Our most important meetings were with Dr. K.C. himself, a privilege I treasure. Our planned book on needed reforms of Nepal's health care, however, remains another of my many unfinished projects.

Another completely different unfinished Nepal project, begun during my first Fulbright, was to visit and photograph all of the *bāhās* and *bahīs* of the Kathmandu Valley. Until then, my time in urban Kathmandu had always been as brief as possible, such that by 1983 the Christmas and New Year holidays were the only time annually that I would leave the hills for the city. Locke's 1985 Buddhist

Monasteries of Nepal inspired me to try to visit all of them, and for four cities, Kathmandu (105 sites), Patan (166 sites), Bhaktapur (23), and Kirtipur (7), I succeeded, with many small urban adventures along the way, sometimes even needing to obtain permission to enter someone's house and crawl out through one of their windows to reach the site. Nepal Mandala, 1982, by Mary Shepard Slusser also helped me discover the wonders of the Valley, but I only belatedly discovered UNESCO's extraordinary two volume 1975 Kathmandu Valley--Preservation of Physical Environment and Cultural Heritage--Protective Inventory. I seriously regret taking for granted the now destroyed beauty and traditional architecture of the Valley when I had the opportunity to appreciate it forty-five years ago, when the Valley's air was still clear, the rivers flowed cleanly, and the rice fields were intact. Since there was no traffic then one could bicycle anywhere, and thefts of Nepal's religious treasures had only begun to eliminate Kathmandu's remarkable cultural heritage.

During my first Fulbright, for TU's fall vacation, I had the opportunity to teach at the Asian University for Women in Chittagong, Bangladesh, to celebrate Dashain with the 30 Nepali students there, and to visit the large Hindu community's many Durga mandaps along with their spectacular submersion of the enormous Kali and associated statues in the Bay of Bengal to conclude the holiday.

By the time of my second Fulbright, it was considered too dangerous to return to teach again in Bangladesh, but instead I was invited to lecture on social justice in medicine at five medical schools in Uzbekistan, an opportunity that also broadened my international understanding. It was the final year of Islam Karimov's long, repressive dictatorship, and I was met at the airport by an embassy official to be driven around in an armored SUV. "Don't worry, it is just for show," I was told, escorted by the driver and my embassy handler throughout Tashkent, the same two chain-smoking government agents also showing up in the front row at every talk. "They're only interested in what others say, not what you say," reassuring me that I could speak freely. I did manage to address medical students also in Bukhara and Samarkand, and to visit Khiva for a weekend, all arranged by the embassy, who told me I did better than their previous two official visitors, then Secretaries of State John Kerry and Hilary Clinton, each of whom only got to visit two of the three famous cities.

In Samarkand, the excellent translator assigned to me, who had carefully reviewed with me my powerpoint, was abruptly replaced at the last minute by a government agent, and a brave young surgeon who had studied in London caused an uproar when she stood up and accused him of mistranslating my remarks about nuclear testing in Central Asia, comparing it to the Marshall Islands, where I have also done research.

Were I to have anthropology graduate students, I would now encourage them to study Central Asia, particularly

Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan, where, in all three countries, I found the tensions of cultural revival, ethnic identity, Islamic resurgence, and international competition for influence and power fascinating. That reality genuinely is socially constructed has been reaffirmed by these visits and having seen so many other diverse areas of the world.

Question 8: How do you summarize your contribution in medical anthropology to Nepal and to the wider audience around the world?

