

Rademacher, Anne M. 2011. *Reigning the River. Urban Ecologies and Political Transformation in Kathmandu*. Durham: Duke University Press. xviii + 245 pp. Pb.: \$22.95. ISBN: 9780822350804.

Rademacher's comprehensive book thoroughly examines a conflict over the environmental restoration of the Bagmati and Bishnumati rivers, which flow in the Kathmandu Valley, Nepal. This monograph is put in the context of study of global South cities facing dangerous environmental problems. Because of an unprecedented "urban explosions", Kathmandu has experienced difficulties: the extreme poverty of inland migrants, a rapid growth of city's slums, and the degradation of nature. The last facet is an obvious embodiment of crisis in Kathmandu at the turn of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The main subject of the book is urban ecology as a social practice made by three relevant groups involved in the efforts of the rivers restoration: 1) state experts and development experts who elaborated plans to improve rivers' environmental conditions, 2) cultural heritage activists anxious to restore river-centred religious practice, and 3) housing advocates defending the rights and interests of poor migrants. Tracing the contest between these actors, Rademacher describes how they reassert and proclaim their own understanding of urban ecology in Kathmandu.

In an extensive introduction, the author develops theoretical frameworks and an approach to urban ecology. Besides the historiography of global South cities, Rademacher keeps her research within the purview of global urbanisation and urban ecosystem studies. The issue of the environmental crisis of cities is understood by the author in terms of struggles over power, knowledge, and governance. Rademacher departs from an influential tradition of scholarship that has regarded Himalayan moral and social order via sacred landscape studies. Instead of that, she follows developmentalist logics of morality that emphasises collision of varieties of views of actors who re-examine the meaning of the rivers' environmental restoration.

The first chapter depicts the formation of a national state in the Kathmandu Valley. According to Rademacher, mandala is the core of local polity. The concernment of mandala is made through spatial practices and performances of citizenship that determine attitudes to urban ecology. Mandala assisted to fix a political power and made a social order in Kathmandu. The latter was the subject matter of reflection and struggle in the era of political transformation in the 1990s, which was the time the environmental concern became the tool of the groups that upheld their views of the past, present and future of Nepal.

In the second chapter, Rademacher explores three narratives of the pollution of Kathmandu rivers from the perspective of river-focused actors. The first narrative represents an official view on the rivers' degradation. This frame is proved by scientific data and policy plans, linking the main reason of deteriorating of water quality as a result of human encroachment into the rivers system. It contradicts the second narrative, which foregrounds negative outcomes of the river management plans for thousands of landless poor (sukumbasi). Housing advocates pointed out the use of cultivation of the rivers system by migrants. The third narrative represents a specific view on the rivers degradation as a cultural and historical problem. An indefatigable spokesman of cultural restoration

of the urban ecology, Huta Ram Baidya, rejects these two narratives, since he is for the restoration of the entirety of the rivers through a return to the roots of the Bagmati civilisation. This approach condemns the modern development of Nepal as the main threat of the riverscape's cultural integrity.

The third chapter analyses the impact of the significant political events on the efforts in renewal of the Bagmati and Bishnumati rivers in 2001. The fusillade of the royal family by Crown Prince Dipendra on 1 June 2001 with the subsequent accession of a new King Gyanendra to the throne abrogated both the democratic transition and the uncertainty of the building of the diversion tunnel that partly cleared the Bagmati. A new period of unsettled emergency solved the problem of sukumbasi settlements. The sudden expulsion of poor migrants from the riverbanks was unanimously treated as a necessary measure to save the river. In comparison with the loss of moral authority of the royal family, a more dire threat to Kathmandu citizens was the rebellion army of Maoists that had a strong support in Nepali countryside. In such a complicated political situation, new clean facilities of the Bagmati River constructed without foreign assistance reinforced hope for restoration of royal power and the Nepali nation state.

The fourth chapter dissects the environmental development in Kathmandu under King Gyanendra. Disbelief in democracy induced actors to appreciate overnight beautification campaigns on the eve of the South Asia Association for Regional Cooperation summit in Kathmandu. Rademacher points out that in post-andolan democracy era, emergency ecology reserved and muted controversies among the main actors for the sake of the authoritarian efficacy of environmental management.

In the fifth chapter, the author traces alterations in state and public representations of Kathmandu's sukumbasi population after their forced resettlement in the winter of 2001. In the condition of the city's crisis, the landless poor were responsible for the river degradation. Rademacher argues that coherence of political, ecological, and economic moralities of the emergency period and the uncertain status of sukumbasi were the reasons for their resettlement to the outskirts of Kathmandu. The developmentalist view on restoration of the Bagmati and Bishnumati rivers represented by the state and development officials legitimised the decision concerning the relocation of landless migrants whose presence on the riverbanks hampered the beautification campaign.

In the sixth chapter, Rademacher elucidates 'the ways that river-focused identity and global connections were strategically invoked or rejected' (p.155). The actors formulate their vision of symbolic significance of the river stewardship through a range of their attitudes to the meanings of urban ecology. The narrative that connects the contemporary Nepali national identity with the international community is opposed to a view on global development as the main threat to the cultural legacy of the Bagmati and Bishnumati rivers. Both approaches failed to find a common ground for joint efforts in spite of shared ultimate goals. As a result, the Nepali state plays a key role in fulfilling topical ecological aims.

In conclusion, the scholar contemplates the importance of urban ecology for the Kathmandu case. Environmental expectations of different actors concurred with political transformation of Nepal when urban ecology was emancipatory and anticipatory. Above all, the transformation of environment urban ecology in Kathmandu revealed the weight

of moral order, while actors tried to ‘(re)make the state, re(map) urban space, and re(order) urban social life itself’ (p.178).

Has this laconic, well-defined book by Rademacher convincingly answered the delivered question of what urban ecology means? Focusing on the processes of urban development and political transformation, the author embeds urban ecology in a developmentalist environmentalism discourse. This lets the reader understand the process of rivers restoration in dynamics as well as see political alterations that have influenced the environmental transformations in Kathmandu. This book could be regarded as a notable contribution to South Asia and Himalayan studies, while the approach itself might be valuable to explore other areas in which the process of environmental renewal is consonant with unpredictable political changes.

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