Answer 8: Negligible. I doubt that a dozen people have read either of my volumes of oral shaman texts and translations in the Harvard Oriental Series, my most important works, and those books have inspired no one to collect additional texts from other valleys of the region between the Kali Gandaki and Jajarkot, not even obvious variations of a single tale such as "The Nine Sisters" known in some form by every *jhāngri* that might produce structurally insightful comparisons into local customs. True, Michael Oppitz recorded recitals from Kham Magar shamans in Takasera, Anne de Sales recorded shamans in Libang, also concentrating on Magars, and Marie Lecomte-Tiliouine taped recitals in Darling, Gulmi District, but all three apparently assumed the mantras were meaningless, and no one has published a corpus similar to mine. For other areas of Nepal the ones I think are best are the Gurung Pe collection by Simon Strickland and the works on Tamang oral recitals by Andrés Höfer, but those are completely different traditions. Magars, however, recite many of the same recitals as do *Kāmīs*, and even, as I later confirmed on a visit to Takasera, some of the same mantras, often in the same archaic Nepali. It remains uncertain, but it seems to me that at least some of the Magar recitals were originally in Nepali, with some lines in Kham inserted and others translated from Nepali into Kham with the original remaining sufficiently prominent in the text that a Nepali speaker can follow the narrative. Of course, the idea that 'untouchables' could recite powerful mantras was extremely provocative, and Brahman Sanskritists who attended my inaugural address at the Nepal Academy universally declared that I was mistaken, it was simply not possible, a controversy that delighted then Vice-Chancellor Mr. Madan Mani Dixit, another prominent intellectual I was privileged to know.

More recently, as already noted, I have examined the remarkable Ghandhian protests of Dr. Govinda K.C.'s non-violent "Fasts Unto Death" to decentralize, depoliticize, and restrict for-profit medical education in Nepal and the ways that successive governments have accepted but then, because of the corruption involved, fail to implement his proposals, proposals that seem to me crucial to future healthcare in Nepal. Again, my venture into activist medical anthropology has failed to produce any results.

Question 9: You have closely followed and conducted academic research on the non-violent and fast-unto-

death movement of Dr. Govinda KC, Professor of Nepal's first medical institute and an Orthopedic Surgeon. You have met and interviewed him. How do you see his personal life and his movement for the health system reform and governance in Nepal?

Answer 9: I firmly believe that if Dr. KC's movement for reforming governance in Nepal fails, Nepal must be considered a failed state in which health and healthcare will deteriorate precipitously and irreparably. Everyone might as well leave for elsewhere in the world.

Dr. KC's abstemious life provides the moral fiber needed to achieve reform, but he floats adrift in a sea of corruption, hypocrisy and greed. How many successive governments have promised reform then ignored its commitments? Uncontrolled for-profit medical education should be a criminal activity anywhere in the world. Health is a human right, a right incompatible with Nepal's current selling of medical credentials to sub-standardly trained, debt-burdened graduates who are neither able to find post-graduate training opportunities nor willing to accept positions outside of the Kathmandu Valley. The result is not simply an acute embarrassment to Nepal, it points to a total health care misfortune for the country soon.

Question 10: You have very close relations with some scholars in Jajarkot, who have great interest and contribution in literature and they actively engage in politics, and some of them were your students as well. How was that possible to keep that long relations?

Answer 10: At first, yearly letters and receiving annually the Nepali calendar helped maintain contact, while Nepali students and visitors (including Rishikesh Shah, whom I visited later in Kathmandu, and memorably, the Bir Hospital army surgeon who removed the different caliber bullets from Birendra after his assassination and talked about Birendra's Sai Baba medallion) at the East West Center. It kept my language ability alive, and more recently, e-mail has improved communications, though now in English, but I have also regularly re-visited Jajarkot, except during the years of armed conflict, when I was warned that clandestine American military advisors to the Nepal Army suggested the value of staging an incident in which it would appear that the Maoists executed an American, so that I needed to stay away. Consequently, for some years I concentrated my ethnographic interests on the many islands Micronesia, particularly the various outer islands of Chuuk, Yap, and Palau.

Three of my former fellow teachers in Jajarkot, Rajeswor Karki, Amar Shah, and Dilip Shah have published volumes of poetry and short stories, and all belong, as do I, to a very active literary organization, "Nepālī Kalāsāhitya dotcom." For the past five years, and now endowed for the foreseeable future, we present an annual award for a book written by someone who remains resident in their home district. For example, a former student of mine, Sher Bahadur Adhikari, author of "Jajarkoti Lok Sahitya," who

worked as a teacher in his village in western Jajarkot, was given the award in B.S. 2073, and my friends and I made a memorable trip to Jumla in Kartik, B.S. 2076, at which Khadananda Chaulagai, a local writer who continues to live in Jumla, have received the award. Most recently, the poet, essayist, and short-story writer Navin Vibhas (Rolpa) has received the award in Rolpa, while previously poet Purna Sameer Mahatara (Jajarkot) and writer/researcher Manohar Lamichhane (Salyan) have also received the award.

It was Rajeshwor Karki's father, the late Yogeswor Karki, who for a decade became my primary assistant in Jajarkot. He was a local leader, former Chairperson of the Gaun Pharka Rastriya Abhiyaan district committee, part of a political movement initiated to favor the monarchy. Chairpersons were appointed by King Mahendra. It was his authority that when he ordered local shamans to teach me 'everything,' most had no option but to obey, allowing me to record such extensive collections of shaman oral texts and their mantras. And it was Yogiswor who introduced me to Madan Mani Dixit, then Vice Chancellor of the Royal Nepal Academy, leading to my nomination for the Birendra Prajnānkār and subsequent introduction to the late King of Nepal, Birendra Bir Bikram Shah. I hadn't imagined that learning how to conjugate Nepali honorifically when speaking to royalty, with its special vocabulary, would turn out to be so useful.

Curiously, I had no interactions with Yogeswor during my first two years in Jajarkot. The Peace Corps had a strict policy that volunteers must stay out of politics and as the King's district representative, he was the person most representative of local politics. However, his son Rajeswor was a fellow teacher who gradually became a good friend, and eventually I met his father. We immediately hit it off as I found him to be knowledgeable, better informed than anyone else (by listening daily to the BBC radio broadcasts, as he owned one of the few radios then in the district), eager to learn, and willing to be helpful in any way possible to advance my research of the district and its customs.

Question 11: Your contribution has been honoured in Nepal. You were honoured with the 'Birendra Prajnānkār' from the late king of Nepal Birendra Bikram Shah, and with a 'Vidyādhārī,' honorary degree of Sanskrit scholarship awarded by the late Yogi Naraharinath. How do you reflect yourself after receiving such prestigious awards?

Answer 11: I've already mentioned that the photo of Birendra shaking my hand when he bestowed on me the fifth (and final) Birendra Prajnānkār restored my ritually pure status with the Shahs of Jajarkot, while it turned out that Yogi Naraharinath, whose knowledge was enormous, could recite many of the mantras known by the Jajarkot shamans, and Naraharinath corrected errors in my manuscripts before the books were printed. There is

clearly a connection between the Kanphata Yogis and the Kāmī shamans that I would have liked to pursue further with him, but some of Naraharinath's agenda worried me, leading me to decline his invitation to study with him regularly.

Question 12: In 2018, you were appointed the Director of Global and International Health at the University of Hawaii John A. Burns School of Medicine. How do you assess your work as a Director of the program?

Answer 12: For most of the twenty years that I have worked at the medical school, I have regarded myself as something of a decorative ornament for the school, someone with a PhD who is invited to be a guest professor at Universities in Zürich and Paris, who is affiliated with the France's Centre national de la recherche scientifique and has addressed the Collège de France, but whose usefulness in a medical school is not obvious. American medical schools seek to be innovative, unsure how to improve the education of future doctors but knowing that improvement is necessary, and for about a decade in the 1990s having an anthropologist on the faculty was both fashionable and relatively inexpensive. Few have survived to the present, so it was a real surprise, when I was anticipating the topic of my retirement to be raised as I approached my 65th birthday five years ago, to be offered this unexpected promotion, along with a travel allowance that has facilitated visits to medical schools in Japan, South Korea, Thailand and Indonesia. One disappointment, however, was my failure despite several attempts to sign a reciprocal student exchange agreement with the Patan Academy of Health Sciences, which I was convinced would benefit both Nepali students and those from Hawai'i. The pandemic also prevented a planned trip to help place pediatric resident physicians in a rural Laotian hospital, and the current political situation has eliminated any possible ties with Chinese schools. Efforts to establish ties with the impressive medical school in Samarkand have also gone nowhere. Consequently, I have been unable to achieve the full potential initially offered by the position.

Question 13: How do you see the cultural anthropological research of foreign and native scholars in Nepal? In your opinion, what are the missing areas of research in the context of Nepal?

Answer 13: Examples:

- 1) Comparative studies that examine multiple ethnicities and their interactions and conflicts.
- 2) Discursive studies on the Nepalese language that examine aspects like code-shifting, use of foreign words, with language and philology placed more centrally into local cultures. Engendered conversations.
- 3) Detailed studies of important rituals, such as Locke's 1980 *Karunamaya the Cult of Avalokitesvara-Matsyendranath in the Valley of Nepal*.
- 4) Works in which compassionate portraits appear

of real people, such as Robert Desjarlais, 2003, *Sensory Biographies. Lives and Deaths among Nepal's Yolmo Buddhists*.

5) Extensive, detailed work on a community, as Gellner and Quigley's 1995 *Contested Hierarchies--a collaborative ethnography of caste among the Newars of Kathmandu*, or Robert Levy's 1990 *Mesocosm Hinduism and the Organization of a Traditional Newar City in Nepal*.

6) Finding a radically original approach, such as combining philology, topography and ethnography, as in Charles Ramble's brilliant 2008 *The Navel of the Demoness: Tibetan Buddhism and Civil Religion in Highland Nepal*.

7) More complete collections of oral texts, such as Simon Strickland's two volume *Materials for the Study of Gurung Pe*.

8) Diachronic studies - I would like to read a good one for example on the Nyishangte traders of Manang and Thamel; or perhaps of modern Tharu or Gurung communities that now occupy urban centers; Chinese traders in Kathmandu might be a good topic, too, and I am not familiar with a good study of Tibetans in Nepal though they began to flood into Nepal in 1959.

I am skeptical of the value of excessively reflexive work, particularly if it is one's only fieldwork experience. Yes, studying one's own country in one's own language may be possible, but first have a genuine anthropological experience doing fieldwork elsewhere. Were I able to finance it, I would send promising Nepali candidates to Central Asia (Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, or Uzbekistan), or perhaps to the islands of Micronesia (Palau, Yap, Chuuk, Pohnpei or Kosrae) for a minimum of two years of fieldwork. Afterward, they might be eventually ready to take on a topic in Nepal.

Question 14: You have been supporting the Editorial Team of Dhaulagiri Journal of Sociology and Anthropology as an international Advisory board member. You have also made a financial contribution. What are the specific suggestions to the editorial team? What areas do you think should we should focus upon and how shall we raise the quality and visibility of the journal as well as the papers published?

Answer 14: In fact, I wish foreign "advisors" would let Nepalis make their own decisions. For decades, Nepal has been overrun by foreigners who are unable to speak Nepali, who know nothing of Nepal's history, social organization, or the country's rich intellectual life and literary achievements, yet think they can advise what's best for the country's future, which seems to be primarily a neo-liberal consumerist society similar to those in the west. Nepal is economically poor, yes, but rich in so many other ways.

At the time of the referendum in 1980 I recall telling a USAID official that village children were now learning to sing revolutionary songs (I filled notebooks with copies)

while marching and that mounting rural discontent was such that Nepal could expect a violent revolutionary movement in the hills within a decade. My observations were dismissed as nonsense. "Never. We own this country," was his arrogant reply. The idea that others know what is best because they are a source of funds is a dangerous illusion from which Nepal needs to free itself. Accept funding when possible, yes, but avoid any strings that may be attached to the money. Flying into Kathmandu now brings tears to my eyes, thinking of what an extraordinary, uniquely beautiful place it could have become, not the catastrophe it now is.

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